Visit to the Johnson

As you visit the study gallery and tour the museum, we would like you to consider the following questions:

- What do the changing images of horticulture in art tell us about our notions of beauty? Of good and evil?

- What do the pieces tell us about the relationship of the garden and nature to the artist?

- What can we learn about horticulture from art? What is the range in horticultural topics that you see represented?

- How are certain plants symbolically used to convey emotion?

In the book, *The Meaning of Gardens* (1990, The MIT press), the editors, Mark Francis and Randolph Hester, Jr., have the following to say:

“In the garden, as in society, there is an ongoing battle of seeming oppositions:

male versus female,
good versus evil,
reactions versus revolution,
self versus community,
consumerism versus self-reliance,
connectedness versus anomie,
integration versus segregation,
rich versus poor,
real versus surreal,
bigness versus smallness,
sacred versus profane,
science versus intuition,
high versus folk art.

Some of these conflicts in the garden are age-old, while others are a result of modern life (and a desire to control and order our personal worlds). In the garden these apparent irreconcilables are clarified and mediated because the garden accepts paradox. Anyone who has ever gardened knows that a garden represents constancy yet is ever changing.”

- For those of you who have gardened, what are your thoughts about this assertion?

- Let’s consider the relationship of the garden to art. What comparisons can be made about the above between gardens, and art? Do these seeming oppositions occur in art as well?
We would like for you to choose a piece, and reflect on what in particular about that piece speaks to you. It doesn’t need to be “positive;” in fact, you may be repelled by a piece, or dislike it. Perhaps there is one that you are drawn to, but do not understand what the artist may have wanted to convey with it. Jots thoughts in your journal, and come back prepared to share, if you will, thoughts about the piece and how it speaks to you.