

The Art of Horticulture

Horticulture 2010

Fall 2009

Instructor:

Marcia Eames-Sheavly
169 Plant Science Building
607-255-1781
ME14@cornell.edu

Teaching Assistant:

Michelle Leinfelder
MML32@cornell.edu

Location:

Horton Lab, Ken Post Labs and Greenhouses
(Denoted on campus maps as the “green greenhouse.”)
Tuesdays, 1:25 – 4:25 p.m.

Office hours:

Please arrange appointments. This semester I will be working in my office each Tuesday morning unless otherwise indicated. I still prefer that you send an email to let me know that you plan to come by.

Please silence cell phones and refrain from texting during class. This is a highly experiential and reflective class, and cell phone use is inappropriate. If you wish to check messages or make calls, please do so during the break.

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the *Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity*. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student’s own work. **The Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others** is found in the Policy Notebook for the Cornell Community and also on the web at: <http://www.cornell.edu/UniversityFaculty/docs/main.html>

Course Rationale and Objectives

This experiential survey course will have two distinct units that overlap throughout the semester: plants used in/as art, and plants as a subject of art. 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). We will also delve into plants used as a subject of art, and our explorations will include drawing, botanical illustration, and watercolor painting. Although these are distinct units, they will not be taught sequentially; rather, we will often integrate both approaches into each class.

Taking this course will provide students with a unique chance to view the world of plants from a very different perspective. This is important 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.

Third Credit Option

Students have the option of taking the course for 2 credits, or for 3. Students often desire to gain proficiency in drawing skills that the class time does not foster. A third credit option requires students to follow a series of exercises to enhance skills in drawing and illustration; students will meet at least once during the semester to discuss the exercises, and will submit drawings over the course of the semester. See additional hand out for details.

Major Conceptual Areas for the Course

The overarching themes that run as an undercurrent through our work in Hort 2010:

- 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:” horticultural/physical challenges of creating art from plant materials.

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 2010 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 what is beautiful or meaningful to us?

- What does horticulture in fine art tell us about the relationship of the garden and nature to the artist?
- Why/how 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?

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.

We do not cover gardening. We also do not delve into most topics with particular depth. This is a survey course that is highly experiential. Any student interested in gaining a deeper understanding of any artist and his/her approach, or furthering an interest in a horticultural technique used to create art, is encouraged to do so through their final project.

Attendance and Participation

The effectiveness of the course and your evolving hands-on understanding of art and horticulture depend upon the participation of all students. Attendance and participation are similarly important to the collaborative learning process. Given that we only meet once each week, **missing more than one class can impact your grade.** In addition, **repeated late arrivals** will also **negatively impact your grade** for attendance and participation. Please be timely and come to class each week.

Course 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 speak briefly after class for a quality circle. Because there are 25 students, this means that each person will likely do this two to three times in the semester.

After class, the TA will ask the group 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 (in an effort to encourage your candid and constructive thoughts, I will not know which students provided the feedback.). Students are also encouraged to talk with others in the class to gain more feedback. 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

Text on reserve in Mann Library:

Collected Poems, by Wendell Berry.

For earth art inspiration, see <http://www.greenmuseum.org>

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

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

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 one class, or being late consistently, can significantly affect your grade.
- **35%: Completion of reflective reading and journals/writing assignments.**
- **35%: Creation and presentation of a final project of your choice**, as a group or individually, on a topic of interest.

Reflective Reading and Writing

This semester we will focus on the poetry of Wendell Berry, to discover how words are also an important part of “the art of horticulture.” Berry’s book, *Collected Poems*, is on reserve in Mann Library. You are to read the book. There will be three corresponding writing responses that will be a part of the journaling process, the first of which is due September 15; they appear in the section on “The Course at a Glance.”

Journals and writing responses will provide the opportunity to:

- Reflect on learnings from the class.
- Extensively reflect on content and its application to you and your interests.

- Reflect on what resonates with you in the readings.
- Make connections and compare with other experiences.
- Occasionally, engage in discussion with other students related to the reading and writing.
- Email writing responses and journals to ME14@cornell.edu, once each week. **Paste your journal from Word directly into the email message.** The subject line should contain the week (week 1, week 2, etc.).
- There will be a total of 8 writing responses/journals due over the course of the semester. **They will be due via email on: September 8, 15, 22, 29, October 6, 20, 27 and November 3.**

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.

Final Projects

You will work on your own on a topic of interest. Each of you will provide a presentation to the class, the last day of class, and will bring your work with you – or images of your work, if you're not able to bring the project to class.

Please see hand out for details.

Criteria for grading final projects:

- **Adhering to each of the deadlines** – you provide the instructor with a description of your final project by **October 6**, and present your final project to the class on **December 1**.
- **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 efforts that are **consistent with the major conceptual areas or themes** of the course.
- **Clearly shows the link between art and horticulture.**
- **Originality and creativity!**

For inspiration and 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.

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.

Note: *please* do not over-spend on supplies. For example, a good quality watercolor paper block may be desirable as you progress, but isn't necessary, unless you decide to pursue watercolor further. There are many good watercolor paints and supplies, but anything beyond the basics, above, is not necessary for Hort 2010.

Materials fee

\$35, checks payable to Cornell University, due by the third week of class.

Deadlines at a glance:

- **October 6** – brief description of final project due.
- **Journals/writing responses due via email each week by the beginning of class.**
- A brief **self-assessment of your participation** in and contribution to the class, in the form of an email sent to the instructor, due the last week of class.
- Last day of class, **December 1 – 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 December 1, all your course requirements – writing, final projects, self-assessment, and 3rd credit assignments, must be complete!

The Course at a Glance

Week 1 (September 1):

Course overview.

Introduction to living sculpture

Turfworks, or "Art with Grass" with guest Dr. Frank Rossi

Overview of mowing patterns, grass art, sod furniture, and more – all to create living sculptures.

Introduction to the 3rd credit option.

Suggested journal topic for this week (this journal is due via email at class time next week): When was the last time you had the opportunity to really immerse yourself in the plant world, whether a garden, forest, greenhouse, or other place?

Reflect on it, talk about it – how did you feel, and what do you remember most? If you haven't *really* engaged in the plant world in awhile, what do you miss about it?

Week 2 (September 8):

Turfwork build at the Cornell Plantations.

Dress to get very muddy/dirty! Appropriate footwear only, please no open-toed sandals or flipflops. Work shoes or old sneakers are ideal. Bring work gloves if you have them.

Suggested journal topic: Would you have thought that turfgrass could connect in any way to art? React to the presentation from last week, your experience this week, and relate to any former opinions you may have had.

Another/alternative suggested journal topic (you choose): Flowers are an important part of celebration. Yet, many students have said that they resent the connection between, for example, 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? Do you have a least favorite? Again, why do you like it the least?

Week 3 (September 15):

The woven branch

- Introduction to the making of sculpture or semi-functional features by interlacing flexible young stems and branches of shrubs and trees.
- Create woven art from a variety of materials.
- Prepare displays for Judy's Day at the Plantations.

Introduction to various media used in botanical illustration. Our goal will be to acquaint (or reacquaint) you with some media, with the objective of learning what is used in botanical illustration, as well as what you could use for your final project.

Journal - Writing response to the reading:

Wendell Berry is a poet, a farmer, a naturalist, a man of family and community, and so much more. He is not just one of these roles. Often we get channeled into being one thing that doesn't fully express who we are. Can you think of a time when you were pushed into a category, role or someone that did not fully express "you?" Reflect on the Berry poems that could highlight the fusion of your different roles in life and perhaps illuminate who you really are.

Week 4 (September 22):

Grafting, with guest Ken Mudge

- Presentation to introduce grafting
- Learn grafting techniques that can be used to create tree sculpture

Introduce watercolor – bring watercolor supplies today

- Basic principles of color and color mixing; brush care, papers.
- Some introductory exercises.
- Make a color chart.

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. For this writing, 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? What happens when you look around – *really* look – for a change? Reflect on this a bit....

Week 5 (September 29):

Watercolor, continued– bring watercolor supplies today

- Simple approaches.
- Painting outdoors, if possible.

Creating Cyanotypes

Journal – writing response to the readings and to evolving work this semester:

Berry often uses metaphor in his poetry. Think of a project that we have created this semester that could be a metaphor for something in your life. Consider the materials you used to create, for example, the woven art, the process by which you created it, the final outcome, what it's going to be used for, or whatever else resonates with you. Are there words that describe the art that also describe you? What are they? Can you weave together those words the way you put together the woven branch art....worked with a brush...moved your hands to create sod sculpture?

Week 6 (October 6):

Creative expression at the Plantations.

Watercolor and writing exercises – bring watercolor supplies today

Journal - Writing response to the reading:

Wendell Berry often returns to certain objects or themes in his poems, repeating them in his works and across his works. Why might he do this? Is there an object or theme, such as a particular plant or place, from Berry that similarly resonates with you? Is there a plant or element of nature that you would return to in your own writing? Why?

Brief description of final projects are due today.

Week 7 (October 20):

Plant dyes: history, culture, use.

Interact with plant fibers, indigo dye studio

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

Wear old clothes!

3rd credit option students meet today, toward the end of class, for mid-semester studio: show your work, discuss what is going well, areas of confusion or challenge.

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 10 (October 27):

Introduction to next week's floral design session – what to expect

Sculpture in leaf

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

Watercolor, continued– bring watercolor supplies today

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?

Alternative 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 are facing along the way.

Week 11 (November 3):

Floral design with Chad Miller

Bring container for floral design

Week 8 (November 10):

Visit to the Johnson Museum

Week 9 (November 17):

Chinese brush work with guest Jim Hardesty

Week 12 (November 24):

TBA

Week 13 (December 1):

Presentation of final projects

Paragraph-long self assessment of your contribution to, and participation in, Hort 2010 – due via email to Marcia.