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Artist Goes With Life's Flow Winnetka Heights native values Oak Cliff's organic nature

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Red lines trace the contours of a paper river and metamorphose between plants, blood vessels, and the eye of a Chinese dragon. The medium, a topographical map of Colorado, has pre-printed lines demarcating the boundaries of mountain ranges and valleys, yet the drawing still manages to be eclectic and organic — two terms that describe the style of Winnetka Heights native Sara Cardona.

Her art can be seen in the Bishop Arts District's Decorazon Gallery — along with work by Aliza Lelah and Erin Stellmon — as part of "Stitch To Each Other," an exhibit featuring mixed media and recycled materials.

When asked why she chose a map and red marker as her "canvas and brush" she said the method began as a product of her environment: After returning to work as an art appreciation and humanities professor at Richland College, following a recent pregnancy, she began drawing with the materials she brought home from work.



Staff Photo: Christina Barany
Winnetka Heights native Sara Cardona laughs with friends during the opening night of the "Stitch To Each Other" exhibit at Decorazon Gallery.

"The boundaries between work and home and being a professor started getting blurred. And I really enjoyed bringing these supplies home that I normally used at work," Cardona said. "I like working on paper because it's more immediate to me. Personally, for me, canvas has always seemed a little precious. It set me back somehow. It took me longer to get started. It was less intimate."

Cardona's blurred boundaries have spawned pieces such as the aforementioned Sanguine Expedition — a blending of her thoughts about birth, lineage, and evolution.

"It's really about the journey of blood. This kind of weird substance inside of us that carries all this information and it's always mutating," Cardona said. "Each generation brings something from the past, but it's also in the process of changing. I don't know what future generations from my son, hopefully, will look like, but I was just imagining it as a giant organism that mutates and changes."

Cardona, who is Hispanic, said she values Oak Cliff for the "organic way" in which places like the Bishop Arts District have sprung up in harmony with pre-existing Mexican businesses.

"I think what attracts artists to this area — other than it is physically very beautiful — is that it is a community that has long, deep roots with the Mexican and Mexican-American community, and it has a unique cultural flavor — the fact that it's not totally gentrified. It's eclectic, but it's also very organic. That's the true beauty of this neighborhood," Cardona said. "In other neighborhoods the Mexican part just gets squeezed out, and that's not what has happened here."

Decorazon Gallery owner MK Semos feels that is why a mix of restaurants, shops, and galleries have thrived in the Bishop Arts District.

"[Mexican businesses] are just incorporated in," Semos said. "They are part of the tapestry. ... It's a very symbiotic relationship. All these businesses depend on one another. It's a real community."

Cardona said she likes to let the viewer interpret her work, but if you ask about the genesis of certain pieces in the Decorazon exhibit, it's not hard to read the tapestry that her heritage and environment have woven.

"When artists live in the same place that they produce, you can feel it," Cardona said. "Everything starts developing organically."

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