

**CATHY WURZER:** It's that time of year when people around Minnesota are preparing for the Minnesota State Fair. This week on *Minnesota Now*, we're spotlighting a quintessentially Minnesota art form-- crop art. Sam Stroozas is a digital producer at MPR News. Her current story's about a crop art class that happened over the weekend. She joins us right now to talk more about the work and the artists who make it. Sam, welcome to *Minnesota Now* it's your debut.

**SAM STROOZAS:** Hi, Cathy. Thanks for having me. Yes, I'm very excited.

**CATHY WURZER:** I'm glad you're here. OK, now, for the uninitiated, what the heck is crop art?

**SAM STROOZAS:** Yeah, so it's essentially what it sounds like. It is creating art out of seeds. So what people will do is trace a design with carbon paper and copy that over onto a board. Or they might freehand draw a design that they've had in mind, and then they'll use Elmer's glue to follow along the outline. And then they'll use a toothpick to push around seeds and decide where they want their seeds to go, what colors they want to use. Some advanced artists may use tweezers too, but it's very unique to the Midwest, which makes it all the more special.

**CATHY WURZER:** OK this sounds fairly simple just on the face of it, but I'm guessing it is not.

**SAM STROOZAS:** That's kind of what I thought going into it. I know the more intricate ones definitely take more time. Someone that I spoke to who has been at the State Fair a lot spent over 80 hours on one piece. And I don't believe anyone finished that day. We had three hours, and people were about halfway through, but no one walked away with a complete piece.

**CATHY WURZER:** OK, so you went to this class, and did you attempt to do a piece?

**SAM STROOZAS:** I did not myself. It had me thinking that I really should attempt one-- to do one. But it was about a dozen people at Marine Mills Folk School at Marine on the Saint Croix, so it's about an hour drive from my apartment. I got there. I go in. There's bluegrass music playing, John Denver, and we just start going with the seeds. People pick out what seeds they want. They had some designs. And some people did free-handed stuff, and then some people just copied over pictures that they had.

**CATHY WURZER:** I'm wondering, does it-- the seeds must be the key to everything, right, to pick the right seeds for what you're doing?

**SAM STROOZAS:** Yes. So the seeds are basically the central art form with crop art, but there's only some seeds that are actually allowed when you're entering the Minnesota State Fair. So they practice that regardless, just so people know what is allowed and what's not allowed if they decide to use their pieces. So the State Fair does not allow wild plant seeds, white rice, sesame seeds, or dyed seeds. And all the seeds used have to be from Minnesota-grown crops.

**CATHY** I love the fact that you did a story on crop art where some people were there for the very first time. What did  
**WURZER:** they say about this?

**SAM** Yeah, so a lot of the people there had seen it at the State Fair, and they were really excited to work on a hands-  
**STROOZAS:** on activity that they had valued and really admired over the years. I talked to someone who has visited the agriculture and horticulture building, they said, about 40 times over the last 40 years. They went every year but 2020 with COVID, and they said they were super excited to do it themselves. Some said it was harder than they thought, some said it was easier, but definitely a lot of patience, and focus, and non-shaky hands was key.

**CATHY** That is the key, the non-shaky hands. One of the artists I know that'll be at the fair this year is Liz Schreiber. Can  
**WURZER:** you tell me about her work?

**SAM** Yeah. So Liz has won seven first place ribbons at the State Fair. She started crop art in 2004 after seeing it in the  
**STROOZAS:** agriculture and horticulture building like us. And then she just teaches crop art classes on the side. So she focuses on portraits. She's done the Bride of Frankenstein, Joan Jett. She did a Little Richard portrait. That was the one that took over 80 hours. So she'll be making crop art every day at noon in the agriculture and horticulture building with the U of M.

**CATHY** So I did not know. I figured that crop art was done in other states, like Iowa, right? But I didn't realize it was really  
**WURZER:** a Minnesota tradition.

**SAM** Yeah. So Minnesota says crop art instead of seed art to honor the farmers and localize the angle a little bit more  
**STROOZAS:** with the type of seeds that are allowed. So people use all different kinds of seeds, but some popular ones are gold flax or red quinoa. And it is the most popular in Minnesota, but there is a Corn Palace in South Dakota--

**CATHY** Oh, yeah.  
**WURZER:**

**SAM** --that was actually built in 1892 with outer walls that are covered in corn.  
**STROOZAS:**

**CATHY** Sam, have you seen that, by the way, the Corn Palace?  
**WURZER:**

**SAM** I have not.  
**STROOZAS:**

**CATHY** You must. You must. It's a bucket list item.  
**WURZER:**

**SAM** Yeah, for sure.  
**STROOZAS:**

**CATHY** Yeah. So I know you're a fan. So this year you're going to go, and what do you think you might see?  
**WURZER:**

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** Yeah, I have always loved crop art and just going to the State Fair in general. I go every year with my parents multiple times, even though I am from Wisconsin. I just think it's very unique, and it represents our state so well. And it's important to thank the farmers who put food on our tables. And I'm looking forward to seeing pieces about the current political climate and local music icons, like Lizzo, now that her new album has dropped.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** Oh, I didn't think about that. That would be pretty cool. Sam, you're going to have to, of course, enter something somewhere along the line. That's your next step. You know that, right?

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** I think I'll spend the next few years maybe trying to perfect seed art on my own.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** I can see you doing that. Sam, thank you for the report. Great job.

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** Thank you.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** Sam Stroozas is a digital producer at MPR News. You might want to check out the crop art story by going to [mprnews.org](http://mprnews.org).