

# Great River Chapter of the American Society of Botanical Artists

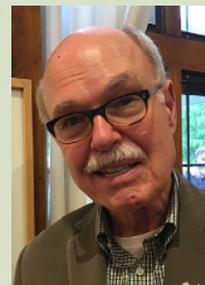
March 2018



Constance Scanlon Blueberries 2013 ©

## Message from the President

I have yet to attend an ASBA conference. I will this year. I don't see how a chapter president can *not* attend. But I am nervous about it. There is so much good work being done today, I fear my own will suffer by comparison. Oh, I know people say that's silly. Marilyn Garber assures me that those who do attend are wonderfully supportive, and that the conference itself is designed to make newcomers feel welcome. I'm sure that's so. But I have yet to know it. All I can say for now is that I'm nervous, and I'll be glad when it's over.



There is one presentation, however, that intrigues me no end. It's the "Beyond Accuracy" panel. Marilyn says it's the highlight of the conference. It's a group of artists presenting their thoughts on the future of botanical art, the future not constrained by mere accuracy.

The future of botanical art is very much on my brain. Lately, it seems as if everything I do is related to it. It comes up all the time in Art & Fear discussions. A recent talk I gave on an American pre-Raphaelite painter had the words in its title. A short piece I wrote for the current (March) issue of *The Botanical Artist* implies it. The programming for the chapter that I'm working on, some of it, at least, is concerned with the topic. And my work frequently pushes against the boundaries set by our tradition. But if so, then why should I not enter the welcoming, supportive ASBA fray? Is it really because I haven't got the nerve to display my work?

No. It's because I'm not sure I want to go beyond accuracy.

Accuracy, which is to say, getting all the details right—the essential ones *and* the nonessential ones—is more than a principle with me. It's an article of faith. As a principle, it argues on behalf of the world as it is, not as it should be. It's a bulwark, therefore, against all efforts to reduce and homogenize. The thing standing there in front of you, it says—or, more likely, the thing planted in the ground before you—is not there for your sake. It's there for its sake. And in order to value it, we must learn to respect its particulars, all of them.

Accuracy is an article of faith for me because it believes these details, especially the insignificant ones, matter. They can be bred away, and even for spectacular reasons. Industrial tulips of the kind Michael Pollan wrote about were bred to expose their most significant trait (at least to humans), their beauty. But in becoming successful in this way, they also became less diverse and more vulnerable.

The same dynamic occurs in botanical art. We, too, can remove the details that fail to live up to our understanding of what the particular plant in question is or should be. We can also retain them, believing that they, too, say something about the plant, something that might even secure its future.

This divide—between those who feel free to alter nature to suit their purposes and those who wouldn't dream of doing any such thing—is a false dichotomy in my book. We need both. There is a time for improving nature, and there is a time to refrain from improving nature. What I have little time for, however, are those who say the art belongs entirely with the improvers, that unless we artists do shape and prod and tweak our subjects, we'll not be creating art. We'll simply be reproducing what's there, and that, not very well.

The details, I believe, hold the key to the art that is the property of the subject. The beauty they reveal does not arise from an artist's imagination; it conforms to the plant's function as a living thing. Color may be significant, and it may not. Strength may play a part, and it may not. Pheromones, ditto. It all depends. It depends on the plant's unique strategy to perpetuate itself. What's more, as Darwin showed, the plant's strategy is not, in the end, really about the plant as it is. It's about what the plant must become in order to survive. Plants, like every other living thing, are constantly evolving. When we paint them, we've arrested their evolutionary movement in order to see them...for what they are? No. For what they are becoming. After we're done with them, they've already moved further down Heraclitus's river.

I grant that this makes our work even more difficult, for we cannot picture the future. We can only guess what it will be like. Hence, we need both artists who cannot wait to exercise their imaginations—they could very well be inspired—and we need artists who are eager to probe more deeply, the better to see the underlying patterns, the ones charting new paths and new directions. Neither kind of artist has a grip on the truth of the matter. But both should be allowed to try.

- Scott Stapleton

## *Notice of upcoming event:*

**Monthly Studio Day,  
Highland Park Library,  
1974 Ford Parkway, St. Paul  
Date: 09 Mar 2018, 10:00 AM**

Join other members for an opportunity to work on a project of your choice in water color, graphite, or colored pencil while you socialize with other members and exchange ideas.

The group will meet on the second Friday of each month from 10:00AM to Noon.

Locations may change from month to month.

Bring your own light if you wish and a beverage/ snack if you desire. Contact Cora Wortman (763-493-4810) if you have questions or are interested in a Monthly Studio Day but at a different day, time, or place.

Mail [crwortman@earthlink.net](mailto:crwortman@earthlink.net)

Looking forward to your participation!  
Great River Chapter ASBA

## *Save the Date!*



## *The 24th Annual Meeting and Conference*



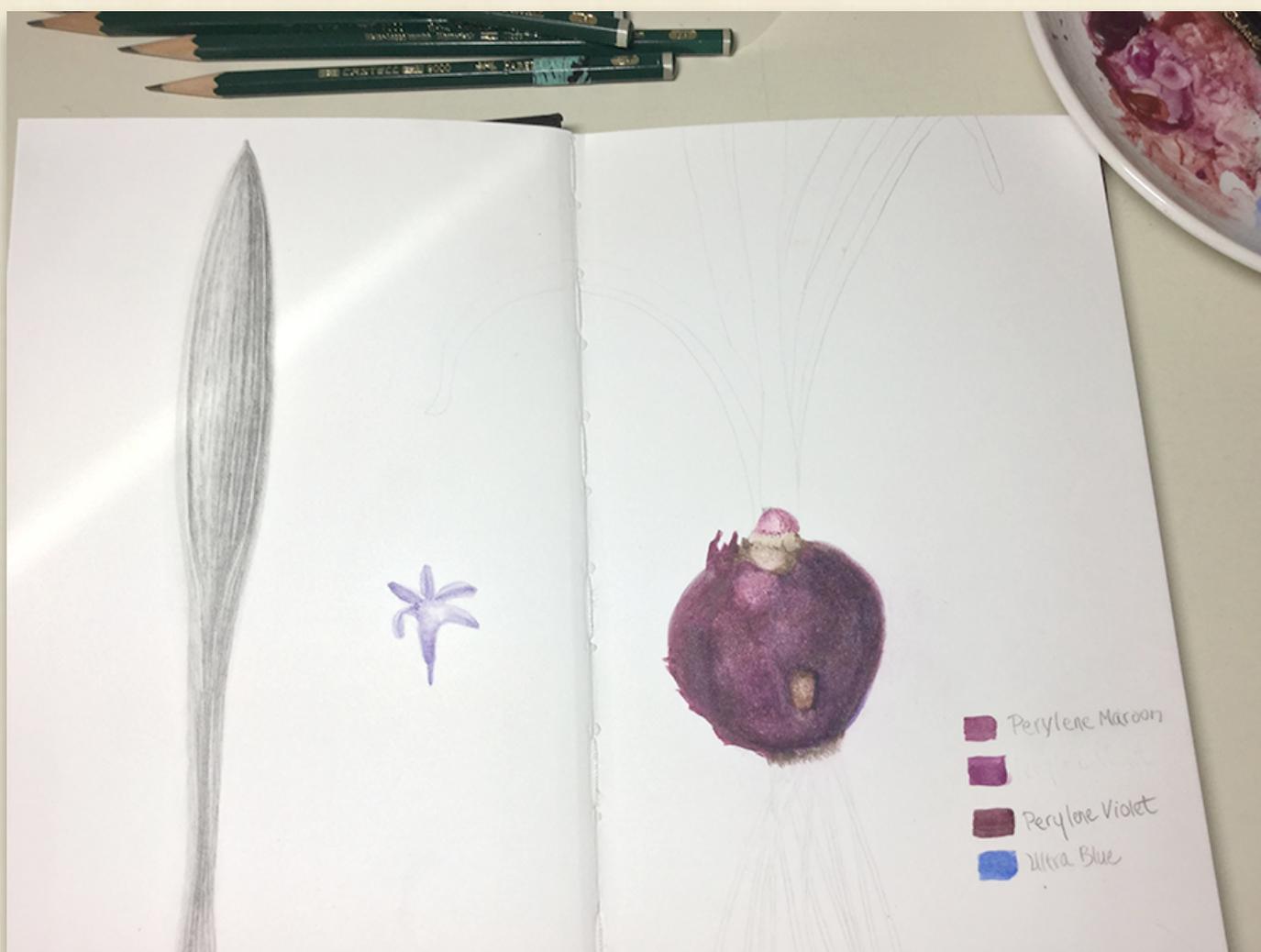
**October 11-13, 2018**

**St. Louis, Missouri**

## *GRC Sketchbook Exchange Project*

We are excited to announce that our chapter is starting a sketchbook exchange. We are beginning with one book and here is the March page in process. We are looking for members interested in completing one page within a month, then passing the sketchbook to the next member. Botanical subjects, of your choice, may be completed in watercolor, graphite or colored pencil. We will skip a page between entries so we aren't working on the back of previous work. Diane Sutherland has excellent blogs about sketchbook exchanges and is a great source for ideas and inspiration. (Link to her blog is on next page.) When the sketchbook is complete, we hope to use it as a fundraising item for our chapter.

The sketchbook we are using is Stillman & Birn Zeta Series 5"x8". The paper quality is very good. We request entries be painted/drawn directly on the page, not glued in from other papers. This is meant to be a fun project with a relaxed approach to each entry and an opportunity to practice and escape. We hope many of you will want to take part in this new opportunity to produce a small work that benefits our chapter. Our April page is open and waiting for an artist. Please contact me at [cynthiaslarsen@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiaslarsen@gmail.com) with questions or to add your name to the participant list.





For information on sketchbook exchanges, go to: [diannesutherland.blogspot.com](http://diannesutherland.blogspot.com). Scroll down the right hand column to "SEARCH THIS BLOG" and enter sketchbook exchange.

Here are a few examples of paintings and drawings Dianne created in her many sketchbook exchanges.



# *Exhibition at Arboretum*

## **UPDATE!**

### **11<sup>th</sup> Annual *Inspire By Nature* Exhibition October 28 - December 26, 2018**

In 2018, we have the incredible opportunity to display our GRC *Inspired By Nature* exhibition in the Reedy Gallery at the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum!!! What a fantastic pairing...skillful and beautiful botanical art shown in the nation's #1 Arboretum! If you haven't selected your botanical subject for this year's exhibition, there are already some "snowdrops" popping through the snow at the Arboretum with hundreds of gorgeous wildflowers close behind.

The **UPDATE** for our 2018 exhibition is that the Arboretum has informed us that we can hang our show a few days earlier than planned so...the paintings will be dropped off on Thursday, October 27 between 9 and 12 and hung in the Reedy Gallery that afternoon by your Exhibition Committee. The official opening reception remains the same which is Sunday afternoon, November 4. The exhibition will close at the end of the day on Wednesday, December 26, 2018 with the "pick-up" on December 27.

For the drop-off and pick-up dates, consider the buddy system which allows artists in a specific geographical area to select one artist to do the drop-off and another artist to do the pick-up. The advantages are that this saves time and gas, accommodates individual schedules, and allows your packing material to be returned to you immediately. For those who can't find a buddy...don't despair as the Exhibition Committee will work with you to get your work to and from the Arboretum! We want your participation!!!!

**Don't forget, that this year we will give awards at the opening reception for Best in Show and First-Time Participant, and at the end of the exhibition for People's Choice.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Suz Galloway at [galloway1297@msn.com](mailto:galloway1297@msn.com).



## ***Botanical Art, BP & AP***

*(Before & After Photography)*

An opportunity to view  
selected prints and drawings  
at the Minneapolis Institute of Art  
March 23, at 1:30 and 3:00 p.m.

Unknown artist, France (?), 18th-19th century  
Geranium (*Pelargonium* sp.) c.1800  
Charcoal and white chalk, green wove paper  
19 7/8 x 14 1/2 in. (50.48 x 36.83 cm) (image)  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Minnich Collection,  
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund 66.25.148

Have you ever wondered what difference the introduction of photography made in our art? We use it all the time as a tool to supplement our observations. When daguerreotypes first appeared in 1839, however, they didn't just supplement. They changed the way art was made. Objectivity was raised to a new level, and at least in principle, nothing was omitted. What botanical art was and was not omitting before and after photography's invention is the subject of this little, in-house show.

On Friday, March 23, at 1:30 and at 3:00 p.m.—we're having two viewings—you'll have an opportunity to see selected prints and drawings that illustrate this topic from the Minneapolis Institute of Art's fabulous Minnich Collection. We're also supplementing the selection with photographs of botanical subjects from the museum's Photography and New Media holdings—in short, almost thirty works in all. Scott Stapleton, the president of the chapter, will give a brief presentation, and then you'll be free to look at and discuss what you see.

The event is free. It is open to the membership, and each member may bring a guest. We do need to know who is coming, however, for the Prints and Drawings Study Room, where the display will be held, can only accommodate seventeen (17) people at a time. Send your request stating your viewing preference to Scott Stapleton at [scottostapleton@gmail.com](mailto:scottostapleton@gmail.com). He will schedule you on a first-come, first-serve basis. After that, he'll sign you up—if you wish—for the remaining viewing *if there is room*.

Our thanks to Mia's Kristin Lenaburg in Prints and Drawings and Joe Doherty in Photography and New Media for their generous support.

# Rethinking Botanical Art: A Conversation with Kimberly Moss

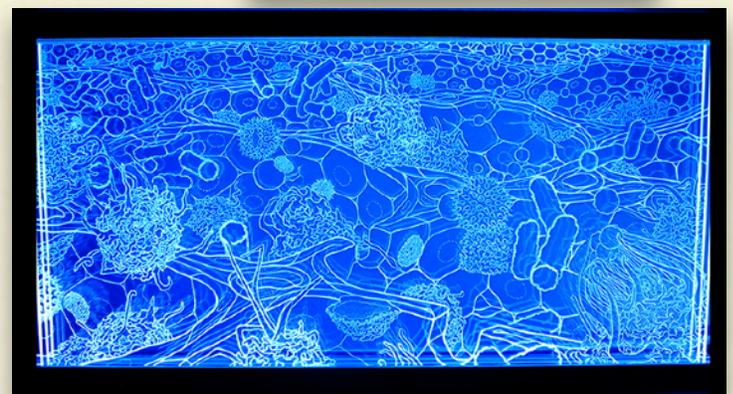
Kimberly Moss is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Visual Culture at Iowa State University. She's also Coordinator of the school's Biological/Pre-Medical Illustration Program. As such, it's her job to inspire and equip her students to make art that conveys something of the "Wow!" uncovered by today's biological scientists. If you look at the work of Zoe Keller and Rogan Brown, for example, and Zaria Forman, too, you'll see what we mean. Think, too, of how far our understanding of the world of plants has come. It's mind-boggling. Now, how to say that in our art?

Our speaker has some ideas. She's got the background: an MFA in Medical and Biological Illustration from the University of Michigan, plus a BFA in Studio Art with a Concentration in Scientific Illustration & Biology from St. Olaf College. She's also got the experience: her *Dicentra cucullaria* (Dutchman's Breeches) was accepted for inclusion in the upcoming Botanical Art Worldwide Exhibition.

On Saturday, **June 2, at 2:00 p.m.**, location to be determined. She'll be on hand for an informal conversation about how she makes her art, and what is happening out there in the world of scientific illustration. She's bringing lots of material to share, too, and she's eager to share it. And we hope you're eager to hear what she has to say.

The event is free and open to the public. A word of confirmation that you're coming is helpful, but not required. You may send it to Scott Stapleton, the president of the chapter, at [scottstapleton@gmail.com](mailto:scottstapleton@gmail.com). Thank you.

Here is something of the length and breadth of Kimberly's art:



Her *Dicentra cucullaria* painting, one of her Trading Pollinators cards, and a new glass etching.

## *A peek inside GRC members work area.*

### **Jane Hancock**

I have been enjoying the adjustable height Ikea table that I acquired last year. I keep it a bit higher than normal, which is restful for my shoulders, and sometimes I use it as a standing table. With the addition of a portable table-top easel I can keep my work at a comfortable angle while I still have plenty of space on the table top for brushes, palettes, and other tools. A couple of low wide cabinets provide storage for paper and other supplies.



We would love to share a picture of your work space in upcoming issues. Please send a photo of yourself, a few comments and a picture of your work space to [barbbjornson@comcast.net](mailto:barbbjornson@comcast.net).

# *Congratulations*

Jane Hancock, Linda Powers and Kathe Wilcoxon have been accepted into Filoli's 20th Annual Botanical Art Exhibition: *A Palette of Flowers*  
February 23-May 20, 2018.



**Linda Powers**  
detail of *Xylobium Pallidiflorum*,



**Kathe Wilcoxon**  
*Pink Peony*



**Jane Hancock**  
*Parrot Tulip*

## **Congratulations, Scott Stapleton**

In the current (March) issue of *The Botanical Artist*, Scott has a piece about the drawing he made during Nancy Gehrig's colored pencil class this past summer. Students in the class were encouraged to draw subjects they found at local farmers' markets. Scott chose Dragon Tongue bush beans. Little did he know when he began that their dragon tongues were talking away. What they were saying, he said, made him think his drawing had more than one title. Or none. Check it out.



*Scott's drawing in the March, 2018 The Botanical Artist.*

### ***Great RiverChapter Mission Statement***

Our mission is to create public awareness and appreciation for historical and contemporary botanical art in our community.

To educate the public in plant diversity, regional ecology and preservation.

To introduce the public to the beauty and usefulness of botanical art through exhibitions and provide a forum for artists to meet, share ideas and learn from one another.

*“Ask your work what it needs, not what you need. Then set aside your fears and listen, the way a good parent listens to a child.”*

*--David Bayles and Ted Orland, Art & Fear*

*A Recent Talk at the Minnesota School of Botanical Art  
on the American Pre-Raphaelite painter, Charles Herbert Moore*



Charles Herbert Moore, American, 1840-1930

Pine Tree, detail, 1868

Pen and black ink with touches of graphite on tan laminated paper board

63.7 x 50.7 cm. (25 1/8 x 20 in.)

Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Miss Elizabeth Huntington Moore, the artist's daughter, x1951-89

Photo: Princeton University Art Museum

On Sunday, Feb. 11, at the Minnesota School of Botanical Art, Scott Stapleton gave a talk on the American pre-Raphaelite painter, Charles Herbert Moore. It was the second time he gave it. The first was a year ago, also at the school at Marilyn Garber's invitation. Marilyn thought the talk deserved a second hearing. Scott did, too, for he wanted another chance to say what he really meant to say.

Moore was an accomplished, albeit minor, landscape painter who fell under the spell of John Ruskin, the eminent English art critic and artist who brought the pre-Raphaelites on both sides of the Atlantic to prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his first talk, Scott emphasized the value of holding on to Ruskin's mantra, "truth to nature," even though Ruskin himself was flawed and the concepts of both truth and nature were many. Botanical artists could profit from it even so. With a year's time to think about what he'd said, however, it dawned on him that Ruskin's real goal of raising up a people in love with nature was what it was all about. As Ruskin himself said, "I would rather teach drawing that my pupils may learn to love nature, than teach the looking at nature that they may learn to draw." He ended the talk with a photo of the gate at the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, over which appear the words "Let Nature Teach You."

If you would like a copy of Scott's remarks, plus a thumbnail list of the images he used to illustrate it, contact him and he will be happy to supply you with them.