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Herbs to Orchids: Botanical Illustration in the Nineteenth Century

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The Watkinson Library holds many important illustrated botanical works. A checklist of "Botanical Imprints in the Watkinson Library to 1800" (Watkinson Library Guide No.2) by Jeffrey H. Kaimowitz was published in 1982. The current exhibition was organized to highlight the nineteenth-century illustrated botanical imprints in the Watkinson Library.

The nineteenth century reached a high level of achievement in the art of botanical illustration. The sciences of botany and medicine, fostered by expeditions around the world, had utilized the art of the scientific illustrator for some time. Flower painting and art with botanical subjects, however, were newer and the combination of art and botany produced some of the most beautiful books and periodicals ever published. These include general treatises on botany (including the illustration of the "new" Linnaean system of classification), medical botany, books documenting scientific expeditions, books illustrating certain species or families of plants (such as roses, orchids, or ferns), decorative flower books, and periodicals dealing with floriculture and related fields.

While most book illustrations before the nineteenth century were woodcuts and copperplate engravings, additional print techniques were introduced in the nineteenth century including stipple engraving, aquatint, mezzotint, uncolored and hand-colored lithography and chromolithography. The perfection of stipple engraving, which made more subtle variations possible, was particularly well suited to botanical illustration. Lithography, invented at the end of the eighteenth century, involved drawing directly on the stone rather than cutting or etching the plate. An example, exhibited here, is the largest botanical book published with lithographic plates, James Bateman's Orchidaceae of Mexico and Guatemala, printed in a limited edition of 125 copies.

In England, William Curtis founded Curtis's botanical magazine, the most distinguished and long-lived of a number of botanical periodicals (1787-1983). Curtis founded the magazine with a didactic and financial purpose and employed and trained the most important English botanical illustrators of the time, including Sydenham Edwards and James Sowerby. Each issue contained numerous plates, which were engraved until 1845 and after this date lithographed. Other important English periodicals include the Journal of the Horticultural Society of London and the Floricultural Cabinet. Among other botanical illustrators working in England were Miss S. A. Drake, Mrs. Augusta I. Withers, William Jackson Hooker (editor of Curtis's botanical magazine from 1826-1865 and first official director of the Royal Gardens at Kew), and Walter Hood.
Fitch. Fitch, who was the principal artist of Curtis’s botanical magazine from 1837 to 1877, worked on numerous books and probably was the most prolific of all botanical artists in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps the greatest botanical illustrator of all time was Pierre Joseph Redouté. Born in Belgium, the second of three brothers, all artists, he was trained by botanists in France. Some of his more scientific illustrations were for Histoire des plantes grasses by Augustin Pyramus de Candolle, the first publication Redouté illustrated entirely by himself, even executing the stipple engravings; Histoire naturelle, agricole et économique du maïs by Matthieu Bonafous; and Flora boreali-americana by Andre Michaux. Redouté’s most popular works, including his book on the lily family, Les Liliacées, were completed under the patronage of Josephine Bonaparte. (Two plates from Les Liliacées from a private collection are exhibited here.) Redouté perfected the technique of stipple engraving and his works have a luminosity and perfection of line which places them among the most prized (and copied) botanical illustrations. Other important French illustrators of the nineteenth century are Pancrace Bessa, a pupil of Redouté, and Alfred Riocreux.

The flora and fauna of the United States had long been a subject for explorers and botanical illustrators from Europe. Publishing of important botanical works began in the United States in the early nineteenth century. Jacob Bigelow’s American medical botany was the first color plate book published in the United States, and other books about American botany include those by William Paul Crillon Barton and Charles Sprague Sargent. With its large chromolithographs, Victoria regia, or, The great water lily of America by John Fisk Allen is a striking example of American botanical illustration.

Victorian gift books, small flower books, and books on the "language" of flowers were very popular in the nineteenth century in the United States and Europe. Histoire des roses by Charles Malo with illustrations by Pancrace Bessa is an excellent example of the small, sentimental flower book. The Language of flowers, probably based on a French version, was very popular in Europe and the United States. A version shown here is illustrated by Kate Greenaway, the popular illustrator of children's books. Of particular interest from a local standpoint is The Voice of flowers by Lydia Sigourney, published in Hartford in the 1840s.
A number of fine scientific nineteenth-century botanical books resulted from government sponsorship of the study of native natural history, such as Manual Blanco’s Flora de Filipinas and Claudio Gay’s Historia fisica y politica de Chile. The many illustrations in Blanco’s work are lithographs; engravings, some of them after drawings by Riocreux, are featured in Gay’s massive study. Other splendid books were published to document the work of expeditions. Karl Ludwig Blume’s Flora Javae includes both engravings and lithographs. Mentioned above for the importance of its large lithographed illustrations, The Orchidaceae of Mexico and Guatemala by James Bateman, depicting the orchids of Central America, is a superb example of the art of the botanical illustrator. The combination of the drawings by Miss Drake and Mrs. Augusta Withers with the lithography of Maxim Gauci sets a high standard for all types of botanical illustration.

A selected list of artists, a brief bibliography, and a checklist of titles displayed in the exhibit follow. In the list of artists, reference is made to the author or to the title of the publication in which the artist's work appears. The checklist should be consulted for full citations of the publications.

SELECTED LIST OF ARTISTS

**Bessa, Pancrace**
1772-1846, French.
SEE: Malo; Michaux, F. A.

**Curtis, John**
1791-1862, English (no relation to William or Samuel Curtis).
SEE: Curtis, J.; Curtis’s botanical magazine, 1825.

**Drake, Miss S. A.**
fl.1818-47, English, "of Turnham Green."
SEE: Bateman; *Journal of the Horticultural Society of London*, 1847.

**Fitch, Walter Hood**
1817-1892, English, born in Scotland.
SEE: Badham; *Curtis's botanical magazine*, 1856; Hooker, *Century of ferns*.

**Redouté, Pierre Joseph**
1759-1840, b. Belgium, worked in France.
SEE: Bonafous; Candolle; Michaux, A.; Michaux, F. A.; Redouté.
Riocreux, Alfred
1820-1912, French.
SEE: Decaisne; Gay; Journal de la Société Impériale et Central d'Horticulture, 1860; Sargent.

Sharp, William
1803-1875, Anglo-American.
SEE: Allen.

Sowerby, James
1757-1862, English.
SEE: Woodville.

Sowerby, John Edward
1825-1870, English (grandson of James Sowerby).
SEE: Sowerby, J. E.

Withers, Mrs. Augusta I.
fl.1829-1865, English.
SEE: Bateman.

FOR FURTHER READING


CHECKLIST

This is a short-title checklist of Watkinson Library materials displayed in the exhibition, "Herbs to Orchids: Botanical Illustration in the Nineteenth Century." In the case of multi-volume titles, the number of volumes is given and, unless noted, the library's Holdings for such titles are complete. The Watkinson Library collections include many more nineteenth-century botanical publications than could be displayed in this exhibition, and most can be located by searching the Trinity College online catalog.


Gay, Claude. *Historia física y política de Chile*. Paris: En casa del autor; Chile: En el Museo de Historia Natural de Santiago, 1844-71. 28 v. and atlas (2 v. plates).


*Language of flowers*. Illustrated by Kate Greenaway. London: G. Routledge, [188-?].


Robinson, John. *Ferns in their homes and ours*. Salem [Massachusetts]: S. E. Cassino, 1878.


*Vignettes from Mr. Bateman's Orchidaceae of Mexico and Guatemala*. London: Cook, 1844.


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**CREDITS**

Co-curators of this exhibition are Alesandra M. Schmidt, Watkinson Library Assistant Curator, and Trudy B. Jacoby, Trinity College Library Slide Curator. Ms. Schmidt arranged, installed, and described the exhibition and prepared the catalog checklist. The catalog essay, list of artists, and bibliography were prepared by Ms. Jacoby. The catalog was designed by Julia Vecchitto, Trinity College Art Director, and printed by Central Services. Photographs were taken by Philip J. Duffy, Trinity College Audio/Visual Department Director. Web site design and scans by Cedric Howe '96, Trinity College Slide Collection. Publication of this catalog was made possible through the support of the Trinity College/Watkinson Library Associates Fund.

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#1 Curtis’s botanical magazine. London, 1825. *Iris longispatha*. (Illustrator: John Curtis.) (purple)


#18 Sargent, Charles Sprague. *The silva of North America*. Boston and New York, 1890-1902. (v. 5) Dogwood. (*Cornus nuttallii*). (Illustrator: drawing by C. E. Faxon, engraving under the direction of A. Riocreux.) (black and white)


Photographs by Philip J. Duffy, Audiovisual Department, Trinity College.

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Franklinia

Gordonia pubescens
PENTANDRIA
MONOGYNIA

VIOLA TRICOLOR

Love-in-idleness