

Process of Nature: Artmaking with Invasive Species

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In the summer of 2021, I had the immense pleasure of working as Artist in Residence at the art cottage in Richmond Beach Saltwater Park, where I processed invasive scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry plants growing in the park into hand-made paper, as well as created paint and ink from plants around the art cottage.

Prior to this residency, I had been experimenting with making paper from recycled newspaper in my studio practice. I was intrigued by the quiet, repetitive, and delicate nature of this ancient craft, and loved the different textures and surfaces I could achieve with it. I had also been experimenting with brewing ink from different plants, flowers, and minerals I found in my backyard and in nearby parks. In both of these practices, I was intrigued by the potential of these hand-made art-making materials to tell a story about place through their material components. I saw this residency as an opportunity to deepen these explorations, as well as to connect with the unique location of Richmond Beach Saltwater Park.



Paper made in my studio using pulp from recycled newspapers, tinted using powder pigments or acrylic paint, and decorated with dried flowers. The yellow paper on the left was made using yellow acrylic paint and dandelion petals.

When I made paper in my home studio, I used recycled newspaper that I had shredded, soaked in water, and blended to create paper pulp, which I reformed into new sheets of paper. In comparison, the act of processing a plant into paper was much more labor intensive. Step 1 – harvest plant material. Step 2 – trim to manageable size. Step 3 – soak in water. Step 4 – peel the bark from the woody inner core. Step 5 – boil the bark in a solution of water and lye in a well-ventilated area for 2 hours. Step 6 – strain and rinse the fibers in clean water. Step 7 – beat the fibers with a wooden mallet on a wooden surface for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Only after these steps were the fibers ready to be dispersed in water and formed into paper using a mold and deckle. The final result was a soft, flexible, highly textured paper that almost felt like fabric.



Scotch broom fibers after being separated from woody stem and being boiled in a solution of water and lye. The heat and alkalinity of the lye work to break down the chemical bonds holding individual fibers together.



Boiled scotch broom fibers are beaten with a wooden mallet on a wooden surface for approximately 1 hour.



The fibers have reached maximum separation after being thoroughly beaten, and now disperse evenly in water.

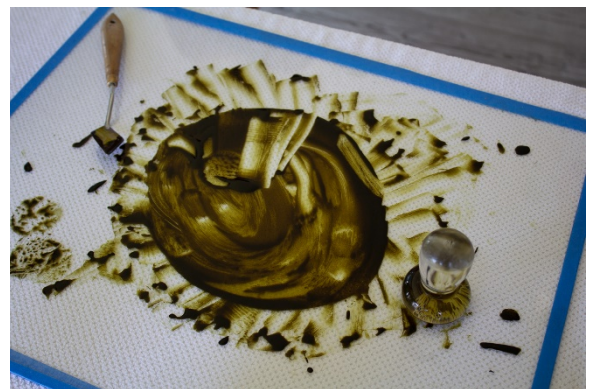
Alongside this paper making investigations, I explored the color potential of flowers and berries around the cottage. I did swatch tests by rubbing these pigmented materials directly onto an index card, thereby creating palette of colors over the course of the residency. While I had previously made ink by boiling pigmented plants and adding a preservative like vinegar or alcohol, during this residency I learned how to process plants into lake pigments, which could be ground up and made into watercolor paint.



Scotch broom flowers separated from stems and boiled for one hour to extract color.



The color extracted from the scotch broom flowers is made into a lake pigment by adding solutions of alum and soda ash which together create a solid.



Once all the water has evaporated, the solid is ground into a powder pigment and mixed with gum Arabic to make watercolor paint.

A key component of the residency was, in a word, *process*: the process of transforming a plant growing out of the ground into a sheet of a paper, the process of extracting color from a flower petal and rendering it a solid powder pigment, the process of discovery as I learned these techniques. Over the course of the residency, I took photos of each step of my explorations, which I printed and displayed on the art cottage walls. I wanted to

create a living, changing display of all of these processes that I could share with community member who came to visit, and with attendees at the final exhibition.



View of photo installation in the main entry of the art cottage showing the process of making scotch broom into paper and pigments. Samples of the fibers at each stage are displayed alongside printed photos.

Throughout the month of July, I led a series of workshops for Shoreline teens who were using the art cottage during weekdays throughout the summer as part of the City of Shoreline Let Off STEAM Camp. On Tuesday afternoons, I met the teens at the art cottage and led a papermaking workshop where they learned how to make their own paper from recycled paper pulp. On Thursday afternoons, I led a paint-making workshop where the teens learned how to grind pigment into paint, and then used that paint to make artwork on the paper they had created earlier in the week.



Shoreline teens grinding and mulling paint using chalk and powder pigments mixed with gum Arabic. The neutral toned paper pictured on the right is hand-made recycled paper made by the teens.

Overall, this residency was full of many different challenges and surprises. I found out just how much work it takes to transform a plant into paper, and how little of the total plant mass is comprised of the fibers viable for papermaking. The Himalayan Blackberry vines, which I had hypothesized would be the easier plant to make

paper from, turned out to have fibers that were too strong and woody to be broken down for hand paper making. The scotch broom, which I was entirely unsure about, turned out to have thin, soft fibers that proved very good for paper making. I also learned that when making lake pigments from plant dye, alum, and soda ash, the final color of the pigment could turn out quite similar to or very different from its original source.

I concluded my residency with a final exhibition in the art cottage on Sunday, August 8, 2021. The exhibition consisted of a display of the handmade scotch broom paper, an immersive photo installation spread throughout the cottage, a series of drawings of the cottage grounds using the paint and pigments I made on site, as well as a video installation showing the complete papermaking process from start to finish. [The link to the full video can be found here.](#)



Visitors viewing photo installation (above), and still frame of the process video projection (below) at the final exhibition.



This residency was a beautiful and unique opportunity to explore a new craft and connect with the landscape of the park. I greatly enjoyed sharing my process with visitors who came to visit the cottage on Saturdays and for the final show, as well as with Shoreline teens through the workshops we did together in July. Richmond Beach now holds a special place in my heart, and I hope to find opportunities visit in the future. I plan on continuing to explore paper making in my studio practice and am excited to see what relationships I can build with both place and people through this practice.



Drawing of a Himalayan blackberry plant on watercolor paper using a combination of watercolor made from scotch broom and ink made from blackberries.



Swatch tests of pigmented plants found around the art cottage, displayed together to create a palette of colors.



Hand-made paper made from scotch broom.