

Life in LAMORINDA • Botanical Art Discovery

By Sophie Braccini



Catherine Watters at work in her Orinda studio Photos Sophie Braccini

Sometimes the stars align and things just happen the way they were meant to be. Catherine Watters, a botanical painter from Orinda, was looking for a venue at which the Northern California Society of Botanical Artists could hold an exhibition. At the same time Paul Licht, Director of the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden, was looking for a way to bring botanical art to the Garden.

When Vanessa Crews, the Garden's Director of Development, met Watters she connected the two. "Dr. Licht asked me how botanical art might fit in and I suggested an exhibit, a lecture and a class, and they said yes to all," said Watters. *Plants Illustrated: An Exhibition of Botanical Art*, curated by Watters, opened at the Garden on January

16th. Two of the 36 artists whose work is displayed are from Lamorinda; Watters and Lee McCaffree.

Watters was born and raised in Paris, France, and moved to the United States as a teenager. She graduated from UC Davis in French Literature and Arts. The beginning of her adult life took her from teaching to traveling, before getting married and having children. "Then one day I woke up and felt that if I didn't go back to art now, I might miss it for the rest of my life," Watters remembers. She looked for classes and stumbled by chance on a Botanical Art class. "The minute I entered that class I knew that this was what I would be doing for the rest of my life," says the painter. Watters continues to grow in her chosen art form, dedi-

ating an increasing number of hours to teaching it.

"I can teach botanical painting to anyone," she says, "even if they haven't had any formal training." Watters says that it takes one to two years for her students to start mastering the techniques, if they apply themselves consistently. "I can tell right away if someone has a gift and will become excellent at it," she says, "but all can become very good."

Botanical painting is the art of reproducing exactly, and to scale, plants, flowers, or pods that come from nature. "You always work with live material," says the artist, "ideally, you will achieve the first drawing in one sitting, take pictures of your plant before it wilts, and work with similar live plants to finish the work." A painting can take from 50 to 200 hours of works and is made with only natural elements: natural pigments for the watercolor, ceramic bowls to hold the paint, sable brushes, and cotton or calf skin canvas (vellum).

"When the masters of the 18th century developed this art, it was for scientific purposes," explains Watters, "but they attracted art loving patrons, too. Such was Pierre-Joseph Redouté, who was beloved by Marie Antoinette and the Empress Joséphine (Napoleon's first wife, who had a passion for roses).

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A Watters painting that can be seen in the Berkeley exhibition

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Cuckoo's Louise Fletcher Gets Star on Orinda Theater Walk of Fame



Photo Ohlen Alexander

Actress Louise Fletcher (seated left), who won an Oscar for her portrayal of the steely-eyed Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, looks on as her honorary star for the Orinda Theater Walk of Fame is unveiled. Fletcher along with cast members Mimi Sarkisian (center), who played

Nurse Pilbow, and Michael Berryman (right), who played mental ward patient Ellis, and producer/director Saul Zaentz (not shown) attended the California Independent Film Festival's screening of the 1975 film classic at the Orinda Theater on Saturday, January 16th. A. Firth

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