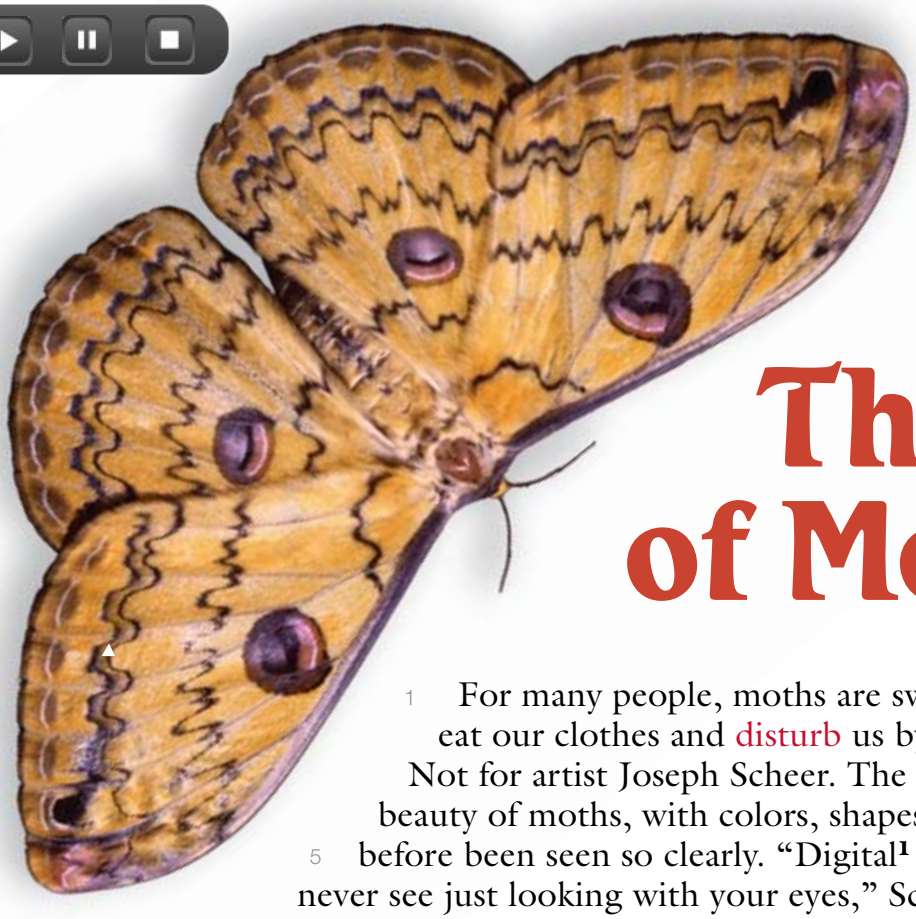

◀ Not all moths are dull-colored: Saturn moths bring a variety of color to the rainforests of Borneo.

The Beauty of Moths

For many people, moths are swarming, dust-colored pests that eat our clothes and disturb us by flying around lights after dark. Not for artist Joseph Scheer. The images he creates bring out the beauty of moths, with colors, shapes, and patterns that have never before been seen so clearly. "Digital[1] tools let you see things you'd never see just looking with your eyes," Scheer says. Scheer's images have been displayed around the world, and one reaction is heard everywhere: "People insist, 'No, that can't be a moth,'" says Scheer. One Swiss viewer credited the insects' lovely variety to their exotic American origin: "We don't have such nice moths in our country," he declared. In fact, every country has moths that can amaze.

Moth Hunting

The process began with a moth hunt in the state of New York. Scheer would leave the lights on and the windows open overnight at his university office, then collect the moths that had flown in when he returned in the morning. When the building cleaners at the university complained, he moved the hunt to his friend Mark Klingensmith's yard. "Mark's a gardener with lots of stuff growing on his property," Scheer says. "Moths like it." They set up two lights shining over a plastic container on a white sheet. Then they watched, astounded,[2] as moths emerged from the darkness, flew carelessly into the sheet, and fell into the plastic container. "We got a different species every night that first season," Scheer says. "The patterns and colors were overwhelming."

▲ Scheer and Klingensmith set up a light source to attract moths for their collection.

[1] **Digital** systems record or transmit information as thousands of very small signals.

[2] If something **astounds** you, you are very surprised by it.

Scanning the Details

Using a powerful scanner[3] designed for camera film, they were able to capture detailed pictures of moths. Small moths present special challenges. "One twitch of the finger and there goes a wing," says Scheer. "I try to drink less coffee when I'm working on [them]."

▲ Joseph Scheer carefully arranges moths on a scanner. "One twitch of a finger and there goes a wing," says Scheer.

The scanner records so much information that a single moth can take 20 minutes to scan. A scan of just two small moths fills an entire CD. All that information means the size of the image can be increased 2,700 percent but still retain all the details and appear perfectly clear. You'd need a microscope[4] to see the details shown in Scheer's prints.

Scheer's work is not only a new form of art. He can also be congratulated for making a valuable contribution to the record of moths where he lives. He has helped identify more than a thousand different species. "Not from Alaska or the Amazon," Klingensmith says. "All from one backyard."

[3] A **scanner** is a machine that can take a picture of a thing for use by computers.

[4] A **microscope** is a scientific tool that allows small objects to appear larger, so that details can be seen.

▲ Over 20 species of moth cover a wall in Scheer's studio. His photographs have been shown in countries around the world.