

A LESSER-KNOWN CONJUNCTION OF ART & SCIENCE IN PITTSBURGH

Some may consider art and science to be on opposite ends of the spectrum. However, here in Pittsburgh people with diverse interests in plants, gardening, nature, art and science are being trained to blend both classical artistic techniques and scientific (botanical) details into stunning realistic works of art. Botany is one of the oldest known sciences, and this conjunction with art is occurring in Pittsburgh through a lesser-known field of study called Botanical Art & Illustration. The use of hand rendered plant images with precise details (not easily captured by standard photographic techniques) are still significant tools for the identification and characterization of plant species. Botanical artists are challenged to create real-life plant images by capturing not only the unembellished aesthetic beauty and personality of a particular plant, but also to incorporate botanically correct details of the plant's morphology. Subjects selected for botanical art study include representatives of the entire plant kingdom: flowers, trees, grasses, fruits, vegetables, i.e. all things botanical.

All the skills required to create a real-life plant portrait and work of fine art are currently being taught by Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in their adult education program of Botanical Art & Illustration. In addition, these skills are also being independently practiced and continually refined within the Allegheny Highlands Botanical Art Society (AHBAS), the local chapter of the *American Society of Botanical Artists* (ASBA). By closely focusing on the botanical details and principles of artistic beauty of all types of plants and flowers, both Phipps and the AHBAS help budding amateur and seasoned professional artists to discover an increased awareness of nature's beauty. Unfortunately, in our hectic lives the infinite varieties of nature's beauty can sometimes be too easily overlooked. Making botanical art can be challenging and requires time and patience to thoroughly study a "live plant specimen" and research its specific morphological characteristics. Then all of these artistic and scientific details must then be precisely rendered (layer by layer) and incorporated into an accurate botanical image. However, the process of making botanical art can also be deeply relaxing, meditative, enjoyable, fulfilling and may also lead to a life-long passion.

The AHBAS (Allegheny Highlands Botanical Art Society) serves members primarily located in Western Pennsylvania, Eastern Ohio and West Virginia. It was organized in 2001 to provide an educational and social forum for members to improve their artistic skills and increase their botanical and artistic knowledge. Through their annual Flora project with Phipps Conservatory, as well as other exhibitions, the chapter serves to educate the public on plant diversity, plant ecology and conservation. We are always looking for new members whether a novice or professional. Members use a wide variety of media such as: watercolor, graphite pencil, colored pencil, printmaking as well as pen & ink. Generally, in non-pandemic times, there are several "open studios" every month. Here members and non-members are welcome to participate in sharing and doing their art in a less structured social setting. Both, AHBAS members and nonmembers as well can get input and help from other experienced botanical artists. The Pittsburgh area is also fortunate to have a number of other unique botanical resources such as: The Hunt Institution for Botanical Documentation containing one of the world's largest collections of botanical art, The Carnegie Museum of Natural History with digitized Herbarium Collections and the recently reopened Botany Hall. In addition, there are also numerous botanical gardens, parks, nature reserves as well as a broad spectrum of independent art and scientific organizations such as ours, the Allegheny Highlands Botanical Arts Society (AHBAS). In addition to gratefully utilizing these resources, the other AHBAS activities include field trips, other social outings like our recent "Plein-Air Open Studio" at Threadbare Cider House. There are also educational events such as an annual private showing at

the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Members of the AHBAS also have numerous opportunities to participate in activities and exhibitions with the American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA), its Annual Meeting as well as receiving quarterly copies of ASBA's journal, "The Botanical Artist."

We are looking forward to continuing to emerge from these difficult times and resuming our full slate of activities. Come join us, and please visit us at www.ahbas.org. to learn more and to see some examples of AHBAS members' botanical art in our on-line gallery.

Jim Hansotte & The Communications Committee