

Washington City Paper

# *Health of the Planet*

*City Lights Section*

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In the abstract, the exhibition of artworks by Steve Miller at the National Academy of Sciences—billed as a "metaphorical checkup" on the ecological health of the Amazonian rainforest—sounds like a gimmick. But while some of the pieces are needlessly complex, others turn out to be strikingly beautiful. In the former category are a series of large canvases that utilize renderings of satellite imagery and local flora and fauna to communicate the basin's galloping deforestation and loss of biodiversity. The multiple overlays of imagery confuse rather than clarify. Simpler and more effective is Miller's use of X-rays to depict animals (some of them still living, a stiff technical challenge). In two triptychs, Miller has assembled X-rays of artfully posed birds, turtles, and iguanas. Their ghostly images, rendered by inkjet on aluminum, seem to jump outward with an eerie shimmer. Meanwhile, in "Law of the Jungle," Miller etched an X-ray on laminated glass, showing a sinuously curved python with a very dead mouse still being digested in its stomach. Equal parts beautiful and creepy, the work is easily Miller's finest and the show's least political. *The exhibition is on view Mondays through Fridays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., to Jan. 31, at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW. Free. (202) 334-2415. cpnas.org. —Louis Jacobson*