

Rooted in Place: A survey of the natural pigments available in the Western North Carolina Region

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ABSTRACT

Western North Carolina is home to one of the largest mixed mesophytic forests in the world. It harbors a vast biodiversity in flora and fauna. Being an artist here means having a seemingly endless supply of plant matter and oxides for pigment making.

In this survey, it was found that many common plants can be made into inks to use in art making. This study targeted edible, medicinal, invasive, or poisonous plants for ink making purposes. This study was performed to give myself more materials to work with to tie me to place in my artistic practice.

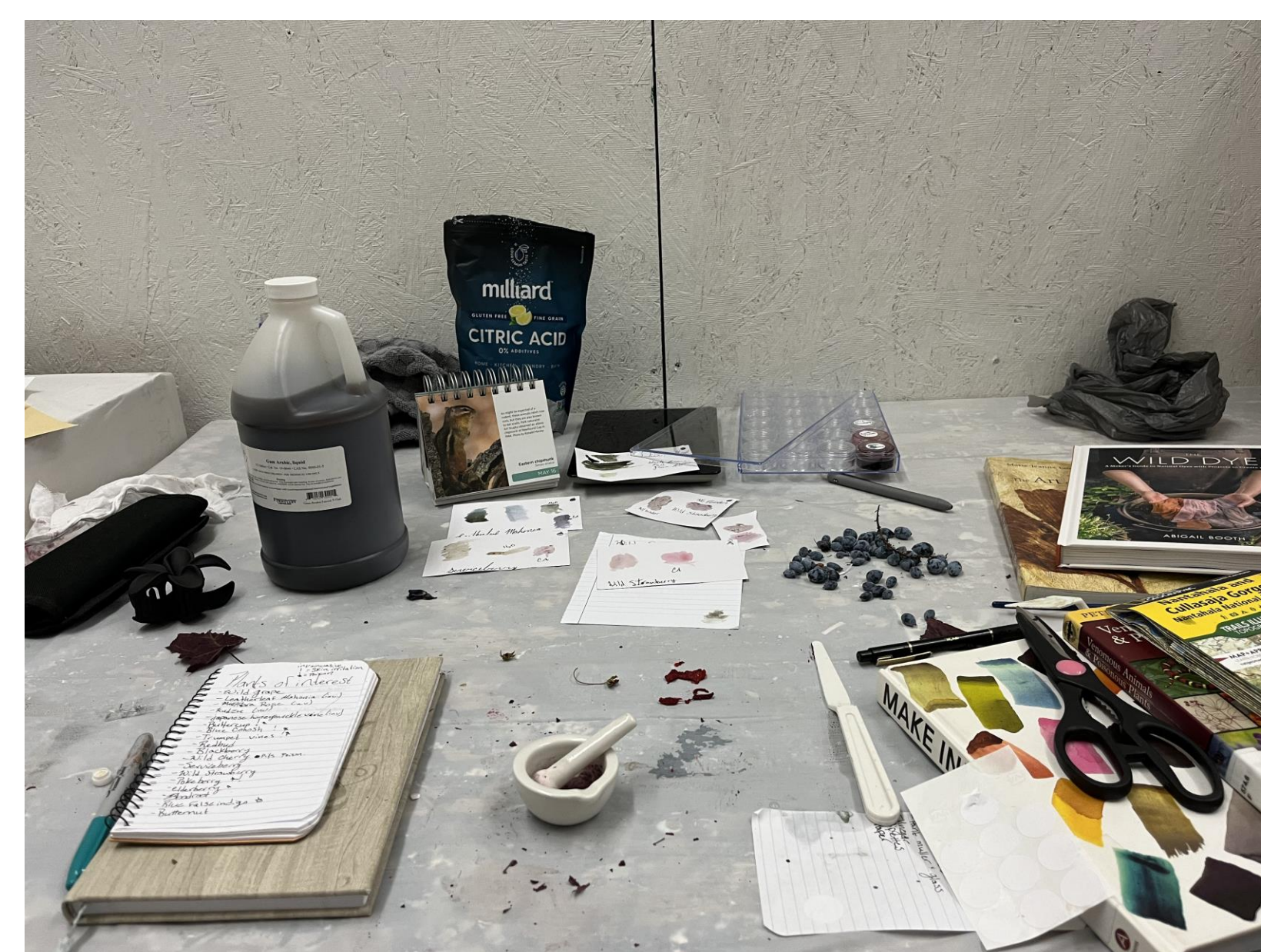
INTRO / GOALS / OBJECTIVES

As a visual artist, I am always looking for ways to create redundancy in my work. For some background information, my work deals with creating metaphor between the trauma evident in the landscape due to human intervention and what trauma does to our brains and, more specifically, memory.

By conducting a survey of the edible, medicinal, invasive, and poisonous plants of this region and learning what pigments I can make from them, I start to create a language using elements of the landscape. I later can use the information I learn in practice to create parallels between media and subject matter by photographing the human interference in the land and then using the pigments I made from the land to enhance the photos I make.

METHODS

Starting in May, I would take weekly walks to forage for plants. Because of the time of year, new species of plants were becoming available each week. Depending on what part of the plant I gathered, I would process differently. For berries and other soft fruits, I ground them in a mortar and pestle. For leaves, twigs, nuts, etc, I boiled them and made "teas" out of them. For both processes, I strained the liquids through a cheesecloth to remove particulates, put them in sanitized jars and added gum Arabic as the binder and whole cloves to them to keep them fresh. I also added citric acid to the inks to preserve their color.



Pigment Processing setup with samples




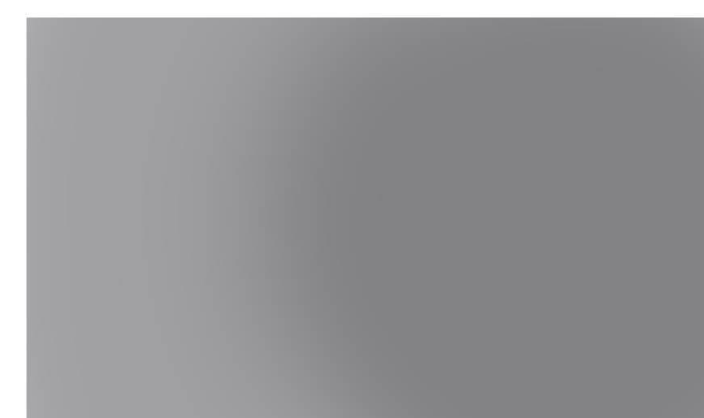

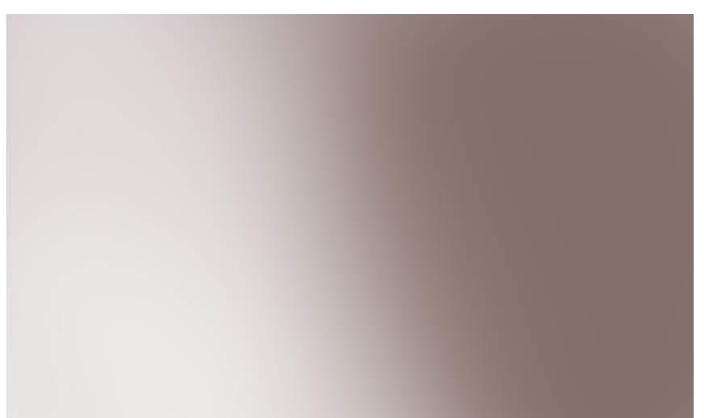




Juneberry tree with underripe berries

RESULTS

Over the course of this survey, over 20 inks were made. After nine months, the inks have not discolored or spoiled.

Sample of some of the inks generated

Nothing Added	With Citric Acid Added
	
Wild Strawberry	Wild Strawberry
	
Leatherleaf Mahonia	Leatherleaf Mahonia
	
Serviceberry	Serviceberry
	
Redbud leaf	Redbud leaf



Wild Strawberries foraged on WCU Campus

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this survey, I discovered multiple new ways to connect my work to place, specifically through materials used. Using the flora of the region to make pigments for application in other media such as photography and ceramics, I have new ways to bring redundancy to my practice, making the conceptual themes of my work stronger. Some recommendations for those who may want to use this study to further their practice:

- Ethically and sustainably source all of your materials. If on private land, ask for permission to harvest any plants. Only take a third or less of material from a single plant.
- Always add citric acid to your ink to preserve color UNLESS it is a pH indicator.
- Mulling your inks would make for a more consistent color throughout. It emulsifies the solids into your binder (gum Arabic).
- Protect inks from UV light as some are not as lightfast as others

References

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2. Jones, R. (2005). Plant Life of Kentucky. University Press of Kentucky.
3. Logan, J., & Ondaatje, M. (2018). Make ink: a forager's guide to natural inkmaking. Abrams.

Acknowledgements

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