

Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration

A Thesis Presented

By

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ABSTRACT

Native and Invasive Flora is an art installation inspired by my concern regarding invasive plants and their impact on native flora found in Massachusetts. Native plants included are Goldenseal, Purple Milkweed, Showy Lady's Slipper, and Braun's Holly-Fern, which are considered endangered in Massachusetts. Other common species such as Red Columbine, Anemone, and Carolina Rose are also showcased. The installation includes drawings of flora, imagery of plant life in animations, and images of invasive species printed on large-format paper scrolls. Much of the imagery included is of the invasive plant, Japanese Knotweed, which is prolifically invasive in our local ecosystems. My aim is to express the destructive impact invasive species have on the native plant life. The project will allow the viewers to have an immersive experience as they look at the drawings, watch the animations and walk through the forest of 12' tall paper scroll installation.

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ARTIST STATEMENT

I create artwork that is reflective of my life. The subject matter ranges from introspective thoughts and emotions to works based on concepts reflecting my life experiences. The media and materials I use vary, but all reflect my background as a fine art printmaker.

Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration is a project where I explore the use of multiples as imagery and how that can express concepts of power, limitations, and growth; experiences we all have in our daily lives. This has resulted in an installation that includes large-format digitally printed paper scrolls, drawings on paper, and time-based animations.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, I have become fascinated with nature which has led me to explore the importance of the native flora of Massachusetts and the effects that invasive plant species have on local environments.

My interest and connection to the natural environment has also led me to practice gardening as a new lifestyle. This has renewed an admiration for my family heritage of farming. In 2020 I sowed in my first garden; it included a few vegetables like tomatoes and summer squash. This has evolved into a garden that feeds my household for months. For the first time, I am growing all my own plant-based food, as an act of independence. Everything in my gardening practice brings me a sense of peace. From planting seeds and watching them sprout to weeding my garden, it all feels like a meditative practice. However, just like all life experiences, this comes with frustrations. There are pests to deal with, the need for continuous watering, fertilizing, and weeding. Unfortunately, my garden currently has an invasion of wild onion, and the Japanese Knotweed is trying to choke out my small brook. The Mile-a-Minute vine is constantly trying to ensnare and annihilate the trees in the neighboring woods. My new awareness of nature in all its capacities has become an all-consuming preoccupation.

Learning that my family was once a family of farmers is fascinating to me. My grandfather and great grandparents owned a dairy farm and most of my ancestors were farmers. It is only in recent generations that the family stopped farming and forgot that way of life along with all its lessons. My great grandparents sold the Reynolds Dairy Farm, and it is now where the Dedham Mall in Massachusetts sits. When I drive past the

few farms left on the Massachusetts south shore, I feel sad realizing that I could have had a farming experience if my family had made different decisions. With my garden I hope to provide homegrown food for my family while reconnecting with my family's heritage.

My garden makes me feel connected to my family's heritage. I have many sentiments and bonds with plants due to applying personal symbols to different plants and flowers. I reflect on my memories of individual family members and associate particular flowers or plants to that person. My family is important very important to me and I am lucky to have some amazing role models to look up to. Their importance has motivated me to symbolically and permanently represent them on my body with tattoos. The entire right side of my body, from my chest down to my hip is covered in tattoos of flowers that hold meaning and symbols that I have personally applied to them.

Each flower that is tattooed on me symbolizes a member of my family; Dandelions for my paternal grandfather, with whom I used to go 'lion hunting' with while pulling dandelion weeds. Daisies represent my mother, who planted them every year and has them tattooed on herself as well. Lilies represents one of my mentors, poppies are for my maternal grandfather, and Carolina Roses are for my grandmother who grew them at the family beach home.

The act of getting tattooed has inspired me to continue making art. I find the tattoo process to be interesting because it showed me how a two-dimensional drawing can be transformed

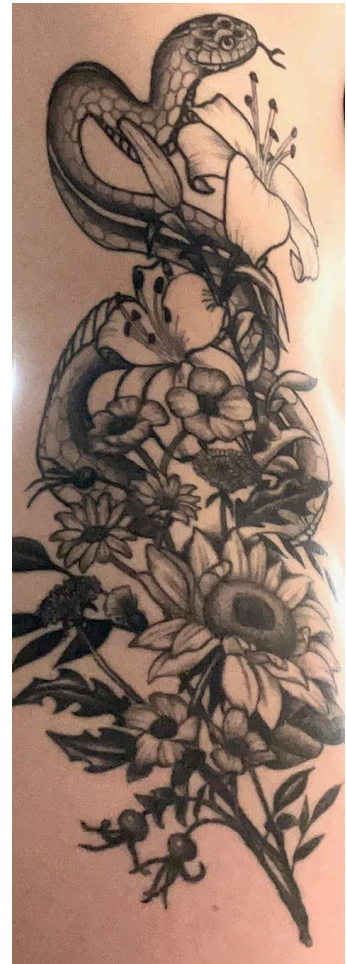


Image 1: My Tattoos

onto a three-dimensional surface. I brought sketches to the tattoo artist and he took them as a reference. He explained why he had to fix certain things to better position the drawings to fit my body. I watched as two-dimensional graphics of these sentimental symbols became a three-dimensional expression.

During the summer of 2022, I was able to apply this process of transferring flat images to a three-dimensional sculpture. I was invited to paint the surface of one of the bear sculptures that are displayed around Bridgewater State University's campus. These sculptures are about 6 feet tall, 10 feet long, and made of fiberglass. The bear that I was asked to paint had been heavily damaged and repaired. I proposed a black and white design that displayed a playful application of native Massachusetts flora. Previously my art was brooding and dark, related to mental illness, addiction, or negative personal relationships. I was ready to leave that subject matter behind and begin to make work reflecting my current life.

Meanwhile, in my gardening practice, I was learning about the importance of native plants and was creating plans to convert my front yard to a more native landscape using grasses native to Massachusetts. "A plant is considered native if it has occurred naturally in a particular region, ecosystem, or habitat without human introduction" (The National Wildlife Federation). As I tried to make plans for my garden, I realized how little I knew about native flora and how to care for the land around me. As a way of publicly raising awareness, I decided to paint images of native Massachusetts flora on the bear sculpture.



Image 2: BSU Bear Sculpture

I imposed many different images of plant species onto the bear. One of which was a Carolina rose, the same as the one I have tattooed on me for my grandmother. The flora was painted in a bold black and white style reminding me of wood blocks I have made in the past for printmaking. I prepared the images as if I was preparing to make relief prints, but instead of being carved into a block, the imagery was painted onto the bear sculpture. This style also emphasized the general form and shape of these plants to make them more identifiable. The irony is that the sculpture is installed on campus in a garden surrounded by non-native plants. This project inspired my further exploration of using local and native plants as subject matter in this thesis project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration is a body of work that includes large format digital scroll paper prints, drawings on paper, and animations, presented as an installation. The primary imagery is of the invasive species, Japanese Knotweed, and is used to imply how it can dominate and take over space. Other artworks reflect on the fragility and preciousness of native flora and how important it is to protect. The images of the native flora include species that are considered endangered or at risk in our area as well as more common and recognizable species.

I experimented with different media, imagery, and display methods while creating this body of work. I began to experiment with digital tools to create both animations and large format prints. The digital print process has allowed me to enlarge the scale of my artwork, which led to new ideas about how we can experience art.

METHODOLOGY

After the pandemic hit in 2020, I had limited to no access to the studio equipment needed for creating traditional editions of prints. My studio practice was reliant on presses, paper baths, and chemistries that could not be acquired or practically used at home. I had to change my artistic approaches to fit the methods and media I could use while at home with limited resources.

I developed a new drawing practice as I began to make of drawings in preparation to go back to the studio. I drew images in a style that resembled relief printing. Relief printing is the technique of “the printing surface is cut away so that the image alone appears raised on the surface. Relief prints include woodcut, linoleum cut, letterpress, and rubber or metal stamping. The raised areas of the printing surface are inked and printed, while the areas that have been cut away do not pick up the ink” (Museum of Modern Art). The images I created were graphically bold, black and white with a slightly simplified form. This simplification replicates the look that is achieved when I carve a block of wood for relief printing.

While trying to be resourceful, I began to utilize technology as a creative tool. I started experimenting with digital drawing allowing me to draw anywhere without needing too many materials. I can easily work and capture ideas to later develop. By utilizing digital tools, I can source images, sketch, play with form, try out colors, and more. The copy and paste features allowed me to easily create multiples like I would with printmaking. The use of the multiple is a big reason why I like the medium of print.

Creating multiples digitally allows me to experiment with compositions before investing the time of printing a wood block. As time passed, my methodology started to

become less focused on creating traditional prints, and I began to focus on creating imagery that replicated itself. By keeping all my imagery in a relief printed style, regardless of the medium, I can create a cohesive aesthetic throughout my artwork.

Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration has moved me out of my comfort zone in many ways, especially in regard to materials, process and subject matter. This exploration was fluid as one thing always led to another. For example, the use of digital prints allowed me to scale up the size of my work for installation while leading me to explore the possibilities of animation. I created a clip-based animation with the same imagery used in the digital drawings and installation. I allowed myself to explore different media while utilizing the same imagery. After creating the animation, I realized how powerful video can be as a medium and began to work on a longer format clip-based video that showed the removal of an invasive species. While exploring these media, I continued to create drawings and traditional prints that coincided with the subject matter.

EXPLORATION

Deciding to use flora as my main source of subject matter was the first area I investigated. I began by revisiting the flora imagery I used on the bear project. I created pen and ink drawings of the flora that I feel a personal connection to, including Carolina rose, ferns, columbine, and anemone. I then created a traditional linocut print of each and began experimenting with different print ideas.



Image 3: Columbine flower drawing
6"x 9", black ink drawing on paper



Image 4: Fern drawing
6"x 9", black ink drawing on paper

I quickly realized that I preferred the pen and ink drawings of the individual plants over the prints. The ink drawings are smooth and have a matte surface quality, while the traditional prints have a texture that slightly catches the light disturbing the way the image is seen. What followed was to print a block multiple times. The idea was to create a series of printed images that emphasize the absence of abundance of native flora. To do this I printed the Anemone flower linoleum block repeatedly until the imagery filled the entire 18"x 24" sheet of paper. By repeating the image over and over, I was

trying to achieve a sense of abundance. I then began to contemplate how to show that there is an absence. I accomplished this by utilizing negative areas and shapes to form the picture.



Image 5: Absence of Abundance test print

To create absence, I physically cut out negative shapes right out of the paper. I experimented with different compositions and ended with the final composition having the abundance print of the Anemone flower with the negative shape of the image cut out. The print was attached to a white background with a gap left between the two layers. The gap allowed the cut-out shape to cast shadows in the blank void below. But even after multiple attempts the idea did not feel fully resolved by the imagery. I shifted my focus on trying to figure out how to show the viewer that the native plants are precious and

important. This led to the introduction of invasive plant species imagery used in this project.



Image 6: Absence of Abundance, 18”x 24”, composition experimentation white. Image 7: Absence of Abundance, 18”x 24”, composition experimentation black.



Image 8: Absence of Abundance resulting art
18”x 24” black linocut print, cut paper

To represent the limited amount of native flora and the abundance of invasive flora I decided that I needed to address the scale of the works. I continued to draw in a

relief style as a way of keeping consistency regardless of medium used. This way as I continued to explore media, imagery would be cohesive throughout any pieces that make into the final body of work.

Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration is the first time I am able to exhibit large scale artwork. I decided to use large format digitally printed scrolls to completely occupy the Anderson Gallery, like a forest of paper suspended from the ceiling. I am intrigued about how scale impacts the viewer's experience. By bringing two-dimensional imagery into three-dimensional space, my goal is to find ways to immerse the viewer into the work. I want to make the invasive plant imagery feel like it is physically taking over and invading.

After realizing I wanted to move forward with an installation display format, I needed to figure out how to incorporate both the invasive and native plants into the work. The installation piece evolved suspending prints of the invasive species, Japanese Knotweed. The piece became overwhelming with the amount of imagery of the invasive, but the point of this project was to show the importance of native flora, not just the threat of invasive species. I began experimenting with different ways to bring focus back to the native flora. At first I had the idea of hiding the native flora within the invasive installation. This would deepen the viewer's experience as they explored the installation and have them discover the native flora along the way. After a few attempts, I landed on the idea of using glass jars to encase the native flora. This is to emphasize the idea that these plants are precious and need to be protected. As an example, image 9 is the mock-up for the piece and it includes the native flora on the inside with invasive imagery on the outside. Ultimately, I decided against the jar composition and reworked the idea.



Image 9: Native jar mock-up

After deciding the jar composition was not the way to go, I kept experimenting with different ways to display the native flora. From the jar iteration, I realized that I liked the idea of using the invasive and native imagery together, showing them together points to the dichotomy of their relationship. I began creating different elements that I thought I could later be merged together. I made delicate pencil drawings of the native flora, which I later transformed into ink drawings. Then I made paper-cut versions of two invasive species using a laser cutter. All of these individual components eventually came together to make full pieces.

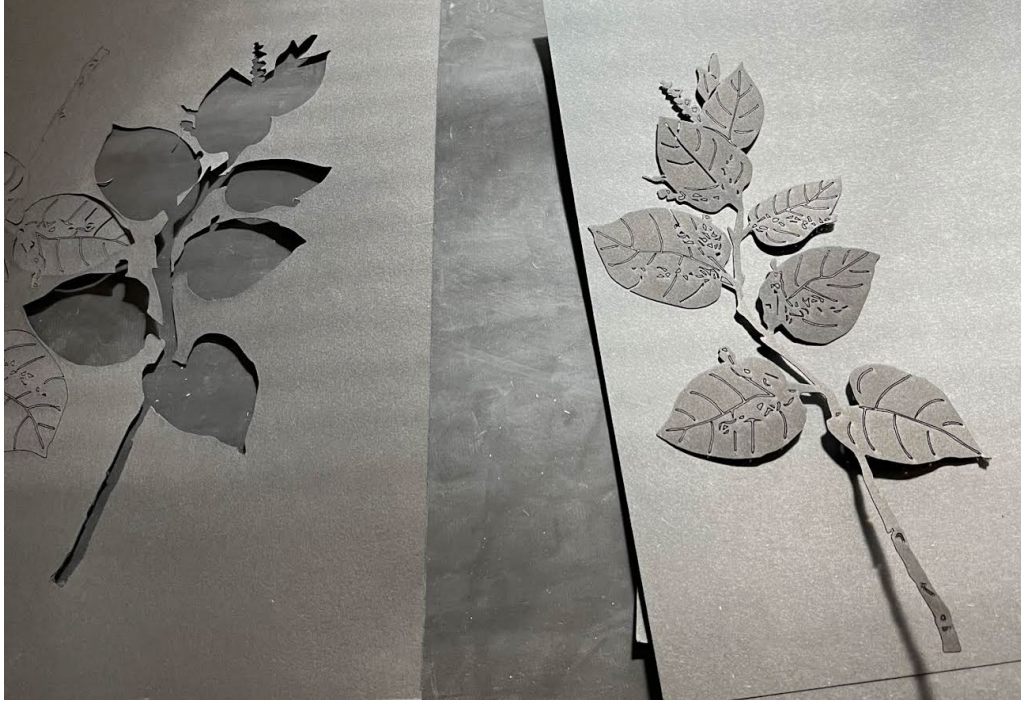


Image 10: Japanese Knotweed paper cut out

Overall, this project has been filled with experimentation. One thing led to another throughout the entire process of this project.

RESEARCH

Invasive Plant Species

Invasive plants are species of plant life that do not belong to the environment they are in. There are many different invasive plants all over the country and Massachusetts is no exception. Simply by driving around you can see invasive species taking over yards and woods. I personally have to deal with many invasive plants on my own property. I live in Rockland, Massachusetts and have a small front and back yard. The backyard ends at the edge of a brook that runs along the length of my neighborhood. Beyond the brook, I have a few neighbors and a small area of woods that is protected and owned by the town. When I first moved in, the yard was heavily overgrown and the brook was not even visible. Many invasive species had overtaken the area, and I had to painstakingly remove them. Over the course of many years, my yard has become free of most invasive species and overgrown brush. Every spring I still combat the few invasives that are spread by animals or that are carried downstream by the brook. The worst of these species is Japanese Knotweed. *Fallopia japonica*, more commonly known as Japanese Knotweed, is a predominate invasive species that is native to Asia. It was introduced to the United States in the 1800s as an ornamental plant. It crowds out native species and can choke out waterways. In my backyard, it took over the brook and surrounded it, attempting to choke it out and take over. Japanese Knotweed is the main invasive species used in this art project. I chose this plant specifically because of its prolific spreading and my own interaction with its invasiveness. (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE)



Image 11: Japanese Knotweed

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/fallopia/japonica/>



Image 12: Japanese Knotweed

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/fallopia/japonica/>

Mile-a-Minute Vine is another invasive species I used as imagery in this project. I luckily do not have to deal with this plant anymore and have seemed to mitigate it from my property, but in the distance I can still see it taking over trees in the woods just past the brook. *Persicaria perfoliate*, also known as Mile-a-Minute Vine is also native to Asia. It was introduced to the United States in the 1930s accidentally as a contaminant of nursery stock. It forms dense mats that crowd out native species. (Mass Audubon)



Image 13: Mile-a-Minute Vine on a tree

<https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/invasive-plants/mile-a-minute-vine/images/mamv-on-tree-c-leslie-j.-mehrhoff-university-of-connecticut-bugwood.org>



Image 14: Mile-a-Minute Vine

<https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/invasive-plants/mile-a-minute-vine/images/mamv-stand-c-leslie-j-mehrhoff-university-of-connecticut-bugwood.org>



Image 15: Burning Bush in red and green stages of growth

<https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/invasive-plants/winged-euonymus/images/winged-euonymus-planted-as-a-landscape-shrub>

Burning Bush, scientifically known as *Euonymus alatus*, is another common invasive species in our area that is native to Asia. It was brought to the United States in the 1860s as an ornamental plant for landscaping. “It invades fields, field edges, and forests, and displaces native plants. Birds eat the fruit and disperse the seeds. Second generation plants produced from these seed typically lack the bright red fall foliage of the parent plants.” (Mass Audubon). I made the easy mistake of planting a burning bush in my front yard landscaping. It is sold at all the big chain garden centers, which is where I bought mine. For this project I decided to remove this invasive species as a demonstration to the importance of the species removal. (Mass Audubon)

Native Flora

The native flora selected for this project includes species that are endangered in Massachusetts and more commonly recognizable species as well. The endangered species included are Goldenseal, Purple Milkweed, Showy Lady’s Slipper, and Braun’s Holly-Fern. These plants are listed on the Massachusetts state website by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife with the state status of each plant being endangered. These species do not have a federal endangered status but are considered endangered in the state of Massachusetts. The common native species included are Red Columbine, Anemone, and Carolina Rose. Many of these species can be seen throughout the year in the Massachusetts landscape, including locally on the south shore.



Image 16: Goldenseal

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/hydrastis/canadensis/>

Goldenseal is widely distributed in eastern North America and is very rare in New England. This plant is considered endangered by many states, including Massachusetts. Goldenseal has a long history of being used as a medicinal herb. Native Americans used goldenseal to treat cancer, liver conditions, fevers, pneumonia, tuberculosis and other ailments. It is illegal to forage for this plant in order to further protect it. (Native Plant Trust)



Image 17: Purple Milkweed

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/asclepias/purpurascens/>

Purple Milkweed grows in twenty-five states and in some parts of Canada. But it has become more and more uncommon throughout. In New England it can currently be found in some parts of Connecticut and Massachusetts. Purple Milkweed is considered endangered in the state of Massachusetts. It grows on the edges of forests, meadows, and fields. (Native Plant Trust)



Image 18: Showy Lady's Slipper

<https://plantfinder.nativeplanttrust.org/plant/Cypripedium-reginae>

Cypripedium Reginae, more commonly known as Showy Lady's Slipper, is another native flora species that is endangered in Massachusetts. It is considered the showiest of native lady's-slippers, which is how it earned its name. It is known for being difficult to grow and requires moist soils with plenty of sunshine. These plants are rare due to the destruction of suitable habitats and deer browsing, along with invasive plants taking over any remaining suitable habitats. (Native Plant Trust)



Image 19: Braun's Holly Fern

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/polystichum/braunii/>

The last of the endangered species included in this project is Braun's Holly Fern. Braun's Holly Fern's scientific name is *Polystichum Braunii* and it can be found in moist soil of cool forests. Its leaves resemble the leaves of holly due to the upper side being dark green and shiny. The edges of the leaves also have bristle tips. Braun's Holly Fern is near its southern range in Massachusetts and has many factors contributing to its endangered status. Due to it being in its southern range in Massachusetts, climate change is a potential reason why the species is no longer common in the area. Logging and other habitat alterations are more contributing factors since the plant requires canopy cover. Invasive species taking over its ideal habitat is another contributing factor. (Native Plant Trust)



Image 20: Red Columbine

<https://plantfinder.nativeplanttrust.org/plant/Aquilegia-canadensis>

Red Columbine, *Aquilegia Canadensis*, is one of the more common native Massachusetts flora species used in this project. It is a springtime bloomer and are a valuable resource for insects and bugs. It is a perennial herb that grows up to two feet tall. The flowers are red and yellow and face downward. Red columbine can grow in a wide range of habitats. This columbine is a popular garden perennial because it is hardy, tolerates shade and a wide range of soil conditions, and can easily regenerate by seed. It is common enough that it can be found at local garden centers. (Native Plant Trust)



Image 21: Anemone

<https://plantfinder.nativeplanttrust.org/plant/Anemone-canadensis>

Canada Windflower, *Anemone Canadensis*, is an easy to identify wildflower that can be found in the northern states of the United States and parts of Canada. It is a perennial that grows one to two feet tall with deeply lobed leaves and a single white flower. Canada Windflower has been used widely as a medicinal plant by Native Americans. It can be found in meadows and fields, and on the shores of rivers and lakes. (Native Plant Trust)



Image 22: Carolina Rose

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/rosa/carolina/>

Rosa Carolina, more commonly known as Carolina Rose or Pasture Rose, is another common native species in Massachusetts. Rosa Carolina is considered a shrub and can grow two to four feet in height. The pink flowers are loved by native pollinators, and the rose hips that are produced after flowering support birds in winter. The Carolina Rose is one species I have personal ties to as my grandmother grew these plants at our family beach home. It can be commonly seen in many garden landscapes in Massachusetts. (Native Plant Trust)

INFLUENCES

John Cage

John Cage was an influential avant-garde composer whose 1952 composition *4'33"*, consists of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence. This piece set the tone for future experimental music and art. Cage was also a visual artist. He started to apply the same methods of random composition to his drawings and prints that he used for his music. Cage explored techniques he had only just encountered or simply played with the rules he had made for himself. He experimented with etching and printmaking. He also experimented directly with paper by crumpling it, staining it with tea and coffee, and even running over it.



Image 23: *Variations II*, 1991, 26"x19"

<https://www.artsy.net/artist/john-cage>

John Cage embraced growth, and time, much like growth and time in nature. An experimental and playful approach to creating artwork was lacking in my own practice. I had forgotten to play, I had become too rigid with what I thought art was and was not. I thought I had to make endless sketches and preparatory drawings to eventually create a piece that was worthy of being art. This made my artistic practice very slow paced and riddled with creative burnout.

Learning about the simplicity of Cage's experimentation helped me reevaluate my own art practices. He would simply put a cup of coffee on a page and let it create a stain over time. That stain was intentional and impactful to the composition, yet simple. His practice focuses on the artist as a passive observer. I needed to bring back some simplicity to my work. This realization made it possible for me to consider using different media and allowing myself to simply play and experiment artistically. Just as Cage gave himself limitations to his experiments, so did I. By placing some limits on my practice and following my own rules, my practice became more cohesive. Playing and experimenting no longer resulted in divergent art that felt disconnected, instead limitations led to consistency.

While making *Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration* I played, created and lost any fear of failure. I explored many new media formats and branched out of my confined comfort zone. By giving myself boundaries in the aesthetic cohesion of the imagery, I was able to use whatever medium I thought might work to create a successful work of art. I limited myself to only drawing in black and white which was common theme in my past work as well. I also only made imagery based on photographs drawn in a style that resembled a linocut print aesthetic.

Banksy

Banksy is an artist that has always caught my attention. He is an anonymous graffiti artist presumably from England. “He is known for his anti-authoritarian art, often done in public places. He came into notice as a freehand graffiti artist and merged graffiti with installation and performance art” (Mancoff, 2022). The bulk of his work is created with a stencil technique that creates bold black imagery. His work usually makes bold statements to match. I have always found his artistic style and activist approach intriguing.



Image 24: *Love is in the Air*, 2003

<https://www.banksy.co.uk/in.html>

Banksy uses imagery of nature in some of his works. The most famous of which is *Love is in the Air*, also known as *Rage*, *The Flower Thrower*, pictured in image 15. It depicts a man with his face covered throwing a bouquet of flowers. He is caught in a stance in the middle of throwing the bouquet of flowers as if it were a grenade. The imagery of the man is in a bold black graphic style, while the flowers are painted in a more realistic fashion with color. It is this simplified graphic style of his that I have always been drawn to. This print shows both Banksy's artistic style as well as his political activism. The image represents a call for peace instead of war.



Image 25: *Cameraman and Flower*, 2010, Street art in Park City, Utah

<https://www.banksy.co.uk/out.html>

Cameraman and Flower depicts a man holding a video camera kneeling on the ground trying to get a close-up view of a pink flower that he is pulling in close to the

camera. His pulling on the flower seems to have uprooted it. This piece demonstrates the idea of the lengths people go in order to capture something beautiful for posterity even if it destroys the beauty in the end. The uprooted flower will die unless planted back in place carefully. Regardless, the cameraman's actions put the flower he is so intent on capturing at risk of no longer existing only for his personal gain of getting the video he desired. I have always found the messages Banksy bases his work off of to be profound and moving. His activism on current events and bringing awareness to the public has influenced my artistic themes. My goal is to spread awareness about the invasive plants we are living with along with expressing the importance of protecting native flora.

Swoon

Swoon is hands down my favorite contemporary artist. I have always been drawn to her work and think her artistic approach is beautiful. She combines printmaking with things like street art, three-dimensional sculpture, and installation. "Caledonia Curry, known as Swoon, is a contemporary artist and filmmaker recognized around the world for her pioneering vision of public artwork. Through intimate portraits, immersive installations and multi-year community projects, she has spent over 20 years exploring the depths of human complexity" (Swoon Studio). She is widely known as one of the first women street artists to gain international recognition. Street art is usually a male dominated field, and Swoon broke into this art scene by pushing its conceptual limits and paving the way for future women street artists. "However, her expansive practice defies genre. As a classically trained printmaker, she has innovated new approaches to create large-scale relief prints, screen print editions, and intricate paper cuts" (Swoon Studio).

Her use of medium and materials has always intrigued me since many overlap with my artistic practice as well.



Image 26: *The Canyon*, mixed media installation

<https://swoonstudio.org/the-canyon/w63495pser9kpimn9zgizcqlysj99t>

Swoon was one of the first artists I learned of who combined printmaking with installation. She creates two-dimensional prints and turns them into three-dimensional sculpture objects. These objects at times expand into an installation that fills a room while other works dominate spaces with their untraditional three-dimensional displays or scale. Pictured in image 26 is an example of a freestanding sculptural piece Swoon creates. Each element is two-dimensional but brought together using three-dimensional display.



Image 27: *Cicada*, 2019, exhibit including installation

<https://swoonstudio.org/cicada/jyg9deufauax2csnu7mqf7pfsumkvo>

Swoon's use of two-dimensional imagery used in a three-dimensional space inspired the idea that I could do the same. I could use prints to create an installation that takes up space and demands attention from the viewer.

Kusama

My inspiration to create an installation grew as I learned more about Yayoi Kusama. Yayoi was born in Japan in 1929 and is one of Japan's most prominent contemporary artists. She is well known for her use of patterns, especially of polka dots and nets. She is also known for her intense, large-scale environments, such as her infinity mirror rooms. Yayoi Kusama works in a variety of media, including painting, drawing, sculpture, film, performance, and immersive installation. She was born into a wealthy

family in rural Japan that managed and ran plant nurseries. From a very young age Yayoi would carry her sketchbook and sit among the flowers. One day she experienced the flowers crowding in and talking to her. This was the first of a series of disturbing hallucinations that occurred during her childhood.

Yayoi Kusama's artistic journey continued when she first arrived in New York in 1958 at age 27. Her breakthrough works, the Infinity Net paintings, emerged from an earlier series of watercolors entitled Pacific Ocean. She had made in response to watching the tracery of waves on the surface of the ocean when she had flown for the first time from Tokyo.

Yayoi Kusama returned to Japan in the 70s after becoming somewhat of an outcast in New York. The hallucinations and panic attacks came back and she was hospitalized many times. She found a way to manage her mental state and direct it toward her creativity. "Kusama sleeps at the hospital each night and works in her studio across the road six days a week. She eats sushi from the local supermarket. She makes her own clothes. She apparently has little interest in the wealth that has come to her late in life" (Adams, 2018). She has a small team of assistants in her studio, and gallerists who look after her interests in New York, Tokyo, and London.

Now Yayoi is known for her use of dots in her works and has been referred to as the 'the princess of polka dots'. Most of her work from paintings to installation have one thing in common, dots. She said, "Our earth is only one polka dot among a million stars in the cosmos. Polka dots are a way to infinity. When we obliterate nature and our bodies with polka dots, we become part of the unity of our environment" (Kusama). She often

creates with this idea of obliteration and even wears polka dotted pattern clothing to further express it in her everyday life.

In her installation works, Yayoi Kusama creates environments of dots so that her viewers can experience the feeling of self-obliteration. She creates infinity rooms by installing LED lights into mirrored rooms. The light in the dark room reflect in the mirrors creating an endless illusion of space making you feel like you are in an infinite space. These infinity rooms have made her very popular in the current art world. They have been shown all over the world including in Boston where I was lucky enough to experience her *Love is Calling* exhibition.



Image 28: *Love is Calling*, 2019, Installation

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/09/23/arts/ica-reopen-yayoi-kusamas-kaleidoscopic-love-is-calling-exhibit/>

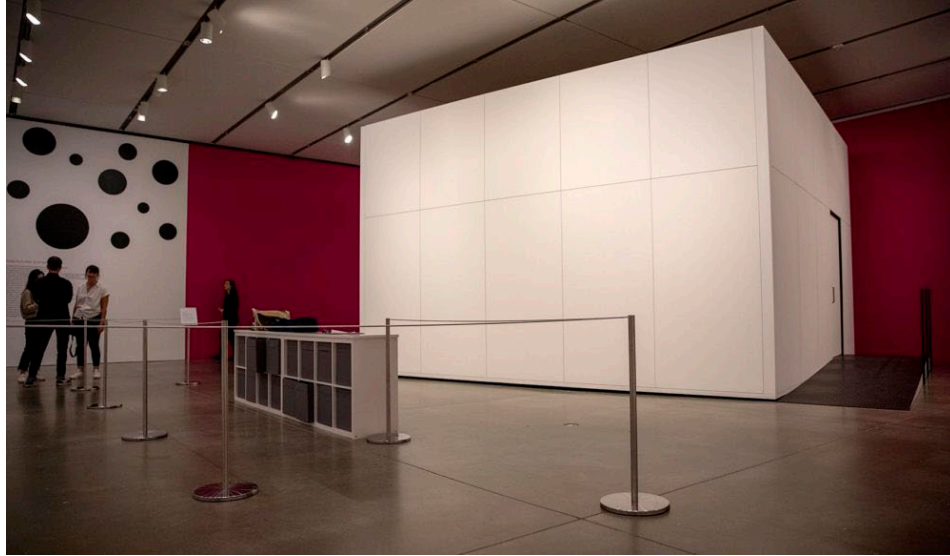


Image 29: *Love is Calling*, 2019, Installation, outside view

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2019/09/20/ica-infinity-mirror-room-yayoi-kusama>

Yayoi Kusama's infinity room was the first immersive art installation that I have experienced in person. I saw the exhibit *Love is Calling* at the Institute of Contemporary Art Museum in Boston in the winter of 2019 after my first semester in the BSU graduate program. While walking into the exhibit space you saw a big white cube, the infinity room's blank exterior, sitting in the middle of the gallery. Other artwork and poems hung on the walls surrounding it but the room still looked bare.

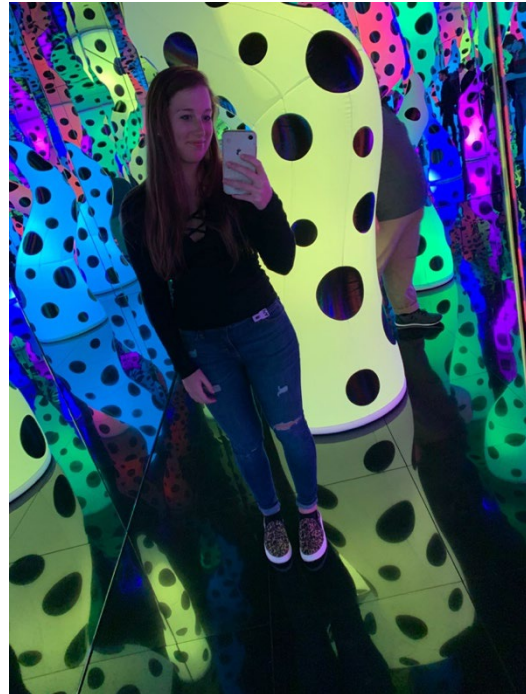


Image 30: *Love is Calling*, 2019

Inside the room you were met with tentacle like structures made of a light-weight plastic. These neon-colored squiggles seemed to go on forever as all the walls and the ceiling and floor were reflective. After your allotted time, a door on the opposite side from which you entered opened, and you walked back into the gallery. This experience was surreal. The idea of using installation became more and more prominent in my thinking. The thought of making art that just hangs in a frame on a wall did not excite me anymore. I wanted to create more for the viewer like Yayoi Kusama does.

Cage, Banksy, Swoon, and Kusama are a group of artists that have greatly influenced my work. These artists have one similarity that fascinates me. They all reuse their imagery in multiple pieces. Banksy and Swoon in particular use their images repetitively. Banksy will use the same stencil in different works which result in the works to become edition like. Some works are painted on public walls and then recreated in more gallery suited pieces. Swoon does the same and uses her prints in many ways. She will take the print and keep experimenting and utilizing it whenever she feels it is fitting. Her prints can be found in murals on the streets and in installation pieces in galleries. Seeing artists reuse imagery made me realize that this was something I can do in my own practice, and that it is acceptable. Before this project, my art was disjointed in imagery but cohesive in meanings and concept. Through this project and utilizing images repetitively, I was able to make a body of work that not only is cohesive in concept but also aesthetically.

ARTWORK

Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration is inspired by the impact of invasive plant species and the importance of native flora species. The work includes drawings on paper, large format digitally printed paper scrolls, and animations all presented as an installation at the Bridgewater State University's Anderson Gallery.

Invasive Installation



Image 31: *Invasion*, Digital drawings

The main focal point of *Native and Invasive Flora: A Creative Exploration* is a forest of large-scale digitally printed paper scrolls. These are Epson prints on plain white craft paper with bold graphic black and white imagery. They each measure three feet wide by twelve feet high. All 19 of these are suspended from the ceiling reaching the floor occupying most of the gallery space.

The installation is in the Anderson Wallace Gallery in the universities Art Center. The layout of the prints creates a walkway for the viewers to move around the space. The prints force the viewer to go deeper within the installation to discover the other works displayed on the walls. As you approach the gallery, the scrolls that are first encountered

are mostly the white of the paper, as the viewer walks deeper into the gallery they are surrounded by scrolls with imagery growing to fill the white paper with bold black and white of Japanese Knotweed.



Image 32: *Invasion*, 3'x 12', print example



Image 33: *Invasion*, 3'x 12',
print example installed



Image 34: *Invasion* installation

Layered Prints

I experimented with prints that had printing errors too noticeable to use in the installation piece. Many of the prints had creasing issues in the blank white spaces at the top of the image. I trimmed those prints down in size and played around with different ways to repurpose them. This resulted in a layered print with three prints stacked on top of each other. The paper that was used is thin enough to see through and when the prints are stacked, and a layered image came together. I displayed this piece installed with tacks only on the top corners. This allows the viewer to flip the imagery like pages, if desired. I experimented with displaying the imagery on a light table, which resulted in a more noticeable view of the stacked layers.



Image 35: *Invasion*, 20"x20", layered print

Animation

The same imagery used in the invasion installation was also used in an animation piece. After seeing each side by side in a document and quickly scrolling, the images seemed to turn into a flip book of sorts. In real time, you could see how the imagery consumed the page. The installation piece plays with the idea of time and demonstrates how the invasive plant takes over space over time and the viewer must take their time and immerse themselves in the work. The two inspired the idea to take the same imagery and

turn it into an animation. With the new trend of social media becoming video based, like Reels on Instagram or TikTok, the format of short clip-based animation was familiar to me. I stitched each image together like a single frame and created a 10 second animation that plays on a loop. After successfully creating the Japanese Knotweed animation, I created a second animation using the imagery of the invasive plant, Mile-a-Minute vine. Instead of coming from the bottom, the vine imagery instead starts from the top and works its way down to fill in the whole space.

Native Plant Overgrown Series

The biggest challenge I had during this project was figuring out how to incorporate and show the native plants importance. The body of work is heavy on invasive plant imagery, showing how it is invading land in real life and how there is less and less of these native species. To show the relationship between the native and invasive I decided to incorporate them both into one piece. This led to a series of four pieces all constructed the same way utilizing cut paper, and pen and ink drawings. Each piece showcases one native species that is considered endangered with a pen and ink drawing in the center of an eighteen-by-eighteen inch black piece of paper. The native flora shows through a cut out circle on the black paper and is distorted by cut paper versions of the invasive species coming out of the circle. Each native plant is still visible, especially due to the high contrast of its white background. But the invasive imagery overlaps creating a barrier between the native flora image and the viewer. This resembles how native flora is choked out and overtaken by invasive species in the environment.



Image 36: Showy Lady's Slipper, 18"x18"



Image 37: Goldenseal, 18"x18"



Image 38: Purple Milkweed, 18"x18"



Image 39: Braun's Holly Fern, 18"x18"



Image 40: Endangered Series

Invasive Removal Video

The research that I conducted for this thesis hit very close to home. As I researched which plants were invasive around Massachusetts, I had come to the disturbing realization that I have an invasive plant in my front yard that I planted. In the same yard that I was trying to convert into a native plant paradise stood one of the most common invasive species, a burning bush plant. I had purchased my burning bush from Lowe's, the home improvement store chain that is common throughout our country. Like many, I bought this plant and added it to my landscaping not knowing it was invasive. The bush produces berries that are eaten by animals, mostly by birds. The seed within the berries is then dispersed by the animal throughout the environment. Woodlands and meadows are commonly the areas affected by these invasive bushes and can outcompete many native plants.

For this piece, I simply wanted to share the importance of removing invasive plants. To do this I recorded myself digging up and removing the burning bush from my front yard. The bush grew closest to my house in the corner of a garden bed. This allowed me to film with minimal background obstruction. The bush was coming out of its winter dormancy and started to sprout foliage while the ground was finally warm enough to remove it. My house was used as the backdrop and is fittingly red which matches the color of the foliage the plant gets its name from. I am working on adding to this video with more invasive species removal. The current invasive species I am battling is wild onion and I want to compile a video documentation of all invasive removal I do this growing season.

DISPLAY

The display of this body of work was primarily designed for the Anderson Gallery but is not site specific. Due to the installation component, the display aspect of this body of work became very important to the overall success. The Anderson Gallery is over thirty-six feet long and ten feet in depth making it a long a narrow space. This dictated the placement of the prints for the installation piece, but they could be adjusted to fit any space.

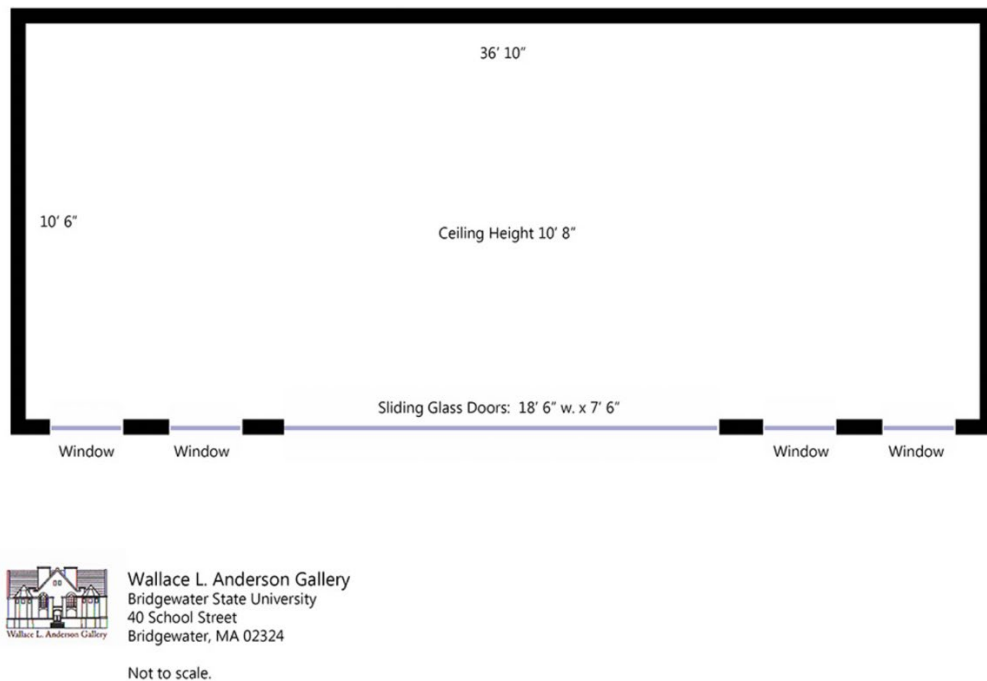


Image 41: Gallery floor plan

The printed scrolls were hung throughout the space starting from the front glass wall to the back wall. Six prints were put in the front of the gallery. The imagery on these prints was small with only a few Knotweed stalks growing. These prints concealed some of the scrolls in the middle and back of the gallery. Moving through the galley doors, four

more prints are suspended from the ceiling. This makes the viewer stop and unable to simply walk through the gallery freely. The viewer can only walk left or right. Each direction leads to another print suspended from the ceiling slightly set back from the first suspended row. On the back wall, six more prints are hung and the imagery starts to fully fill the print size from floor to ceiling.



Image 42: Installation view from front



Image 43: Installation from inside gallery

After figuring out the placement of the scrolls, I began placing the other pieces around the gallery space. Wall space was left open to display the animations on the left wall of the gallery. In the back left corner, the layered print is hung next to three ink drawings of common native flora. The right-side gallery wall displays the endangered series pieces. The entire gallery is incorporated in the display of the body of work.



Image 44: Gallery view from left side



Image 45: Gallery back left view



Image 46: Gallery right side view

CONNECTION TO TEACHING PRACTICE

My studio practice has changed immensely since entering this program. I have had to rethink how I create and how to maintain a sustainable studio practice. The pandemic in 2020 interrupted the studio practice I already had established, and it relied on working at the studio facility at Bridgewater State University. I have been a student at BSU since 2015 when I started my undergraduate coursework. In the five years between 2015 and 2020 I was regularly in the art building for class and working all hours of the night on creative projects, including in 2019 when I started my graduate coursework. The art building and printmaking studio became my second home. But this all changed when the pandemic shut everything down. Instead of going to the studio, professors had students create at home. This became very difficult for me since I relied heavily on the studios at BSU as my creative space. At that time, I was still living at home and sharing a room with my sister. We were in a small, rented house that did not have the space for my creative processes. It was during this time that my artistic practice stalled.

I moved out of my family home at the end of the year in 2020 and tried desperately to rebuild my studio practice. However, with the pandemic still in full swing and the studios being restricted, I found myself going to campus less and less. In the fall of 2020, I also started my first full-time teaching job as a traveling elementary art schoolteacher. I teach at two different schools throughout the week in the town of Rockland, which is also where I moved to. Adjusting from a part-time position to full-time while moving into a new house in a new town hindered my studio practice even more. This resulted in extreme burnout slowing down my coursework to one class per semester and I eventually took all of 2022 off from school.

It was not until the summer of 2022 when I started working on the bear project for BSU that my artistic practice started coming back. I dedicated a room in my new home as my studio. I made myself create every day to get back into the habit of creating freely, instead of just for class. I had become too accustomed to being a student instead of an artist. Now I primarily create at home and only visit the BSU studios when necessary. My studio practice consists of working before or after work for an hour or two. The subject matter I am drawn to is reflective of the life I now live, and I am trying to let myself play and explore as much as I want to while creating.

My studio practice has influenced my pedagogy, just as my pedagogy has influenced my studio practice. The introduction of play and exploration in my practice was a hard concept to grasp until I found inspiration in my students. Every day they come to art class so excited to see what we are making. They always surprise me with their creativity and what they add to their projects. Seeing them play and explore with materials in ways that I would not have been inspirational. By introducing 'play' in my practice, I realized how important it truly is. For me, play in art means to freely explore with no expectations on results. The act of doing and being curious and trying new things all the while not feeling any pressure to do anything. Now I give my students more time to play, and it has resulted in students having more creative freedom. This freedom allows them to create what they want and use their own personal inspirations and imaginations instead of just completing a project. I got caught in the mentality of just making work to fulfill a project and realized I was passing on my old thought process to my students. I conducted many projects that were teacher directed where the students followed me step by step. However, now I teach them of methods and how to use

materials while they focus on a theme, and then they create independently. This has resulted in a range of creative projects rather than cookie cutter assignments.

I have had to come to terms with the fact that not all the art I make has to be good. The important thing is to continue making it. I have passed this idea along to my students throughout my pedagogy. I have introduced my students to the artist Bob Ross who has the famous quote, “There are no mistakes, just happy accidents” (Bob Ross). This quote hangs in my classroom as a reminder for students to keep going and work through their mistakes. He has another quote that hangs next to the other stating “As long as you are learning, you are not failing” (Bob Ross). Many of my students get frustrated, just as I do, when projects do not turn out the way they want. I remind my students, and myself, that if you try, you are progressing. These positive reminders help our creative processes flow and avoid a creative block.

I also realize how important access to supplies, equipment, and space is to a studio practice. I had very limited access to specific recommended supplies, studio equipment, and adequate working space. I was able to work through these problems in my own artist practice but realized I needed to help my students do the same. I encourage all students to make art at home. I constantly give out coloring sheets and plain paper for students to take home a draw with. But I work in a district with many low-income families and many immigrant students who have little. My mission lately has been to hand out materials for students to take home that otherwise would not have access to any art materials outside of art class. By improving access to art materials, students have been improving in many areas especially when using their imagination to come up with their own ideas.

The importance of physical space to make in has correlated both in my own studio practice and with my students. As I was gaining access to space in my own home, some of my students gained space in our new art classroom too. I am an art-on-a-cart teacher, which means I do not have a classroom and instead I push a cart of supplies into classrooms and teach from there. This set-up is not the best for many reasons, such as the students' desks not being big enough, or in some classrooms it is hard to move around, or the limitation of materials that I can store or place on a cart. Rockland opened its brand-new elementary school in December of 2022. Phelps Elementary will be the new home for all elementary students in Rockland, but for now, it is only used by students from a school that had to be torn down. The students who are in the new school have gained access to so much new space, equipment, and opportunity. We have a brand-new art room fully equip with everything we could ever want. My students are now able to create in a completely different manner now that they have the proper space to do so.

I am very open with my students that I am not just a teacher but also a student and an artist as well. Most lose their minds when they hear I am still in school and instantly start relating with me. Building close personal relationships with my students has allowed me to show them the art I create on my own time. They are most astonished by the public artworks I have made, like the bear. Due to this, I have been trying to incorporate public and collaborative displays with my students' work. I received a grant from my district to create art pieces to reflect the time of change that is occurring in my district. Rockland is at a point of transition from having three elementary school buildings and consolidating into one new school, Phelps Elementary. Each school will be making a large collaborative painting on canvas that will reflect their individual school's identity. After

the canvases are completed, all three will be brought to the new school and displayed in unity. It is the hope that these paintings will serve as positive reminders of the old schools for students and help them all feel like they are a part of the new school.

This year my goal for student learning is to teach my students about contemporary artists. One of the first artists we looked at was Yayoi Kusama. The students were fascinated by the images of her infinity rooms. We watched videos and read books about her. Every one of my classes in all grades, kindergarten to fourth grade, created a dot themed project inspired by her. It was fun to share an artist I am personally inspired by with my students.

My pedagogy and studio practice truly do go hand in hand. There is an eb and flow of ideas and creativity from artist to teacher to student that I am grateful to be a part of.

CONCLUSION

This project resulted in a full body of work ranging in media from digital printed scrolls and drawings to animations all presented in an installation. This body of work explores the intrusive capability of invasive plant life and its impact on native flora. It showcases the rapid growth of invasive plants and the fragility of native species. The exploration I experienced while creating this body of artwork was vastly different from creative experiences I have had before and has changed my creative practice greatly.

Creating work about the world around me allows me to create a deeper understanding of it. During this project, I was able to introspectively explore a subject matter that is reflective of my current lifestyle. Nature has become more important than ever to me and the use of it as subject matter in my artwork has only just begun.

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