



Ohio artist maps 'heartbeats' of native seeds



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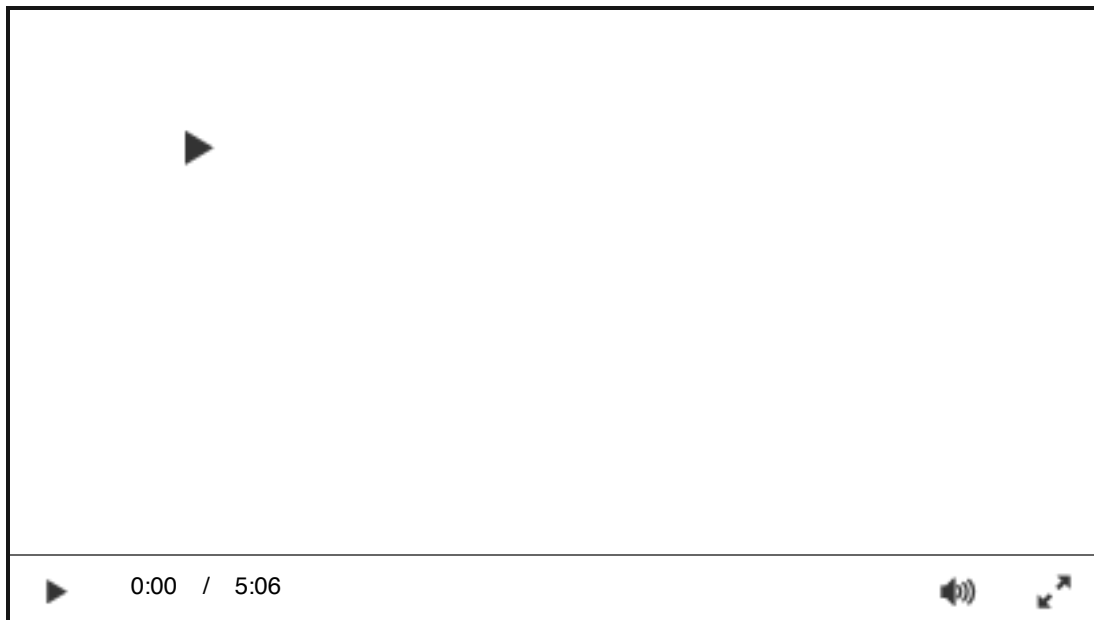
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Her grandmother gravitated toward art. Her grandfather preferred science.

Cadine Navarro blends both in her work, a twist on a traditional Japanese form of ink art known as suminagashi. While traditional suminagashi uses water and ink to create a marbled effect on kozo paper, Navarro, a French-American artist whose grandparents link her to Toledo, also incorporates prairie seeds, whose tiniest sounds she records with sensitive, purpose-built mics. She sends these recordings through water to cause movement in suspended ink, creating patterns and images.

“Suminagashi is the art of floating ink that I went to study in Japan,” Navarro said. “And so in that sense they have a similar origin, and yet what came out from recording the seeds is that they all have a different arrhythmic, what I call a heartbeat, but an arrhythmic beat. And it's so unusual. So those rhythms are creating different patterns.”



The effect is a display of warped, concentric circles, which she has etched into sheets of glass that in turn resemble topographical maps, as gallery patrons recently discovered near Columbus. The artist recently closed an exhibit, titled *It Sounds Like Love*, at Otterbein University's Frank Museum of Art in Westerville.

Navarro sees her art as an homage to her late grandparents' interests in science and art. Her grandmother, Louise Bruner Collins, was an art critic at *The Blade*, and continued to freelance for the newspaper after her retirement in December, 1978. She died in 2004. Navarro's grandfather, Raymond Bruner, worked alongside her grandmother as a science writer until his death in 1970.

Navarro, who now operates out of Westerville, is inspired by both. She invites scientists and academics to observe, learn, and grow their research through her work.

"This is not a scientific show, it's an art show," Navarro said, speaking at the exhibit earlier this month. "I've been bringing this work to science departments and to Wesleyan, Kenyan, Denison, Ohio State, and we've been talking with scientists across the state and they've been interested in this research as fresh, kind of new, unexpected research. So it's not hard data, but it's sort of poetic data."

She uses Ohio prairie seeds in her work, and considers their natural vibrations, or heartbeats as she calls them. Navarro finds that the images

they create are often fairly comparable.

“When I do this technique to test them again and again, they’re obviously different because we’re working with water, and water is just really difficult to control. Why would we want to do that? But they’re recognizable,” Navarro said. “Echinacea always has these four tentacles that come out and has a sort of turtle-like, for whatever reason, image.”

Switchgrass is another of the seeds that Navarro chose. Unlike the other seeds, it branched out entirely, depicting a long, thin image using those same interlaced, concentric lines.

“If you look at switchgrass in the prairie, they are super tall and they have this very delicate, lace-like composure. And so in a way they stand out from the crowd, and that’s what switchgrass is doing right here,” Navarro said, gesturing to a switchgrass ink image.

Mapping out every seed as its own unique rhythm, Navarro noticed that they almost resemble topographical maps with their varying display of concentric, wobbly lines.

“In that same vein, I’ve been involved with a bit of land design, landscape architecture, and thinking about these as non-human-centric topographical maps or land design use of the plants tell us where to go and not humans in a way,” Navarro said.

At the gallery earlier this month, patrons looked down to view the images, which were laid into the floor. Looking down on art might seem out of the ordinary, but for Navarro’s work, it is entirely on purpose.

Patrons are “invited to look down to the earth for answers instead of always looking for someplace besides the earth,” said Janice Glowski, curator for the Frank Museum of Art.

Navarro said she hoped that people would feel like the art is attainable or tangible, and in that way, visitors could grow more connected to its message.

“A lot of times artwork can be so precious, and it’s on the wall and it’s untouchable,” Navarro said. “And so I wanted to have this work to be, you know, a different experience, something that you could connect to.”

Navarro invited dancers, musicians, scientists, and a group following the traditions of the Lakota from a Zapalinamé spiritual community in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico. Chief Ramon Perez and community member and Sun Dancer Silvia Perez traveled to Otterbein to offer traditional songs displaying their gratitude to Navarro for giving the earth a voice, and a platform to share the universal message of nature.

A former educator at Otterbein University, Terry Hermsen, also presented a song.

“I tried to sing Woodie Guthrie’s song called 'This Land is Your Land,' but the artist had this strong reaction that maybe this land doesn't belong,” Hermsen said. “We don't have to grab it, we don't have to claim it; we can let it be.”

In addition to voice performances, Bill Walker, a retired Columbus City Schools teacher and practicing flutist and violinist, offered a tune that he wrote for the flute, inspired by his time spent studying echinacea’s imagery in the exhibit.

Through her artwork, Navarro is carrying on the legacy of her grandparents, one Ohio prairie seed at a time. In her eyes, these images should serve as a universal language.

“And that’s what these are,” Nararro said. “These are like universal pictograms, so everyone can speak this language.”

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