The Art of Horticulture I: Plants as a Subject of Art
Horticulture 201

Fall 2005

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

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Office hours
Tuesdays, 8:30 – 11:30, by appointment, in 169 Plant Science Building
Other times as arranged by appointment.

For additional course resources, to see a gallery of student projects, and for a copy of this syllabus and 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).

Rationale
Part of a Hort 201 – 203 sequence, this experiential course will consider plants and gardens as a subject of art. Students will explore basic drawing techniques, botanical illustration methods, watercolor, and garden photography. The course will address the natural history and symbolic use of plants in fine art, and will consider the artist’s relationship with the garden. Students will critically reflect on course content in journals and explore the work of garden writers. During the studio portion of the course, students will have ample opportunity to paint, illustrate, photograph, and 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. We will host several visiting artists and will visit the special collections of Mann Library to see illustrations in rare books.

Students are encouraged to take this in sequence with Hort 203, The Art of Horticulture II: The Use of Plants in Art and as Artforms, offered in the spring semester.

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. It is expected that students will spend time outside of class sketching, painting, photographing, and writing about the plant world.

**Major Conceptual Areas for the Course**
Students will choose one or more major conceptual areas to explore in depth. Journals, final projects, 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 artistic 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.
- 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 watercolor, drawing, photography, and/or writing.
- Critique elements of the art of horticulture covered 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. Typically we will begin with a brief discussion or presentation and move to the studio portion of the class. There will be a field trip to the Johnson Museum, the Mann Library, and one or more outdoors to sketch, weather permitting. We will have several visiting artists.

Course Resources
Required text (also available on reserve in Mann Library):

In addition to readings in the required text, you will select one of the following three books and devote one journal article to a one to two page book review, providing a brief overview of the book, discussing the author’s main points, talking about the writing style, and whether or not the writing resonated with you. The book review will be due November 22.


Journals
Students are required to keep a journal for the first 10 weeks of 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. Paste your journal from Word directly into the email message. The subject line can contain the week (week 1, week 2, etc.).

Consistently late journals can jeopardize your grade.

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.

Course Requirements
For two credits:
• Attendance and active participation.
• Completion of course readings and assignments.
• Weekly journal keeping.
• Creation of a final project of your choice, on a topic of interest. The final project can be a further exploration of a topic from class, or a work of art and horticulture that is not addressed in class. This could be, for example:
  * a music composition, sculpture, web feature, or other piece of original work
  * a series of watercolor, oil, or acrylic paintings or botanical illustrations
  * your analysis of the work of an artist
  * an essay, poetry collection, or other piece of garden writing
  * another medium in which plants are expressed in art.

Final project must be approved by instructor.

For an additional third credit:
Submission of a collection of sketches, paintings, photos, and other works created outside class over the semester. Ideas for optional assignments are listed in the “course at a glance” that follows.

**Grading**
25% Participation in class, studios, discussion, assignments, and activities. Missing more than two classes will greatly affect your final grade.
35% Journal keeping. Missing weeks of writing in your journals, or being late with assignments, will affect your grade.
40% Creation and presentation of final project.

**Supplies Needed**
• Inexpensive sketchbook (Strathmore 400 series, size 11 x 14 is ideal).
• Brushes: I would suggest three sizes, such as #4, #8, and #12. Please, no stiff bristled brushes. Look for large brushes with good, fine points.
• Tubes of watercolor paint. Reeves offers an inexpensive full set.
• Inexpensive palette or dinner plate.
• Several pencils.

Please bring along cameras to the three sessions devoted to photography. Sessions will be geared toward working with the type of equipment that you bring along. If you don’t have a camera, we will have several for groups to work with.

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 or loose paper may be desirable but isn’t necessary, unless you decide to pursue watercolor.

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

**The Course at a Glance**
**Week 1 (August 30):**
Introduction to the course: what is the “art of horticulture?”
Course expectations and goals.
Balancing breadth with depth.
How the course will be structured.
Why your perspective as the course unfolds is so valuable.
Creative writing exercise
Begin drawing exercises

Read for next week Chapters 1 – 3 in Beautiful Botanicals

**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?

**Optional assignment for portfolio**
On your way home, collect fallen leaves, acorns, small branches, and other items to have at hand for drawing and painting. Begin by taking your time to draw one of them.

Always date your drawings so you can note your progress!

**Week 2 (September 6):**
Introduction to techniques of botanical illustration.
Basic form and perspective
Learning how to observe what you see
Composition

Read for next week Chapters 4 and 5 in Beautiful Botanicals

**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**
Create some pencil sketches of a plant or landscape of interest to you. Or, continue to drawing items from last week in detail.

**Week 3 (September 13):**
Illustration techniques, continued.
Introduce watercolor

Read for next week Chapter 6 in Beautiful Botanicals

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

Week 4 (September 20):
Presentation on the contemporary artists’ relationship with nature and the garden.
Visiting artist: Dr. Franklin Spector, Chair of the Art Department, Cornell University
Discussion
Watercolor studio begins
Basic principles of color and color mixing.
Create a color chart.
Brush care, types of watercolors used, papers.

Introduction to the techniques used in watercolor, such as mixing colors, even and graded washes, wet on wet, wet on dry, softening an edge.

Review topics of interest in Beautiful Botanicals

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
Find a comfortable place and draw or paint outdoors on campus.

Tip for portable paints: save an Altoid or other small metal container. Glue bottle caps to the bottom, and apply a large dab of your favorite watercolors to the inside of each cap. Allow to dry, fold up, and tuck in your pocket. With a brush, a small pad of paper, and a water bottle, this makes it very easy to complete small paintings outside.

Week 5 (September 27):
Watercolor, continued
Painting simple, bold plant forms.
Painting detailed plant forms.
Introduction to landscapes.

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. Try to sketch live, not from photos. Although reference photos are useful, try getting used to working without them. Or, take your own photos to work from.

Do you have a favorite poem, novel, piece of music? What would it look like as a painting?

Week 6 (October 4):
Garden photography
Visiting artists: Dr. H. Chris Wien, Professor of Horticulture
Photography studio

Please bring along your camera, or borrow a friend’s that you would like to explore the use of. We will have extra cameras at hand.

Photography assignment
You will be asked to complete a photography assignment; details will be provided in class. You will need to turn in your completed assignment by October 12 to

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 are the elements that resonate with you?

Optional assignments for portfolio
Create a collage from watercolors that you’re willing to cut.
Create a series of “miniatures” – tiny paintings and drawings.
Write a poem about the changing seasons, the garden, your relationship with nature, or other topic of interest.

Week 7 (October 18):
Photography, continued.
Critique photo assignments.

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: conqueror, one of surrender, or other?

Optional assignment for portfolio
Using techniques learned in class, take photos, and develop a short photo essay with a theme, such as signs of the changing seasons.
Mat a piece of your work using pre-cut mats, or experimenting with cutting your own.

If you have enjoyed the process of journal writing, take one of your favorite pieces, and polish it to submit to the Cornell Plantations magazine.

**Week 8 (October 25):**
Photography, concluded.
Digital manipulation of images.
Meet in Mann Library Classroom/Microcenter

**Suggested journal topic:**
How is your final project coming together? Are you experiencing challenges? If so, what are they, and how are you overcoming them? How is the project evolving?

**Optional assignment for portfolio:**

**Week 9 (November 1):**
Visit Johnson Museum. Meet in the foyer.
Viewing 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.
Some exploration on your own.

At this point in the semester, you should be making significant progress on your final project. If you’re at all concerned about the progress of your project, please contact the instructor for a brief conference, so we can discuss how it’s going.

**Suggested journal topic**
Many students find the creative process to be a tremendous stress relief. Reflecting back on the semester, has this been the case for you? Has drawing, painting, reflective writing, etc., provided an opportunity to engage in “self-expression and discovery” as the syllabus suggests?

**Optional assignment for portfolio**
Write a poem or essay about one of the pieces in the Johnson Museum. Or, paint or draw a piece using a similar approach to one that you admired.

**Week 10 (November 8):**
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**
Use your journal to reflect on your final project, and the process you have followed to conceive of and create it. Have you encountered challenges? If so, how did you, or how do you anticipate, overcoming them?

**Optional assignment for portfolio**

**Week 11 (November 15):**
Chinese watercolor and brushwork studio, continued.

All journals completed by this date.

**Week 12 (November 22):**
Your choice:
Visit the Mann Library to see botanical illustrations in rare books
Or, presentation about photographing and archiving your work.

Portfolios due today.

**Week 13 (November 29):**
Presentation of final projects by students.
Final projects are due, and will be presented in class today.
Portfolios
Name:
Email address:

Description of your work in class

Description of your work outside class

Please list optional assignments that you chose to do (recommended that you do three to six:)

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