BAASA
BOTANICAL ARTISTS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

NEWSLETTER
OF THE BOTANICAL ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Celebrating 20 YEARS of BAASA by taking the work on the road

When planning the activities for the BAASA Gauteng programme for 2019, two wonderful opportunities to take part in exhibitions, were offered to the committee – the first on the island of La Réunion and the other as part of the first Johannesburg International Flower Show.

Following a successful exhibition in 2018 by Julie Ah-Fa, one of our members, at the Mascarin National Botanical Gardens in Saint-Leu on the Indian Ocean Island of La Réunion, BAASA was invited to exhibit there in June 2019.

The exhibition was to coincide with the 2019 International Island Biology conference.

Julie and Gillian Condy were also invited to run two botanical art courses, over the same period.

The 45 artworks were sent with a shipping agent because of the customs and paperwork requirements. Due to complications with SARS, the value of the consignment, and forex and export implications, we were forced to withdraw the option of selling the artworks in La Réunion. Despite that, there was huge interest and appreciation of the work and a constant stream of visitors.

The exhibition was formally opened by a representative from the *Département de La Réunion* and the Director of Mascarin along with members of the press.

The two art courses were very successful with many participants in both the courses offered – one for beginners and the other for more experienced artists.

Opening of Mascarin Exhibition: Gillian Condy (Chair BAASA), Jacqueline Henry from the *Departement de la Réunion*, Julie Ah-Fa (co-organizer of the exhibition and teacher), Monsieur Lucas (Director of Marcarin Botanical Gardens, St Leu)

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BAASA blog http://botanicalartistsassociationsa.blogspot.com/

Top: Students from the two day beginners class with their work. The youngest student was 12 years old.
Above left: Sally Townshend taking part in the advanced course. Five BAASA members attended the workshops.
Above right: Gillian Condy conducting a class

Left: A painting of the venue of the exhibition - the original farmhouse situated in the centre of the Botanical Gardens - by Guy Siew of La Reunion. Not a large space but perfect for our 45 paintings
Above: Visitors intently studying paintings on opening night

Johannesburg International Flower Show

In October BAASA Gauteng participated in this wonderful event hosted by the Mall of Africa, Waterfall Park on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

This exciting new happening on the horticultural calendar will hopefully be repeated annually. We were offered a very up-market marquee to ourselves and hung 67 artworks. Participating artists helped man the stand and over 1 000 of our members' greeting cards were sold.

We were a refreshing addition to the flower market, stands of plant sellers, garden designs and stunning super-sized flower arrangements.

An extensive collection of cards on display and the continuous stream of visitors that enjoyed the paintings

Both exhibitions offered first time exhibitors and seasoned artists the opportunity to exhibit their work and promote SA botanical art.

Tackling BIG scale drawings

by Sibonelo Chiliza

"Currently I am very excited about a King Protea that I am working on and planning to exhibit at Kirstenbosch in January – it is 1140mm x 1040mm."

An invitation from Strilli Oppenheimer to produce two 1800 x 1440mm pieces came as an enormous challenge having never drawn anything of that scale before.

I was very excited to be invited to Brenthurst, the Oppenheimer house, and enjoyed the walk in the huge, beautiful garden up to the Cape Dutch house on the hilltop. In the house were high walls with long curtains printed with a tree design. The commission was to produce drawings of two *Strelitzia nicolai* to complement the curtains and be hung on either side of the entrance door into the lounge.

First Piece 4 March – 24 June

My first drawing was of a scaled down *Strelitzia nicolai* habitat. The composition had first been worked out in a detailed A4 drawing.

I started on the 4th March, having prepared my paper a few days ahead – by leaving it between heavy boards to flatten. The paper was then attached to the top of the board using bulldog clips and lightly taped at the bottom to stop curling. Standing the boards upright (having taken over Keith Kirsten's board room) the initial drawing was lightly sketched in using photographic images of a cluster of *Strelitzia* trees taken in the Brenthurst Gardens. Once drawn up, the shading was easier to do while laying it flat on the board room table, or on the floor, starting from the top left and working down, or bending over from the sides, working from the middle out, to avoid smudging. I also wore latex gloves to help keep the paper clean and kept it covered with layout paper when not working on the drawing.

After some weeks of working, I became stuck as the images were not of a good enough quality for the detail that I required, needing to draw each leaf-tear and indentation. Halfway through I had to call Gill Condy to help me find the direction I needed to continue and complete the drawing. Gill made recommendations, pointing out the things I needed to look at in order to achieve botanical correctness and sent additional photographs of plants from SANBI Pretoria Botanical Gardens.

First Piece of scaled down *Strelitzia nicolai* habitat

From then on, my drawing took shape and I could invite Mrs Oppenheimer to see it. She liked it slightly unfinished, with the addition of a few highlights. It had taken a full four months to produce a graphite drawing that I thought would be completed in one!

Second piece 5th July – 20 August

On the 5th July I started my second piece of enlarged *Strelitzia nicolai* flower heads attached to a tree. I finished this in less time because I was now familiar with large scale drawing and had bigger areas to shade in pencil compared to the more intricate detail in the first artwork. I was able to finish this piece on the 20 August – a huge achievement.

With this commission I was able to start building my mother's house (near Hibberdene) where I will have a bigger room with enough light in which to draw.
My thanks go to the Oppenheimers for changing my life; to Gill Condy for always holding my hand through dark moments, and making sure that no opportunities pass me by, and to Keith Kirsten for giving me a place to stay when I was in need.

Second piece of *Strelitzia nicolai* flower heads attached to a tree

My room and studio in KZN, with no windows!

Foundation of my new room and studio

TSWALO – one year on

A year after retiring from SANBI in December 2017, Gill Condy was offered the opportunity to be 'Artist in Residence' at the Oppenheimer's private nature reserve, Tswalu, in the Kalahari - the aim being to illustrate as many as possible of the plants seen in one horticultural year. Here Gill describes this amazing experience entailing around seven trips from Gauteng in an already hectic period.

As we ardently pray for rain to alleviate the desperate state of the southern Kalahari, I was reflecting on the amazing year I have had, and how it would have worked out if this November had been the start the project? I would have been totally disillusioned and at a loss of what to paint.

November 2018 was my first visit to this beautiful part of the country. In those three weeks I managed to start eight paintings and was so inspired by everything I saw and the people I met. Returning in January, I started a further seven paintings, such was the abundance of plants available. Each subsequent trip, I have always found exciting material to draw. But last month (November) on the 20km. drive in from the tar road, I found nothing to collect to draw, and on my current trip, 9th December, I found only two bulb species – already painted last year - starting to flower.

The Kalahari desperately waits for rain. Due to a prolonged period of drought, there is no grass for the grazing animals. A couple of showers have been enough to stimulate new growth on a few species of trees, but the grass will need years of prolonged rain to be replenished. Until then, the animals will suffer.

PHOTOS ABOVE
Left: A wonderful new addition to the Dedeben Research facilities at Tswalu has been the building of a large art studio facing out towards the bush. This has shown a serious commitment by the Board to the 'Artist in Residence' programme. Right: The Johannesburg landscape artist Bruce Backhouse working on a canvas.

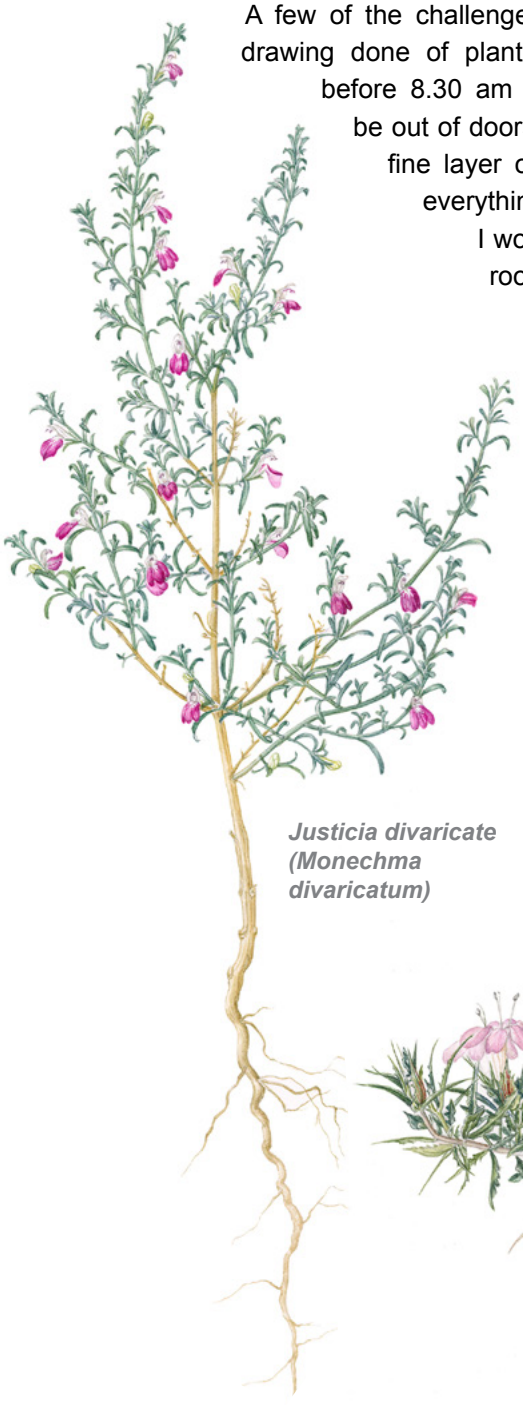
Senna italica

But while I am here, I have plenty to keep myself busy with completing paintings I have been working on in stages, including the two Euphorbias begun last month. However I am always hoping for new material. Maybe this is my chance to turn my hand to landscapes as the soft afternoon light over the vast expanse of rolling dunes calls to be illustrated.

A few of the challenges: the heat – any drawing done of plants *in situ* must be before 8.30 am as it is too hot to be out of doors later; the dust - a fine layer of red sand covers everything.

I work with a fan in the room and only open a window for fresh air when there is no breeze; all parts of the painting not being worked on must be covered with acetate and cotton cloth; I wipe down my desk every morning and blow particles of sand out of my paint box. The most used brush is a number 1 as plants tend to have very small leaves and most work has been dry brush due to the small surface areas to paint. Using a small brush means that the pigment has dried on the palette and brush before one is ready to paint the next section/leaf. As many artworks are full Arches they are quite time consuming. I have used mostly 600 gm. Arches Hotpress plus the Arches mounted on Canson board, which sadly the factory has stopped producing.

Despite the current state, this year has been one of my most productive. I have completed about 22 paintings of various shapes and sizes for Tswalu, with a further four close to completion and six in progress – also a painting for Australia, two for Grootbos plus two small Protea, two commissions for the Oppenheimer's and two additional paintings for exhibitions; have taught at the Cavern twice, two courses in Reunion and at the Tathan Art Gallery, and have taken a trip to the UK and one to Madagascar to paint Baobabs. A very satisfying year. I do love retirement!!



Justicia divaricate (Monechma divaricatum)

Barleria rigida

The date is now set for the Tswalu solo exhibition at Circa Gallery, next to the Everard Read Gallery, Rosebank, opening 15th June 2020, for two weeks.
I hope many of you will be able to visit as we bring a touch of the Kalahari to Johannesburg.

"Acacias"
now Vachellia and Senegalia

Acacia originally came from the Greek "ake" meaning a sharp point. *Acacia* was very descriptive of the South African "Thorn trees" or "Doringbome". Earlier the Genus *Acacia* represented about 1377 species in the Fabaceae (Pea family)

The genus *Acacia* was divided into three sub-genera namely:

- **Sub genus *Acacia*:** About 178 species occurring mainly in Africa.
- **Sub genus *Aculeiferum*:** About 239 species occurring mainly in the Americas.
- **Sub genus *Phyllodineae*:** Largest group, largely confined to Australia (960 species)

A tree from Africa, namely *Acacia nilotica,* named by the early Greeks and described by Phillip Miller in 1754 was chosen as the type species for the genus *Acacia*. According to nomenclature rules the name *Acacia* would apply to the Genus in which *Acacia nilotica* was classified.

Later investigation showed that the very large group of trees in the Genus *Acacia* did not represent a single group and needed to be split.

According to the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN) any splitting of a genus would follow the rule that the name of the original type species would be preserved. i.e. the Genus name *Acacia* would remain with the genus in which *A. nilotica* was classified. Thus, the Genus *Acacia* would apply to *Acacia* species throughout Africa, America, Asia and Northern Australia. The Australian wattles would take the Genus name *Racosperma*. i.e. the second oldest name given to trees in this group.

In 2003, an argument was put forward to change the type species of *Acacia* so that the name *Acacia* could be allocated to the largest fragment i.e. the sub genus *Phyllodineae*. This meant that the genus name of the *Acacia* species in Africa would change to *Vachellia* or *Senegalia*. This suggestion was considered and in 2004 it was announced that *Acacia penninervis* (an Australian wattle) was the new type species for the Genus *Acacia*. The genus *Acacia* would refer to the largest group the *Phyllodineae* which is found in Australia. This decision was ratified in 2005.

It is interesting to note that most of the Australian wattles do not bear thorns.

Vachellia has spike thorns on the **V** and the **i** is shown as a spherical head.

Senegalia has hook thorns in the capital **S** and the **l** is shown as a spiked inflorescence.

An easy way to distinguish between Vachellia and Senegalia is to look at the thorns and flowers

Fransiolemtru (Fransie) Pretorius

1940 – 2019

Fransie on her 70th birthday with her daughter Laura

Sadly, Fransie Pretorius died in August this year

Introduced to BAASA in the mid-90s, Fransie went on to become the chair of the KZN branch of BAASA. She was a lecturer for many years in the fine arts department at the Durban University of Technology (previously the Natal Technikon) holding a BA (Fine Arts) degree, an HEd (Higher Education diploma) and a BEd degree. She was an accomplished artist in her own right and loved life drawing and still life painting.

She will always be remembered for her wonderful gift of teaching. Unlike other artists Fransie was able to convey the instruction of art to learners, making her an excellent teacher, mentor and friend to both the BAASA and art community in KZN. Her past students have fond memories of her ability to motivate and pass on her passion and enthusiasm for art. Fransie gave numerous workshops for BAASA as well as art lessons every Saturday from her home studio

Some comments from students and friends:

"*I will always remember her smile, her absolute love of her garden, her enthusiasm and unbounding energy. She is and will be missed. I can tell you that we all enjoyed her workshops. She will have left behind many precious memories, like her sketch book she always kept in her car and the drawing materials always at hand. Fransie lived her art and was a shining example to us all.*" Siobhan O'Reagan.

"She was always lovely, and a very talented lady who also loved animals. She made an impact on so many people's lives through her art". Patty Douglas."

I will always remember her beautiful bright clothes and her outlook on life. Her legacy is all her tuition to so many artists, who will be passing on her knowledge to the next generation. Rest in Peace our flamboyant and wonderful Fransie. Carole Macdonald.

Obituary

Jean Powell
1927-2019

Jean Powell, well known Durban artist, died peacefully on June 14th, 2019 at the age of 92. She was the inspirational backbone of BAASA in KZN from its establishment in the late 1990s and was awarded honorary life membership in 2014. Described as a great champion of the arts, Jean was an artist, art educator, designer of textiles, enamel, glass and much more; exhibition organiser and promoter of Art Deco architecture in Durban. Her love of plants can be seen in her own original artworks on paper and glass

This wonderful, talented, caring woman will be missed by many.

As an active committee member of the KZN Society of Artists, the Friends of the Durban Art Gallery and other bodies, Jean taught and helped countless young people to develop their skills and talents.

Many of her past students have become BAASA members and botanical artists, a tribute to her influence and teaching. She found ways to introduce botanical art to her students once BAASA was established and created a botanically themed competition to encourage students to participate in the annual exhibitions.

One of KZN's foremost members, Sibonelo Chiliza took part and as a result of his award-winning canvas bag on that occasion, was asked to illustrate plants for a technical publication which led to an opening for him to develop his career in botanical art. *See Sibonelo's memories of Jean accompanying this article.*

Jean is less well known for her own artistic production and few of us know the breadth of her work, nor her journey through life. Born in Kenya, she studied in Durban and at the Bartlett School of Architecture and the Central School of Art in England where she was taught drawing by a young Lucian Freud. She worked in London and Kenya before coming to South Africa and is one of the few art teachers who taught at the University College on Salisbury Island, Durban. She went on to teach textile design at the University of Durban Westville before moving onto the then Natal Technikon

Probably best known for her enamel works, Jean worked with several architects and did many wall panels starting off with industrial designs and later introducing botanic motifs and was one of the few enamel artists who experimented with the incorporation of fabric.

Obituary

Jean Powell

Sibonelo Chiliza had a very special relationship with JEAN POWELL and here he shares some of his memories

I could talk the whole day about how Mrs Powell shaped me and gave direction to my drawing career. We met in 2001 when this lovely old lady offered me a brief from BAASA for plant drawings to be transferred to bags and aprons.

Although my drawing was good it had never included plants – but from then on Mrs Powell made sure that I drew plants and she introduced me to Elsa Pooley and other BAASA members. Later that year, or the following year I took part in my first exhibition as a newly discovered botanical artist

A strong friendship then began to develop, and I was invited to spend weekends at the Powells house drawing under the supervision of Mrs Powell. She would continuously give me pointers on what to add or subtract and eventually my drawings improved a lot. She was behind my every move, until I moved onto an internship programme at SANBI (Pretoria), made possible by Mrs Powell, Gill Condy and Elsa Pooley.

In 2010 I went back to KZN but now stayed at Mr and Mrs Powell's house where I met a lot of different important people. She was a great person to be around and taught me about Durban's beautiful Art Deco buildings; despite her age, she never missed an art event – with me always in tow!

Mrs Powell laid the foundation on which I built my career as a botanical artist. Although there are others who have helped, she is the one that started it all and always had all the time in the world to guide me.

BAASA Gauteng, as always, ran several interesting events in the course of 2019 including workshops by Lynda de Wet – Proteas, Sibonelo Chiliza – graphite; and Paddy Balsdon – sketchbook making

One of the outcomes of Sibonelo's tuition

LYNDA DE WET arrived in Johannesburg in May with armfuls of freshly picked Proteas that she nursed on her flight from Cape Town. For us Vaalies this was a treat indeed and some of us had never tackled drawing or painting a protea before. The fully booked 'Perfect Protea' workshop took place in May and was a resounding success

We spent three idyllic but hard-working days struggling to conquer the magnificent specimens she brought with various degrees of success. As always, we learnt exponentially – with Lynda's attentive, caring assistance could not do otherwise. With a concentration on correct drawing in the greatest detail, Lynda only allowed progression to paint after her scrutiny and approval of the drawings. Such was the outcome of our efforts however, that we showed a proliferation of protea paintings on our exhibition at the Johannesburg Flower show in October.

PADDY BALSDON'S 'How to make your own sketch book' workshop in March was much enjoyed by the full class that participated. They left with a bunch of new techniques including pamphlet stitch binding, Japanese stab binding and the Leporello folding method which uses a parallel folding technique to form a continuous concertina which can then be bound in various ways. Paddy prepared all the materials and gave step by step demonstrations accompanied by her very articulate instructions.

SIBONELO CHILIZA'S workshop in August was a revelation to most of us. Entranced by his expertise with graphite some of us 'painters' were completely won over with this fascinating medium demonstrated to us by this master.

Sibonelo's technique of slow, careful layering using relatively hard pencils to achieve darker tonal values, was an eye-opener to many of us and we loved the time spent learning something of the technique.

Safe to say, this two-day workshop left all the participants eager to learn more. Sibonelo was patient and attentive – an excellent teacher and the workshop was much enjoyed by all.