The Art of Horticulture I: Plants as a Subject of Art
Horticulture 201 – Fall 2004

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Horton Lab, Ken Post Labs and Greenhouses
Tuesdays, 1:25 – 4:25 p.m.

Teaching Assistants:
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Office hours
Tuesdays, 8:30 – 11:30, by appointment, in 169 Plant Science Building
Other times as arranged by appointment.

For additional course resources, to see a gallery of student projects, and for a copy of this syllabus and handouts, visit the course website, www.hort.cornell.edu/art

To view the Cornell Cybertower on Fine Art and Horticulture, visit http://www.cybertower.cornell.edu (a free registration is required).

Rationale
Part of a Hort 201 – 203 sequence, this experiential course will consider plants and gardens as a subject of art. Students will explore basic drawing techniques, botanical illustration methods, watercolor, and garden photography. The course will address the natural history and symbolic use of plants in fine art, and will consider the artist’s relationship with the garden. Students will critically reflect on course content in journals and explore the work of garden writers. During the studio portion of the course, students will have ample opportunity to paint, illustrate, photograph, and write about plants and gardens. By keeping a reflective journal, students will express their own thoughts about art and horticulture, and have the opportunity to write creatively. We will host several visiting artists and will visit the special collections of Mann Library to see illustrations in rare books.

Students are encouraged to take this in sequence with Hort 203, The Art of Horticulture II: The Use of Plants in Art and as Artforms, offered in the spring semester.

Taking this course will also provide students with a unique chance to view science from a very different perspective. Creativity is the cornerstone of advancement in science. Exploring the relationship between art and science can foster an understanding of principles of design and presentation in living forms. Exploring the art of horticulture will help students view plant forms through a unique lens.
Who should take the course?
Given that we define horticulture as both the “art and science of growing plants,” the course would provide horticulture and plant science majors with a context for the aesthetic aspects of the discipline. It would provide non-majors with the chance to explore an artistic perspective of horticulture in an interesting and engaging exploratory environment.

There are no prerequisites for this course. All studio and art-related activities and explorations will be at a beginner level. No formal art or horticulture experience is necessary for this course. It is expected that students will spend time outside of class sketching, painting, photographing, and writing about the plant world.

Major Conceptual Areas for the Course
Students will choose one or more major conceptual areas to explore in depth. Journals, final projects, and other activities will be conducted through this lens.
- Beauty: the aesthetics of plants and gardens, the intersection of art and horticulture
- Human well-being: the impact of the artful side of horticulture on our emotional, psychological, and spiritual health
- Self-expression and discovery: uncovering and articulating your thoughts and reflections that emerge around topics and activities in the course.
- Nature and our relationship with it, as expressed and “worked out” in the garden.

Course Objectives
Upon completion of the course students will be able to:
- Discuss the diverse ways in which artists have a relationship with plants and gardens.
- Begin to be able to articulate a “personal aesthetic” of topics covered in the course, and describe what appeals to you.
- Recognize the “art of horticulture” in public and private spaces.
- Gain proficiency watercolor, drawing, photography, and/or writing.
- Critique elements of the art of horticulture covered in the class.

This course will also provide students with the opportunity to think broadly about questions such as:
- What do the changing images of horticulture in art tell us about our notions of beauty?
- What does horticulture in fine art tell us about the relationship of the garden and nature to the artist?
- Why have artists used plants and gardens as a medium for expressing themselves?
- What can we learn about horticulture from various art forms?
- How are plants symbolically used in fine art to convey emotion?
- What means of horticultural art expression most speaks to me?

Class Format
Class will meet from 1:25 – 4:25 on Tuesdays. Typically we will begin with a brief discussion or presentation and move to the studio portion of the class. There will be a
field trip to the Johnson Museum, the Mann Library, and one or more outdoors to sketch, weather permitting. We will have several visiting artists.

**Course Resources**
On reserve and available at the Cornell Store:


You will select one of the three books above and devote one journal article to a two page book review, providing a brief overview of the book, discussing the author’s main points, whether or not the writing resonated with you, points you agreed or disagreed with. The book review will be due November 23.

**Journals**
Students will be asked to keep a journal throughout the course. Students will:

- Briefly summarize learnings.
- Extensively critically reflect on content and its application to you and your interests.
- Make connections and compare with other experiences.
- Email journals to ME14@cornell.edu, once each week. Paste your journal from Word directly into the email message. The subject line can contain the week (week 1, week 2, etc.).

Consistently late journals can jeopardize your grade.

Please note: I will ask your permission to share portions of your journal in presentation or publication settings. Your identity would remain anonymous, and in addition, entries used would be general examples that would not in any way reveal your identity.

**Course Requirements**

- Attendance and active participation.
- Completion of course readings and assignments.
- Weekly journal keeping.
- Creation of a final project of your choice, on a topic of interest. The final project can be a further exploration of a topic from class, or a work of art and horticulture that is not addressed in class. This could be, for example:
  * a music composition, sculpture, or other piece of original work
  * a food-related project that weaves art and horticulture with food presentation
  * a series of watercolor paintings or botanical illustrations
  * a series of acrylic or oil paintings (acrylic and oil are not covered in class)
  * a case study of a public garden setting
  * your analysis of the work of an artist
* an essay, poetry collection, or other piece of garden writing
* a web feature
* a photoessay documenting the community life and activities of our class.

Final project must be approved by instructor.

**Grading**

25% Participation in class, studios, discussion, assignments, and activities. Missing more than two classes will greatly affect your final grade.

35% Journal keeping. Missing weeks of writing in your journals, or being late with assignments, will affect your grade.

25% Creation and presentation of final project.

15% Submission of the collection of sketches, paintings, photos, optional assignments, and other works created over the semester.

**Supplies Needed**

- Large sketchbook (inexpensive but decent quality pad such as Strathmore Sketch premium recycled). Good quality watercolor paper block or loose paper may be desirable but isn’t necessary.
- Brushes: I would suggest several different sizes, such as #4, #8, and #12. Please, no stiff bristled brushes. Look for large brushes with good, fine points.
- Tubes of watercolor paint. Reeves offers an inexpensive full set.
- Inexpensive palette or dinner plate.
- A range of pencils from 6B to 4H.

Please bring along cameras to the three sessions devoted to photography. Sessions will be geared toward working with the type of equipment that you bring along. If you don’t have a camera, we will have several to loan to a group to work with.

**Materials fee**

$50, checks payable to Cornell University, due by the third week of class.

**The Course at a Glance**

**Week 1 (August 31):**

Course expectations and goals, personal experiences.

Introduction to the course: what is the “art of horticulture?”

Course goals and objectives: balancing breadth with depth.

How the course will be structured.

Creative writing exercise

Begin drawing exercises

**Suggested journal topic:**

- Think back to a favorite painting, drawing, or other work of art. What was it about that piece that spoke to you? What details do you remember about it?
Week 2 (September 7):  
Introduction to techniques of botanical illustration.  
- Drawing exercises to help students better observe subject matter  
- Pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, carbon dust, ink wash, color pencil, watercolor pencil  

Suggested journal topic:  
- As a child, did you enjoy art? Do you still? How has your expression of art changed since your childhood, if at all? If it has changed, why do you think that might be?  

Optional assignment for portfolio:  
- Create some pencil sketches of a topic of interest to you.

Week 3 (September 14):  
Visit the Mann Library to see botanical illustrations in rare books.  
Illustration techniques, continued.  

Suggested journal topic:  
- People often retreat to the garden for relaxation. Think of a time that a public garden space, personal garden, or other landscape had an impact on your personal well-being. What was the place, and what did it do for you?  

Optional assignment for portfolio:  
- Using one of the illustration methods learned in class, complete a loose, quick series of sketches.

Week 4 (September 21):  
Presentation on the contemporary artists’ relationship with nature and the garden.  
Visiting artist: Dr. Franklin Spector, Chair of the Art Department, Cornell University  
Discussion  
Begin watercolor studio.  
- Create a color chart – begin with small areas of primary paint colors, mix up secondary and tertiary colors from those. Label.  
- Brush care, types of watercolors used, papers.  
- Introduction to the techniques used in watercolor, such as mixing colors, even and graded washes, wet on wet, wet on dry, softening an edge.  

Suggested journal topic:  
- Explore an area of the Cornell Plantations. Reflect on any garden, or any aspect of the garden, in your journal.  

Optional assignment for portfolio:  
- Sketch outdoors on campus.  

Week 5 (September 28):  
Color presentation
Watercolor, continued

- Painting simple, bold plant forms.
- Painting detailed plant forms.
- Introduction to landscapes.

Suggested journal topic:

- Flowers give us much – scent, color, beauty, and taste. We use them to convey emotional responses to weddings, funerals, graduations, and births. Why flowers? Describe a flower or a bouquet that takes you back to an incident or to your past. Do zinnias remind you of the ones you stole from the neighbor’s yard when you were eight years old? Do yellow roses remind you of the ones you got from someone who stood you up? If you participated in “forced labor” in the family garden, is there a flower you can’t stand?

Optional assignment for portfolio:

- Series of quick watercolor sketches. Please sketch live, not from photos.
- Do you have a favorite poem, novel, piece of music? What would it look like as a painting?

**Week 6 (October 5):**

View Renoir-Monet presentation on line.

Watercolor studio, conclude.

**Brief description of final projects are due today.**

Suggested journal topic:

- If you plug “art gardens” or a similar search phrase, into the search function on the Web, you’ll get a myriad of sites to choose from – something like 833,000. Peruse some of these sites, and find one or two that catch your attention. What are the elements that resonate with you?

Optional assignment for portfolio:

- Create a collage from practice watercolors that you’re willing to cut.
- Write a poem about the changing seasons, the garden, your relationship with nature, or other topic of interest.

**Week 7 (October 19):**

Exploring how another culture expresses its relationship with the garden through art.

The art and poetry of Chinese brush painting.

Visiting artist: Jim Hardesty, Chinese brush painter

Watercolor and brushwork studio, largely demonstration

Suggested journal topic:

- Turning to the garden is a universal remedy for stress. Is it because we want to revel in it, enjoy it, make peace with it, or perhaps conquer it? What is your experience: conquerer, one of surrender, or other?
Optional assignment for portfolio:
- Using pre-cut mats, or experimenting with cutting your own, mat a piece of your work.

Week 8 (October 26):
Chinese watercolor and brushwork studio, continued.

Suggested journal topic:
- Most of us have an unsettling memory of another child who loomed larger than life as we were growing up: someone we resented, feared, or deeply envied. It might have been a sibling, a cousin, someone from the neighborhood, or someone from school. Often, that child – perhaps a little older or a little younger – had the power to make us take risks that we would never have taken on our own, or had the power to make us absolutely miserable. Well, eventually, these children grow up.
- First, think about your childhood between the ages of about six and twelve, and try to recall someone whose memory, even now, has the power to invoke strong, often negative feelings in you. Was that person the class bully, the clown, the daredevil, the town snob, the neighborhood bore, etc.? Write down details of what you remember about this person. How did he or she look and talk? Did you ever have any encounters with this person? Or, did you just observe from a distance?
- Next, if you haven’t seen this person for awhile, imagine what he or she is doing now, where she lives, etc. Let your mind play out the details. Now: what kind of garden or landscape do you imagine that this person has? Describe it in juicy detail.

Optional assignment for portfolio:
- Create some images in the style taught in the last two classes.

Week 9 (November 2):
Visit Johnson Museum. Meet in the foyer.
- Horticulture in fine art and the symbolic use of plants and gardens in art; and the natural history of horticulture as recorded in art through a tour of the museum and study gallery.
- Work with the “carts” in medieval and Asian galleries.

At this point in the semester, you should have made significant progress on your final project. If you’re at all concerned about the progress of your project, please contact the instructor for a brief conference, so we can discuss how it’s going!

Suggested journal topic:
- The imagination can be like a person who has stayed inside too long, alone in his or her house. The house is like a closed mind, a clenched fist; the objective is to open the door and leave. It’s dusk. You sit on a back porch behind a screen door or on cool cement steps. A breeze through the screen carries the scent of honeysuckle, mixed with the bitter scent of weeds, and a slight acrid scent of exhaust from a lawn being mowed somewhere. You hear the hum of a mower, some birds, and farther away, conversation. At the back of the yard is a rusted barbed wire fence. There is a
gate there, too. You rise and cross to the gate. Go through the gate into the dusky shadows. Who or what is there? Write about it.

Optional assignment for portfolio:
• Write a poem or essay about one of the pieces in the Johnson Museum.

**Week 10 (November 9):**
Garden photography
Visiting artists: Charlie Mazza, Senior Extension Associate, and Dr. H. Chris Wien, Professor of Horticulture
Photography studio
Please bring along digital and single lens reflex cameras, if you have them.

Photography assignment:
• You will be asked to complete a photography assignment; details will be provided in class. You will need to turn in your completed assignment by the end of this week (November 12) to Jill Montgomery.

Suggested journal topic:
• Use your journal as to reflect on your final project, and the process you have followed to conceive of and create it.

Optional assignment for portfolio:
• Using techniques learned in class, shoot photos, create and develop a short photo essay with a theme, such as signs of the changing seasons.

**Week 11 (November 16):**
Photography, continued.
Critique photo assignments.

**Week 12 (November 23):**
Photography, concluded.
Digital manipulation of images.

**Portfolios due today.**
All journals completed by this date.

**Week 13 (November 30):**
Presentation of final projects by students. Final projects are due, and will be presented in class today!