

# **The Art of Horticulture Horticulture 201**

Fall 2007

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

**For additional course resources, to see a gallery of student projects, and for a copy of this syllabus and all handouts, visit the course website, [www.hort.cornell.edu/art](http://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).

**Office hours:** Please arrange by appointment.

## **Rationale**

This experiential survey course will have two distinct units: plants used in/as art, and plants as a subject of art. In unit 1 we will explore the ways in which plants can be used in or as art, such as living sculpture methods (including turf-works and tree sculpture, for example) and floral design. In unit 2 we will delve into plants used as a subject of art, and our explorations will include drawing, botanical illustration, and watercolor/pastel painting.

Taking this course will provide students with a unique chance to view the world of plants from a very different perspective -- an important one, given that observation and creativity are cornerstones of advancement in science. Exploring the relationship between plants and art can foster an understanding of principles of design and presentation in living forms, and offers a distinctive lens through which to view the plant world.

Students have the option of taking the course for 2 credits, or for 3. In past courses, students have requested opportunities to gain proficiency in drawing skills. A third credit option requires students to follow a series of exercises to enhance skills in drawing and illustrations; students will meet occasionally to discuss the exercises, and will submit drawings and a portfolio/collection of their activity over the course of the semester.

## **Who should take the course?**

Given that we define horticulture as both the “art and science of growing plants,” the course provides horticulture and plant science majors with a context for the aesthetic aspects of the discipline. It provides 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 journaling, sketching, and investigating art-related discoveries of the plant world.

## **Major Conceptual Areas for the Course**

Here are the overarching conceptual areas for Hort 201:

- Beauty: the aesthetics of plants and gardens, the intersection of art and horticulture
- Human well-being: the impact of the artistic side of horticulture on our emotional, psychological, and spiritual health
- Self-expression and discovery: unearthing and articulating your thoughts and reflections which emerge from the course.
- Nature and our relationship with it: expressed in the garden.
- The “mechanics:” physical challenges of creating art from plant materials.
- The “horticulture:” attending to plants’ needs when using them to create art.

## **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 and some skills in using plants in the arts, which may range, depending on your interest, from feeling confident about creating a piece of sod furniture, or learning from the completion of a number of sketches and paintings, to working in a completely different medium not covered in the class for your final project.
- Critique elements of the art of horticulture addressed in the class.

## **Hort 201 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 used to convey emotion in fine art?
- What medium do I most enjoy?

## **Class Format**

Class will meet from 1:25 – 4:25 on Tuesdays. Often we will begin with discussion or presentation, and move to the experiential portion of the class. We will have a number of visiting artists and guests.

## **Quality Circles**

We will use a method of embedded assessment for continually evaluating teaching strategies and student learning. This assessment focuses not on “likes and dislikes,” but on learning and approaches that assist or impede it.

Each week, the teaching assistant will be responsible for selecting several students to stay briefly after class. Because there are 25-30 students, this means that each person will only have to stay after class two to three times over the course of the semester.

After class, the TA will ask the group of four to five students to respond to these questions:

- In class today, did you get what you needed?
- What assisted with your learning?
- What could be improved?

Students in the quality circle will confer, and will share feedback with the TA. The TA will share anonymous results with the instructor (I will not know which students provided the feedback, in an effort to encourage your candid and constructive thoughts). Students are also encouraged to talk with others in the class to get feedback to share with the TA. The instructor may occasionally pose other questions for the quality circle to consider. Quality circles have greatly influenced the way in which art of horticulture courses evolve.

## **Course Resources**

On reserve in Mann and Sibley Libraries:

Cooper, Paul. 2001. *Living Sculpture*. London: Octopus Publishing Group.

King, Bente Starcke. 2004. *Beautiful Botanicals: Painting and Drawing Flowers and Plants*. Cincinnati, OH: Northlight Books.

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

- **30%: Attendance, active participation, and brief written self-assessment of your participation in and contribution to the class.** Missing more than two classes can significantly affect your grade.
- **35%: Completion of Option 1, 2 or 3, below.**
- **35%: Creation and presentation of a final project of your choice,** as a group or individually, on a topic of interest.

## **Course Options**

**There 3 Options/Choices available** (see descriptions of each below):

### **Option One: Journals**

**Option one** is for you to keep a journal for the 8 weeks of the course – any 8 out of the first 10. You will:

- Briefly summarize learnings from the class.
- 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.).

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.

### **Option Two: Review of Readings**

**Option two**, you will write two papers, about 3 - 4 pages in length, summarizing elements from the two texts on reserve at Mann (by Cooper and King), particularly their application to you and your interests. These are due on October 2 and November 10, respectively. You are encouraged to make connections and compare with other experiences, state your opinions about the texts, and delve into detail about your own views of content. This isn't intended to be a dry review of these texts! Please reflect generally on the texts and their application to you and your interests.

### **Option Three: Garden Writers' Review**

**Option three**, you will read any two of the following books and write book review, about 3 pages in length, of each book, providing: 1) a brief overview of the book; 2) a discussion of the author's main points; and 3) a reflection on the writing style, and particularly, whether or not the writing resonated with you. I am not interested in a dry review in which you regurgitate dry analysis of the books. Rather, you are encouraged to make connections and compare with other experiences, state your opinions about the texts, and delve into detail about your own views of content. The book reviews are due on September 30, October 23 and November 20.

Ackerman, Diane. 2001. *Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden*. NY: HarperCollins.

Druse, Ken. 2003. *The Passion for Gardening: Inspiration for a Lifetime*. NY: Clarkson Potter/Publishers.

Kingsolver, Barbara. 2007. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*. NY: HarperCollins.

Masumoto, David Mas. 1995. *Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on my Family Farm*. Harper San Francisco.

Mitchell, Henry. 1981, 1999. *The Essential Earthman*. NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Orlean, Susan. 1998. *The Orchid Thief*. NY: Ballantine.

Pollan, Michael. 2001. *Botany of Desire*. NY: Random House.

Stewart, Amy. 2007. *Flower Confidential*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books.

**You need to decide on option 1, 2, or 3 by the second week of class.**

## **Final Projects**

Students will work on their own or in small, self-identified groups on a topic of interest. Each student/group will provide a presentation to the class, the last day of class, and will show their work.

### Criteria for grading final projects:

- Adhering to each of the deadlines – you provide the instructor with a description of your final project by September 18, and present your final project to the class on November 27.
- Demonstrated work over the course of the semester. Your project should evolve over time, since it reflects a significant part of your grade, and shouldn't come together at the last minute. During your presentation, you'll describe the process and your work as it progressed.
- Reflects a major conceptual area of the course.
- Clearly shows the link between art and horticulture.
- Originality and creativity!

You may want to explore a topic from class in more detail....or consider an area of plants used in art or as artforms not covered in class. Examples:

- Batik, shibori, or tritrik, or another method of making designs on cloth with plant-based dye
- Musical instruments from plant materials
- A tree sculpture, turf work, topiary or piece of woven branch art.
- Bonsai
- Mixed media: use of both living and non-living plants in sculpture
- Detailed plan for crop art.
- A series of paintings, drawings, illustrations
- Sculpture
- Work in concrete, stone, metal
- Work in fibers or cloth

For images of what other students have done, visit the course website.

Project must be approved by instructor.

## **Supplies Needed**

Most materials will be supplied in class. Due to the highly experiential nature of the course, and the significant number of supplies, there is a materials fee.

During the last few weeks of the course, we will be exploring some painting methods. For this you have a choice of working in watercolor or soft pastel.

How to decide which? For the purposes of this class, if you're inclined toward executing detailed illustrations of plants, I'll encourage you to purchase some basic watercolor supplies. If you hope to capture loose, open images of the landscape or of plant forms, I'll suggest that you purchase soft pastels.

For **watercolor**, you'll need:

- Inexpensive sketchbook (Strathmore 400 series, size 11 x 14 is ideal).
- Brushes: I would suggest two to three sizes, such as #4, #8, and #12. **Please, no stiff bristled brushes.** Look for brushes with good, fine points. Purchase smaller brushes for fine detail, larger brushes for washes that cover large areas.
- Tubes of watercolor paint. Reeves offers an inexpensive full set.
- Inexpensive palette or dinner plate.

For **pastel**, you'll need:

- A set of soft pastels (not oil or cray pas), preferably in landscape colors.
- A pad of Bristol vellum paper.
- Rag to clean your hands.

Note: *please* do not over-spend on supplies. You will be introduced to a range of media, and shouldn't purchase extra supplies unless you need them for a final project. For example, good quality watercolor paper block may be desirable but isn't necessary, unless you decide to pursue watercolor. Different colors of pastel paper, from grays to browns and blacks, are a joy to use, but not necessary for Hort 201!

## **Materials fee**

\$40, checks payable to Cornell University, due by the third week of class.

## **Johnson Museum Reflective Exercise**

The Hort 201 class typically visits the Johnson Museum to look at gardens and plants in the context of the works there. This semester, we're going to be doing this differently. We will have images available on-line and we'll direct you to a site, at which you'll find a study gallery of images. We will provide some guidance for viewing the pieces on your own time, and you'll write up a one page reflective paper based on your reactions to them. More information is forthcoming; this will be part of your participation grade.

## **Deadlines at a Glance**

- **You must commit to option 1, 2, or 3 by the second week of class. Email the instructor ME14 with your choice.**

- Students choosing **Option 1** – journals begin the first week of class and all 8 are due within the first 10 weeks (by November 6).
- September 18 – brief description of final project due.
- Students choosing **Option 2**, papers summarizing readings are due October 2 and November 10.
- Students choosing **Option 3**, papers about 3 books you've selected from the list, are due September 30, October 23 and November 20.
- A brief **self-assessment of your participation** in and contribution to the class, in the form of an email sent to the instructor, and a **one page reflection on the Johnson Museum pieces**, are both due on November 20th.
- Last day of class, November 27 – **final projects are due**. You will have 5 minutes to present the final project to the class; more time allotted to groups.

When class ends on November 27, all your course requirements must be complete!

## **The Course at a Glance**

### **Week 1 (August 28):**

Course expectations and goals.

Balancing breadth with depth.

How the course will be structured.

Why your perspective and opinion in evolving the course is so valuable.

Introduction to living sculpture

Introduction to turfworks, with guest Frank Rossi

Overview of mowing patterns, and the carving of earth slabs, turf and peat to create living sculptures.

Suggested journal topic (for option 1): When was the last time you had the opportunity to really immerse yourself in the plant world, whether a garden, forest, greenhouse, or other? Describe it, talk about it – how did you feel, and what do you remember most?

### **Week 2 (September 4):**

Art with Grass – Turfworks build date

Suggested journal topic: We rely on plants for everything - food, shelter, clothing, inspiration - do you think we forget the significance of the plant world in our lives?

What are your thoughts about how we view the plant world, individually, as a culture...?

Another/alternative suggested journal topic: Would you have thought, before coming to this class that turfgrass could connect in any way to art? React to the presentation, your perspectives, and relate to any experiences you may have had with this topic.

### **Week 3 (September 11):**

Tree sculpture with guest Ken Mudge

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?

#### **Week 4 (September 18):**

The woven branch

- Introduction to the making of sculpture or semi-functional features by interlacing flexible young stems and branches of shrubs and trees.
- Presentation on how artists work with living plants by shaping, training and weaving into sculpture, furniture and architecture
- Create woven art from a variety of materials.

Sculpture in leaf

- Revival of interest in topiary
- Introduction to broad range of contemporary approaches
- Students complete topiary project

Suggested journal topic: Unlike some aspect of horticulture, topiary waxes and wanes with respect to public interest. Do you find this artform appealing, or not? How have you reacted to images of pruned shrubs and shaped trees? Do you find them to be things of beauty, or do you dislike the “management” of them?

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

#### **Week 5 (September 25):**

Bring a small item to dye (clean white socks are great)

Wear old clothes!

Plant dyes and fibers: history, culture, use  
Interact with plant fibers, indigo dye studio

Suggested journal topic: Plants are linked closely with human well-being. Are you noticing anything with respect to working with plants this semester, and an impact on your own peace of mind and well-being?

#### **Week 6 (October 2):**

Floral design

- The basics: line, form, color, different types of arrangements

Suggested journal topic: Flowers are an important part of celebration. Yet, many students have said that they resent the connection between commercial roses and Valentine’s Day, giving flowers as a symbol of love, or connecting certain flowers with certain occasions. What are your thoughts about that? What’s your favorite flower and why?

#### **Week 7 (October 16):**



Floral design, continued

What's new, what's cutting edge? An exploration of the innovative

Suggested journal topic: At Cornell, we have a lot on our front burners. Exams, papers, moving quickly from one class to another...it often passes in a rush. Make a commitment to take one day, in which you look up as you're walking, and notice the trees, shrubs, fall flowers, and the beauty of our natural environment. Do you do this each day, or are you in the habit of moving so quickly through your day that you miss it? Reflect on this a bit....

**Week 10 (October 23):**

Unit 2: Plants as a subject of art

Introduction to various media used in botanical illustration.

Students taking the third credit option: meet toward the end of class today.

Suggested journal topic: Many students reflect on middle school in their journals. This seems to be a pivotal time, at which, students began to "give up" the art that they enjoyed, became more self-critical, and moved on to other subjects. Does this apply to you? Do you take time in your daily life to be creative, or are you simply not able to fit it in? How did today's media workshop sit with you? Did you enjoy it, or was it too messy, stressful, etc.?

**Week 11 (October 30):**

Introduce watercolor and pastel.

Watercolor: Basic principles of color and color mixing; brush care, papers.

Pastels: overview of types and papers, how to prepare pastels, tips for going further with supplies.

Suggested journal topic: It's often at this point in the semester that can bring frustration to some students, often brought about by sneaking a look at what the student next to you is doing – and for some reason, it always seems "better" than your own work. Is this your experience? Are you hard on yourself, or completely open to whatever the drawing and painting experience brings? Do you find you're more invested in the creative process....or the finished product?

**Week 8 (November 6):**

Watercolor and pastel, continued

Suggested journal topic: How is your final project progressing? Is it a joy, a struggle, a challenge, all three? Share your progress and address challenges you're facing along the way.

**Week 9 (November 13):**

Watercolor and pastel, continued

**Week 12 (November 20):**

Chinese brush work with guest Jim Hardesty

**Week 13 (November 27):**

Presentation of final projects