

INTRODUCTION

The origins of still life painting can be traced back to antiquity but in the West it was only in the sixteenth century that it became acceptable as an art form in its own right. Before then flowers had appeared regularly as part of the decoration in the borders of medieval manuscripts, most notably of the Flemish and Burgundian Schools, culminating in the workshop of Jean Bourdichon. The illuminators can be exquisite in their rendering of floral detail (1–3) and attention to accurate delineation of the plants is juxtaposed with sensitive placing of them on the page. The illustration of herbals likewise contained drawings of plants which had particular pretensions to botanical accuracy.

A few individual artists, like Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, surpass the miniaturists in the accuracy of their drawings from nature. Leonardo's botanical drawings (mostly to be found in the Royal Collection at Windsor) show considerable understanding of plant structure and habit, while Dürer's watercolours of flowers and grasses (Albertina, Vienna) are amongst the most beautiful of all his work; both artists' botanical work looks strikingly modern. Still life painting in oils does not survive much before the mid-century, but a detail like the pots of lilies and iris in the foreground of Hugo van der Goes' *Portinari altarpiece* (Uffizi, Florence), completed c.1479 and Memling's *Marian flower piece* (Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid) on the verso of a portrait of a Young man at prayer, give an idea of what Erasmus, who died in 1536, must be referring to in his *Colloquies* about the pleasure to be derived from comparing real with painted flowers. He adds that the painting holds fresh and green all the winter when the flowers are dead and withered. This sentiment gives additional insight to the reason for painting flower-pieces aside from for the intrinsic allegorical meaning they contain: that all life is fragile and death comes to all.

So far as botanical drawings are concerned the tradition of the illuminator merged with the scientific quest for accuracy implicit in the illustrators of the herbals, and resulted in the late sixteenth century in a series of beautiful watercolours usually executed for wealthy or aristocratic patrons. Notable amongst those whose work has survived are Jacopo Ligozzi who worked for the Medici in Florence, Georg Hoefnagel, who worked for Rudolf II of Prague, and Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, a Huguenot, who fled Paris at the time of the St Bartholomew Massacre (1573) for London. To them can now be added

Antoine du Pinet de Noroy (4), the earliest of the botanical draughtsmen represented in the Fitzwilliam. These artists head a tradition which continues to this day.

In the seventeenth century one of the main centres of flower drawing was Paris, where Nicolas Robert's work (7–9) inspired Louis XIV to commission a series of botanical paintings on vellum, known as *Les Vélins du Roi*. Robert painted twenty of these a year for the King, a tradition maintained by his successors, including Claude Aubriet (15). These vellums are still kept at the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris. Other centres of importance for botanical drawing were Frankfurt and Holland, where tulip books (5), with drawings tantamount to advertisements, were the forerunners of the seedsmen's catalogues. It is odd that in England, where at this time important contributions to botany and science in general were being made, no native artists specialising in flower painting appeared apart from Alexander Marshall, whose work can be seen at the British Museum and at Windsor.

The most important flower painters in oil at the beginning of the century were Jan Brueghel in Antwerp, Jacques de Gheyn at The Hague, Ambrosius Bosschaert, who left Antwerp for Middelburg and Georg Flegel, who worked for many years in Frankfurt. It was in Frankfurt that the most interesting of the women engaged in botanical drawing was born, Maria Sibylla Merian (12). Merian led an unusual and exciting life, travelling to Surinam (that part of South America later known as the Dutch, French and British Guianas) to pursue her botanical and entomological studies. Her published works revolutionised the sciences of zoology and botany and laid the foundations for the classification of plant and animal species by Charles Linnaeus in the eighteenth century.

Merian died in 1722, a forerunner of the many distinguished women artists who found it possible to make careers as professionals in this restricted area of painting. Foremost amongst these were the Dietzsch sisters (19, 20), known particularly for painting on a dark ground. They worked in Nuremberg which became an important centre for botanical art, thanks in large part to the patronage and enthusiasm of the physician, Dr Christoph Jakob Trew. He helped the young Georg Ehret (21–6) at the beginning of his illustrious career. Ehret, possibly the finest botanical draughtsman of all, was much influenced by Linnaeus' ideas and put into practice his way of classifying plants (25). Although born in Germany, the son of a gardener, it was in England that

Ehret's career came to full fruition. He worked for a series of fashionable patrons, including the President of the Royal Society, Sir Hans Sloane, the Royal Physician, Dr Meade, and Margaret, Duchess of Portland, and lived in England from 1736 to 1770. Ehret's influence was widespread through the coloured engravings issued after his drawings during his lifetime. Most of the hundred drawings in the Fitzwilliam by him are on vellum but there is one drawing on paper (23), inserted in a *florilegium* by the Bath artist, Thomas Robins the Elder (1716–70). The drawings in this album (28, 29) are all done from nature and were the basis of more formal paintings intended for exhibition and sale (27).

One of the reasons for the great importance of botanical drawings was that often botanists had nothing but a dried specimen from which to attempt to classify a plant. Not every expedition could employ a trained draughtsman to join them in the field. Artists like Ehret could reconstitute the appearance of the flower in its prime using the specimen and sometimes a sketch done on the spot by an amateur draughtsman. Of course, this could result in a slight distortion of the plant in its depiction and this may explain why it is sometimes difficult to be a hundred per cent certain of the correct botanical name which should be attached to some of these early drawings. Accurate drawing was very important, but the best artists used their judgement in the positioning of the plant on the page to its best effect, to create an artistically and aesthetically pleasing composition. Ehret was a prime exponent of this, but so too were Robins, Sowerby and Redouté.

In the later eighteenth century several women exhibited publicly at the Royal Academy in England and the Salon in France. The first woman to have a professional career as a flower painter in Britain was Mary Moser (1744–1819), (32). She was a founder member of the Royal Academy in 1768 and decorated a room at Frogmore in Windsor Park for Queen Charlotte. A direct contemporary, in France, Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744–1818), was appointed painter to Queen Marie-Antoinette (33). Comparison of their work shows a completely different attitude to flower drawing: Mary Moser is more concerned with dramatic presentation in the Dutch tradition, whereas Anne Vallayer-Coster is more interested in a painterly approach to her subject, ultimately inspired by Chardin.

Apart from the career-women, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are remarkable for the number of first rate lady amateurs. Elizabeth Burgoyne (35), Amelia Fancourt (37), Mary Compton, Countess of Northamp-

ton (38) and Lucy Cust (52) are all fine practitioners, worthy of public exhibition alongside the best of the professional males, James Sowerby, who founded the *Botanical Magazine* (40, 41), and the Austrians, Francis and Ferdinand Bauer (44, 45). The Bauers were phenomenally gifted and both were extremely precocious. Francis had the fortune to come to the attention of Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society, who arranged for him a permanent job as draughtsman to the Royal Gardens at Kew, where he worked for nearly fifty years. Patronised by the Royal family (Queen Charlotte was one of his pupils), he was unusual in having a secure position all his adult life. His younger brother, Ferdinand, no less gifted a draughtsman, had a more adventurous career. He travelled in the Aegean with John Sibthorp, Sherardian Professor at Oxford University and to Australia on Matthew Flinders' five year journey of exploration. On his return to England, he was unable to find financial support for the publication of the Australian plants he and Robert Brown, the botanist, had discovered, so he went back to his native Austria.

Whilst England remained a leader in the field in the nineteenth century the French school, dominated by the example and pupils of Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759–1840) reasserted itself. Redouté himself, who had the distinction of working for both Marie-Antoinette and the Empress Josephine, has a justly won reputation (42, 43). At his best he is the equal of Ehret and, like him, knowledge of his work was spread by coloured prints and lavishly produced books based on his watercolours. The finest of his drawings were those made for the Empress in which he recorded the rare plants she grew in the gardens at Malmaison. He is best known for the coloured engravings of *Les Liliacées* and *Les Roses*, published respectively in 1802–16 and 1817–24. After Napoleon's fall Redouté continued to have a fashionable career, working at the Jardin des Plantes and teaching public courses and private pupils, like the two daughters of the Duc d'Orléans, the Princesses Louise and Marie. Towards the end of his career his style hardened and several of his late works have a mechanical appearance. Despite his reputation and skill, Redouté was prodigal with his money and he died in poverty. He had many pupils of varying degrees of excellence and several drawings are known in which the pupil copies the master; Nathalie d'Esménard's *Noisette Rose* (53) is a characteristic example. Redouté's modern reputation may outflank his contemporaries, but in his day several artists fought him for the palm, amongst them his pupil, Pancrace Bessa (48). The nineteenth century saw Lyons assert itself as a centre

of flower painting, represented here by Antoine Berjon (39) and Dominique Dumillier (61).

In England the juxtaposition of professional and amateur continued, with several of the women, Mrs Withers (59) for example, achieving a more consistent standard of excellence than the men. Whilst the interest in accurate delineation of exotic species continued (orchids by Cornelius Durham (58) and the Gynea Lily by John Lindley (54) are examples of this tradition), a more 'Romantic' pictorial approach is found in the work of Charles Rosenberg (57) and his sister, Mrs William Duffield (60) and, on the Continent in that of W. Mussill (62).

The twentieth century has seen both these strands continue. Although represented by a finely botanical drawing of an *Antirrhinum* (63), Raymond Booth is best known for his imaginative naturalist paintings, whereas Margaret Stones (64) has a justly deserved reputation as guardian of the grand tradition of botanical drawing, commensurate with Nicolas Robert, Georg Ehret and Pierre-Joseph Redouté. These two artists show that there is still a lively interest in the work of, and a practical need for, botanical draughtsmen and they exemplify the equal brilliance in this area of expertise of both men and women.

The Fitzwilliam's collection of flower drawings owes its importance to the bequest in 1973 of Major the Hon. Henry Rogers Broughton, 2nd Lord Fairhaven. Major Broughton had already given a splendid group of thirty-seven flower paintings to the Museum in 1966. At his death these were enriched by a further eighty-two oil paintings, including examples by Jan Brueghel and Jan van Huysum. In addition to these were about nine hundred drawings of flowers on paper and vellum and thirty-eight albums in which were found many of the most important drawings included in this selection. With so increased a richness of quality and variety to what little the Fitzwilliam already possessed in this area (scattered examples by Ehret, Merian, Margaret Meen and one each by Redouté and Cézanne), the museum became overnight one of the principal repositories in Europe. Although there are *lacunae*, Leonardo, Dürer, Hoefnagel, Ligozzi and Le Moyne de Morgues have already been mentioned, similarly there are no flowerpieces by the great nineteenth-century exponents, Delacroix, Fantin-Latour, Courbet, Odilon Redon and Manet. But, as happens so often to the rich, greater riches are

given, and the museum was presented with a splendid example of Margaret Stones' draughtmanship by John McIlhenny in 1989 (64), and, most recently, Her Majesty's Government allocated to us the ravishing book (4) made for Louise of Lorraine by Antoine du Pinet in 1575 from the collection at Wrest Park, thus providing us with a natural link between the decorations in Medieval Books of Hours and the scientific drawings of the seventeenth century.

The initial botanical identification of these drawings was done by John Raven, who was elected Honorary Keeper of the Broughton Collection. Other botanists who have helped with identification of species include Peter Yeo and Clive King, Dr John Dransfield and Dr Martyn Rix. The basic work on biographies and measurements has been done by a series of volunteers, foremost amongst them Mrs Vivian Tubbs.

In making the selection for this handbook three criteria have been foremost: historical continuity, variety of artists and quality. Many of the drawings illustrated are bound in albums, which can only be exhibited a page at a time and thus are rarely seen by the public. This explains the extraordinary condition of much of the Broughton Collection and the brilliance of the colour of the drawings. Indeed, in a book like this, one is able better to savour the range of the collection than in an exhibition.

The drawings are mostly executed in watercolour or bodycolour (pigment to which white is added to make it opaque), sometimes with the addition of gum arabic, a natural resin which imparts a rich gloss to a colour and enhances the tonal quality of the darker areas, over an outline drawing in graphite. Many are on prepared vellum, which gives an especial lustre to the surface effect of the pigment. The measurements are in millimetres (apart from 1–3) and are given height before width.

The best introduction to the history of botanical drawing is Wilfred Blunt's *The art of botanical illustration*, London, 1950, enlarged by William Stearn, Collins 1994 and reissued in larger format. Ehret is treated handsomely in Gerta Calmann's *Ehret – painter extraordinary* and Redouté, most recently by Martyn Rix with William Stearn in *Redouté's fairest flowers*, The Herbert Press/The British Museum (Natural History). Martyn Rix's *The art of the botanist*, Lutterworth Press, 1981 and Lys de Bray's *The art of botanical illustration*, The Wellfleet Press, 1989, are also good introductions to much of what is

abbreviated here. For botanical information fundamental are *The Royal Horticultural Society's garden encyclopaedia of plants and flowers*, the *Readers Digest Encyclopaedia of garden plants and flowers* and *Hilliers' Manual of trees and shrubs*, David and Charles. *The plant finder*, published in association with the Royal Horticultural Society is also useful.

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I

DES PROPRIETEZ DES CHOSES

A translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus'
De proprietatibus rerum, made by Jean Corbechon
at the command of Charles V of France.

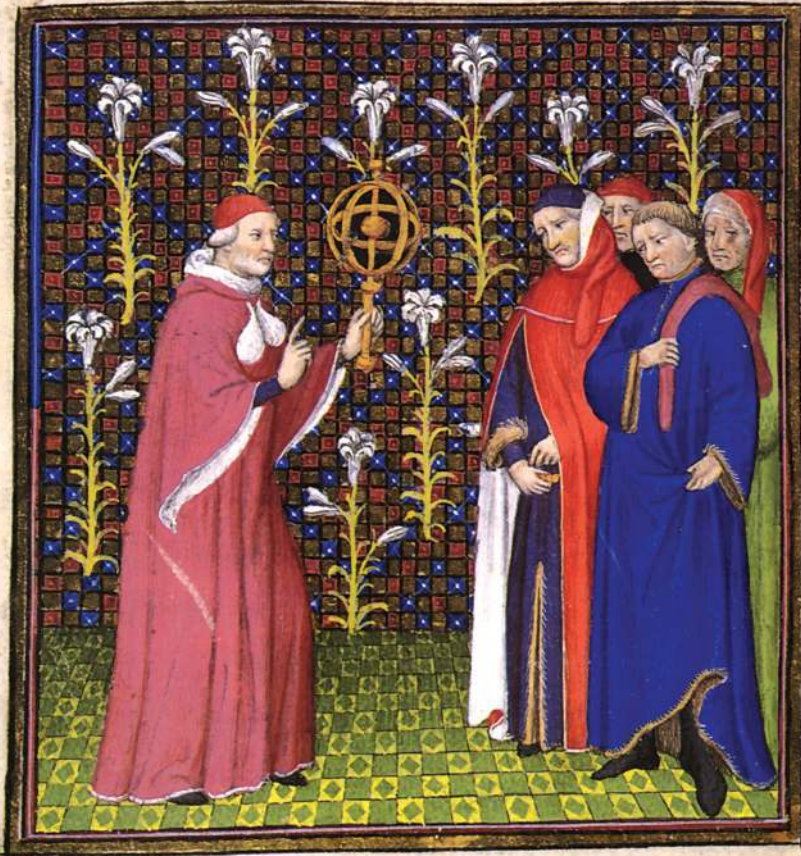


Vellum. 40.5 × 28.5 cm. 363 folios.
Produced c.1415 in France. Probably made in the
workshop of the Master of the Hours of the Maréchal de
Boucicault. Given by Brigadier Alexander Stirling
of Keir, 1897. **MS.251 folio 135.**

The background is sown with lilies, presumably as a compliment to Amadeus VIII of Savoy, who used the lily as an emblem and for whom it is likely that this manuscript was made. The quality of draughtsmanship is extremely high and the artist responsible for the illumination must have studied the lilies from life to be able to delineate their form so accurately. The lily is perhaps the flower most frequently depicted in early manuscripts, largely because of its association with the Virgin Mary and in particular with the Annunciation.

The scene shows a lecturer holding a gold armillary sphere and giving a lecture to his pupils.

comme il appartient a ceste pñte enuue
Et a tant fine le 6^me liure des prope
tez des choses



En commence le 6^me liure des pro
prietez qui parle et traite du monde
et des corps celestieulz Et ne buent

HORAE
BOOK OF HOURS



Vellum. 11.3 × 7.9 cm. 196 folios.
Produced in the fifteenth century, probably in Bruges.
Bequeathed by Frank McClean, 1904. **McClean**
MS.93, folios 152 verso, 159 verso.

Written in Dutch, the upper miniature shows Livinus, Bishop and Martyr, who was ordained at Canterbury by St Augustine and was martyred in 657. His relics were brought to Ghent in 1007. He is holding his attribute of a pair of pincers with a de-racinated tongue, surrounded by a border of heartsease and speedwell, with butterflies and moths.

The lower miniature shows St Barbara reading beside the tower in which she was imprisoned, surrounded by a border of pinks, one growing from a wicker basket, with a snail crawling up the stem, the others flowering free, with a spider, butterflies and moths.

This sort of border decoration reached its greatest perfection in the Books of Hours produced in France in the workshop of Jean Bourdichon (1457–c.1521). The quality of these Flemish Hours is not as exquisite as those, but the idiom is the same and considering the small scale of this particular book the execution is crisp and delicate, with the flowers showing evidence of having been studied from nature.