



Press information

Art at Kew

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew) holds one of the world's greatest collections of botanical art, totalling over 200,000 drawings, watercolours and prints. Assembled over the last 200 years, the artworks are part of the National Reference Collection and play a key role in plant identification, underpinning conservation.

The primary purpose of botanical art is to show scientific detail. It can reveal more than a photograph, depicting every stage of a plant's lifecycle from flower to seed or deliberately highlighting elements that cannot be distinguished with a camera. Yet its aesthetic and art historical value makes it significant beyond technical accuracy.

RBG Kew's collection includes works by the great masters of the eighteenth century, such as G D Ehret, the Bauer brothers and Redouté, nineteenth century artists including Thomas Duncanson, George Bond and Walter Hood Fitch and by twentieth century artists such as Lilian Snelling, Stella Ross-Craig, Mary Grierson and Margaret Stones. Present-day artists represented include Christabel King, Ann Farrer and Pandora Sellars.

Within the collection are a high number of original botanically precise watercolours used in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* dating back to 1789. There are special collections of specific artists, such as Margaret Meen, Thomas Baines, William Roxburgh and the Edouard Morren collection of Bromeliad paintings. There are also illustrations of extinct species for which the artwork may be the only surviving record.

Among the Library's 300,000 books and pamphlets are lavishly illustrated and rare books dating back to 1380. The Archives hold the illustrated notebooks of great botanists and plant hunters including Kew's first Director, Sir William Hooker, objets d'art, photographs and daguerreotypes. The Library cares for an extensive collection of portraits of individuals spanning several centuries to the current day relating to every aspect of botany and horticulture.

For more information see www.kew.org/library and www.kew.org/exhibitions

The Shirley Sherwood Gallery

The Shirley Sherwood Gallery is the first public gallery in the world dedicated to botanical art and open all year round. It was designed by leading architects Walters and Cohen and opened in April 2008. It offers carefully managed environmental conditions to display precious artworks from Kew's collections and from the personal collection of Dr Shirley Sherwood.

Dr Sherwood has built one of the world's most comprehensive collections of contemporary botanical art. She started collecting in 1990 when she purchased an orchid painted by Kew artist Pandora Sellars. Sherwood's collection represents art from over 200 artists working in more than 30 countries, acquired during her worldwide travels.

For more information see www.kew.org/events/shirley-sherwood-gallery.html

The Marianne North Gallery

The Marianne North Gallery is a unique display of botanical and landscape paintings by an intrepid Victorian artist. Having spent her life travelling the world, Marianne North documented over 900 species in her own distinctive style. This vast collection of 832 paintings and over 200 pieces of

timber is housed in this purpose-built gallery, constructed in 1882. A linking gallery joins the Grade II listed building to The Shirley Sherwood Gallery.

Major restoration works are currently underway and the gallery will re-open in October 2009. With the help of a £1,867,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant, building features are being repaired and accessibility and environmental conditions are being improved. The art collection is also being conserved and restored as part of the project. Community groups were consulted about their needs and interests to help shape the restoration works. New text to accompany the artworks and an enhanced learning programme are being developed to uncover North's history and the stories behind her art and discoveries.

The 'Adopt a Painting' scheme means anyone can play their part in safeguarding the paintings and saving a piece of Kew's heritage. All 832 paintings in the gallery are available for adoption and can be individually selected according to preference. Supporters who adopt paintings will get to see the complex painting restoration process in person, receive a print of their chosen Marianne North painting and will be invited to a special reopening event in the Gallery.

For more information www.kew.org/places/kew/mariannenorth

Visual arts in the Gardens

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew has been a venue for large scale sculptural works in recent years, using the 300 acre gardens and glasshouses to explore the interaction between art and landscape. Over 860,000 visitors came to see Dale Chihuly's organically shaped glass sculptures in *Gardens of Glass: Chihuly at Kew* in 2005. The *Moore at Kew* exhibition of monumental works by internationally acclaimed sculptor Henry Moore transformed the experience of visiting the Gardens in 2007/8. On permanent display in the Princess of Wales conservatory is a sculpture by Eduardo Luigi Paolozzi, *A Maximis Ad Minima*.

Ends

For more information please contact the RBG Kew press office, telephone 020 8332 5607 or e-mail pr@kew.org