



Seeds of inspiration

A METEOR burns as it tears through the atmosphere. No, wait, it's a nutmeg seed - licked not by flames but by strands of its dried covering, called mace.

Nutmeg and mace are well known for their culinary uses, but for artist Svjetlana Tepavcevic they are reminders of death. "I look at that and I think of all-consuming fire," she says. "Yet fire is both a source of life and a destroyer."

Tepavcevic's relationship with seeds began when she found an alien-looking object 5 minutes from her old house in Los Angeles. Dusty and broken, it might as well have fallen from space. "It looked like a cross between a porcupine and a cannonball," she says. "I was stunned by my own ignorance."

Gradually, she built up an awareness of the great diversity of seeds in southern California. "I let myself notice them, finding surprise in an ordinary moment," she says. On hikes, she would fill her pockets with them, then carry them home to take their portraits with a flatbed scanner.

Now based in Washington DC, Tepavcevic plans to publish a book of her portraits. The skeletal structure (top right), for example, is the inner lining of the seed pod of *Marah macrocarpus* or bigroot, a type of wild cucumber that twines around trees. What looks like a bisected apple (bottom right) is the seed pod of *Koelreuteria elegans*, the Chinese rain tree.

Since moving to the East Coast, Tepavcevic has found herself missing California's plant life. "You've got things growing there from all over the world," she says. Now she relies on friends to help her gather oddities. The nutmeg seed was given to her by a friend from India, who sent a message that sticks in Tepavcevic's mind: "Do you have time to meet? I've got a totally badass seed!"

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