

THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Studying, exhibiting, and conserving plants for 120 years

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The New York Botanical Garden Hosts Its First Juried Exhibition of Contemporary Botanical Art with the American Society of Botanical Artists

Green Currency: Plants in the Economy

On View in the Arthur and Janet Ross Gallery April 20–August 21, 2011

The New York Botanical Garden hosts its first juried botanical art show *Green Currency: Plants in the Economy* in the Arthur and Janet Ross Gallery, Wednesday, April 20 through Sunday, August 21, 2011. Presented in conjunction with the American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA), *Green Currency* is the first medal-awarding international exhibition of botanical art in the United States. The exhibition, accompanying catalog, and audio tour feature 43 works depicting plants used in medicine, food, clothing, and shelter.



Cotton, *Gossypium herbaceum*
© 2010 Esther Klahne,
watercolor on paper

“From food to fuel, furniture, fabric, medicine, and countless other manifestations, our lives are enhanced by plants in ways that are all around us and yet easily overlooked,” said Gregory Long, President of The New York Botanical Garden. “*Green Currency: Plants in the Economy* presents a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the many important uses of plants, and to appreciate their beauty as depicted by some of the world’s most accomplished botanical artists.”

“The New York Botanical Garden’s botanical art exhibition program is breaking new ground with this world-class exhibition,” said Jeff Downing, Vice President for Education at the Botanical Garden. “The jury panel has selected a stunning show featuring the work of exceptional artists highlighting plants of economic significance. We’re delighted to partner with the ASBA to build public awareness about the vital role plants play in our lives and to showcase the beauty of botanical art.”

“I am very impressed with the high quality of the pieces chosen,” said esteemed contemporary art collector Dr. Shirley Sherwood, who is chair of the jury panel awarding gold, silver, and bronze medals for excellence and who contributes an essay to the exhibition catalog. “All the works are botanically accurate, but many artists developed an extra element of beauty or ingenuity in their presentations. This is an unusual, fascinating, and thought-provoking exhibition.”

The 43 pieces of art were selected from an ASBA-record 258 entries from artists representing 14 states and 8 countries. Among the international artists showcased in the exhibition, all of whom are ASBA members, are instructors and alumni of the Botanical Garden’s renowned [Botanical Art Certificate Program](#), North America’s first formal Certificate program in botanical art, which continues to offer classes for students at every skill level.

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The exhibition catalog includes statements on the value that each particular plant species plays in economic areas such as trade, consumption, and production. The collection features interesting plant stories, from the consumer-driven use of cotton in textiles, to the controversial medicinal use of *Cannabis*. The painting of sweet corn (*Zea mays*) by Botanical Garden instructor Karen Kluglein helps to inform about its wide array of uses, including, food, medicine, fuel, as well as clothing. Fermented into a natural polymer, corn is spun and woven into a biodegradable fabric and marketed as an alternative to polyester. Artist Asuka Hishiki chose as her subject an heirloom tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*). Like many plants of economic value, the tomato has traveled an interesting path: originating in South America and brought back to Europe by Spanish explorers, currently about 7,500 different varieties are grown around the world with China accounting for one-quarter of global tomato production.

The stories behind each of the 43 works are available in the exhibition catalog as well as the accompanying audio tour, which features personal statements from each of the artists about their artistic process and what inspired them to choose the particular plant as their subject matter for this economically themed exhibition. As 80% of the plants featured in *Green Currency* are held in the Botanical Garden's permanent collection, signage across Garden grounds will indicate plants featured in the show, extending the exhibition beyond the walls of the Ross Gallery.

The multifaceted components of the exhibition—the art, the accompanying catalog with statements on the economic value of the plant, the audio tour featuring personal statements from the artists, as well as signage across Garden grounds highlighting *Green Currency* plants—seek to enrich visitors' understanding of plants and contemporary botanical art.

Contemporary botanical art stems from a tradition steeped in science. Formal botanical art originated during the Renaissance as a practical way to identify plants used for medicinal purposes, and later as a way for explorers and scientists to document plant life. Today botanical artists strive not only to create works of great beauty, but also to render plant subjects with impeccable scientific accuracy. Scientists today working to gather information on known plants and to document plant species yet to be scientifically described benefit from the work of botanical artists who capture the breadth of plant diversity.

“The study of economic botany has been one of the major thematic activities of The New York Botanical Garden since its earliest days,” said Dr. Michael J. Balick, Vice President for Botanical Science and Director and Philecology Curator of the Institute of Economic Botany at The New York Botanical Garden. “How appropriate an exhibition to have at the Botanical Garden, an internationally recognized center for the study of plant and fungal diversity, where a large number of scientists and graduate students investigate the ancient and contemporary uses of plants... for medicine, fuel, food, fiber, construction, dye, and for many other purposes.”

Green Currency: Plants in the Economy may be viewed from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. when the Garden is open to the public and is included in the price of admission. An opening reception for the exhibition will take place in the Ross Gallery on Wednesday, April 20, from 6 to 8 p.m. R.S.V.P. to 718.817.8598. The *Green Currency* catalog is available for purchase at Shop in the Garden and online at nybgshop.org beginning on April 20. Inquiries regarding the purchase of artwork should be directed to the ASBA at asbaexhibitions@aol.com.

To learn more about the Garden's Botanical Art Certificate Program or to register for classes, visit: nybg.org/AdultEd

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Exhibitions in the Arthur and Janet Ross Gallery are made possible by support from the Arthur and Janet Ross Fund.

Audio tour sponsored by Bloomberg

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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 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, Rock Garden, and Tram Tour: \$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors and students with ID, \$8 for children ages 2–12, children under 2 free. A *Grounds-Only Pass* is available: \$6 for adults, \$5 for adult Bronx Residents; \$3 for seniors, \$2 for students with ID, \$1 for children ages 2–12, children under 2 are free. Grounds-only admission is free all day on Wednesdays and from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit nybg.org. Read the Botanical Garden's popular blog, *Plant Talk* at nybg.org/plant-talk

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.

The American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting public awareness of contemporary botanical art, to honoring its traditions, and to furthering its development. Founded in 1994 with the mission of promoting public awareness of contemporary botanical art and its traditions, ASBA is a non-profit corporation with nearly 1,200 members across the U.S. and in 24 other countries. Its membership includes artists, illustrators, collectors, botanists, botanical gardens, and museums. The ASBA's offices are headquartered at The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, N.Y. For further information, contact Robin Jess, Executive Director, at asba@aol.com or visit AmSocBotArtists.org

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