The Art of Horticulture  
Horticulture 2010

We don’t learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience.  
- John Dewey

Fall 2010
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Location:
Horton Lab, Ken Post Labs and Greenhouses  
(Denoted on campus maps as the “green greenhouse.”)
Tuesdays, 1:25 – 4:25 p.m.

What This Course Promises You
This experiential survey course offers a deep exploration into self, and the community of the classroom, by engaging with the plant world in a creative context. If you are willing to diligently and intentionally invest your energy in The Art of Horticulture, you will learn the value of engaging in the plant world as a way to foster your well-being and as an outlet for your creativity – an understanding that may serve you for many years to come, indeed, the rest of your life.

There are 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.

You will gain a view of the plant world from a very different perspective, and an important one, given that observation and creativity are cornerstones of advancement in fields such as 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
You 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 gives you the chance to follow a series of exercises on your own, via a distance learning interface, to enhance skills in drawing and illustration. Students will meet once during the semester to discuss the exercises, and will submit drawings, due bi-weekly, through the Moodle interface.
Learning Outcomes
Through your deep engagement in Hort 2010 you will...

- Develop your own sense of what is beautiful: better understand the aesthetics of plants and gardens, and an intersection of art and horticulture;
- Feel better: you will discover the impact of the artistic side of horticulture on our emotional, psychological, and spiritual health;
- Express yourself: engage in self-expression and discovery, by unearthing and articulating your thoughts and reflections which emerge from the course.
- Look around you: closely observe the plant world, the garden, nature, and our relationship with all of it.
- Make it: figure out the “mechanics” needed to create a work of art all your own, the horticultural/physical challenges of creating art from plant materials.

Upon completion of the course you 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 a number of sketches and paintings, to working for your final project in a completely different medium from what is covered in class.
- Critique elements of the art of horticulture addressed in the class.

Hort 2010 will also provide you 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 writing reflectively, working on original art work, and investigating art-related discoveries of the plant world.

**We do not address 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.
How Will We Fulfill the Course Promise?
To realize the course promise, you must take responsibility for your own learning, and participate as an active learner. You will reflect considerably on your experience, and the experiences related to those we engage in during the course, through weekly writing. In addition, you will create something highly unique – hopefully, a project that will come to mean a great deal to you.

Attendance and Participation
The effectiveness of the course and your evolving hands-on understanding of art and horticulture depend upon the participation of all of us. Attendance and participation are similarly important to the collaborative learning process. Given that we only meet once each week, missing more than one class will deplete the experience and will ultimately impact your grade. In addition, repeated late arrivals will also negatively impact your grade for attendance and participation. Please respect the course atmosphere by being 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 of you 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). You 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
Texts on reserve in Mann Library:
Collected Poems, by Wendell Berry.
Why I Wake Early, by Mary Oliver.
For earth art inspiration, see [http://www.greenmuseum.org](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](http://www.hort.cornell.edu/art)

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

**How we will evaluate the nature and progress of your learning**

- **30%:** Attendance, active participation, and at course’s end, a 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 course experience, and ultimately your grade.
- **35%:** Completion of reflective reading and writing assignments.
- **35%:** Creation and presentation of a final project of your choice.

**Reflective Reading and Writing**

This semester we will focus on the poetry of Wendell Berry and Mary Oliver, to discover how words are also an important part of “the art of horticulture.” Berry’s and Oliver’s books, *Collected Poems* and *Why I Wake Early*, respectively, are on reserve in Mann Library. **Please begin reading the books during the first week of class.** In addition to your other reflective writing prompts, there will be three corresponding writing responses that will ask you to reflect specifically on Berry’s and Oliver’s work, the first of which is due September 21; they appear in the section on “The Course at a Glance.”

Reflective writing will provide the opportunity to:
- Reflect on learning from the class.
- Extensively reflect on content and its application to you and your interests.
- Consider 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 reflective writing to ME14@cornell.edu, once each week. **Paste your reflective writing 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 due over the course of the semester. **They will be due via email at class time, following the week in which they appear below in course at a glance.**

Please note: I will ask your permission to share portions of your reflective writing in presentation or publication settings. Your identity would remain anonymous, and in addition, entries used would be general examples that will 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 are not able to bring the project to class.

Please see hand out for details.

Criteria for evaluating your final project:
• Adhering to each of the deadlines – provide the instructor with a description of your final project by September 28, and present your final project to the class on November 30.
• 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.
• 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
For the first time this year, we will supply all materials in class. In the past, students purchased their own watercolor supplies, and they suggested this would be much easier. You are, of course, encouraged to purchase your own if you wish, particularly if you want to practice outside of class.

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

Office hours
Please arrange appointments. I will try to be available during the time that works best for you. I 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
A word about assisting you in a stressful university atmosphere....

Stress can play havoc on even the most “together” student! Significant stress, mood changes, finding that you’re worrying too much, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with your academic performance, and could be signs that you are not yourself. The source of symptoms might be largely related to your course work; if so, I invite you to speak with me (or your other professors) directly. However, problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis can also have a big impact in your life, and may require additional professional support.

Here at Cornell, we provide a variety of support resources, including an Academic Advising office in each college, EARS peer counseling, and Gannett’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Each of these resources can help you manage personal challenges that threaten your well-being or ability to thrive at Cornell. Accessing them, especially early on, as symptoms develop, can help support your academic success as a Cornell student.

While I do not need to know the details of what is going on for you, your ability to share some of your situation with me will help me connect you with the appropriate support. I invite you to share with me, to the degree you feel comfortable, what may be happening with you, so that I can help to steer you. In the event I feel you could benefit from such support, I will express my concerns (and the reasons for them) to you and remind you of our resources.

The Course at a Glance

Week 1 (August 31):
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 reflective writing response topic for this week (this journal is due via email, pasted into the body of a message to Marcia, 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 7):
Turfwork build – meet in front of Roberts Hall on the ag quad.

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 reflective writing response 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,
the way in which creating public piece of art is collaborative – any other thoughts about the art form and process.

Another/alternative suggested reflective writing response 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 14):
The Foundations of Fiber for Art

- Working with cordage.
- A visit to the Cornell 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.

Reflective writing response to the reading:
Wendell Berry is a poet, a farmer, a naturalist, a family and community member; Mary Oliver is a poet, avid walker, Pulitzer Prize winner, lover of deep nature. Neither is just one of the roles described here.

Often we get channeled, (shoved, even) into being one role that does not fully express who we are. Consider a time when you were pushed into a category, role or someone that did not fully express “you.” Select a range of Berry and Oliver poems to reflect on, in particular, those that perhaps illuminate and relate to who you really are.

Week 4 (September 21):

Grafting, with guest Ken Mudge

- Meet in the Minns Garden, between Plant Science Building and Tower Rd.
- Presentation to introduce tree sculpture.
- Learn grafting techniques that can be used to create it.

Introduce watercolor

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

Suggested reflective writing response 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 are walking across campus, and notice the trees, shrubs, fall flowers, and the beauty of our natural environment, as well as other people’s responses to them, the looks on people’s faces, how present other people seem to be on campus. Do you “notice” each day, or are you in the habit of moving so quickly
through your day that you miss a great deal? What happens when you look around – really look – for a change? Reflect on this….

**Week 5 (September 28):**
Creative expression at the Plantations.
Watercolor and writing exercises

**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?

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

**Week 6 (October 5):**
Working in clay, with Alex Paya

**Writing response to the reading:**
Wendell Berry and Mary Oliver reflect deeply on plants and nature, often returning to certain objects or themes, repeating them across their works. Is there an object or theme, such as a particular plant or place, from Berry or Oliver that similarly resonates with you? Is there an element of nature that speaks to you personally, that you might return to in your own writing? What is it, and what makes it special?

**Week 7 (October 19):**
Chinese brush work with guest Jim Hardesty

**Suggested reflective writing response 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 26):**
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
- Topiary project

**Watercolor, continued**
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 reflective writing response topic:** It’s often at this point in the semester that can bring frustration to some students. In addition to becoming very tired from working so much, students often can question their abilities, worrying about the quality of their work, wondering about their own artistic or creative inclinations. Is this your experience? Quite frankly, are you hard on yourself? Or are you completely open to whatever the creative process brings? Do you find you’re more invested in the creative process….or the finished product?

**Alternative reflective writing response 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 2):**
Floral design
Bring container for floral design!

**Week 8 (November 9):**
Visit to the Johnson Museum

**Week 9 (November 16):**
Plant dyes: history, culture, use.
Dye studio
Bring a small item to dye (clean white socks are great)
Wear old clothes!

**Week 12 (November 23):**
TBA

**Week 13 (November 30):**
Presentation of final projects
After receiving feedback about your final project, you will have one week to provide a paragraph-long self assessment of your contribution to, and participation in, Hort 2010. You will also reflect on your final project. How did you feel that you did, and how does your perspective compare to your peers’ assessment of your work? Due via email to Marcia by December 7th.