



This set of palms from Thailand received the Mary Mendum Medal. Photos © the artists and C. Davies.

Botanical Images Scotia 2019

Coral Prosser

BISCOT once again staged another excellent exhibition of botanical art at Gardening Scotland in 2019. The phrase ‘small but beautifully formed’ springs to mind and is a true description of this annual miracle. Once again, the international contingent was strong. Two of the artists were from Italy, one from Switzerland and one from Thailand. The other contestants were from the U.K. The quality of the exhibit was outstanding and this was borne out by the number of high awards given by the judges. Nine artists took part. Four Gold, one Silver-gilt, three Silver and one Bronze awards were presented. One artist won the Mary Mendum Medal. There was very strong competition from at least two other artists for the honour.

The range of subjects was diverse, from tropical palms to native lichen species, and proved to be an educational as well as an

aesthetic and visual treat for those who have an interest in both art and botanical subjects.

Alongside the BISCOT exhibition a further display of botanical paintings was shown. These paintings were the first selected works which will eventually form the R.G.B.E. Florilegium. This new project for R.B.G.E. is a long-awaited event and will consist of contemporary botanical studies. The collection will be an ongoing labour into the future but the initial main body of works will be completed to coincide with the 350th anniversary of the R.B.G.E. in 2020, and will be shown to the public at the James Hope Gateway in the autumn of that year. Many artists have signed up to create a work for the florilegium. The works produced will undergo a strict selection procedure. It is envisaged that it will be oversubscribed so there will be an

exhibition of those works, which although of excellent quality, were not chosen for various reasons e.g. duplication, or not fulfilling the requirements of the RBGE list of plants

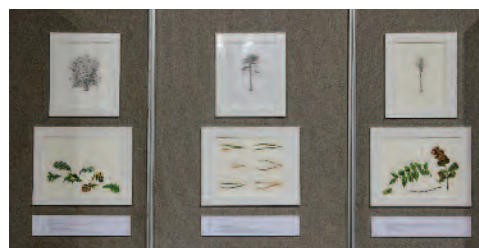
Simonetta Ochipinti - Gold award 'Citrus - The Golden Fruits'

This set of paintings brought us up close and personal to some less-known citruses mainly from the south of Italy and Sicily. The artist assured me that in the areas where they grow, they are used in recipes for their special and distinctive flavours. Most of these fruits were certainly unknown to most of the visitors, the one most commented upon was because of the weird finger-like protuberances which are part of, and project out of the ends of the fruit. The painting of the subjects is masterful. The details of the pores and knobbles and the subtle shadows and colours gave the viewer an almost tactile experience. The fruits, leaves and branches of each variety were excellently drawn, showing the differing characteristics of each to great effect. These beautifully composed images have a timeless quality and thoroughly deserve their Gold award.

Vivanne Dubach - Silver award 'Common Leaf-Damage in Swiss Trees'

This was a particularly informative set of well observed, drawn and painted works depicting leaf-damage to various trees in Switzerland. It was good to see an exhibit which leaned very

much toward the recording of botanical incidents and imparting information through the medium of botanical illustration. This is not to take away from the artistic endeavours of the works. The exhibit showed graphite drawings of each tree, and below, shown separately, were examples of leaf-damaged specimens painted in water-colour. This arrangement had the effect of inadvertently dividing the exhibit into two, because the graphite was used exclusively for the trees images and watercolour only for the diseased leaves. This could have been remedied by depicting the tree and damaged leaves together in one composition, (but another three exhibits would needed to comply with the competition regulations), or by using the same medium for all the works. This would have resulted in a more cohesive and pleasing exhibit and probably gained a higher award.



*(top) Even damaged leaves can lead to fine art.
(bottom) Golden citrus.*



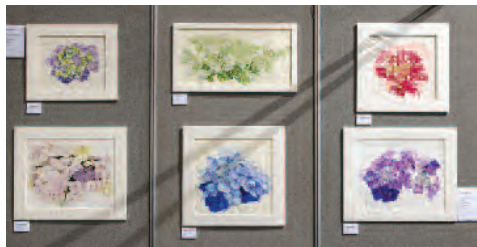
Rhododendrons.

Linda Russell - Silver-gilt award Rhododendrons of Ardvorlich

This collection of paintings was memorable for its bold and beautiful rhododendron compositions. The selection of the varieties painted showed the colour and character, growth forms of leaves and branches as well as the flower heads of individual subjects to advantage. The portrayal of the stems of some of the larger varieties were believably lax and 'springy' while those of others were stiff and 'snappy'. These contrasts of the robust nature of the form and colour of some, shown adjacent to the more delicate, smaller rhododendron varieties made for a particularly interesting group of images. The details of seed heads were well observed and the use of shadow to convey depth of field added to the success of the compositions.

Denise Playfair - Bronze award Hydrangeas

This was a set of paintings which were generally very attractive and had 'wall-appeal' but did not always live up to their botanical promise on closer inspection. This being said, there were some beautifully well-rendered parts in all of the paintings and the draughtsmanship, detail and textures demonstrated were often of a high standard. The qualities of composition, colour and depth were not consistent throughout the group and were sometimes adequate rather than excellent. Some of the subjects 'floated' in the spaces in which they sat and would have benefitted botanically and dimensionally by attachment. The most successful of the paintings in every respect was the *Hydrangea quercifolia*. There was a richness in depth, detail, form and colour. It occupied the space within its frame



Hydrangeas.

comfortably and the greenish-white flower-head had a satisfying accuracy and sureness of touch which raised it to a higher level than the others in the group.

Mariapia Pasini - Silver award 'The Allure of What Remains'

These paintings are aptly titled. Mariapia has drawn and painted studies of plants which have passed their flowering season and show the interesting structures which are left before they finally decay and disappear entirely for another year. The peculiar, alluring shapes she has found have a strange, stark beauty of their own. They are dramatic with an underlying strength which belies their delicate forms. They deserve a closer look. The studies are well-drawn and painted in a monochrome of browns. The compositions are varied and intriguing but not always satisfying.



Detail from the Allure of What Remains.

Sandra Russell - Silver award

Clematis All Year

These images of different varieties of *Clematis* were painted as they came into flower throughout the year and there is a great deal to be admired. They are well drawn and painted and attention to detail is of a high standard. The different characteristics of each are shown precisely. The delicacy of the leaves and twining stems, and colour of the flowers are well observed and executed. Some of the compositions are more successful than others which lack a certain liveliness, due perhaps to



Clematis.

being isolated on the page. One has been painted on a ground which is of a different shade of white from the others and this mars the unity of the group. The details and textures of the painting of *C. 'Bagatelle'* are particularly well-observed.

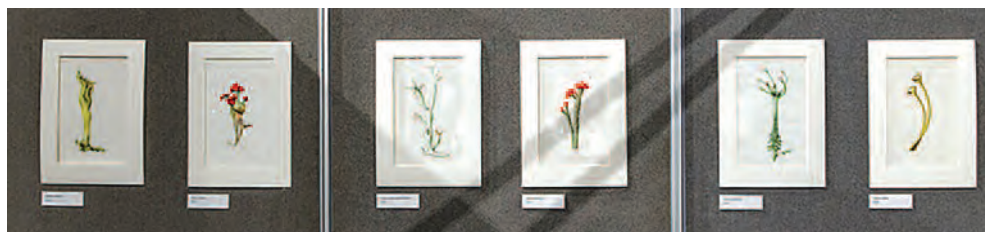
Marianne Hazelwood - Gold award

Arisaema biseasonal

This set of paintings is a true labour of love. Marianne was so committed to the subjects that she grew and cultivated them from seed. This proved difficult but she persevered and the resulting studies are phenomenal. The intimate understanding that the artist has acquired is manifest in the painting studies she has produced. These images are exceptionally well-observed, drawn and painted. It was possible to imagine oneself as an insect perched on a leaf under the canopies of the plants. The precise details are flawless, and the view-points full of interest. The compositions are exciting, cool and creative and reveal the unusual and particular characteristics of each plant. Altogether a stunning display.



Arisaemas.



Scottish lichens.

Fran Thomas - Gold award Scottish Native Cladonia Lichens

This set of studies of *Cladonia* lichens was a delight. They have put this subject in the spotlight and piqued the appetite of viewers to see more. The detail which is shown in each of the paintings is barely visible to the naked eye, and the artist spent many hours recording the individual characteristics of each lichen by looking at the subjects under a microscope. The resulting images, besides being excellently drawn and painted, are a captivating and accurate depiction of this mainly hidden world. The individual subjects seem to have 'personalities' whose characteristics are unique to each of them. These studies are remarkable and have added to our general knowledge of a specific botanical world. Their educational value is in addition to their skilful representation.

Sansanee Dekrajang - Gold award Tropical Palm Trees (*Arecaceae*)

This group of paintings brought the sunshine with them! Most of the palms grow in the artist's grandmother's garden in Thailand. She has grown up with them and the intimate knowledge she has is apparent. The images are astonishingly filled with detail. The compositions contain comprehensive amounts of information about each plant. The details of fruits and palm leaves at different stages of development are so numerous that one might expect there to be some confusion, but this is not the case. Every element is placed and so well organised in the space to show and describe without impinging on the importance of the 'main event.' The images are cohesive and complete. There are few superlatives left to describe the enjoyment experienced when viewing them. The judges awarded the Mary Mendum Medal for this set of paintings



Detail of a palm - the public's choice for best in show.

against stiff opposition and the public chose one of the set as the 'Best in Show'.

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BISCOT is taking a year out in 2020 but the competition will return in 2021.