

The Art of Horticulture II: The Use of Plants in and as Art Hort 203

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

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

Course website: hort.cornell.edu/art
2 credits

Code of Academic Integrity: You should be familiar with Cornell's Code which may be found at <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html>. You are responsible for knowing and complying with the code.

Office hours

Tuesdays, 8:30 – 11:30, by appointment, in 15B Plant Science
Other times as arranged. I am not in the office Wednesdays.

Rationale

As part of a Hort 201-203 sequence, this experiential course will focus on plant materials that are used to create art, or that are manipulated into pieces of art. It will acquaint students with a range of topics such as the use of plants in fibers and dyes, floral design, and living sculpture practices such as topiary, the woven branch, turfworks, tree sculpture and bonsai. Students will create a final project focused on these or related methods.

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 activities and explorations will be at a beginner level. No formal art or horticulture experience is necessary for this course.

Major Conceptual Areas for the Course

- Beauty: the aesthetics of manipulating plants for human interest (or folly?)
- Self-expression and discovery: articulating your thoughts and reflections that emerge around topics and activities in the course.
- 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 are able to manipulate plants.
- Identify and critique non-living and living plants in contemporary art.
- Begin to articulate a “personal aesthetic:” describe what appeals to you in this intersection of art and horticulture.
- Become proficient in one or more of the approaches presented in class.
- Critique elements of the art and horticulture covered in the class and in the readings.

Class Format

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

Quality Circles

We will use a method of embedded assessment for continually evaluating teaching strategies and student learning.

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?
- If so, what was it that you “got?”
- If not, why not?

Students in the quality circle will confer, and will share feedback with the TA. The TA will share results with the instructor. 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 Library:

Cooper, Paul. 2001. *Living Sculpture*. London: Octopus Publishing Group. This will be the primary text for the course.

Also on reserve in Mann library:

Dwarf Potted Trees. Special Revised Edition of Plants & Gardens, Vol. 9, No. 3, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record.

Gooding, Mel, with interviews by William Furlong. 2002. *Artists Land Nature*. NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Nash, David. 1996. *Forms into Time*. London: Academy Group Ltd.

Nemitz, Barbara. *Trans plant: Living Vegetation in Contemporary Art*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz ; New York, N.Y.: Distributed in U.S. by Distributed Art Publishers, 2000.

Simpson, B. B. and M. C. Ogorzaly. 1995. *Economic Botany: Plants in Our World*. NY: McGraw-Hill Inc.

Course Requirements

- Attendance and active participation. Missing more than two classes can significantly affect your grade.
- Completion of course readings and on-line discussion.
- Creation of a final project of your choice, as a group or individually, on a topic of interest.

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. If you're working in a group, you will also provide to the instructor:

- a brief review of useful resources and/or inspirations;
- description of how to care and maintain the project over time, if this applies;
- and a brief self assessment of your contribution to the group process.

There will be three deadlines:

February 22 – brief description of final project due.

Mid-March – optional conference with instructor to get feedback regarding progress.

Last day of class, May 3 – final projects are due. You will have 5 minutes to present the final project to the class; more time allotted to groups.

Criteria for grading final projects:

- Adhering to each of the deadlines, above
- Reflects a major conceptual area of the course
- Clearly shows the link between art and horticulture
- Originality and creativity!

Individuals or groups 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.

The use of plant materials in the making of Asian art.

A tree sculpture, turf work, topiary or piece of woven branch art.

Mixed media: use of both living and non-living plants in sculpture.

Detailed plan for crop art.

A web feature.

Project must be approved by instructor.

On-line Discussion

Interactive written communication is a time honored, highly effective approach to learning. Modern internet technology provides tools to make written discussion an exciting, dynamic approach to active learning. Students in this course will use the Discussion Board feature of the web-based course management utility, called Blackboard, to interact with fellow students and the instructor(s) on a regular basis. The on-line discussion will be required and evaluated as a part of each student's overall grade. Students will be asked to participate in an on-line discussion, via Blackboard, of course content and related topics. Students will:

- Provide at least one (approximately paragraph long) commentary per week, choosing a topic of your choice to reflect on.
- React to at least one other student's posting per week.

Discussion content:

- Critically reflect on what you're learning from course reading assignments, and their application to you and your interests.
- Make connections and compare with other experiences.
- Converse with one another regarding your opinions, beliefs, thoughts about topics.
- Converse in "informal voice" – it isn't a term paper!

Please remember that this is a public discussion, so anything you post will be read by others, not just the instructor. You are expected to be polite and respectful of other students and their postings. If you have comments or concerns that you wish to keep between you and the instructor, you can feel free to email me at ME14@cornell.edu.

In the spirit of openness typical of art or horticulture courses, I do encourage you to check in with me about how this is going.

To access Blackboard, go to:

<http://blackboard.cornell.edu/>

Log in using your existing user ID and password, or the one we've temporarily assigned you.

Please select the Hort 203 course icon under My Courses.

Go to the discussion board.

Grading

- 30% Participation in class, lab/studios. Missing more than two classes will greatly affect your final grade.
- 35% Completion of course readings and participation in on-line discussion group. Missing weeks of on-line discussions, or being late with assignments, will affect your grade. Interactive learning is a very important component of the course.
- 35% Creation, materials, and presentation of final project.

Supplies Needed

All 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 the ikebana studio, you will need to collect several small branches and stones (such as river pebbles, often sold in arts and crafts stores). You'll also need a small bowl – we'll show an example.

Materials fee

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

The Course at a Glance

Week 1 (January 25):

Course expectations and goals.

Approach to working with guests and visiting artists.

Emphasis on on-line discussion and group project work.

Turfworks presentation by Frank Rossi

- Overview of the carving of earth slabs, turf and peat to create living sculptures.
- Identify a small group to design a turfwork for a final project.

Read in *Living Sculpture*:

Introduction, pp. 6 – 11.

Turf-works, pp. 64-95.

Read for weeks 2 & 3:

Economic Botany, Chapter 16: Fibers, Dyes and Tannins

Week 2 (February 1):

Plant dyes

History, culture, use

Indigo dye studio

Bring a small item to dye

Wear old clothes!

Week 3 (February 8):

Plant fibers

History, culture, use
Spinning studio

Week 4 (February 15):

Floral design – 2 sessions

- Basics of line, form, color, different types of arrangements
- Students create small arrangement

Week 5 (February 22):

Floral design, continued

Ikebana with visiting artist Sonja Skelly

For the ikebana studio, you will need to collect several small branches and stones (such as river pebbles, often sold in arts and crafts stores). You'll also need a small bowl – we'll show you an example.

Brief description of final projects are due today.

For next week, read in *Living Sculpture*:
Sculpture in Leaf, pp. 12 – 37.

Week 6 (March 1):

Sculpture in leaf

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

For next week, read in *Living Sculpture*:
The Woven Branch, pp. 38-63.

Week 7 (March 8):

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 your own woven art from a variety of materials.

For next week, read in *Dwarf Potted Trees*:
pp. 4 – 13, 27 – 42.
Skim the rest of the handbook.

Week 10 (March 15):

Bonsai

- Presentation and extensive demonstration

Week 11 (March 29):

Bonsai, continued

- Demonstration continued, and students practice the art of bonsai

For next week, read in *Living Sculpture*:

Tree Sculpture, pp. 96-119.

Also read in *Forms into Time*:

Through the Narrow Door, the essay by Marina Warner, pp. 8 – 24.

Glance through photos of work throughout the remainder of the book.

Week 8 (April 5):

Tree sculpture

- Using traditional methods of horticulture such as grafting and tree surgery to make sculpture from living trees

Week 9 (April 12):

Tree sculpture, continued

Week 12 (April 19):

No class this week: please work on final projects

For next week, read in *Trans plant: Living Vegetation in Contemporary Art*:

pp. 7-20, examine photos in the remainder of the book.

Also, examine photos in:

Artists Land Nature

Week 13 (April 26):

Earthly interventions

Week 14 (May 3):

Presentation of final projects