BOISE, ID

Thin Skin

Glistening silver clouds—made of plastic film and vaporized aluminum and filled with varying amounts of helium—float freely in a small room, shifting with the movement of air or with the gentle touch of an observer. Andy Warhol, widely known for his unconventional art, created this installation concept, *Silver Clouds*, as an integration of pop culture and new technology in art.

Warhol's piece, along with 19 other works that investigate the relationship of air, bubbles, thinness and circular shapes to life and art, will be featured at the Boise Art Museum in "Thin Skin: The Fickle Nature of Bubbles, Spheres and Inflatable Structures," on display March 13 through May 23.

The exhibit will showcase artwork created through a variety of technologies, with displays ranging from sculptures and photography to full-room installations. For instance, gauzelike webs of fabric, created by Ernesto Neto, will provide a dreamlike realm for museum patrons to investigate.

Artist Sutee Kunavichayanont uses *Siamese Breath (Twins)*, a two-figured silicone sculpture inflatable by human breath, to represent cultural identities, the spiritual past of Thailand and the integration of the East and West.

Pipilotti Rist's *Nothing* features fragile soap bubbles, produced by a bubble machine and waiting to be popped by curious individuals.

For more information, call 208-345-8330, or visit www.boiseartmuseum.org.

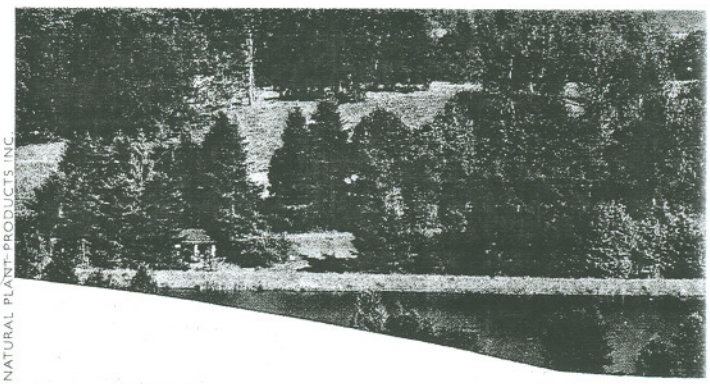
—Andrea Fortney

WILLAMETTE VALLEY, OR

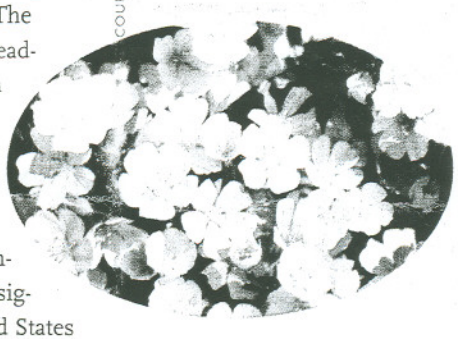
Natural winner

Native meadowfoam may be a wonder crop

When viewed from an airplane, the swaths of white meadowfoam flowers growing amid the green crops in Oregon's Willamette Valley resemble snowfields. But the wildflower is, itself, a crop being grown for sale.



COURTESY: NATURAL PLANT PRODUCTS, INC.



Cosmetics companies value the rehydrating and preservative properties of oil extracted from meadowfoam seeds.

Meadowfoam's potential began to be recognized when researchers at Oregon State University, funded by the USDA, began searching for a new crop with commercial possibilities in the late 1950s. The researchers found that meadowfoam seeds produce an oil that is very stable, making it promising for use as a lubricant and in products such as cosmetics and food. The researchers' project took on extra significance when the United States banned sperm whale–oil use in the early '70s.

By the mid-1970s, the OSU group had developed the first variety of meadowfoam that was tall enough to be harvested with a combine and that retained its seeds during harvesting. Commercial production began in 1979, and today there are approximately 84 commercial growers—all in Oregon—along with some research-only plots in Virginia and New Zealand. Growing conditions are ideal in western Oregon because the plant likes moisture but doesn't like hot or cold extremes.

Natural Plant Products Inc., the production and marketing arm of the OMG (Original Meadowfoam Growers) Meadowfoam Oil Seed Growers Cooperative, sells the refined oil to 25 worldwide distributors for roughly $5.75 per pound. End buyers include Revlon, L'Oréal, Chanel, Aveda and Mary Kay, says NPP CEO Jerry Hatteberg. The industry is working to increase sales and reduce an oversupply of oil that hit the market in the 1990s, when NPP had an exclusive agreement with a marketer who requested more oil than there was demand. In the 2002-2003 fiscal year, refined meadowfoam oil grossed more than $2 million, Hatteberg says. NPP is looking for a 10 percent increase this year over last year.

In late 2003, the oil became available as a bio-based hydraulic fluid, and many applications still need to be researched, including use in inks, detergents, fabric softeners, waxes, leather preservatives, sleep aids, foods and rubber products.

"Meadowfoam has so many directions it could go, scientists can't keep up," says Terry Isbell, USDA research chemist.

Meadowfoam meal—left over after the oil is extracted from the seeds—is being sold as an organic fertilizer, and is being studied as a herbicide, a fungicide and a pesticide.

"Meadowfoam is a very succulent little plant," says Jimmie Crane, retired Oregon State senior faculty research assistant, "yet you can grow it out here, and the slugs don't eat it ... and in Oregon slugs eat anything. The best is yet to come for this amazing plant," he says. "It's like a wonder crop." *—Cassi Clark*