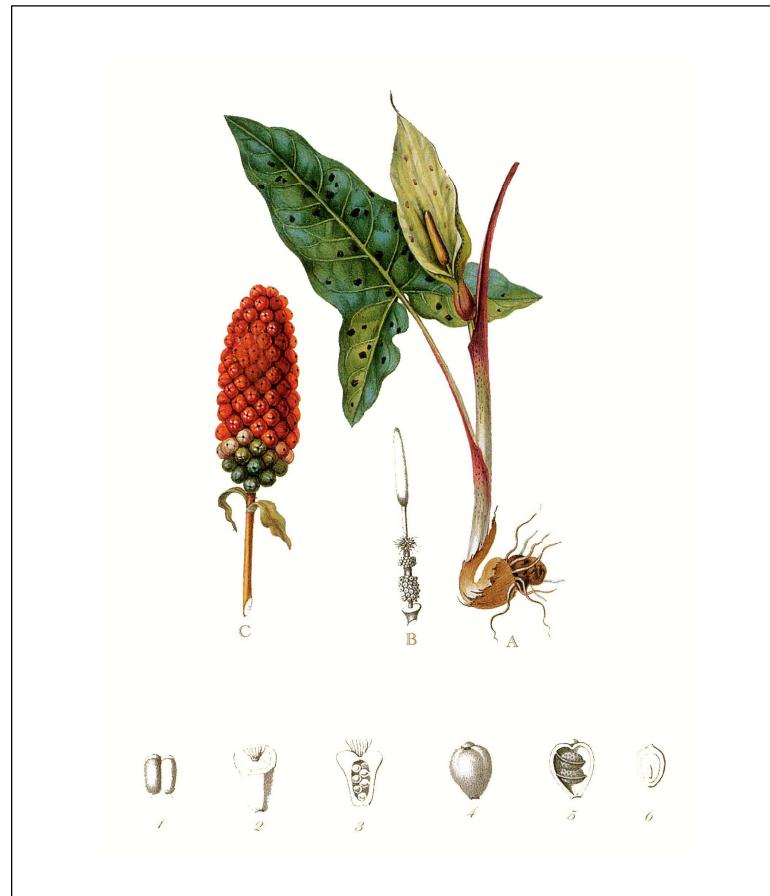


expeditions. Naturalists, botanists, and explorer artists who traveled in unknown lands were searching for plants that were beautiful, useful, or economically profitable. These botanical artists made significant contributions to the understanding of the plant world through their sketches, drawings, and etchings.



Arum maculatum, Artist unknown. Circa 1890

Text by Adele Cooke, 2010, for the
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psbi-art.org

Celebrating the Artist As Explorer



Ardesia by Pat Gregg, 2007

Let us commemorate the lives of botanical artists, the men and women with uncommon courage and scientific curiosity who searched the world for new and exotic plants and documented them for posterity. The explorers of the 18th century traveled into dangerous areas and advanced scientific knowledge by keeping journals, describing their discoveries, and illustrating the plants they saw in drawings and paintings. Today some modern botanical artists also explore and paint their discoveries, focusing on contemporary concerns: medical uses, conservation, ecology the environment, and promoting the awareness of native flora and rare species.

Meet three modern age artist-explorers:

Margaret Ursula Mee [1909-1988], who created an impressive collection of Amazon paintings and sketches, is known around the world for her magnificent paintings. She had traveled from England to Brazil and lived there for over 30 years. On a walk in Sao Paolo she discovered a castor oil plant with wonderful shapes. Inspired, she drew this plant and began sketching and painting flowers. At age 47 she made her first trip into the Amazon territory, ultimately making over fifteen trips into the Amazon to paint living plants. Over time, she became concerned about the fate of the Amazon and was involved in the political struggle to save that threatened territory. In 1988 she said, "I know my death will not be the end of my work. Wherever I go, I will try to influence those who are destroying our planet, so the earth will have a chance to survive."

Robin Jess, botanical artist and Executive Director of the American Society of Botanical Artists, grew up in Swedesboro, near the Pine Barrens of NJ. When Jess was a student in botany and art at the University of Delaware, she learned that the Pine Barrens were recognized by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve. Concerned about the fragile ecosystem of the Pinelands, she applied for and received grants to paint plants there. Partnered with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, Jess spent one year exploring the Pinelands for the best plants to include in her botanical paintings. Her 47 paintings were shown at major museum and science centers throughout NJ, educating the public in an exhibit, "Protecting the Pinelands Through Art."

Botanical artist **Judy Simon** is a member of the Philadelphia Society of Botanical Illustrators (PSBI). A year ago she traveled to a wooded area in Pennsylvania with a friend who showed her where wild orchids grew. She discovered a native *Cypripedium parviflorem*, (a yellow slipper orchid), *Gallearis spectabilis* (a showy orchis) *Obolarica virginica* (Virginia pennywort) and *Hydrastis canadensis* (gold seal) growing wild in the same

area. She carefully observed and photographed the plants. After making studies, she created a life-size painting of these plants together in their habitat. Like Simon, the botanical artists of today share their intimate knowledge of rare species with their carefully rendered images.

Meet three of the historical artist explorers:

Born in Scotland, **Francis Masson** [1741-1805] became an under gardener at Kew Gardens in England. He was sent by **Sir Joseph Banks**, director of Kew Gardens, to South Africa to collect plants and seeds. Masson spent twenty years overseas exploring and collecting. He sent back African plants which were unknown in England, such as gladiolas, amaryllis, strelitzia, geraniums, ixias, trillium, and irises found in the grasslands, and succulent plants, the stapelias and euphorbias found in the desert. Masson also grew native plants in Cape Town and was inspired to paint 41 species of stapelias. These beautiful paintings were published in Masson's ***Stapelia novae, 1797***. As a collector, Masson sent over 1,000 new plants to Kew.

A gifted naturalist and extraordinary painter of flowers and insects, German born **Maria Sibylla Merian** [1641-1717] was a business woman who supported herself making copper plate prints and publishing her paintings and books. In 1699 at age 52, Merian decided to satisfy her intense scientific curiosity about insects which had fascinated her since childhood. She and her twenty-one year old daughter Dorothea Maria left their home in Amsterdam and sailed unescorted to the Dutch colony Surinam. Led by native guides, she explored the jungle teeming with insect specimens. During the two years she lived in Surinam she painted the life cycles of insects on native flowers and plants. After returning to Amsterdam, Merian published her third book of paintings, titled ***The Insects of Surinam***, in 1705. Her glorious paintings, ecologically depicting insects on the flora of Surinam, made a lasting contribution both to entomology and botanical art.

When the world voyage of Captain Cook and the *Endeavor* was planned, **Sir Joseph Banks**, director of Kew, went along in 1768 as part of a scientific party of nine people. He brought **Sydney Parkinson** [1745-1771], a twenty-three year old artist, who would record and draw the plants, animals, and landscapes discovered during their explorations. Over a two and a half year voyage, Parkinson made 955 botanical drawings, 280 in full color complete with botanical notations. Near the end of the voyage in Java, Parkinson died of dysentery and was buried at sea. Banks brought his drawings back to Kew and had artists there copy Parkinson's watercolors and sketches. Ultimately Banks had Parkinson's work engraved and printed as ***Banks's Florilegium***.

The 18th century was the age of global exploration and plant hunting