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When a tree falls ... make art

"Emeralds to Ashes" mourns the loss of infested trees

BY [JOHN MCLAUGHLIN](#) NOVEMBER 15, 2018

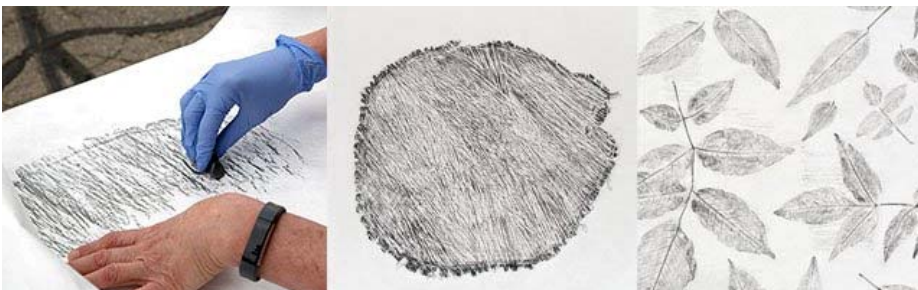


Katherine Steichen Rosing's exhibit includes rubbings from fallen trees.

Another ash tree falls, its corpse peppered with flecks of iridescent green. What might at first appear to be a kind of glitter, is in fact an infestation of the invasive emerald ash borer.

It's a strange cycle of life and death, and Madison-based artist [Katherine Steichen Rosing](#) has built a fascinating new installation around it. *Emeralds to Ashes* is on display until Nov. 29 at Madison College Gallery at Truax.

Spanning the entire gallery space, Rosing's show utilizes a variety of mediums. On each gallery wall hang long scrolls of paper, bearing the rubbings from the trunks of fallen trees — their bark, leaves and limbs — all gathered from the Madison area.



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Several dark columns of fabric are suspended from the room's ceiling. Their forms are definitively tree-like, but in their emptiness, they seem to represent loss, memorializing the ash trees lost throughout the city and country.

But when you look closer, that's when the show lives up to its name. Each fabric piece is adorned with shimmering green beads, traces of dusky golden thread, and other subtle additions; the works were completed with help from students at Spring Harbor Middle School.

These elements are all meant to represent a different part of the emerald ash borer's life cycle, from iridescent adult to egg and larvae. The intricate, serpentine patterns just under the bark recall remnants of young beetles; the beads look similar to the adult insects.

The works are laced with an undeniable cryptic beauty.

"I came to this project first because I love trees. I'm mesmerized by the formal qualities of the trunks, the bark," says Rosing, "But I wanted to bring a balance. I do have sympathy for the beetles: They didn't ask to be here, and I did find a kind of beauty in what they left behind."