Openlands Lakeshore Preserve Podcast
Leaf and Earthbark Prisms

NARRATOR: If you visit the Preserve and it's not winter, you'll probably see a lot of green.

How many shades of green can you name? After the easy ones - bright green, dark green, kelly green, lime green - you might think of mint green, sea green, emerald, jade, and teal; but do these words even come close to describing all the shades of green you can see here at Bartlett Ravine?

OLIVIA PETRIDES: "No"

NARRATOR: Olivia Petrides is the Chicago artist who created three prism shaped posts with stripes of colors. Two are in the ravine, on opposite sides of the path near the lake. One has shades of green. A little closer to the lake, is another with browns and grays. There's a third post by the lakeshore with shades of blue. The colors on the posts are all colors actually found in the preserve - not necessarily now, but at some time during the year.

As a botanical illustrator, Petrides has spent a lot of time in the field, trying to match colors in nature by mixing colors of paint. It's not that easy. For one thing,

PETRIDES: "Color in nature has a luminous quality to it."

NARRATOR: Our perception of color is a function of different wavelengths of light reflecting off an object. But in nature, exact colors are hard to pin down.

PETRIDES: "Color is a very illusive quality because it depends on the light, depends on what it is next to, the proportion of it."
NARRATOR: The time of day, the angle and intensity of the sunlight, moisture in the air, all make a difference. Natural objects such as leaves and bark have complicated surface textures that create tiny shadows and reflections that affect our perception. Colors also change when the object is wet or moving with the wind.

In nature, with color and most everything else, the closer you look the more complicated it gets.

PETRIDES: "Trying to see how complex the ravine is, if you just take a certain quality. That would be a sort of basic way of looking at all that's here."

NARRATOR: That's what these color posts help us see. By distilling nature's infinite shadings down to a few dozen stripes, it's a reminder of just how much is going on that we don't always notice - especially for those of us from urban settings. We're much better at seeing what we need to survive in the city. Think of all the visual clues we use just to cross a street. But when we spend more time in nature, our senses begin to adjust. Subtle colors, textures, and patterns come into focus.

Look closely. See if any of the colors on the posts match colors you see in the trees, plants, soil, and rocks around you.

You may be tempted to focus on the greens, at least during the warmer seasons, but don't overlook the browns.

PETRIDES: "I think those are the more interesting colors. They're harder to identify and they sort of challenge me more. I like looking at the muted, subtle colors, and they're kind of surprising because some of them have pinks and yellows and sort of mauve in there, and they're just beautiful."

NARRATOR: The closer you look, the more you realize: nature comes in more colors than you'll ever name. And not just colors, but shapes and patterns and textures abound with extraordinary detail. There is so much more to the natural world than we absorb at first glance.

The color posts and other artworks throughout the Preserve were placed
here to help us see this abundance. By looking at nature through the eyes of artists, we can hone our senses to be more aware of what is around us in this magnificent world we inhabit.

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