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Visionary Voices: The Art of Naida Oslin at the Riverside Art Museum

by Benjamin M. Adams | July 17, 2017



Los Angeles-based artist [Naida Oslin](#) explores the properties and synergistic relationships of plants, animals and natural entheogens through digital and analog manipulation using scans of plant life. Her latest exhibition features three bodies of work spanning ten years of artistic development entitled *Florescence, Visionary Plants and Birds*. One-third of the exhibition focuses on psychoactive nature of visionary plants.

The applications of visionary plants through history includes cannabis, of course, which is explored in Oslin's works in male and female form. The [exhibition](#) runs through September 13, 2017 at the Riverside Art Museum (RAM).

What psychoactive plants did you include in your series *Visionary Plants*?

For the series I'm interested in all of the psychoactives including stimulants such as coca, coffee, ephedra and tobacco, the sedatives such as opium and the hallucinogens such as mushrooms and peyote. And of course cannabis, which is in a class by itself. I'm most interested in those plants that have a deep relationship with human history in economics, morality, creativity and legality.

Why are you fascinated with the natural side of psychoactive materials?

How would you communicate with a plant? You are taking a plant inside yourself and it is combining with your mind. You are bonding with a plant. What if the consciousness of the plant was revealed through your ingestion? Anyone who has taken psilocybin has probably spoken with the mushroom. It's a profound experience. You can learn from it. These are not party substances. They are plant teachers and healers. They are the beginnings of modern medicine. For example, although the health benefits of the opium poppy have been known and used for centuries, when it was isolated in 1805 it revolutionized pain medication. Unfortunately there is now a lot of abuse of these substances. People are obviously seeking relief from stressful lives. On a positive note, a lot of people have been helped for all sorts of conditions as the prohibition of cannabis continues to come to an end.

In *Sex of Drugs*, you have a "naked" female cannabis plant next to a male cannabis specimen. What this piece meant to personify plant sexuality?

The cannabis plant has separate male and female plants, which is not universal among plants. I wanted to show the male flower because it is quickly removed from any growing operation. It's the undesirable. I also wanted to suggest the sensual side of the cannabis experience.

Why do you think some drugs are acceptable in today's society (i.e. coffee and tobacco) while others are vilified?

It's medicine when a doctor gives it to you and drugs when you do it for yourself. These substances are treated differently by different cultures. Our national drug is alcohol. And while that can be a pleasant temporary experience, it often makes people aggressive. That is a value that is supported in this culture. Cannabis makes you question the nature of things. That doesn't make you a very good cog in a wheel. That's not always good for capitalism.

Do you support medical/recreational cannabis?

Of course. I've had a long and deep relationship with cannabis that spans decades. Contrary to popular mythology, many people including myself are very productive with the help of cannabis. In the morning, I often micro dose using a vaporizer before taking a 20-mile bike ride. Afterwards, following breakfast if I am spending the day in the studio, I start my workday with a small amount of cannabis along with a cup of coffee. Dosing is everything. I use very small doses that shift my perception to get myself to a place that is a combination of immersion and critical distance. I find that to be crucial to the artistic practice and life in general.