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New Art Exhibit Explores Parallels Between Nature, Culture, and Society

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — The Museum of Northern Arizona is proud to present *Life Extended: Biology as Metaphor*, a new exhibit of paintings by Flagstaff artist Debra Edgerton that draws parallels between ecosystems and human society.

“Debra’s watercolor paintings are luminous gems,” says Alan Petersen, the museum’s fine art curator. “Yet beneath their beauty lie profound metaphors relating to the experience of Black Americans navigating post-Civil War America as well as present-day circumstances.”

Edgerton’s series was inspired by freshwater ecosystems on the Colorado Plateau. Observing a *Cymbella* diatom under a microscope, she saw a resemblance to the overview diagrams of slave ships. That revelation sparked a deeper exploration of how social structures might mirror those of ecological communities.

“All of my imagery has to do with green algae and diatoms,” explains the artist. “I use that as a metaphor to see how those relationships went and whether they parallel what was happening before and after the Emancipation Proclamation.”

Through her paintings, Edgerton conveys a powerful message: like ecosystems, human relationships are in constant flux—adapting, evolving, and reshaping over time.

Edgerton is an assistant professor in the School of Art and Design at Northern Arizona University and a research associate with the Museum of Northern Arizona. With roots in Japanese and African American heritage, her artistic practice explores contrasts and uncovers unexpected connections.

Life Extended: Biology as Metaphor is on view in the Courtyard Gallery at the Museum of Northern Arizona Feb. 1 through May 4. Edgerton will present an Artist’s View talk at the museum Feb. 16 at 2 p.m. Learn more at <https://musnaz.org>.

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About the Museum of Northern Arizona

The Museum of Northern Arizona sits at the base of the San Francisco Peaks on the road to the Grand Canyon. For nearly 100 years, it has served as a gateway to understanding the Colorado Plateau by engaging visitors with life-enriching knowledge and experiences centered on culture, art and science. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Monday. Closed Tuesdays through Feb. 25. Learn more at <https://musnaz.org/>.