

“Black Rosa”

Oil pastel on paper, 1975, by Desne Crossley,
Development



BLACK ROSA is a portrait of Desne's maternal grandmother, adapted from a photograph shot by a condescending professional and believed taken early in the 20th century. In the original photo, **Rosa Hightower Sherman** (1892-1979) is standing in front of Levi Coffin House, which had been a stop on the Underground Railroad in Cincinnati, Ohio.*

BLACK ROSA was a 50th birthday gift to Desne's mother, artist and poet Elaine Sherman Crossley. Desne's goal was to show her grandmother lit with fire from within and to press the contradiction that she may have looked white to some white people, but was black.** Rosa's father was Scot-Irishman Turner Hightower, whose family bred race horses in Lexington, KY. Her mother Martha was the black pastry chef of that household. Turner married Martha. The marriage ruined the Hightowers' lives because they were rejected everywhere by everyone—white and black.

*Cincinnati was the first stop of the Underground Railroad during slavery. Levi Coffin House was torn down; however, still in existence is the Levi Coffin State Historic Site, in Indiana.

**In 21st century society, Rosa Hightower Sherman could self-identify as biracial or African American. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s seeded shifts in self-identity, self-agency, laws, and society. In the 20th century and prior, to entrench the system of slavery, invent and promote identity politics for discriminatory purposes, and quell civil rebellions against rich whites—including those carried out by combinations of white indentured servants, poor whites, and people of color—a person with “one drop of Negro blood” was legally black. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One-drop_rule. During slavery, laws were enacted to make children the legal responsibility of the mother; whereas before, in England, children were the responsibility of the father. This change kept infants born of a black mother and white father slave chattel and without inheritance. In some areas, “one-sixteenth of a drop of Negro blood” made one black. The first organ transplant was a kidney in 1954. Rejection of a transplanted organ was common in the late 1960s; success would come in the 1980s. Progress in organ transplants pressed America to re-examine race, the question being, “Does receiving an organ from a person of a different race, simultaneously make him/her a member of the donor's race?”

Rosie and Arthur Alexander “Labe” Sherman, Sr. (rhymes with “babe”), had nine children; the second-oldest died of influenza in 1918. Elaine was the baby girl, with a younger brother. Rosie kept house and was known for her culinary and baking skills—like Martha. She roamed auctions and purchased antiques for resale; the proceeds were hidden for family emergencies. Reportedly, Labe was the first African American in the country to own a florist shop. The couple worked elbow-to-elbow on tall stools at Sherman’s Flower Shop* during Desne’s childhood. It was the second largest flower shop in Cincinnati and hired subcontractors in peak seasons. The Shop was Desne’s favorite place in the world.

Desne was one of a throng of grand, great-grand, and great-great-grandchildren, but Rosie and Desne were very close. According to Labe when Desne was a girl, she was the most like Rosie of their descendants. An especially precious memory is Rosie mailing one of her homemade apple pies to Desne after the Crossleys relocated to California from Chicago. The pie arrived the very next day, fresh and undamaged—a thing of wonder, beauty, and love.

The drawing, BLACK ROSA, was strongly critiqued in the evaluation of Desne’s college senior project in 1976. The chair of the art department took issue with the words “Black Rosa” printed on the face of the drawing, as a permanent component. He insisted it would be more durable without it and went on to say that her work was like Van Gogh’s and viewers weren’t going to be able to absorb the symbolism that was part of her work—maybe 25 percent of viewers at most. Desne replied, “Them not knowing what I’m saying? That’s a good thing. If everybody could read my symbols, I’d feel too naked to let anybody see what I think.” As a milestone birthday gift to her mother, the drawing was a success. Elaine cried.

*Sherman’s Flower Shop was founded in 1928; it closed in 2007.

JAMAICAN INSIGHTS

Contributed by: Dr. Samantha-Kaye Johnston
Affiliate, Berkman Klein Centre at Harvard University

WI LIKKLE, BUT WI TALLAWAH



The original inhabitants of Jamaica are called the Arawaks or the Tainos. Although Jamaica has a small landmass, she is quite well-known on account of her music, language (called 'patois' but pronounced as 'patwa'), food, beautiful scenery, and the resilience of her people. An endearing Jamaican saying, "WI LIKKLE BUT WI TALLAWAH", embodies this sentiment. This means that although small in size, Jamaicans can achieve anything with great impact.

THERE IS STRENGTH IN OUR FLAG

The Jamaican flag is quite iconic. The black represents the strength and creativity of Jamaicans. The green represents our constant hope and provisions as well as our lush agricultural resources. Finally, the gold represents our wealth, radiance, and the natural beauty and warmth provided by the sunlight.



LOCKED AWAY

It is not uncommon to hear Jamaicans say that Bob Marley "put us on the map", which means that he made Jamaica known across the globe. Apart from Marley's music, the world often associates Jamaica with dreadlocks (locks). In Jamaica, locks have multiple "identities". For example, it is a religious endeavour among a group known as Rastafarians. In other instances, locks are adopted as a fashion statement. Unfortunately, in both circumstances, locks are often negatively viewed, owing to the common perspective that they represent rebellion, which is not always the case for wearing locked hair.



Hair is very important in the Jamaican context. Not everyone has dreadlocks in Jamaica. But, for those who do, it is a celebration of religion, of culture, and of individuality. Why is that frowned upon?

TO DI WORLD



Jamaicans are proud to call Usain Bolt one of our own. Like Bob Marley, Bolt has also "put Jamaica on the map". Given Bolt's accomplishments in athletics, it is not surprising that track and field is loved by Jamaicans. For us, the Olympics is a very special time. It is common for Jamaicans to gather in the homes of family and friends and in the streets to celebrate this special time. Bolt is pictured here with his signature 'To di World' pose, which one can expect after he completes (and usually wins) his race.

OUT OF MANY, ONE PEOPLE

It is very common to find people of multiple ethnic backgrounds and cultures in Jamaica, including people with African, Indian, and Chinese heritage. Consequently, our motto "Out of many, one people" represents our understanding that what we produce in Jamaica is representative of diverse perspectives working in unison for a common good. Overall, our motto signifies the diversity of people and the different races, ethnicities and religions in Jamaica.



ONE LOVE, ONE HEART, LET'S GET TOGETHER AND FEEL ALRIGHT.

Digital Art Series

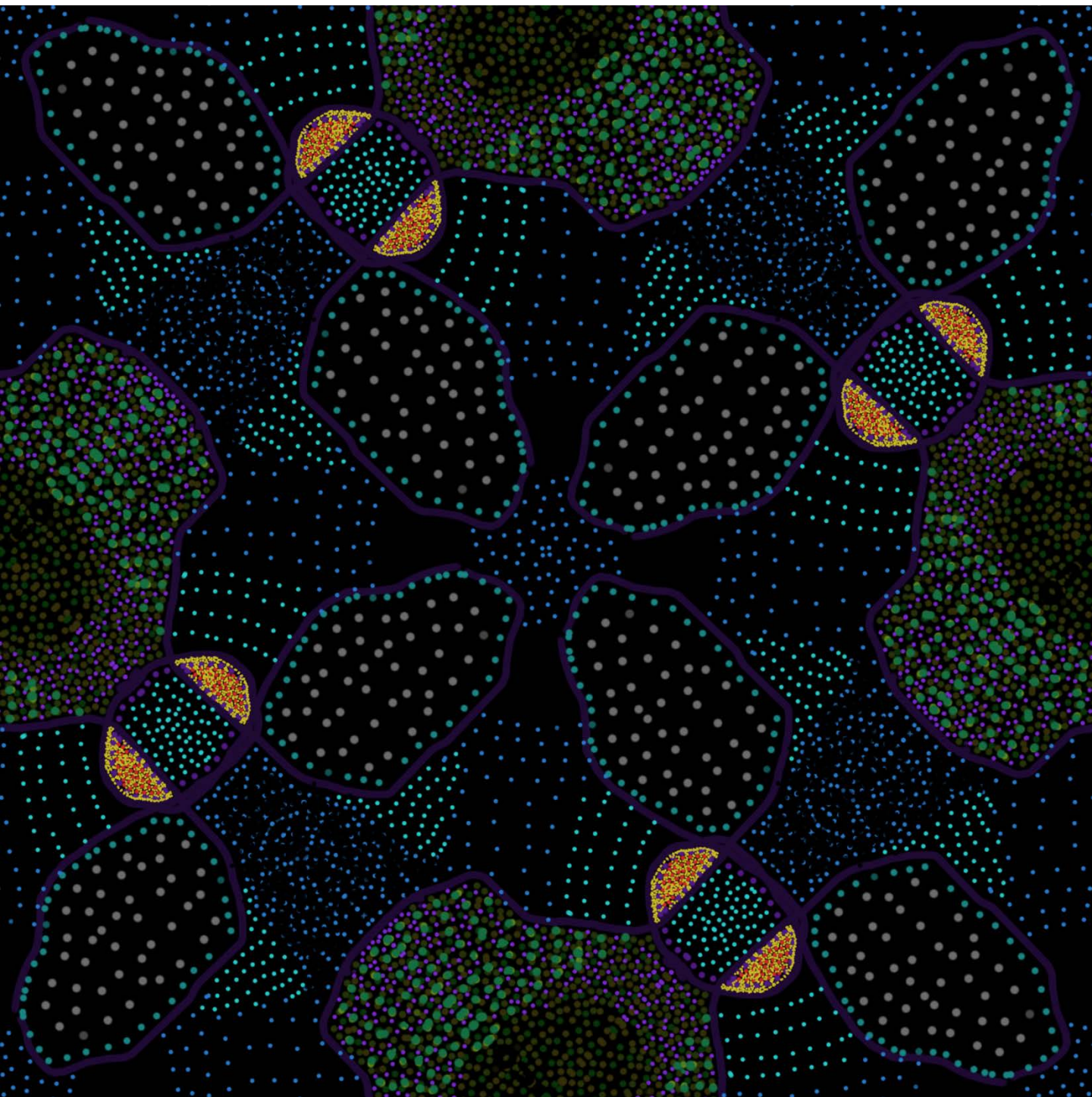
Susan Smith, *Faculty Support Services*

“Being in nature is very important to me. I have a series of digital art images made over the last year that reference my memories of lived experiences of the natural, outdoor world and travels within it. These 'Holding Patterns' made from simple dots and dashes mark specific moments in time, and are a response to being separated from the natural world and unable to travel during the pandemic.”

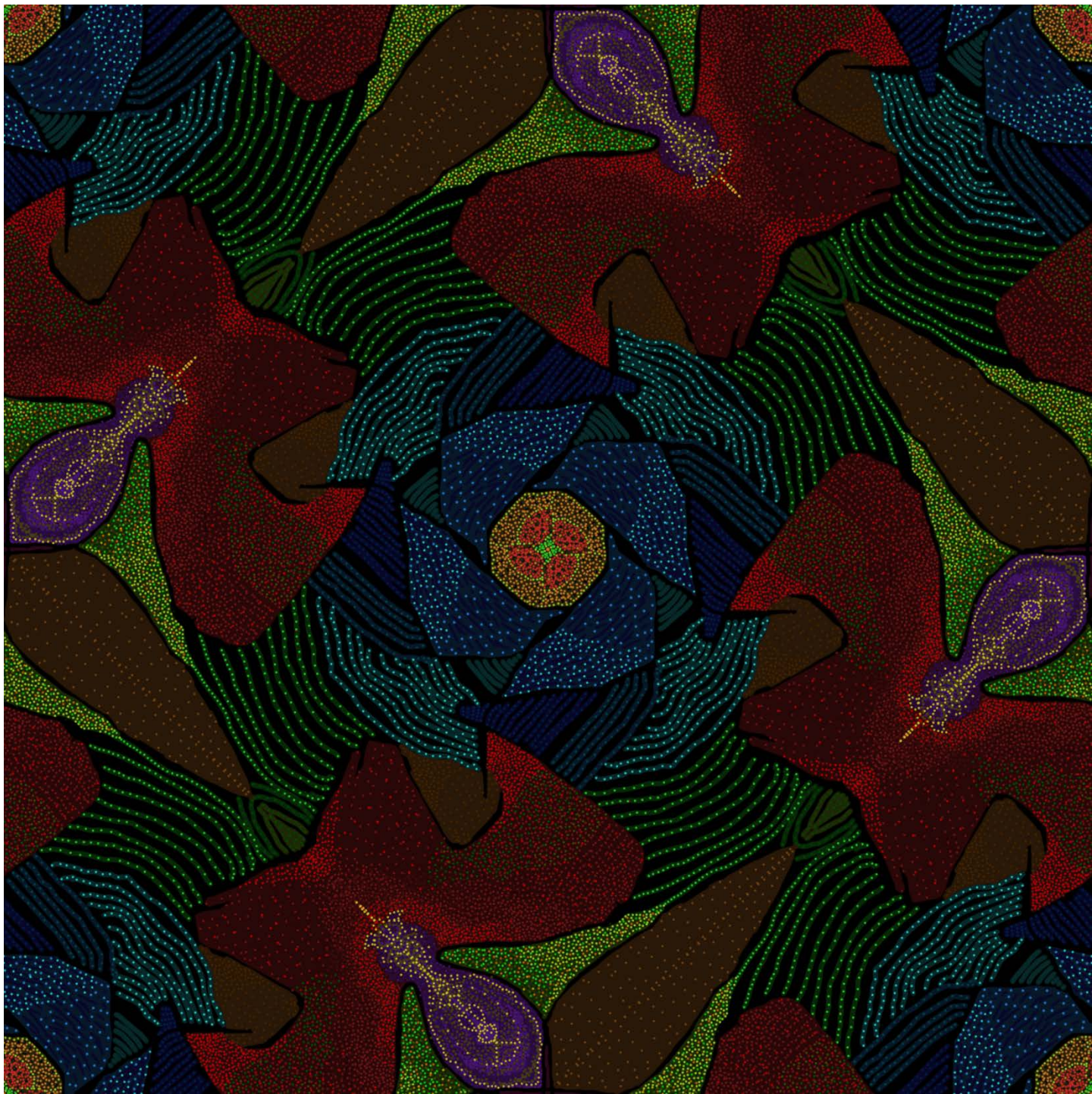
“Missing Maui”



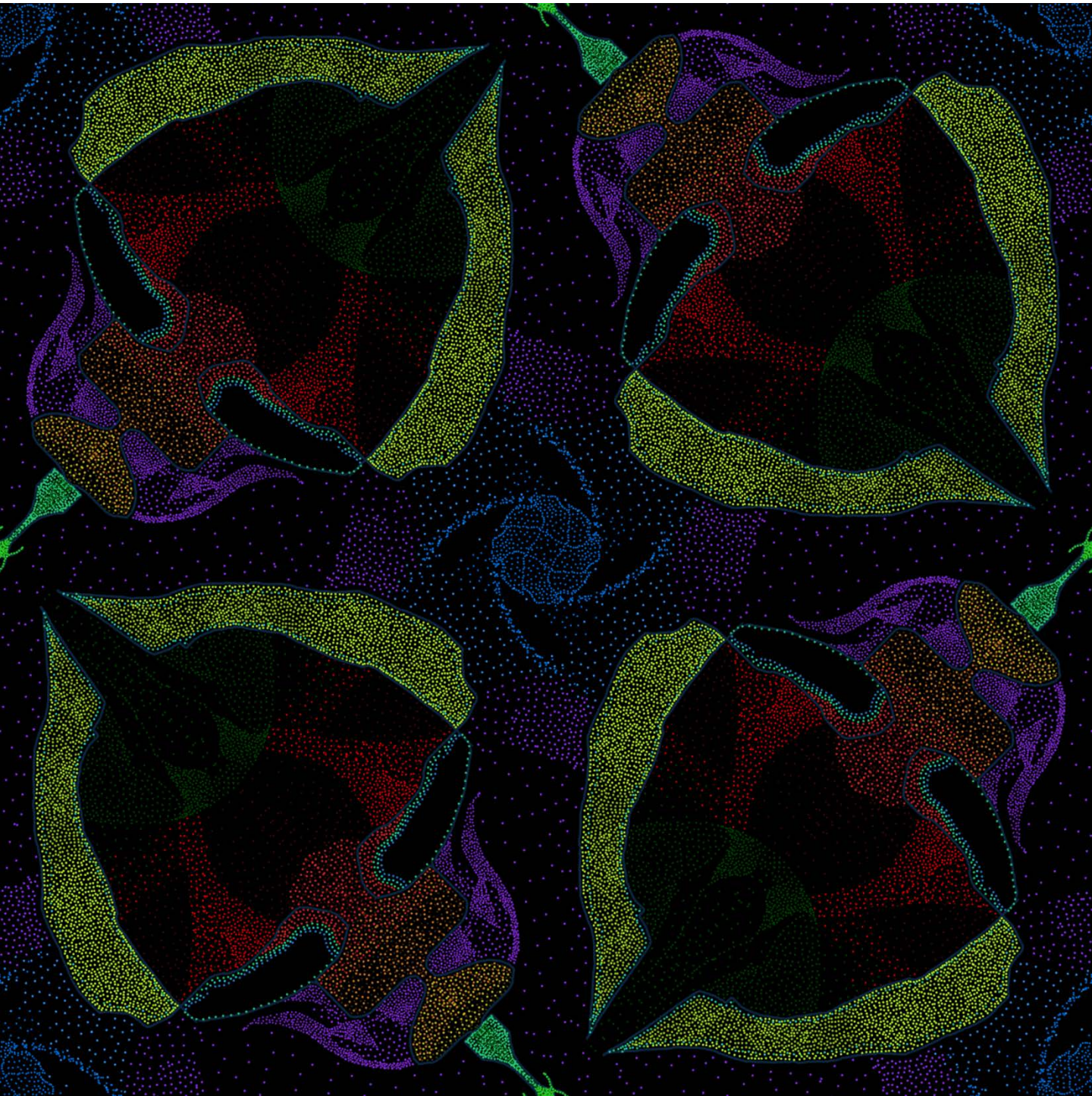
“Lightning”



“Hummingbird Gyre”



“Skate with Me”



“Sea Relic”

