

BSBA Newsletter, Spring 2024



Hibiscus by Josie White

A few words from our chair, Jan:

What a relief it is to have some milder weather and the occasional dry day after a long winter with so much rain. It's such a pleasure to see trees in blossom and our gardens coming to life. As the weather warms up and the countryside comes alive, I hope you will feel inspired to do more painting or drawing – it's such a lovely way to relax and forget about worries. A recent Norwegian study of 50,000 people concluded that people who created or consumed the arts had lower anxiety and depression and better critical thinking skills. People who enjoyed looking at art got the same health benefits as people who enjoyed making art.

The organising of our next exhibition in November is now underway and we hope to see some of your paintings at our AGM on 18th April. The American Museum Gardens are now open again, with free entry if you are an RHS member on Wednesdays. We hope to have at least sixty framed paintings to hang on the walls at BRLSI and to have enough suitable pictures to make our BSBA Calendar for 2025 of plants from the American Museum Gardens. It would be great if we had a painting from every Member!

We are thinking of those who are unwell or have family members that are ill; our thoughts and good wishes are with you.

The beautiful picture at the head of this newsletter is the latest from Josie White. It would be nice to receive pictures from other members both for the newsletter and also to update the members' gallery on the website. Please send good quality scans of work to me janet.collett@icloud.com

Congratulations to Julia Trickey who has had this painting, of a desiccated Amaryllis bulb on vellum, on show at the Mall Galleries in London in a recent exhibition by the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour:



Wardian cases

From the 18 century onwards live plants have been sent to the UK from distant lands. However, many plants arrived dead mainly due to a lack of light and water on the long sea voyages they undertook. In the early 19 century this changed when Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward created the Wardian Case – a type of terrarium. Ward was a physician with an interest in entomology and botany who saw a fern growing on soil accidentally dropped in a glass case holding a hawkmoth chrysalis. This showed that plants enclosed in an airtight glass case are self-sustaining. In sunlight the leaves transpire water which condenses on the glass and then drips down to be absorbed again by the roots. Leaves give off oxygen by day and reabsorb it at night. It is a closed system limited only by the amount of nutrients in the soil. Ward realised that these conditions were ideal for the transportation of plants and from this developed the Wardian Case. Ward corresponded with William Hooker, who was director of Kew gardens at the time, and Wardian cases were used by William's son Joseph

to bring plants back from his travels in New Zealand and the Falklands in the 1840's. These mini greenhouses (some holding over 20 plants) were still in use at Kew until the 1960s. However, new regulations relating to plant quarantine, and the growth of air travel have now made the technology obsolete.

Jackie Isard workshop:

On 23 February Jackie Isard gave the BSBA a detailed and technical workshop on colour. She talked about 'warm and cool' colours and the best way of mixing the pigments. She then set us a task of mixing various primaries and making colour swatches. Once we had completed this we moved onto colour layering. We drew 6 petal shapes in a row and then made a layered chart letting each petal dry before adding the next wash of the same pigment, a practical way to explain how increasing the layers would deepen the colours. It was good to be experimenting with colour in the dull days of February. The workshop was well attended and an enjoyable day was had by all. Thank you Annabel for the write up and for these photos of the workshop:



Thank you also to Theresa for organising the workshop.

Plants that have changed the world:

One example of such a plant is *Hevea brasiliensis* commonly known as the 'rubber tree'. A member of the spurge family *Euphorbiaceae* and native to the Amazon Basin it is now grown in many tropical and sub-tropical countries.

For many years the Maya/native Brazilians had been using the latex (sap) from the trees to make toys and balls long before Colombus came across it on his travels to South America. The tree became known by its common name of 'rubber' in 1770 when Joseph Priestley noticed that lines drawn in pencil could be removed using rubber. In 1839, Charles Goodyear discovered through an accident in his workshop that the properties of rubber could be greatly improved by heating it with small amounts of sulphur. This resulted in the vulcanisation process used now to give the strength and flexibility needed for tyres. *Hevea brasiliensis* spread steadily from its home in South America to other tropical countries. Henry Wickham carried rubber seeds from Brazil to England where they were cultivated at Kew before being shipped in Wardian cases to Colombo in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The first rubber trees in Sri Lanka were planted at Henarathgoda Botanical Garden, Gampaha, in 1876. 1,919 seedlings were planted and thus began the rubber industry in Sri Lanka. Tree number 01, which during its lifetime had given a record yield of Raw Rubber latex, died in 1988 during a thunderstorm, although its roots are preserved as a national monument.

There followed mass planting of 'rubber' trees throughout India, Ceylon, Malaysia and Indonesia where it thrived in the hot, humid climate creating work for locals and raising much needed foreign currency through the export of raw rubber.

By the end of the nineteenth century demands for rubber by the automotive industry far exceeded production and synthetic substitutes were developed chiefly made from crude oil. Climate concerns and a reluctance to promote the use of oil derived products could see a resurgence in demand for naturally derived rubber. 50% of auto tyres and 100% of aircraft tyres are at present made from natural rubber. Rubber did not invent the wheel but it certainly changed the world of transport.

Many other plant species have had a huge impact on the way we live now – perhaps members could send in a few sentences about other significant plants for the next newsletter?

Butterfly watch:

2023 was, according to scientists, a phenomenal year for the red admiral butterfly. The annual Butterfly Monitoring Scheme shows that the number of red admirals has increased by 318 percent at monitored sites since 1976. According to experts at the Butterfly Conservation charity we are seeing “across all the migratory butterflies and moths much stronger good-year, bad-year peaks and troughs than for resident species” which has been linked to climate warming.

The red admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*, is a migrant to the U.K. from north Africa and Europe in spring. The females lay their eggs here with an emergence of new butterflies from July. The warmer winter temperatures have seen some red admirals overwintering in the south of England and a long-term increase in the U.K. population. In the past 25 years the species has gone from one rarely seen to one of our most commonly seen. The red admiral along with the chequered skipper, speckled wood, large heath and comma had their best year ever recorded in Scotland in 2023.

(based on an article in *The Times* 3/4/2024)

Julia Trickey is heading out to Transylvania again this year so why not treat yourself to a totally immersive botanical painting holiday in September?



Julia's Botanical Art Talks continue each month along with a repeat of the hugely successful 'Botanical Art Conversations' which took place in February, see below to subscribe to this interactive day of botanical art:



REPEATED DUE TO DEMAND

25 MAY 2024 2pm - 7pm GMT

BOTANICAL ART CONVERSATIONS

An interactive day with five leading botanical artists



Elaine Searle, Sarah Morrish, Ann Swan, Lucy T Smith and Laura Silburn come together online to showcase their work, lead discussion groups and give feedback and advice on paintings.

Because of the opportunity to be actively involved in the day - interacting with tutors and other attendees - places will be limited and you need to be able to attend most of the day live (only the first session will be recorded).

THE CONTENT IS LARGELY A REPEAT OF THE DAY IN FEBRUARY.

£75

[FURTHER DETAILS HERE](#)

For more information about Julia's talks and the Transylvania trip go to:
www.juliatrickey.co.uk

Some dates for your diary:

May 12 – Handing in at St. Andrew’s paintings for the 2025 BSBA calendar

June 1-30 Plantae 2024, online exhibition by the SBA

June 21 – Day workshop with Marian Hill, *Collage insects*

July 4 - Mini workshop: *Framing, mounting for browsers and pricing of work for the exhibition*

A final thought from Lyn: ‘Tone does all the hard work, colour steals the glory.

Don’t forget the AGM 18 April !

Please bring a small plate of food to share at lunchtime.