Plant Passport

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PLANT PASSPORT ™
A Global Botanical Discovery Guide

Culture Rooted in Natural Color

From Artistic Discovery to Digital Innovation: Artist Maria Medina-Schechter Introduces Plant Passport by Soil2Surface, an iPhone App exploring the world of natural color.

An interdisciplinary project connecting botanical painting, photography, ecological research, historical dye recipes, and cultural traditions, the project brings Indigenous knowledge systems and traditional color-making technologies into dialogue with 21st-century technological innovation. Through this intersection of ancestral practices and contemporary digital tools, it explores how natural color can preserve, interpret, and transmit cultural memory.

Image: The Aztec (Mexica) celebration in December centered around greeting the rising sun is Panquetzaliztli translating from Nahuatl (meaning "Raising of Banners" at San Jose State University. Photograph courtesy of the artist. 2026.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 18, 2026

Bloomington, Indiana

From Artistic Discovery to Digital Innovation: Artist Maria Schechter Introduces Plant Passport by Soil2Surface, an iPhone App Exploring the World of Natural Color

An interdisciplinary project connecting botanical painting, photography, ecological research, historical dye traditions, and digital technology explores how natural color can preserve cultural memory.

Resonant Signs: Secret Places, Sacred Spaces

An Exploration of Our Cosmos and Our Soil

Artist Maria Schechter introduces *Plant Passport* by Soil2Surface, a new iPhone application designed to help artists, natural dyers, educators, and researchers explore botanical identification, natural color, and the histories and cultural applications of color-producing plants. Launching in the App Store in November 2026, the application is accompanied by *A Global Discovery Guide to Natural Color*, a free downloadable resource available at soil2surface.com/plantpassport.

The application emerges from an interconnected artistic, ecological, historical, and technological investigation spanning nearly three decades of painting and seven years of focused research into sustainable materials and natural color. At its center is Schechter's evolving exploration of how plants, landscapes, and the materials drawn from the earth carry histories of human experience.

Her 2026 body of work, *Resonant Signs: Secret Places, Sacred Spaces*, represents an important expression of this investigation. Inspired by the American Midwest, the project brings together 24 botanical paintings and 24 corresponding photographs, forming a two-part visual exploration of plants, place, material, and memory.

Rather than approaching botanical painting solely as the representation of plant life, Schechter investigates the plant as both subject and source material. Through personally foraging and cultivating plants, she develops natural color palettes that become the material foundation of her

paintings. Each color carries its own botanical origin, material properties, and potential historical and cultural associations.

The photographs extend this investigation, documenting and interpreting the relationship between botanical forms and the landscapes from which they emerge. Together, the paintings and photographs create a visual record of the natural world while considering the histories and knowledge embedded within it.

Created through natural pigments and botanical materials, the paintings draw upon ancestral knowledge, historical craft traditions, and the material practices of earlier generations of artists. The work also reflects the botanical and cultural histories of the American Midwest, exploring how plants, soil, seasonal change, and place contribute to a sense of identity and belonging.

As Schechter investigated the origins and histories of the colors used in her work, her questions extended beyond the studio. Where do color-producing plants originate? How have different cultures transformed them into dyes and pigments? What knowledge survives about their identification, cultivation, preparation, extraction, and application? How might these traditions be documented, preserved, and shared?

These questions helped shape *Plant Passport*.

From the Studio to a Digital Resource

Plant Passport extends Schechter's artistic research into a digital resource for exploring the botanical origins and historical significance of natural color. Designed to assist users in identifying and investigating color-producing plants, the application brings together botanical information, historical context, natural color knowledge, and practical approaches to working with plant-derived materials.

Its companion publication, *A Global Discovery Guide to Natural Color*, offers an additional framework for recording experiments, organizing research, and documenting the processes through which natural color is discovered and developed.

Together, the application and guide connect artistic exploration with accessible botanical and historical information. They are intended to encourage contemporary experimentation while supporting the documentation and preservation of traditional color-making knowledge.

The project represents an evolution in Schechter's practice: from discovering the expressive properties of materials through painting to investigating the ecological, historical, and cultural knowledge that materials carry. Technology provides another means of extending that inquiry, making research developed through years of studio practice available to a wider community.

The project was further informed by Schechter's participation in the DeHaan Artist of Distinction Award, which she received in 2024 from the Indianapolis Arts Council, with support from the Christel DeHaan Family Foundation.

The History Held Within Color

One example of the historical depth of natural color is lac dye and resin. Associated with ancient material and cultural traditions across parts of Asia, lac-derived color has been valued for its rich red, crimson, and pink hues. Its historical applications reveal how natural color has traveled through trade, craft, ritual, and everyday life.

Such histories demonstrate that natural materials carry more than pigment. They carry knowledge of landscapes, cultural exchange, inherited practices, and the relationships between communities and their environments.

For Schechter, color is not simply a visual phenomenon. It is a living archive of human experience.

Her paintings serve as a means of preserving cultural knowledge through color, while *Plant Passport* extends that preservation into a shared resource for discovery, research, and learning.

At the intersection of botanical art, ecological inquiry, historical research, and digital innovation, Schechter's work considers how artistic practice can contribute to the preservation of knowledge that might otherwise remain undocumented or be lost.

Plant Passport by Soil2Surface will be available in the App Store in November 2026.

Learn more and download the free *Global Discovery Guide to Natural Color* at:

https://www.soil2surface.com/plantpassport

Artist Biography

Maria Schechter was born in Pasadena, California, and raised in Silicon Valley. An artist of Mexican and Irish heritage she has maintained an artistic practice for nearly three decades, exploring the relationships between material, place, cultural memory, and meaning. Her German Grandmother, Maria was a painter and heavily influenced her artistic life and lived experience.

Her practice has evolved through ten distinct bodies of work developed across different places and periods of her life. Beginning with painting, primarily oils and collage on canvas, her investigations gradually expanded beyond conventional materials into the physical, expressive, and cultural properties of color. In recent years, her research has focused on natural color as a carrier of ecological knowledge, historical practice, and cultural memory.

Through foraging and cultivating plants, researching traditional dye-making practices, and developing botanical color palettes, Schechter investigates the relationship between the natural world and the histories embedded within its materials. Her research encompasses botanical pigments, plant dyes, fungi, algae, soil, and traditional color-making practices across seventeen countries.

Her 2026 body of work, *Resonant Signs: Secret Places, Sacred Spaces*, brings together 24 botanical paintings and 24 corresponding photographs inspired by the American Midwest. Combining natural color research, botanical observation, and material experimentation, the project considers the relationship between sacred memory, spiritual endurance, and the vulnerability of the natural world.

For the work, Schechter invited Midwestern artisans to collaborate in shaping glass and cherrywood elements, bringing contemporary craft traditions into dialogue with her exploration of natural materials and cultural memory.

Extending this artistic investigation beyond the studio, Schechter developed *Plant Passport* by Soil2Surface, an iPhone application designed to assist artists, researchers, and curious makers in exploring botanical identification, natural color, and the histories of color-producing plants. Its companion publication, *A Global Discovery Guide to Natural Color*, provides an additional resource for documenting research and experimentation.

Schechter recently exhibited in *Arte Club: Latino Artist Network*, a group exhibition at the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields celebrating the diverse Latino cultures and artistic practices of Indiana.

Her painting *Bumblebee and Blooms* was selected by Mark Pascale, Janet and Craig Duchossois Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago, for the 82nd Wabash Valley Exhibition at the Swope Art Museum in Terre Haute, Indiana, where it is on exhibition through January 2027.

Alongside her studio practice, Schechter has spent more than two decades bringing communities together through collaborations with major brands, municipalities, and cultural institutions. She co-founded What-Is-Art & What-Is-Sound, an artist-led international nonprofit that operated from 2000 to 2005. Developed before the era of social media and built through person-to-person exchange, the organization expanded into 13 countries and 28 cities in less than three years. The initiative received a MacArthur nomination.

Through her continuing exploration of cosmologies, historical dye traditions, ecological knowledge, and emerging technologies, Schechter brings artistic inquiry into dialogue with contemporary tools for research and knowledge-sharing.

At the heart of both *Resonant Signs: Secret Places, Sacred Spaces* and *Plant Passport* is an invitation to consider what we inherit from the natural world, what we choose to remember, and what we are willing to protect. While the paintings and photographs explore witness, sacredness, and the enduring relationship between humanity and the earth, *Plant Passport* carries that inquiry into a broader investigation of the materials, histories, and knowledge that connect us to the natural world.

Media Contact

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Interested in testing the app before launch?

Join the Test Flight beta by contacting maria@soil2surface.com.

Press can request a review copy by emailing maria@soil2surface.com.

App name: Plant Passport by Soil2Surface

Platform: iPhone

Availability date: TBA

Apple App Store link: TBA

Website: www.soil2surface.com/plantpassport



Maria Medina-Schechter
Green Haus Studio
Bloomington, Indiana
2026.

Media images: www.soil2surface.com/plantpassport

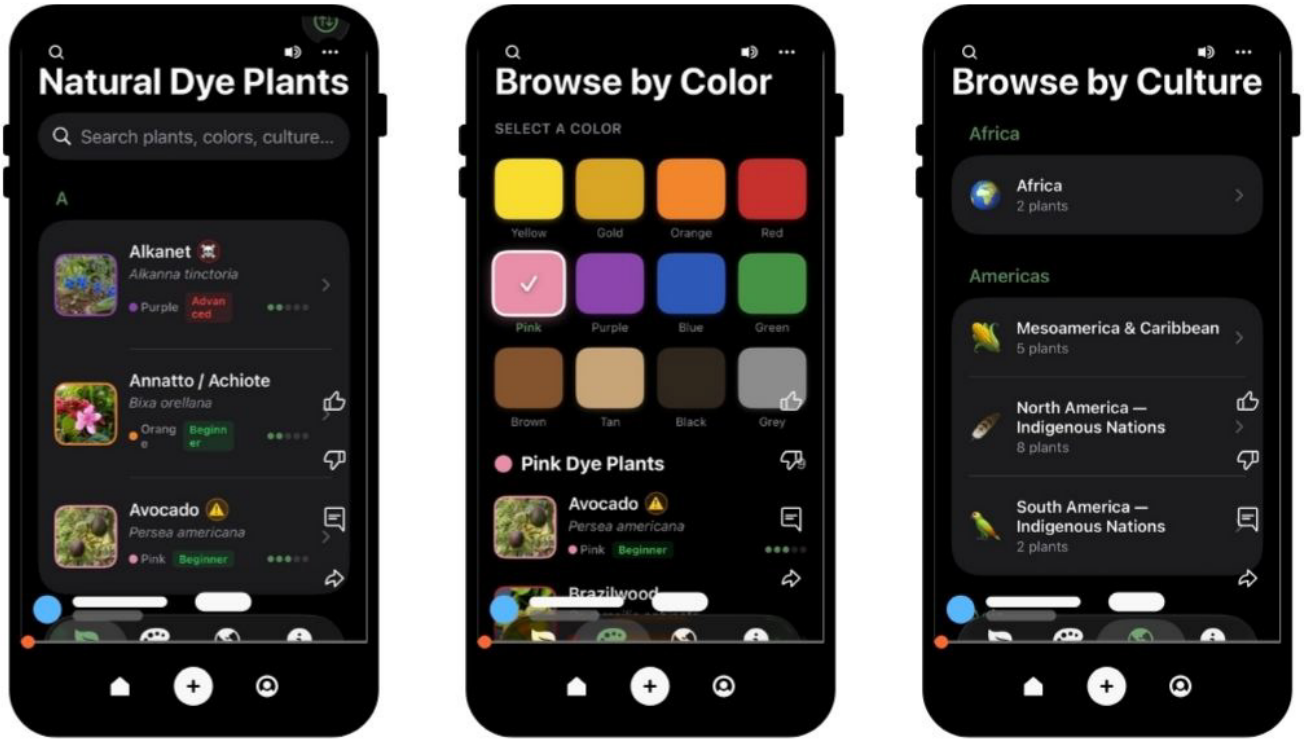
Plant Passport™ the iPhone App







PLANT PASSPORT ™
A Global Botanical Discovery Guide



Browse by Natural Dye Plants, Color, and Culture



Browse plant type:
Learn color, dye method, indigenous history



My work explores natural color as a living archive of cultural memory. Through sustainable, research-driven material practices rooted in historical craft traditions, I investigate the relationships between ecology, identity, memory, and place. Working with pigments and dyes derived from plants, soil, and local landscapes, I consider how the transformation of earth and botanical matter into color can preserve disappearing knowledge while opening contemporary conversations about environmental stewardship and cultural continuity. Sustainability is not merely a method of reducing impact but an evolving methodology, one that asks how materials are gathered, transformed, remembered, and passed forward. This attends to the histories embedded within materials and the ethical relationships between maker, landscape, and community. My current body of work, Resonant Signs: Secret Places, Sacred Spaces, centers on natural-dyed works on paper and explores color as both material and metaphor. I work slowly, extracting color through processes informed by historical dye and pigment traditions. The resulting colors are not merely aesthetic choices; they carry evidence of place, season, transformation, and time. The landscape becomes both source and collaborator, and the paper becomes a site where material knowledge and memory are recorded. Research is central to my practice; the cultural histories of color, traditional methods of dye and pigment production, and the ecological knowledge associated with pigment-producing plants and soils. My study of indigenous knowledge systems and the histories of the lands from which these materials emerge has deepened my understanding of color as substance, story, and cultural record. I approach these histories with respect and acknowledgment of the communities and traditions that have cultivated sophisticated relationships with plants, earth, color, and place over generations. Rooted in craft yet seeing craft as a contemporary language of knowledge, I am drawn to sites of resonance, places where material, symbol, memory, and belief intersect. Through natural color, I seek to make visible the connections between human experience and the living systems that sustain us. My work asks viewers to slow down and consider what materials remember, what histories are carried through color, and what forms of knowledge might be preserved through acts of making. Resonant Signs becomes both an artistic investigation and a material record of our continuing relationship with the earth

Bumblebee and Blooms
Size: 37.25 x 21.25 x 2 inches. 2025.
The painting was selected by this year's juror,
Mark Pascale, the Janet and Craig Duchossois
Curator of Prints and Drawings at The Art Institute of Chicago.

The painting is on view from October - January 2026
SWOPE Art Museum, Terre Haute, IN

www.soil2surface.com/AboutResonantSigns

Resonant Signs: Secret Places, Sacred Spaces An Exploration of Our Cosmos and Our Soil

Glass
Cherrywood
Historical palettes
Indigenous methods
21st Century Innovation

Painting Recipe: laked chokecherry, daffodil, mulberry, oak gall, pokeberry, white tempera on cold press watercolor paper mounted to wood panel.

Materials and Process: chalk, clay, a fused glass crown, and a cherrywood overlay frame. The composition incorporates preserved botanical elements, finished with a layer of gold leaf. The unusual teal pigment was created using lake pigments derived from false indigo and daffodil. Above the lovebirds, a flower playfully drapes over their heads, bringing a sense of tenderness and movement to the composition. Textural squares of edible gold, applied through a mold-printing process, introduce a tactile, luminous surface. Delicate lines of divinity draw attention to the sacred heart, celebrating the interconnected divinity of life and the enduring power of love.

Lovebirds & 7 Planets Aligned
Size: 37.25 x 21.25 x 2 inches





Owlet, Moon & Mother Size:
37.25 x 21.25 x 2 inches

Painting Recipe: laked mulberry, yellow cosmos, eucalyptus, oak gall, and white tempera on cold press watercolor paper mounted to wood panel.

Materials and Process: chalk, clay, fused glass crown, and cherrywood overlay frame. The work incorporates a custom-designed rose symbol, printed on vellum and applied as a textural background that references the historical and cultural significance of the rose. During the High Middle Ages (11th–13th centuries), the rose evolved from a symbol of secular luxury rooted in the Roman Empire into one of Europe's most influential religious and cultural symbols. Gold leaf highlights the light of life, while insect forms embody nourishment, ecological interdependence, and the sacred cycles of life.



Drollery Hare, Poppies and Susans. 37.25 x 21.25 x 2 inches

Painting Recipe: laked daffodil, indigo, logwood, madder root, oak gall, pokeberry, yellow cosmos, yellow onion skin, yellow yarrow, and white tempera on cold press watercolor paper mounted to wood panel.

Materials and Process: clay, a fused glass crown, and a cherrywood overlay frame. The work incorporates a mycelium substrate cultivated onto cold press paper, preserved botanical materials, and gold leaf. The painting celebrates spring, the cyclical nature of life, and the radiant divinity lines emanating from behind the hare reference the historical use of the halo as a symbol of elevated status of the divine connection we hold with the natural world.

Its imagery draws inspiration from the drolleries of medieval illuminated manuscripts, where the margins and borders of sacred texts often concealed playful, and fantastical. Among these curious illustrations were rabbits engaged in furious battles, riding snails and wielding swords in unexpected acts of absurdity and subversion. Drawing on this tradition, the hare triumphantly perches above a skull, presumably that of a defeated villain. Through this playful inversion of the grotesque, the work explores the tension between humor and mortality, celebrating renewal, vitality, and the enduring cycle of life.

Painting Recipe: laked logwood, madder root, oak gall, yellow yarrow, yellow cosmos, yellow onion skin and white tempera, on cold press watercolor paper mounted to wood panel.

Materials and Process: clay, a fused glass crown, and a cherrywood overlay frame. The work incorporates the shaped by clay May flowers floating above the sleeping fox nestled into foxfire mushrooms. In Japanese culture, the phenomenon known in English as "foxfire mushrooms" (bioluminescent fungi that glow in the dark) is traditionally linked to kitsunebi (狐火), which translates to "fox-fire" while the moon represented in gold leaf with luna moths are a design element and a reminder of our night sky as a historical navigation system.

Luna Moths, Mushrooms and a Fox. 37.25 x 21.25 x 2 inches







Detail of Bumblebee and Blooms Glass Crown.

The light was positioned at the crown which provided a deeper illumination of the glass crown.

My painting was selected by this year's juror, Mark Pascale, the Janet and Craig Duchossois Curator of Prints and Drawings at The Art Institute of Chicago. This piece is on view with the Swope Art Museum in the 82nd Wabash Valley Exhibition until January 2027.

Bumblebee and Blooms
37.25 x 21.25 x 2 inches

Painting Recipe: laked daffodil, indigo, logwood, madder root, pokeberry, strawberry, yellow yarrow, yellow cosmos, and yellow onion skin on cold press watercolor paper mounted to wood panel.

Materials and Process: clay, a fused-glass crown, a cherrywood overlay frame, a recycled ice cream lid repurposed as an observation disc, an ethically foraged bumblebee, preserved botanical materials, edible gold, and gold leaf. The glass flowers and dragonfly were created using a glass-and-ice fusion technique. This piece celebrates summer, with June represented as the month of the sun. A bumblebee pollinates the crown of a coneflower as a gentle summer rain descends across the painted surface, overlapping the golden yarrow that blooms during the season. The work carries the delicate scent of strawberries, inviting the viewer to experience the painting beyond the visual.

Clay feathers dusted with edible gold drift along the edges of the flower, tracing the movement of pollination and illuminating the intricate ecological systems sustained by Mother Nature. The fused-glass flowers and dragonfly evoke the remarkable iridescence of dragonfly wings, capturing the fleeting interplay of light, color, and movement found throughout the natural world. Together, these materials and gestures celebrate the interconnectedness of pollinators, plants, water, and sunlight—a tribute to the essential ecological relationships that sustain all life.

Completed during the month of COP 31, 2026.



12 paintings and 12 photographs completed November 2026



Plant Passport™, 2026 by Soil2surface.com