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Natural Inspiration

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Fire Island National Seashore (FIIS) Site Manager Chris Olijnyk pointed to one of his favorite images by photographer Xiomaro, also known as Xio (pronounced SEE-oh). The photo revealed a close up of a ruler against which the kids recorded their heights.

"This image makes you think about how many children have gathered in this hallway to literally measure up against other family members - and how they must have teased each other, or stood on tiptoes. This small section goes back 100 years. Imagine how cool this would be to have in your own home, to have this very real connection to your family's past!"

Making this connection exemplifies the work of Xio, one of more than 50 participants in [Artist-in-Residence](#) programs at National Park Service (NPS) sites throughout the country. Last year's Centennial provided a great opportunity for artists such as Xio to imagine park resources in beautiful and provocative ways.

In anticipation of the Centennial, [A Call to Action](#) was developed to reconnect and encourage public engagement. Call to Action #10, Arts Afire, acknowledged the importance of art as a way to connect with future generations of visitors, supporters, and advocates. Artist-in-Residence programs naturally open a door to the community and invite them to find their park and share the experience with others.

In 2016, Xio was selected as the NPS Centennial Artist-in-Residence for the [New England Trail](#) (NET), in partnership with the Connecticut Forest & Park Association and Appalachian Mountain Club. The NET is a 215-mile hiking path that travels through 41 communities in Connecticut and Massachusetts with colonial historical landmarks and a range of diverse ecosystems. Xio had never hiked the NET before and was unfamiliar with its significance and the area. The NET inspired Xio to use photography as a way to capture local interaction and the simplistic beauty of the trail.

At FIIS, Xio contributed two images to the 2016 Find Your Park Centennial Juried Art Exhibition. The exhibit was part of FIIS's centennial celebration of the NPS and included an exhibit reception on Founder's Day, August 25. The display included an evocative image of the historic graveyard at the William Floyd Estate, a 25"x17" print entitled "The Other Side." An untitled image revealed a sinuous ocean shoreline adjacent to the Fire Island Wilderness.

"With thousands of objects on display in the Old Mastic House, it can be difficult to really look at one item when you're on a tour," said Olijnyk. "His photography highlights those items that sometimes only the staff has the time to appreciate in fullness."

From 2011 to 2017, Xio had the privilege of working at Weir Farm National Historic Site (WEFA) as a Centennial Visiting Artist. This was a natural fit for Xio, as the site celebrates three generations of American artists and their work. "The Artist-in-Residence program at Weir Farm provided an opportunity for me to think, experiment, and connect with the community," said Xio. "That month in 2011 was the springboard I needed to reach new and diverse audiences that do not traditionally visit the parks." In the past few years, Xio has also developed projects with Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area and Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

You can find more examples of Xio's [national park projects online](#) and in the parks themselves.



(Photo by Xiomaro)

