

Art of the Butterfly

Mutisia magnifica and *Astraptes* sp.
(after Heade)

by Isabella Kirkland

A study for a larger work
to be called NOVA AER

Oil on wood panel
12 x 16 inches

Artist's Statement

The little study after Heade of one caterpillar, the YESENN variation from the Two-barred Flasher complex, and of the newly described plant, *Mutisia magnifica*, is an early effort in my attempt to move from still-life, through which I have explored various concepts in biodiversity, to a landscape or environment format. This study is part of a large project I have been researching for several years now to depict species new to western science since 1973 and the enactment of the Endangered Species Act.

The Two-barred Flasher complex, until recently thought to be a single species, is now believed to consist of ten (or more) non-interbreeding species with overlapping territories. All ten varieties of caterpillars metamorphose into extremely similar adults, presumably deriving benefit from the mimicry. *Mutisia magnifica*'s description can be found at www.mobot.org/MOBOT/research/ecuador/Mutisia/welcome.shtml. The *Mutisia* is found thus far only in the Loja province of Ecuador.

My aim in pursuing this combination of science and art, aside from the sheer challenge of mastering the painting style, is to share with the viewer the wonder, amazement, and dedication I see when I speak with natural scientists about their work. With any measure of success, I hope to ignite and galvanize individual viewer's desire to participate in the active preservation of what remains of our natural environment. I am endlessly fascinated by how deeply each organism is embedded in its surroundings, by how enmeshed its life cycle is with that of other life forms within its community. The more we come to understand these relationships and interactions the more accurately we quantify our own connection to and responsibility for every other living thing.

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