The Art of Horticulture
Horticulture 201

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Room 22 Plant Science Building
Tuesdays, 1:25 – 4:25 p.m.

Office hours
Tuesdays, 8:30 – 11:30, by appointment, in 15B Plant Science
Other times as arranged by appointment.

Rationale
This introductory survey course will explore the breadth of the art and beauty of horticulture. In Unit 1, we will explore the use of plants as a topic of art. The course will address the symbolic use of plants and gardens in art, and the natural history of horticulture as recorded in art. We explore techniques of botanical illustration and watercolor. We will consider the artists’ relationship with the garden; introduce an aspect of garden design, as well as garden photography. In Unit 2, we will focus on the use of plant materials in art and acquaint students with fibers and dyes, living sculpture and practices such as topiary, bonsai, turfworks, and floral design. During the studio portion of the course, students will have ample opportunity to paint, illustrate, photograph, dye with, and/or 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. A number of the studios will be devoted to watercolor.

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.

**Major Conceptual Areas for the Course**
Students will choose one major conceptual area to explore in depth. Journal entries, final project, 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.
- Identify and articulate the aesthetic significance of plants and gardens in the lives of humans.
- Begin to be able to articulate a “personal aesthetic;” describe what appeals to you in the intersection of art and horticulture.
- Identify the diverse ways in which art and horticulture intersect.
- Recognize the “art of horticulture” in public and private spaces.
- Convey art and horticulture through watercolor, drawing, photography, writing and/or the manipulation of plant materials.
- 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?
- How can a better understanding of the retreats and “safe places” of our childhood lead to understandings of what we love about and resonate with in the landscape?
- 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 discussion of journals and move to the studio portion of the class. There will be a field trip to the Johnson Museum, and one outdoors to sketch, weather permitting. We will have a number of visiting artists.
Course Resources

Required texts:

On reserve:


You will be required to read Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 from Messervy’s *The Inward Garden* for discussion in class. This book will also be on reserve for those who do not wish to purchase the book.

In addition, you will select one of the other three books above (Masumoto, Pollan, and Russell). You will devote one journal to reflecting on what you feel was the author’s main message, whether or not the writing resonated with you, what points you agreed or disagreed with, and other points you wish to reflect on.

Course Requirements

- Attendance and active participation
- Completion of course readings
- Journal keeping
- Creation of a final project of your choice, on a topic of interest. This could be, for example:
  * a series of watercolor paintings or botanical illustrations
  * a case study of a public garden setting
  * your analysis of the work of an artist
  * an essay or other piece of garden writing
  * a web feature
  * a detailed music composition, sculpture, or other piece of original work
  * an annotated bibliography of recommended art and horticulture resources
  * a photoessay documenting the community life and activities of our class.

Project must be approved by instructor.

Grading

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

25% Journal keeping.
25% Submission of portfolio of sketches, paintings, photos, etc. created over the semester.
25% Creation and presentation of final project.

**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. Label them with your net id, followed by week number (e.g., ME14one.doc).

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. It would be in the spirit of improving our undergraduate experience in horticulture.

**Supplies Needed**
- Large sketchbook (inexpensive but decent quality pad such as Strathmore Sketch premium recycled)
- Brushes: I would suggest several different sizes, such as #4, #8, and #12. (My personal preference: Princeton or Windsor & Newton University Rounds) Please, no stiff bristled brushes. Look for large brushes with good, fine points.
- Tubes of watercolor paint. Not necessary to have a whole set, but you may want to begin with: alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, cadmium yellow, Payne’s Gray.
- Inexpensive palette or dinner plate.
- #2B pencils. Optional: a range of pencils from 6B to 4H.

**Materials fee**
$65, checks payable to Cornell University, due by the third week of class.

**The Course at a Glance**

**Week 1 (September 2):**
Fill out form with name, 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 exercises.
Drawing exercises.

For November 4: Read Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 of Moir Messervy’s The Inward Garden.

For November 4: Collect images from campus, the natural landscape, the garden, glen and forest, water and the landscape, cities. Bring them to class.
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 9):
Begin Unit 1: Plants as a subject of art
Introduction to techniques of botanical illustration

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:
• Using one of the methods learned in class, complete a loose, quick series of sketches.

Week 3 (September 16):
Finish illustration techniques – you may continue on your own for your final project or portfolio.
Begin watercolor studio

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:
• Create a color chart – begin with small areas of paints, mix up tertiary colors from those. Label.
• Create some pencil sketches of a topic of interest to you.

Week 4 (September 23):
Presentation comparing Monet with Renoir
Watercolor studio, continued
Presentation on the contemporary artists’ relationship with the garden.
Visiting artist: Dr. Franklin Spector, Chair of the Art Department, Cornell University
Discussion

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 or paint outdoors on campus.
**Week 5 (September 30):**
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:**
- 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 work from life, not photos.

**Week 6 (October 7):**
Chinese watercolor and brushwork studio, continued.

**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 is it about these gardens that speak to you? What are the elements that you “like” and are drawn to?

**Optional assignment for portfolio:**
Create a collage from practice watercolors that you’re willing to cut.

**Week 7 (October 21):**
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.

**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?
• If you have access to a camera, create and develop a short photo essay with a theme, such as signs of the changing seasons.

**Week 8 (October 28):**  
**Unit 2: Plant materials used as artforms, or in the process of creating art**

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.

**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:**  
• Using pre-cut mats, or experimenting with cutting your own, mat a piece of your work.

**Week 9 (November 4):**  
**Presentation on the Inward Garden, by Julie Moir Messervy**

Understanding our relationship to the garden: what resonates most deeply with us? Garden archetypes.  
Bring in photos and images collected for this session.

**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:
- What would be the elements of your “inward garden?” Quickly sketch out one or two themes.

**Week 10 (November 11):**

**Come in old clothes**

**Bring in: small item to dye**

Plants for dyes and fibers
Visiting Artist: Jean Warholic, Spinner and Dye Artist

**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:

**Week 11 (November 18):**

The art of horticulture with living plants
An overview of and introduction to sculpture in leaf, topiary design, turfworks, tree sculpture, crop art
Floral design workshop.

**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.

**Week 12 (November 25):**

Presentation on the ancient art of Bonsai.
Bonsai demonstration.
Visiting artist: Dr. Lou Albright, Professor of Biological and Environmental Engineering

**Portfolios due today. Journals completed today – you need not submit more after this date unless you are behind, in which case, they are due by the last day of class.**

**Week 13 (December 2):**

Presentation of final projects by students. **Final projects are due today.**