



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

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The New York Botanical Garden Announces Creation of New Humanities Research Institute

Grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Launches New Academic Initiative

The New York Botanical Garden is pleased to announce the creation of a new Humanities Research Institute within its renowned LuEsther T. Mertz Library. This major initiative will strengthen and formalize the Botanical Garden's academic role among humanities museums and libraries and also serve scholars who wish to do research in a plant-based institution. In November 2013, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a generous three-year grant in the amount of \$635,000 to the Botanical Garden to assist in developing the Institute.

The fundamental purpose of the Institute is to form an intellectual community of staff, visiting scholars, and graduate student fellows whose research involves innovative interdisciplinary approaches to areas such as landscape and garden design and history, art history, cultural anthropology, environmental policy, urban social history, and the study of urban ecology and the changing nature of cities. Participants will be given unfettered access to the collections of the Garden's LuEsther T. Mertz Library and William and Lynda Steere Herbarium. The goal is to create a forum for stimulating discourse and promote new thinking about humankind and our relationship with nature and the environment.

Garden's Acclaimed Mertz Library To Be Home of Institute

The Institute, which will be a new division of the LuEsther T. Mertz Library, will formalize the structure of existing humanities and academic programming in the Library, and make the Garden's resources more extensively available to scholars in a wide range of interests from the history of art and the history of science to emerging fields such as landscape urbanism, environmental ethics, and eco-criticism.

"By establishing a Humanities Research Institute, we hope to create a dynamic, new paradigm for how researchers think about issues concerning landscape, nature, and the environment," says Susan Fraser, Director of the LuEsther T. Mertz Library. "The Library's comprehensive and historic collections document how science, art, and culture intersect."

"The academic life of The New York Botanical Garden has always been centered on the plants of the world, both in the wild—through botanical studies—and in cultivation—through horticulture," said Gregory Long, the Botanical Garden's Chief Executive Officer and The William C. Steere Sr. President. "With this new Institute, we are expanding our scope to include broader research topics that the Library is fully equipped to support, and we are looking forward to interacting with scholars in disciplines that sit adjacent to our traditional interests."

Andrew W. Mellon Fellows and Visiting Scholars

Over the next three years, the Institute will sponsor year-long Mellon fellowships for emerging pre- and post-doctoral researchers from a broad range of disciplines. The Mellon Fellowship program will be open to advanced graduate students from around the world and will facilitate the completion of dissertation research that will make significant and original contributions to research in the humanities. A Visiting Scholars program will make available several short-term residencies for established scholars seeking to advance their research.

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Symposia

The Institute will develop and host symposia—one in each year of the program. These symposia will broaden the Garden’s public role in humanities scholarship and discourse, and further the public’s understanding of the importance of nature, plants, and the landscape to their lives, to history, and to the development of the built environment that surrounds them. The symposia topics, which are to be further developed, include *Women and the City: From the Landscape Perspective*, scheduled for June 20, 2014 and tied to the Garden’s exhibition *Groundbreakers: Great American Gardens & The Women Who Designed Them* (May 17–September 7, 2014), and *The Changing Nature of Nature in Cities*, scheduled for November 7, 2014.

NEH Chairman Recognizes the LuEsther T. Mertz Library as Critical Humanities Resource

As the largest, most comprehensive botanical and horticultural library in the world, the LuEsther T. Mertz Library of The New York Botanical Garden holds, preserves, and presents written and visual collections that are vital to the understanding of humankind’s relationship with plants. Long renowned for its preeminence as a science library, the Mertz Library has recently been recognized as an essential humanities resource. According to James A. Leach, former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, evaluators who reviewed the Garden’s successful request for a NEH Challenge Grant characterized The New York Botanical Garden’s LuEsther T. Mertz Library collections as “a critical humanities resource that has an impact on individuals, scholars, and students, and...one of the most important resources for scholars studying human life in relation to plants.”

The Mertz Library holds more than one million items in 85 languages and covers 800 years of botanical and horticultural history, dating from the 12th century to the present. These comprehensive collections on plant science, horticulture, agriculture, landscape architecture, garden history and design, and the history of botany and exploration, represent more than 75 percent of the world’s literature on systematic botany and approximately 82 percent of the world’s published floras. In addition to the core disciplines of botanical science and horticulture, the collections cover a wide range of topics that provide humanities researchers and the general public with resources to understand the impact of nature on human history.

Highlights include the Rare Book Collection, which spans over 600 years of history, from 1190 to 1753. These collections contain the earliest manuscripts and printed books as well as some of the most rare and historically important botanical and horticultural works ever produced. They range from medieval herbals to Baroque and Romantic-era descriptions of the princely gardens of Europe. The Folio Collection has exceptional holdings of 18th- and 19th-century books featuring fine botanical plates from paintings and drawings by renowned artists. The Art and Illustration Collection contains more than 25,000 original works encompassing a broad range of media including line drawings, watercolors, oil paintings, and sculpture, and the Archival Collections contain irreplaceable primary documentation on the history of the fields of botanical science, horticulture, gardening, and landscape design in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Library has an active digitization program and continues to add content to its existing online offerings in its “MertzDigital” portal and through the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL), the world’s largest database of natural history literature. The digital library contains curated collections such as the Nursery and Seed Trade Catalogs and Parks, Gardens, and Plants of New York City and New York State. Ongoing projects that explore the use of emerging technologies to link content from various sources to serve humanities research include the creation of study guides, digital publications, and visual collections.

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Related Garden Resources

The New York Botanical Garden provides unique resources to scholars that include access to scientists who are studying the impacts of environmental challenges on plants and people and developing sustainable, real-world solutions; experts in urban farming and community gardening, who work in partnership with residents to redefine their cityscape; collections of more than 7.3 million plant specimens in the William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, through which the history of environmental change can be studied first-hand; access to the Garden's 250-acre National Historic Landmark landscape, which contains more than 50 historic gardens, representing the evolution of American landscape design from the late 19th century through today.

In addition to its collections, the Garden develops programs that expand the public's understanding of the social and historical importance of plants while advancing interest in the sciences and humanities. The scholarly exhibitions that are held in the Mertz Library's Rondina and LoFaro Gallery are central to the Garden's special exhibition program, which annually mounts institution-wide, interdisciplinary shows that merge humanities themes with science and horticulture. With topics ranging from plant evolution in *Darwin's Garden: An Evolutionary Adventure* to the cultural significance of the *Spanish Paradise: Gardens of the Alhambra*, which explored the history and culture of Spain's Andalusian region through plants, art, and literature, these exhibitions provide an interdisciplinary look into nature that is unique to the Garden.

The Garden also maintains active public education programs, including the Landscape Design Portfolios Lecture Series, in which outstanding designers from around the world discuss their signature landscapes; the Winter Lecture Series, in which speakers share their insights on design and conservation of gardens; and the Andrew Carnegie Distinguished Lecture, which provides a forum for internationally recognized speakers to address a topic of global interest to a wide and diverse audience.

Support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

In addition to the three-year grant awarded to the Garden to assist in developing the Humanities Research Institute, the Mellon Foundation has awarded several important grants to the Botanical Garden over the last few years, resulting in increased access to the Garden's collections. In 2012 the Mellon Foundation awarded the Garden a major grant to support an endowment for humanities activities in the Mertz Library. For five years, ending in 2012, the Mellon Foundation helped fund digitization of the globally important holdings of Latin American botanical literature in the Mertz Library, making them available online to the international scientific and conservation communities.

The Mellon Foundation stated: "As part of its mission to advance meaningful work in the humanities and the arts, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2012 launched an initiative, 'Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities,' to support scholarship and higher education at the intersection of architecture and the humanities. The initiative emphasizes contributions these disciplines may make to the spatial and humanistic understanding of the processes and effects of burgeoning urbanization. One of thirteen grants made so far to major institutions of higher education and research, this grant in support of The New York Botanical Garden's research focusing on human experience as it relates to the natural environment will bring a unique and important perspective to the initiative."

About The New York Botanical Garden

The New York Botanical Garden has been a unique New York City cultural institution since its founding in 1891. The Garden pursues its mission through its role as a museum of living plant collections arranged in gardens and landscapes across its 250-acre National Historic Landmark site; through its comprehensive education programs in horticulture and plant science; and through the wide-ranging research programs of the International Plant Science Center.

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. It is easy to reach by Metro-North Railroad or subway. The Garden is open year-round, Tuesday through Sunday and Monday federal holidays, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The best way to enjoy the Garden is with the *All-Garden Pass*, which includes admission to the grounds as well as to seasonal gardens, exhibitions, and attractions such as the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, Everett Children's Adventure Garden, and Tram Tour. For ticket pricing, please check our Web site. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden, 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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