

# BEETLE QUEEN CONQUERS TOKYO



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## Press, Festival Play and the Future:

*Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* had its world premiere at SXSW 2009 as part of the Emerging Visions line-up. It played to sold-out theaters and received enthusiastic responses from the press.

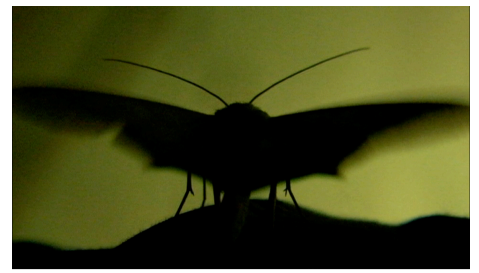
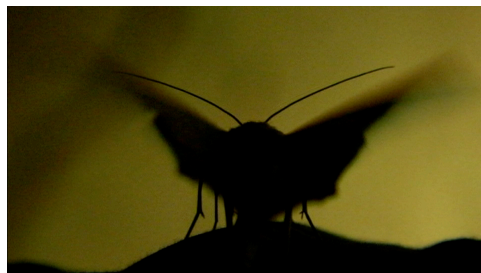
You can check out our reviews from *The Austin Chronicle*, *The Austin-American Statesman*, *Filmmaker Magazine* and the blog *Hammer To Nail* on the following pages.

*Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* has now played at Full Frame Documentary Film Festival in Durham, North Carolina and the Maryland Film Festival in Baltimore and Cinevegas in Las Vegas, Nevada where it won a Special Jury Award for Artistic Vision.

With these festivals under our belt and more on the horizon, *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* is now looking to the future. We are planning on theatrical play at art-houses, film societies, etc, in addition to launching our 50-city museum, library, university and grassroots tour.

Since *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* appeals to niche audiences, our plan for the film is to generate word-of-mouth excitement through specific audiences associated with entomology, philosophy and religious studies. From there we hope to build an interest with the general public, eco-villages, nature preserves, ecological institutions and other grassroots organizations interested in the way that Westerners perceive nature.

We would love to keep you apprised of the latest news about our film, so please visit our Web site [www.beetlequeen.com](http://www.beetlequeen.com). You can also drop us a line at [info@beetlequeen.com](mailto:info@beetlequeen.com) to be added to our mailing list.





## SXSW Film

### Reviews and interviews

BY MARC SAVLOV

#### BEETLE QUEEN CONQUERS TOKYO

##### Documentary Feature, Emerging Visions\_D: Jessica Oreck

So far as we know, Japan is the only country in the world to have a long-running box-office megastar that's also the embodiment of its national femininity and a giant flying insect to boot. (That would be Mothra.) Toho Studios' second most popular *kaiju eiga* is nowhere to be found in Oreck's lush and lovely dreamlike documentary, but her benevolent spirit flitters throughout, graceful yet alien, exactly like the entomologically obsessed citizenry of the Japanese archipelago. Oreck, who traveled to Japan with boyfriend/cinematographer Sean Williams, has made a splendid, enthralling, and fascinating documentary that examines and explains Japanese culture's centuries-old reverence for its tiny, chitinous brethren. From insect fairs to the ancient tradition of keeping crickets as household pets, *Beetle Queen* is a striking micromasterpiece; it's as though Sofia Coppola had scrapped *Lost in Translation* midway through to focus instead on elephant beetles and the children who love them, and the resulting film is utterly, wonderfully unique.

Thursday, March 12, 2009

By Chris Garcia

**'Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo'**

Japanese pop culture is furrowed with bizarre enthusiasms — some cute or "kawaii," others wretchingly perverse — that reflect an arrested, often infantilized sense of wonder. Jessica Oreck's entrancing, meditative documentary reveals one more outré fetish object for the island-nation: bugs.

Oreck, who knows her critters and her science, cogently explains how the creatures' oneness with nature, perfect engineering, lovely coloring and overarching strangeness fit into the Japanese pattern of peculiar passions. She ties the bug love to historical, literary, spiritual and scientific roots, and lyrically juxtaposes electric, kinetic Tokyo with the gossamer domains of dragon flies, butterflies, crickets and caterpillars. The two worlds meet: We see a child purchase an exotic beetle for \$47 at an urban pet shop.

But nature rules, and Oreck illuminates both earthbound and airborne cosmos with glittering imagery and sumptuous sensory detail — the squirm and squish, the creep and crawl, all of it buzzing on an alien frequency that languidly dazzles.



Posted by Alicia Van Couvering, 3/18/2009

## **SXSW MICRO-REVIEW: "BEETLE QUEEN CONQUERS TOKYO"**

I decided today that *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* is the best film I've seen at SXSW. Nominally, the film is about the Japanese interest and obsession over insects in nature and beetles as pets. But somehow, just through images and sound and words, it immerses you in another culture so deeply that it becomes about... everything. There is a story, in as much as you come back to the same characters again and again -- the little boy who we meet buying a new pet beetle, then introducing it to his other beetles, then introducing it to his friends' beetles; the insect harvester who we accompany on a hunting trip, then watch drink hornet-infused-sake, and finally ride with him in his bug-profit Ferrari. Interviews with entomologist/philosophers and bug merchants weave in and out, adding meaning and framing the edit, but it's still not really a *story*. Voice over in Japanese waxes poetic about the symbolic relationship between insects and nature, Zen and human existence. Mainly there just images: thousands of umbrellas walking through the street, shot from overhead; two single ladies picking out treats and bedding for their pet beetles in a department store; gigantic \$10,000 show beetles on display; bonsai gardeners; the flashing lights of a traffic cop's vest; lightning bugs swarming through a delighted crowd.

If I sound corny and rapturous in my description, it's because I'm not exactly sure how the movie added up to so much more than the sum of its parts. Sean Williams' cinematography never seems to settle for a superficial image -- it's not enough to see a metal stake gently prodding a butterfly wing inside a display case; he gets along side it, and rack focuses the pearl tops of its pins into a geometric relief. Director Jessica Oreck set out to make a film about the mystery of Japan's insect love-affair, and her achievement is as ineffable as her subject.

<http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/blog/index.php>

# Hammer to Nail

Ambitious Film

## SXSW 2009: Tuesday/Wednesday Wrap-Up

Posted by Michael Tully 03 / 20 / 09

*Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* — Jessica Oreck's film is smarter than I'll ever be, but not smart in the way of showing off. Smart in the way of tackling a subject with such intellectual precociousness. Featuring a never-ending assault of gorgeous imagery from Sean Price Williams (*Frownland*), Oreck's film tackles the expansive subject of Japan's fascination with insects in a way that is illuminating, educating, and entertaining. Easily one of my favorite films at this year's SXSW, and one that is certain to make my year-end list when the time comes. I almost feel too overwhelmed to even write about it, but hopefully time and a second viewing will give me the in that I need to express what I think makes this such a melodious treat.

<http://www.hammertonail.com/genre/documentary/sxsw-2009-tuesdaywednesday-wrap-up/>

# Hammer to Nail

Ambitious Film

## BEETLE QUEEN CONQUERS TOKYO - *Insect Melody*

Posted by [Michael Tully](#)  
04 / 16 / 09

The knowledge that Jessica Oreck is an entomologist at the [Museum of Natural History](#) in New York City who has never previously made a film might cause one to worry that *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* will be an unavoidably stiff and grueling piece of video academia. Worry not, skeptic. Oreck's wildly precocious exploration of Japan's ongoing fascination with, and connection to, insects just so happens to be one of the more exhilarating new documentaries of 2009. This is a shining example of when a filmmaker's innocence has resulted in something much more vibrant and alive than it otherwise might have been coming from an experienced veteran.

With a sense of natural wonderment and intellectual curiosity, Oreck tackles her subject from as many angles as she can fit inside the frame. In a voice-over that is read in Japanese and subtitled in English (as opposed to being dubbed), we travel back in time to hear many stories that explain the important role insects have played in the shaping of Japanese culture. Celebrated author Dr. Takeshi Yoro delivers his own insights into how interconnected Japanese people and insects actually are. Most of Oreck's footage, however, consists of children, collectors, and sellers who live in a modern day Japan that appears to be consumed by this endlessly wild array of tiny creatures. They're everywhere: in homes, in video games, in stores, on sidewalks. Whether this is, in fact, the case, or if Oreck's overeager vision is painting a somewhat tainted picture isn't the issue here. What matters is that she has managed to transform everyday life into such a mysterious and magical place.

*Beetle Queen* is as visually dazzling as documentaries come. Sean Price Williams ([Frownland](#)) photographs it as if with a microscope instead of an actual video camera. It's gorgeous work, but it also has a purpose. On the insect side of things, Williams needs to shoot in extreme close-up to translate the fascinating intricacies of these creatures. Yet by staying so close on the human beings themselves, Williams does more than just humanize the insects; he insectizes the humans. In doing so, he supports Dr. Yoro's philosophical theory that these creatures are innately intertwined. Williams and Oreck find other striking ways to make these connections, including a high angle view of a bustling street corner in which tiny humans scurry about like busy bugs. On paper, this might sound obvious. In execution, it's breathtaking.

Even for an individual with particularly sharp brain gears, *Beetle Queen* has so much going on at once—visually, sonically, textually—that it begs for a second viewing in order to fully process its overflowing information. Having caught it on the big screen during its world premiere run at South By Southwest, I stumbled out of the theater, awed and intimidated, grinning but feeling that I had missed so much. Now that I've had the chance to experience it again, I can confirm that I was right (at least for myself). On a first viewing, the presentation, while beautiful, seemed scattered as it jumped from the past to the present, from interview to montage, from poetry to prose. But the second time around, this speedy editorial maneuvering became less jarring and I was able to fully absorb what I was watching, making for an even more enriching experience.

After watching *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo*, all of those giant insect movies from Japan don't seem so farfetched anymore. Are there really creatures like this on our planet? Apparently so. With her debut feature, Jessica Oreck has succeeded in injecting a much-needed dose of fantasy into reality, transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary, helping us to see the world through wide, open eyes.