

Botanical Art Worldwide 2025

Linking plants with people through botanical art.

Those who were fortunate enough to attend the opening of our Botanical Art Worldwide exhibition at the Villa Arcadia, will agree it was a magical evening.

The planning for the exhibition had begun four years previously with Zoom discussions that included representatives of the countries that had participated in 2018, together with the steering committee of the American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA).

Once the theme of Crop Diversity had been agreed upon, it was circulated to each country and their artists. Unfortunately, the theme seemed to confuse a number of our local artists who were slow to respond but it gathered momentum with time.

BOTANICAL ART
WORLDWIDE / 2025



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It was a struggle at first to find a venue as unfortunately the Everard Read Gallery was not available again, but thanks to a friend of a friend we were offered the use of Villa Arcadia.

It was love at first sight for the three Gauteng committee members who visited and were shown around the Hollard Campus.

Designed by Sir Herbert Baker as the private residence of Florence and Lionel Phillips, Villa Arcadia dates back to 1910. It includes large reception rooms with a beautiful loggia or long stoep facing the northern suburbs.

There is fine craftsmanship in the panelling, brass work and rococo fanlights above the doors carved by Anton van Wouw.

In 1922, Philips sold the house on six acres of land to the SA Jewish Orphanage and it was 81 years before Hollard bought the property that had been running as an orphanage till then. They restored it to its present pristine condition in 2003 and thanks to Hollard's amazing generosity it became our perfect exhibition venue.



Selection was held mid-November 2024 at Inyoni Creek and the Clubhouse was a hive of activity for the day with the selection panel of Jenny Hyde-Johnson, Gill Condy, Gail de Smidt and Ann Harris being kept busy looking at each entry and giving individual artists personal feedback. An additional selection happened in the Cape for those local artists with the final count of paintings for the exhibition being 92 from 48 artists.

As scans of completed artworks were received, 40 South African images were chosen. These were sent to the US to be compiled into a Powerpoint presentation of paintings from each of the exhibiting countries to be shown at the exhibition venues across the world.

Potential donors were approached; the graphic designer set to preparing the catalogue; banners were designed and produced and invitations sent to guests and Johannesburg schools, while rosters of volunteers for shop and gallery assistants were compiled from BAASA members.

One day to go! ▶



Note the fine craftsmanship in the panelling, brass work and rococo fanlights above the doors carved by Anton van Wouw.



All too soon, it was time to move into the venue. The exhibition stands were constructed, extra lighting brought in, TV screen installed, artwork delivered, unwrapped and propped against the walls by a swarm of volunteers.

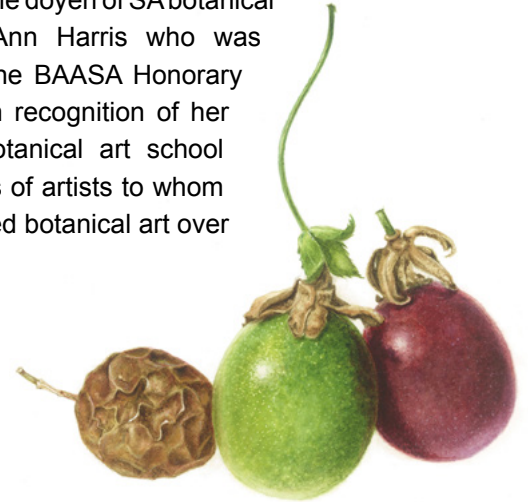
In the Arcadia Library a pop-up shop was receiving a vast selection of goods from artists – resulting in a wonderful display of flasks, table mats, mugs, aprons, cards and prints – all showcasing the botanical work of our artists. And most importantly, we brought in an expert to assist in arranging the artworks for hanging.

Spier Arts Trust had offered to sponsor the opening night and did so with great panache.

As the setting sun lit up the skies over the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, guests gathered on the stoep to sip their wine, while stunning platters of canapes were handed around.

Dr Duncan MacFayden of Oppenheimer Generations was the guest speaker, addressing the threat of climate change and the impending impact on food plants around the world.

Vicki Thomas, the doyen of SA botanical art, introduced Ann Harris who was the recipient of the BAASA Honorary Lifetime Award in recognition of her Johannesburg botanical art school and the hundreds of artists to whom she has introduced botanical art over many years.



BAW25 opening night ▶



Dr Duncan MacFayden



Gillian Condy and Gwenda Caplan



Vicki Thomas



Ann Harris






BAW25 Catalogue 

The exhibition was a resounding success and entertained literally hundreds of visitors with the art, walk-abouts and demonstrations.

BAASA made a good overall profit and gained 16 new members as a direct result.

Some people returned many times and others sent their friends but the overall winner was Botanical Art with a greatly increased awareness and visibility created 





Presentation is everything

Presentation is everything – and the theme-inspired platters of food served on opening night, together with the beautiful layout of the hanging paintings in the magnificent surroundings of Villa Arcadia, undoubtedly made a huge contribution to the resounding success of the exhibition.

A large part of the credit goes to Karen Ahrends who has years of experience in hanging artworks. Her expertise was responsible for the much admired layout of our paintings on the walls and screens in the Music Room.

As she is not that used to working with botanical art, her approach was one not usually seen.

Instead of the more usual groupings of paintings by similar themes or artists, Karen used colour, impact and

shape alone, ignoring names and status of individual artists – with whom she was not familiar anyway.

She arranged the paintings on the carpet beneath their final hanging space to gauge the effect of the groupings, collecting paintings from amongst the seemingly overwhelming number initially stacked around the walls of the Music Room – and juggled the groups until quite satisfied with the layout of colours and shapes.

Only then were they hung in the final pattern. It was a splendid effort and the result drew comments from many of the visitors, drawing them in with the most colourful, dramatic arrangement, carefully engineered by Karen, being the first one seen on entering the gallery. We will certainly repeat this method in our future exhibitions and hope that Karen will be there to help us. 🌸





BAASA's new logo

Earlier this year we embarked on a project to change the BAASA logo which was originally designed by Ronelle Oosthuizen and used since 2013.

BAASA was formed in 2000 and the occasion of BAASA's 25th birthday and the Botanical Art Worldwide exhibition organised by the Gauteng branch seemed like the perfect opportunity to update our collective image. We sent an open call to our members for submissions and are grateful to those that gave up valuable time to submit designs.

BAASA committees narrowed the choice down to two strong contenders that both managed to meet the brief which was to refresh the logo bringing it into line with the contemporary botanical art world and improving legibility of small sizes. It was a strong collaborative project that brought our committees closer, uniting us with a common purpose.

The two chosen logos were put on a Whatsapp Poll of all BAASA members and Ingrid Eckmann's design emerged as winner. Featuring the Protea, South Africa's national flower and most iconic image it has a strong connection to the country's unique identity.

Giving extra personal and historical significance, the design incorporates a section of Vicki Thomas's 2016 *Protea neriifolia* artwork, adding depth and authenticity. Vicki was one of the founding members of BAASA 25 years ago.

The colour palette, inspired by nature, features botanical greens and soft reds, evoking a sense of harmony and elegance.

All at BAASA are very happy with the new identity and feel that it brings new energy to the organisation which looks forward to the next 25 years.



The BAASA logo since 2013.



My Journey to RHS

By Julie Ah-Fa

We are so proud of the success of yet another of our members at the RHS. Julie Ah Fa won Gold, the Judges Special Award and the People's Choice Award at this year's exhibition. She shares her experience with us.

I submitted my application to the RHS exhibition in 2019, hoping my work might be good enough to be accepted, but with many doubts in my heart.

Taking part in the most prestigious botanical art exhibition in the world was a big dream, and I wasn't sure if I had the required standard. I must admit that I was inspired to take a chance after seeing Lynda de Wet and Margaret de Villiers return home with gold medals. Together with Issy, we sent in our applications, and to our great joy, both were accepted.

But joy soon gave way to new doubts, because things were getting serious. I now had to start finding my plants, and five years can pass very quickly.

I knew I wanted to paint the *Mahots* of Réunion Island, but before I could plan my first trip there, Covid struck and international travel was impossible. Not knowing when travel would be possible again, I began looking for another subject. For a time, I considered the endemic and endangered orchids of Long Tom Pass. They were fascinating, but so tiny, and I struggled to connect with them. Then I turned to proteas (showier plants) and even

began working on some with guidance from Jenny and Gill. I was so determined that I even tried painting while ill with Covid, which, unsurprisingly, was a terrible idea... the results were poor, and I had to start again.

By the time I was finally able to travel to Réunion, I was relieved to return to my first love: the *Mahots*. In retrospect, my choice of protea species was probably not the most interesting, so I was glad to start over.

In Réunion, I met many botanists who introduced me to the *Dombeyoideae* family. I had known little about them, but found them fascinating: some with scorpioid inflorescences that flower in a very specific order; some apparently dioecious, but with male flowers carrying sometimes functional female parts, and vice versa. I discovered there had even been a new species described as recently as 2013. Most of all, I learned how highly endangered many of these plants are. As botanical artists, I feel we have a mission to raise awareness of the fragility of our ecosystems. This gave my project a deeper sense of responsibility and more meaning in my participation at RHS.





After many journeys between South Africa and Réunion, I finally secured the six plants I would present at RHS. Finding them in the forests often felt like a true adventure. I sometimes felt like an explorer, filled with pure joy and excitement each time I discovered a plant.

Painting them, however, was far from easy. I found their leaves were complex, with textures difficult to capture. And I feel these were the most challenging paintings I have ever undertaken. I wanted to push myself further than ever before, adding a level of realism beyond anything I had achieved in previous work. It was important to me to honour the plants properly, to reflect both their scientific accuracy and their fragile beauty. The flowers, especially the white ones, were equally demanding, so easy to overwork, and with the tiniest details of stamens and staminodes to render faithfully. I often worried that my plants might not be spectacular enough to draw the judges' attention.

Throughout this process, I shared my work-in-progress with Gill, Ann, Jenny, and Gail, who kindly gave me feedback and pointed out things I could no longer see myself after staring at the paintings for months.

I struggled greatly with confidence, constantly doubting whether my work might deserve Gold. Daleen also encouraged me, offering precious advice along the way, fresh from her own outstanding success in 2024, when she won not only a Gold medal but also Best Botanical Artwork and the People's Choice Award.

When the time finally came to send my artwork to London, I felt both relieved and stressed (truthfully, I think I had been stressed for nearly six years... the extra year thanks to Covid included!). The exhibition opened on a Thursday, but the medal results were to be announced by email the day before. That Wednesday, I spent the whole day walking in London, checking my phone every ten minutes.

By 4pm I still hadn't heard, and we were heading into a meeting. My son Akira, bored, did what any child would do: played games on my phone. By 6pm my battery was down to just 10%, and we were on our way to a restaurant we had booked weeks in advance... only to discover that this fine dining place didn't have adaptors to charge my phone! I was livid. Still no news, and my battery was draining fast.



Julie pictured with (from left) Lucy T. Smith (judge), Charlotte Brooks (curator) and Andrew P. Brown (judge)



At 20:44, with only 2% battery power remaining, the email finally arrived from Charlotte Brooks:

“Dear Julie, I am delighted to write to inform you of your medal award. Congratulations on gaining an RHS Gold medal for your exhibit of *Endemic Dombeyoideae of Réunion Island: Exploring the ‘Mahots’ and ‘Bois de Senteur’*.”

I burst into tears, quickly sent WhatsApp’s to who I could before my phone died in peace and then, finally, was able to enjoy dinner.

The next day, I had a one-on-one meeting with one of the judges, Gillian Barlow. She is an extremely experienced artist and I was quite intimidated, but she asked thoughtful questions about my plants and their stories.

Later that evening came the official opening of the exhibition... and to my enormous surprise, I was awarded the Judges’ Special Award. I believe painting endangered plants, and from a small island few people know of, may have earned me extra recognition.

That evening, I also met Katherine Tyrrell, who told me something I will never forget: RHS exhibits do not need to feature showy plants. Their scientific value is what truly matters. Meeting so many knowledgeable and kind judges and being able to share my work and the story of Réunion’s plants with them, was an unforgettable experience.

Later on, I was also awarded the People’s Choice award. This journey would never have been possible without the generosity of so many people.

In Réunion, botanists, nature lovers, friends, and family all gave their time freely, guiding me through forests,



Julie with Sabine Tillie Davidson (best portfolio photography exhibit) curator Charlotte Brooks and Mayumi Hashi (best botanical exhibit)

helping me locate plants, and sharing their knowledge and passion.

Everyone was deeply involved and supported me wholeheartedly in reaching this dream. I am also very grateful to the South African botanical art community, whose encouragement, feedback, and friendship carried me through the most difficult stages of the process.

Looking back, I can only encourage other South African artists to take part in RHS. We often don’t realise what we are capable of, but I know from the work I have seen here that many have the skills to win Gold — they just need to believe in themselves and find their theme.

We are fortunate to have such unique flora in South Africa and it is our responsibility to raise awareness of its value. With poaching and habitat destruction increasing at an alarming pace, our brushes become our voice and our tool to protect what cannot speak for itself. 🌿



Botanical Art & Photography Exhibition

Bridging the gap between art and science to raise the voices of plants

South Africa is home to some of the most diverse and unique plant life in the world, and world-class botanical artists, illustrators and photographers. These come together at the third annual Stellenbosch University Botanical Garden (SUBG) Botanical Art Exhibition, running for four continuous months from 13 September 2025 to 16 January 2026.

Curated by specialist botanical art curator Karen Stewart, the exhibition brings together 34 top South African artists and photographers. Artistic celebration of nature is combined with scientific rigour, showcasing the detail and unique characteristics of local plants in the way only botanical illustration can.

This year introduces new talents alongside established names, so visitors can expect a fresh perspective on a traditional art form.

Julie Ah-Fa's recent Gold Medal-winning collection for the Royal Horticultural Society is set to be a focal point of the exhibition.

Other highlights include Chris Lochner's *Mimetes cucullatus* and Basia Swiel's *Strelitzia nicolai* as well as less common subjects such as *Aponogeton distachyos* (Martine Robinson), *Conophytum herreanthus* (Janet

Snyman), *Gladiolus recurvus* (Celeste de Cock) and *Oxalis oriethala* (Annette Faul).

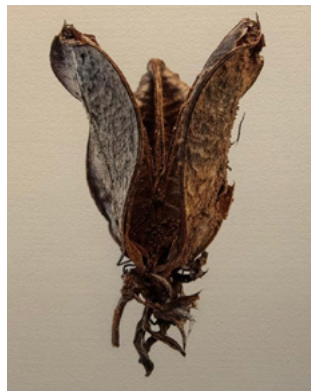
Several walk-about have been organised – hosted by Karen Stewart, botanist Rupert Koopman and Grootbos co-curator and award winning artist Vickie Thomas – and all extremely well-attended.

There is a regular Saturday market which brings lots of people into the garden and two Fine Arts interns are manning the space on the weekends as part of the James and Shirley Sherwood mentorship programme.

The visitor numbers have been high, and the opening was the biggest attendance had to date. So far 18 works have been sold, two have been donated and the first two paintings for the James & Shirley Sherwood Botanical Art Collection were put on display.

Beyond the art, the exhibition gives voice to the plight of plants and raises awareness of plant conservation work. The artworks play a crucial role in plant identification, research, and conservation, while also encouraging visitors to look closer at the biodiversity around them.





In the light of the recent tragic death of Dr Donovan Kirkwood, this exhibition is an ongoing tribute to his work at the garden and his love for botanical art. ▶

We are also fortunate to have buyers who invest and support the consistent growth of this micro industry.

Many artists have seen their works enter prestigious collections through this exhibition, including a new collection of botanical art started at Ellerman House in Cape Town.

All works are for sale, with proceeds shared between the artists and garden, making every purchase an investment in the future of botanical art. 🌸

FOR MORE INFORMATION ▶

[@subotgarden](#) on Instagram,

or Stellenbosch University Botanical Garden on Facebook

CONTACT

Art Curator: Karen Stewart

Cell: 072 719 6136 | studio@karen-stewart.co.za



Capturing light

A focus on highlights and reflected light

*I*n this online workshop, instructor Margaret Best offered an intensive focus on the influence of light to enhance realism in botanical studies. This involves deep observation and useful techniques to ensure highlights and reflected light will enhance one's botanical studies effectively. The practical aspect focused on colour choices and techniques for smooth or shiny surfaces where reflected light is most visible.

We have had a lot of feed back on Margaret Best's *Capturing Light* workshop held in October. Three days, online with Margaret on the other side of the Atlantic in Canada made for a very interesting workshop. Lilian Guerra, Cati Vawda and Jeanette Curling have made notes of their experiences.

As a designer of coins, I am drawn to the detailed and accurate representation of subject matter and the beauty of botanical illustration as an art form.

Botanical art has a rich history across continents as does the art of relief sculpture on coins with many stories captured in a single design, studied, interpreted and enjoyed by generations past and present.

As a novice, I aspire to emulate the experienced artists who are masters of their craft - each botanical art course I attend brings together a group of skilled artists from diverse backgrounds and occupations, all united by a love of this art form, many with a wealth of knowledge about South African flora. I can only marvel at and admire their expertise and dedication to the craft.

It is these illustrators and their work, as well as the opportunity to learn and explore, that draws me to these workshops. I have completed both in-person and online training offered by various educational platforms and have enjoyed both.

Margaret Best's online course *Capturing Light* combines aspects of both teaching methods – a real-time connection with Margaret and the other students in a digital environment. The workshop was well structured, with each lesson building on the previous one. Instructions are based on time-tested techniques and the course is filled with

helpful advice on process, tools, and the combinations and application of colour.

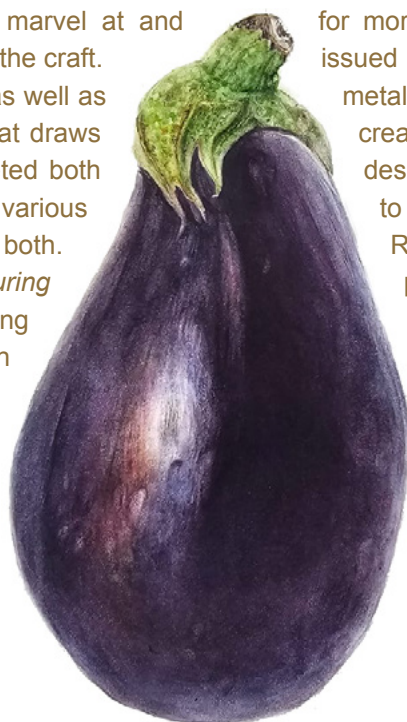
The personalized advice and guidance offered at each stage was invaluable and inspiring and the honest feedback helped me understand processes and concepts better. The information in the beautifully designed *Capturing Light* booklet complemented the course perfectly, allowing one to revisit the material and notes while working.

Visit Margaret's' website <https://botanicalart.education/botanical-art-e-booklets/> which offers a range of booklets each relating to a different aspect of botanical art showcasing her experience and knowledge. Her references to other artists and published works provide further avenues for exploration

The creation and application of colour is a fascinating field of study. As light and shadow move over a subject, our perception of its colour changes. Although the technology to print colour on coins has been around for more than two decades, most of the coins issued by the South African Mint are traditional metal coins. Hence, most of the coin designs I create are monochrome illustrations or graphic designs. It was, therefore, a wonderful surprise to discover Margaret's coin designs for the Royal Canadian Mint on her website and a privilege to share experiences of a world that combines illustration and sculpture within a production environment.

I thoroughly enjoyed Margaret's instruction and would highly recommend the *Capturing Light* workshop.

Lillian Guerra





It was with a good dose of apprehension and feeling somewhat nervous, that I registered for the Margaret Best *Capturing Light* online workshop. I was not disappointed and need not have felt so stressed.

Allowing participation from the comfort of one's own home with the freedom to work at a personal pace made it an amazing workshop.

Margaret is a dedicated teacher who explained thoroughly and shared her knowledge generously – with easy-to-follow demonstrations of every detail.

She required complete participation during the course but allowed sufficient time to complete the exercises. The sessions were muted except when she was giving an instruction or demonstration, so I was able to concentrate without interruption.

A few days before the workshop, we were sent a 44-page e-Booklet "*Capturing Light*" crammed full of information to equip us for the workshop, as well as lots of suggestions and hints from Margaret's experience.

During the three days, she referred continuously to the booklet which is an encyclopaedia of valuable and worthwhile information. We were each given a login to our personal Sync file into which we uploaded our progress and received detailed written feedback from Margaret. She made sure that our drawings and tonal drawings were accurate and colour swatches appropriate.

Two weeks after the workshop, we each had a half an hour one-on-one zoom session with Margaret to discuss our uploaded image and what we had learnt and needed to practice.

It has been a turning point in my art. I have realized that I need to be more disciplined in preparation before painting and the importance of accurate drawing. My eyes have been opened to the emphasis on controlled lighting and an awareness of the shadows and reflected light on a subject. I have felt both challenged and inspired and very pleased that I participated.

Jeanette Curling



I will be looking to attend more workshops like this: • online • at this price and • with this instructor.

As much as the workshop had a clear, sharp focus, the instructor taught in a way that was flexible, teaching the foundations of understanding and practice of botanical illustration and enabling me to practice with a confidence not previously experienced.

Format and Design

- The online format worked well for me allowing the comfort of working from home without having to deal with transport, travel times or costs. I could focus more easily than I find possible in a group. Margaret kept group time dedicated to her input, demonstrations and opportunity for questions. Mostly, this avoided time lost to socialising and distractions from learning.
- The Sync platform was very effective. It allowed us to upload images of our work and receive Margaret's feedback in written form.
- The one-on-one session two weeks after the 3-day workshop was an excellent opportunity to pursue the painting process and to follow-up on questions and issues that arose. I especially appreciated the feedback on progress relative to the goals of the workshop and recommendations for further work.

Content

- Covered the basics and went into the nitty-gritty of techniques and supplies for those working in either watercolour or colour pencil with useful and practical suggestions
- It was much appreciated that Margaret supported her recommendations and views with her own tests and

encouraged us to do the same but did not impose those in her supply list or through the workshop

- The basics of colour matching were also addressed and through the layering test, the glazing technique demonstrated and taught very effectively. I feel that I now have a practical tool to use in future painting.

Support Materials

- Excellent information and high quality support materials (e-booklets) were supplied before the workshop and clear explanations and demonstration of each technique during and after, including the opportunity to communicate via email and then have a one-on-one session, two weeks later.

Cati Vawda





The love of detail

Michela Zanetti comments on Gail de Smidt's workshop and what she learnt



The difference between good and outstanding is often close attention to detail. During November this year, twelve fortunate artists had the opportunity of attending Gail de Smidt's wonderful workshop, focusing on this theme.

The art of detail is really looking. It is important to initially observe live specimens and to record their detail in sketches before they begin to wilt.

Thereafter it is acceptable to work from an accurate photo of the specimen taken while it is fresh, however tracing the entire drawing is not recommended as this can make the artwork flat and uninteresting. It is also useful to focus on small areas of detail on the subject first, rather than viewing the overall image at once, which can be daunting.

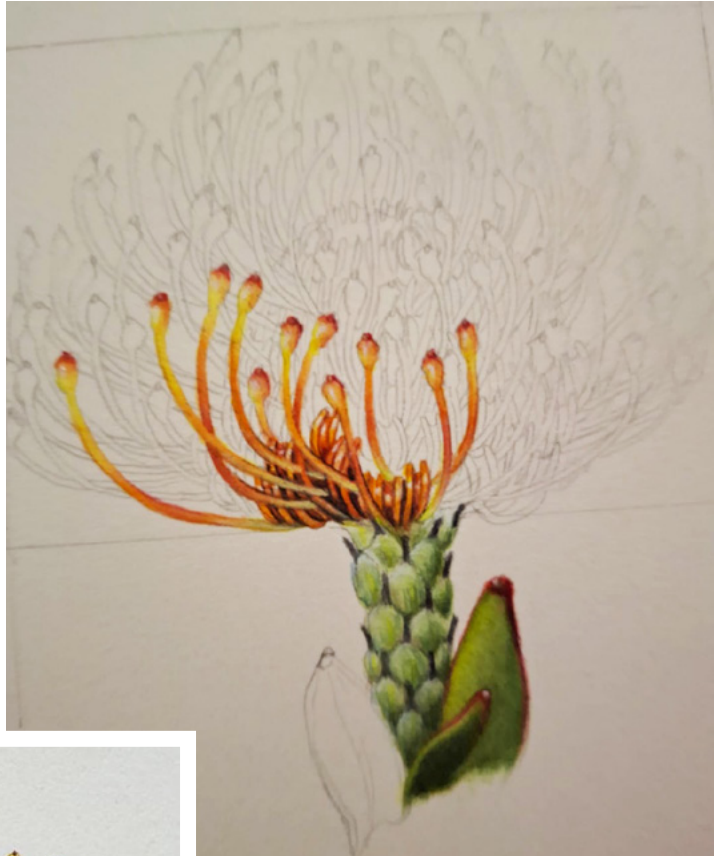
Equipment, such as a magnifying glass, a phone camera, a jeweller's loupe or a microscope can be utilized to zoom into detail. Good lighting from the correct direction reveals more detail and is essential throughout the process.

Imperfections on the subject can create great interest and should be included in artwork. Soft indents, bulges, spots, bloom and unusual textures or light-effects define a plant's life and environment and can add to the beauty. The inclusion of a natural pollinator also adds depth to the plant's story.

Colour testing in different gradations of intensity ahead of painting is extremely useful and graded swatches of colour should be painted on Arches paper alongside the specimen. It is important to note that colour is all comparative, and the difference between tone and hue should be noted. Careful observation is key!

Cypress leaf exercise





Cypress leaf and pincushion exercises were used to teach how to identify nature's patterns and how to optimally capture detail directly from the live specimen.

The group learnt about the gradation of colours between foreground, mid and background and the method of utilizing a tissue to divide the various 'layers' of the specimen to aid in accurately drawing each layer – also to understand the shape and bring depth and perspective.

It was wonderful to deepen our understanding of the importance of detail and how truly seeing subjects can bring paintings to life. 🌸

Gauteng outings and activities during 2025

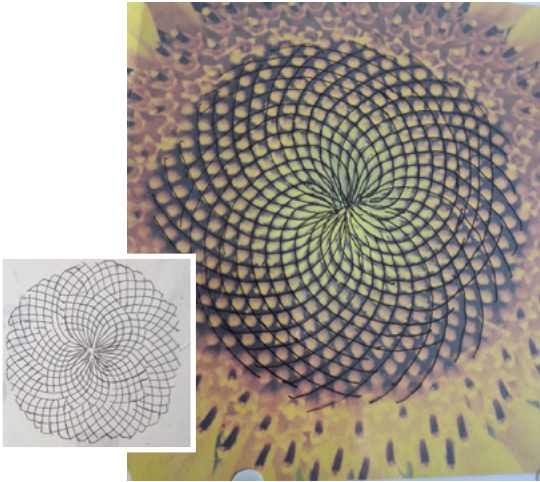
We have had a busy year!

In April we grappled with Fibonacci

Ann Harris showed great patience teaching a bunch of artists trying their best to understand this mathematical concept. The penny did drop however, and we left knowing and understanding much more than before

Willie Schlechter and the primaries in July

Willie Schlechter made one of his very welcome visits to Gauteng and his workshop 'Painting with Primaries – making the most of a limited palette' – did just that – we painted succulents with only two or three colours with really surprising results from all.



BAASA invites members to a workshop on
Painting in primaries
with Willie Schlechter

We will be focusing on
Painting with 3 Primaries –
making the most of a
limited palette.

Date: 3rd, 4th & 5th July
Time: 9:30 - 3:30
Cost: R2250.00 (R1125.00 deposit to secure place)
Max 12 participants
Venue: Inyani Clubhouse, 200 Modderfontein Road, Lyndhurst.
Bookings: dcaplan@global.co.za

Tea and coffee will be available - lunch at the Good 2 Go Café or bring your own
Please bring your own lamps



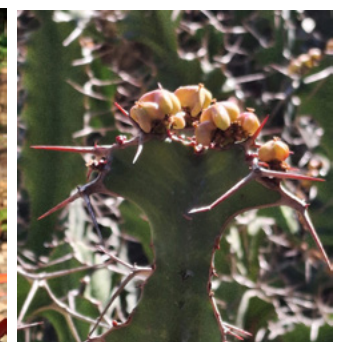
Join us for a walk in the
Aloe Garden at The Pines
on the Hollard Campus
22 Oxford Road
10am Wednesday
6th August 2025

Donation of **R50** on the day
Please **RSVP** with car registration
number
Comfortable shoes and water
RSVP: [Gwenda - dcaplan@global.co.za](mailto:Gwenda-dcaplan@global.co.za)

The Succulent Garden at Villa Arcadia

In August we had a visit to the Succulent garden at Villa Arcadia where we were treated with their usual style and generosity. No other than Patrick Watson was there to guide us.

What a treat to have the benefit of his vast knowledge and expertise walking round the Succulent garden that he established and cares for on an ongoing basis.





Laura Silburn at Grootbos

Visiting Laura Silburn taught at Grootbos in early September. Gail de Smidt was there to report.

It was lovely meeting Laura – she is a very down to earth person who teaches in a very relaxed fashion. She likes to brief artists on the way she paints, showing everyone the various stages of her work, then going over the general basic steps for botanical art. The use of her dry brush technique to complete the detail on a painting was great to see.

I have found with most workshops, that the rules for watercolour and botanical art are generally the same. But one is reminded, when attending, of where laziness has encouraged short cuts and when one needs to revisit basic steps.

One of the most important of these is a tonal drawing which, if completed accurately will enable completion of a realistic painting even when the plant has died.

Another important bit of advice was to study the plant before taking a cutting. This way fewer cuttings will be needed to get the preferred subject onto paper and one can observe how it attaches to the host plant. Then it's important to do thumbnails before positioning and measuring the plant, with the tonal drawings being the next step.

We were a diverse group of students, some of whom had never painted with watercolours before. Others without any botanical art training, and a number also of the more experienced florilegium artists. I am sure this was very challenging for Laura but she handled it with equanimity.

Grootbos and Chris Lochner treated us very well as usual, with delicious food and a wonderful venue making for a relaxing five day botanical art retreat. 🌸



The James & Shirley Sherwood Botanical Art Collection

The Stellenbosch University Botanical Garden launches an innovative botanical art project to highlight rare and threatened South African plants.

The new James & Shirley Sherwood Botanical Art Collection was officially started in May 2025 when funding was received from the James and Shirley Sherwood Foundation.

The collection will contain plants from the wider South African context but be focussed on the innovative living collection of rare and endangered plants at the Stellenbosch University Botanical Garden (SUBG). Artists will capture and celebrate the fleeting beauty of select endangered species from the Garden's permanent botanical art collection.

This will strengthen botanical art capacity and connect garden visitors to the phenomenal diversity and exceptional local endemism of the Cape, thus endearing people to the plight of the many critically threatened species which will help motivate involvement in reversing mass extinction.

SUBG believes that botanical illustration and art has an absolutely crucial part to play by communicating the wonder and value of plants and helping to shift public perception on the long-term conservation of wild areas.

Through the James & Shirley Sherwood Botanical Art Collection, the garden will aim to raise the profile of botanical art, generating awareness and interest in the purchase of investment pieces by established artists, and to inspire early-career botanical artists to contribute to the collection.

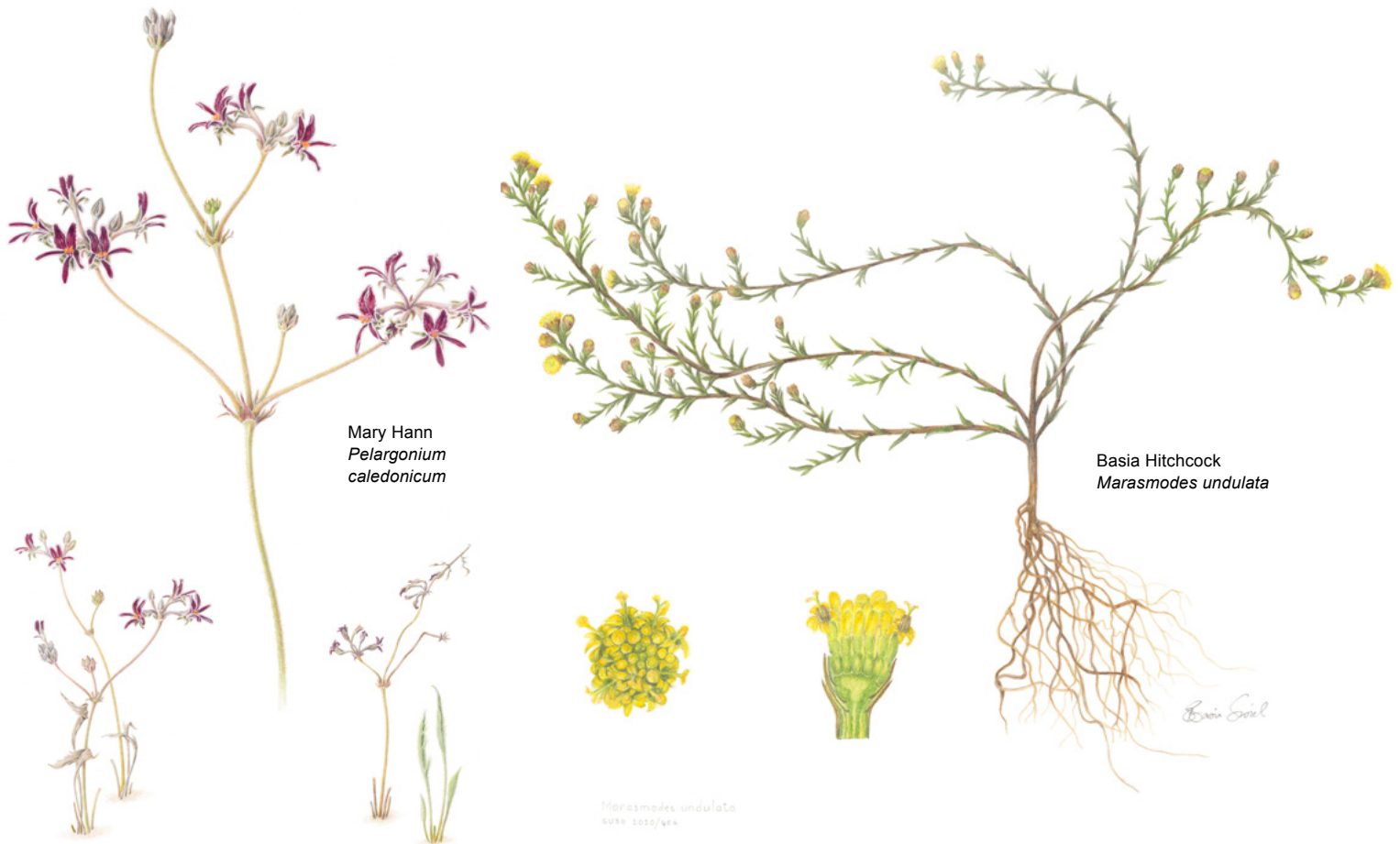
The current collection was started in 2023 by Karen Stewart a specialist botanical art curator and the Cape branch Chairperson of BAASA and the late Dr Don Kirkwood curator of SUBG. It includes paintings by some of South Africa's top and early-career botanical artists. Each work ties into the botanical garden's conservation collection.

Karen will curate the collection and will be supported by the acting garden curator Annerie Senekal, Razelle Gallant the Garden administrator, Martine Robinson, a well-respected scientific botanical artist focusing on rare and endangered geophytes and academic partner, Prof Leanne Dreyer a world expert in the mega diverse Cape *Oxalis*.

Martine Robinson
Haemanthus pumilio



Artists who wish to apply to become involved in the project can email the art curator:
Karen Stewart studio@karen-stewart.co.za



The specially designed beds include viable *ex situ* populations of threatened taxa and are a unique feature of the garden, and the first in the world of this type. They provide teaching links to geology and environmental diversity.

Due to the seasonal nature of these plants, the beds are spectacularly showy in spring and into summer, but towards late summer become dormant.

To inspire visitors to appreciate nature through all the seasons, the work in the James & Shirley Sherwood Botanical Art Collection will create a powerful reminder of the seasonal beauty of these areas.

A unique opportunity for botanical artists


Botanical artists often struggle to find rare plant material to paint, but an important component of this project will be to help artists access incredibly rare live plants.

The project aims to reignite an understanding and appreciation for scientifically accurate botanical works by strengthening artists' depth of knowledge and experience on subject matter – working with the Red Data list and collecting and commissioning paintings of previously undescribed rare and endangered plants.

Most have never been illustrated and many are extremely threatened, or only now being formally described.

The current botanical art collection is housed in the historically significant Garden Office, which has upgraded to make it a world class botanical art gallery.

This opportunity has enabled the creation of the only formal scientific institutional home for botanical art in South Africa. We hope the Stellenbosch University Botanical Garden, and the James & Shirley Sherwood Botanical Art Collection, can continue to provide inspiration, learning and growth for botanical artists and the garden visitors alike. 🌿



▶

Excerpt from Instagram page:

These African horned cucumbers grow wild in the veld around my home in the Cradle of Humankind. They are sliced, eaten raw and added to salads and drinks. The leaves are cooked as spinach and the baboons relish them."

This stunning gouache painting has been added to the James and Shirley Sherwood Botanical Art Collection, a new florilegium of botanically accurate paintings and drawings of plants from Stellenbosch University Botanical Garden's conservation and research collection.

Jenny Hyde-Johnson

The Tuesday Group

*A very special group of artists
in Cape Town*

The Tuesday Botanical group began in 2000 when four artists began to meet at Kirstenbosch and paint under the guidance of Vicki Thomas.

The group grew and moved to various venues as the need demanded. When Vicki left Cape Town in 2002 she arranged with Kirstenbosch that they could continue under the nurturing guidance of Jeanette Loedolff. Having now grown to around 30 participants over a period of 23 years, their mornings together have become very important – on average a morning has an attendance of around ten artists and during Covid their Whatsapp group was a particularly meaningful experience for them all.

Officially painting is from 9.00 to 12.00. And the venue now is a wonderfully light, airy space – officially the Staff Refectory at Kirstenbosch.

As one member recently put it – “It’s such a safe place to exhibit one’s ability, or lack thereof. Where we all know one’s work will be received kindly and with positive criticism or ecstatic raves where necessary or appropriate. We all work with different abilities and even with different media. And we all know we are valued and supported in our constant quest for improvement”

Jeanette is the glue that holds the group together. Her nurturing guidance, mentorship, the camaraderie and shared insights of fellow participants is hugely inspiring.

Enduring friendships have been formed under the umbrella of a common love of botanical painting. A wonderful way to celebrate the amazing life growing all around – the beautiful Cape Floral Kingdom. A wonderful institution that other areas should attempt to emulate. 🌸

Long may it last!



ERIC JUDD

The doyen of South African aloe artists

By Gideon F. Smith

Until 1973, Eric professionally held a position in sales for the South African Pulp and Paper Industries Limited (SAPPI), thereafter working as an independent, self-taught artist.

He gained distinction in the field of botanical art before this with the publication of his book *What Aloe is That?* in 1967. Eric both illustrated the aloes and wrote the accompanying text in neat and perfectly legible longhand – no computers available in those days! When it first appeared bound in hardcover, the book sold for R1.75 but by the fourth impression published in 1976 the price had increased to R2.25 with some impressions having a soft cover.

Eric soon became known to a much wider audience when, in 1976, a wall calendar illustrated with six of his aloe paintings— one per two calendar months—was published by the Southern Life Association and Southern Insurance Association.



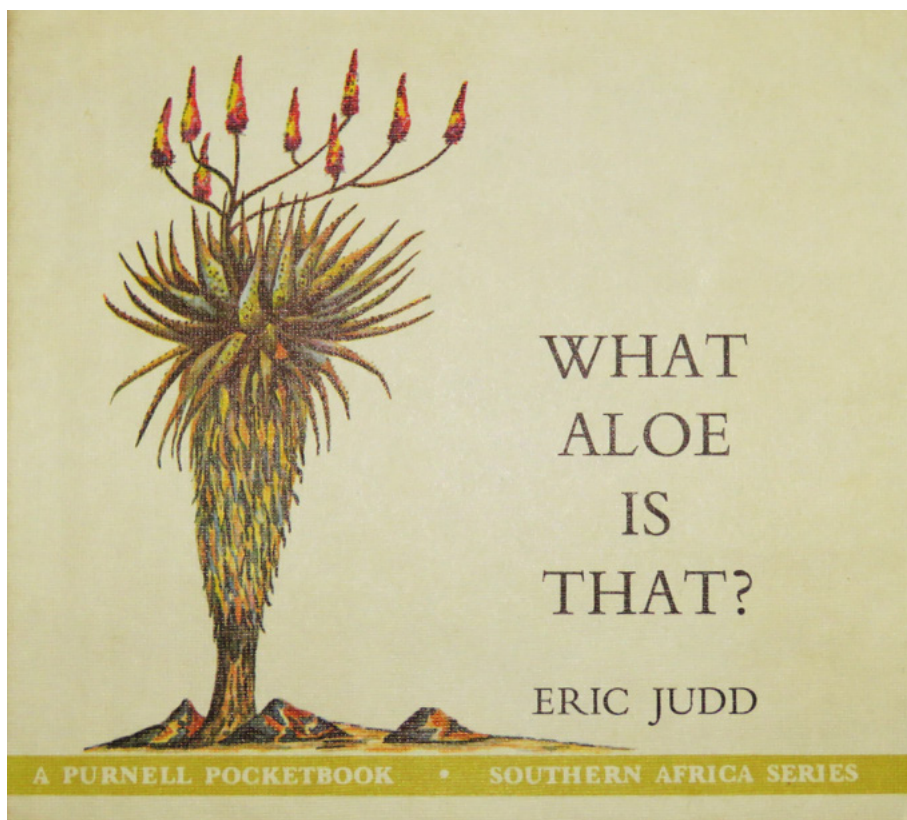
This in the days before mobile and later, smart phones, became widely used, beautifully illustrated wall calendars were quite the rage and some have even become collector's items.

He participated in numerous group art exhibitions, held some on his own and was awarded several medals for his work, including gold in 2006 at the botanical art Biennale held at Kirstenbosch.

His paintings are included in botanical art collections throughout the world and he co-authored a book *Tree Aloes of Africa* with Ernst van Jaarsveld, who named *Aloe juddii* in his honour.

Apart from aloes, Eric also painted other plants and trees, landscapes, beachscapes, and human-made structures, including architectural items and animal-drawn vehicles.

He was born on 20 October 1935 in Springs on the East Rand and died in Simon's Town on 4th October 2024, 16 days short of his 89th birthday. 🌸



JOAN VAN GOGH

*J*oan (whose grandfather was a cousin to Vincent van Goch) was born in Johannesburg on the 10th February 1939. Her parents had emigrated to South Africa from the Netherlands.

Her creative expression started while at school where she took private art lessons with Erica Berry at the Abbotsford School of Art. After graduating from Johannesburg Technical College where she studied sculpture, drawing and watercolour, Joan travelled to the UK with a friend, where she met and fell in love with a young Czechoslovakian medical student. But the call of Africa overwhelmed her and she returned to South Africa to live with her parents.

She married Adrian Boshier, a wild adventurer who lived in the remote bush of the Makgabeng Mountains near the Blouberg, now Northern Province. He was employed to record ancient rock art for Walter Battiss but soon after the birth of their first son, Bowen, they moved to the Thuli Block in Botswana. They had four children, three sons

and a daughter, however by 1972 the marriage ended in a traumatic divorce.

Back in Johannesburg, Joan started working for the Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontology at Wits University where she was introduced to Dr John Anderson a palaeobotanist at the National Botanical Institute in Pretoria. He was busy writing *Trees and Shrubs of the Witwatersrand, Magaliesberg and Pilanesberg* which was published in 1988 and illustrated by Joan who soon became involved in illustrating a number of other books

In 1995 she was contacted by Jacana Publications requesting illustrations of trees for a tourist guide, the *Magic of the Pilanesberg – a complete guide to the Park* by the NW Conservation. This partnership with Jacana Publishers lasted until 2001 and it was followed by the *SAPPI Tree Spotting* series.

Joan was noticed by the SA Philatelic Services in Pretoria who commissioned three sets of stamps issued between 1998 – 2000.

She passed away 8th July 2025. 🌸



21

21 years – the coming of age of the Cavern Art courses

By Gill Condy

The lofty peaks of the Drakensburg form an amazing backbone through the Natal interior – this most majestic of South Africa’s mountain ranges offers diverse and spectacular landscapes as well as a unique flora.

The Cavern Berg Resort is situated close to the Royal Natal National Park and Amphitheatre. It is nestled at the base of a semi-circular range of mountains, with Protea grasslands, mountain forests and the family hotel now run by the third generation.

When my long-standing friend Elsa Pooley asked if I would be interested in joining her in offering botanical art courses at the Cavern, I jumped at the opportunity.

Elsa was running wildflower weekends there at the time but it was not an area that I knew – being one of thousands of people just driving through on their trips to the coast. The deal with the Cavern family was that no matter how few booked to attend, we would both be there to teach.

Elsa’s extraordinary knowledge of the local flora has been one of the highlights of this course as she guides the included pre-breakfast and late afternoon walks in the vicinity of the hotel – as a result of which we are frequently thanked by participants, for making their future walks in the veld more rewarding as they have learnt from Elsa to stop more often, to look at the flowers, notice the

colours and how the light might fall on a clump of grass or leaves. In addition, with the Carte family’s blessings, artists are able to pick plants to draw.

The idea of five to six days immersed in painting in beautiful surroundings with no interruptions for shopping, cooking or other such menial tasks, is absolute bliss. Add to that a like-minded group of people, professional guidance and instruction and the most amazing food (don’t plan to be on diet) – and this week becomes heaven on earth! Many hundreds of both aspirant and experienced artists have enjoyed this experience during these past 21 years.

The evenings are social and relaxing, helping participants to unwind after the intense concentration of the day with the addition of some interesting and instructive videos and some brave spouses – see the next article from one of these.

Having two teachers available means that individual personalized teaching is offered. With frequent returnees, there is an opportunity for them to be challenged to tackle more complicated subjects in the safe space of the studio, where help is always on hand. We don’t promise to turn everyone into botanical artists but can guarantee a week devoted to painting.

Having been hugely privileged to be welcomed into the Cavern family and invited back year after year for the last 21 years, it has become like a second home. 🌸





The 2025 group at the Cavern including a few very happy looking spouses

And what about the spouses?

Francois Hugo gives feedback

*H*aving refused three previous invitations from my wife Jackie to join a Drakensberg workshop, this time, as a result of an invitation from another similarly placed spouse, Dominic, I was persuaded to join – and it turned out to be a week full of surprises.

We joined the artists on their early morning walks, where Elsa shared her encyclopedic knowledge of the veld. She opened my eyes, inspiring a new appreciation of the beauty and detail of the Cavern’s surroundings.

During these walks both Dominic and I became aware of how differently we now see the veld due to Elsa’s talks and our interaction with the artists – and meeting interesting individuals, including artists from Germany, enthused us with their curiosity, dedication and passion for nature.

The Cavern itself is an experience – there is no way of being bored thanks to their wide range of activities for every interest – from guided hikes and horse riding, to tennis, swimming, and scenic cycle tracks.

The management and staff create a warm family atmosphere where one feels immediately at home and the food is out of this world. Being with the artists for all meals made for interesting discussions and learnings. In between we did guided hikes – some easy and some quite challenging. The guides were very professional and knowledgeable about the veld, geology, and local history. They made the environment come alive.

I realized that one is never too old to learn from the experience of new acquaintances and agree with Gill that the partners bring a new dynamic and energy to the week which both she and I would encourage in future. 🌸



Flowers, flowers and more flowers

by Ronelle Oosthuizen

*D*uring the wildflower season in August, I paid a visit to the Namaqua National Park with my brother Willem and his wife Ingrid. For three avid photographers and nature lovers this was heaven!

On our way to Namaqualand we visited the Hantam National Botanical Garden which includes patches of various Renosterveld, bulbs and succulents.

In Vanrhynsdorp we stayed over at the Kokerboom Lodge. Their nursery cultivates rare succulents with the Knervlakte selection being our favourite.

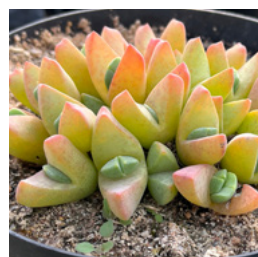
Entering the Namaqua NP at the Groenrivier Gate the coastal duneveld became our home for the next three nights. We set up camp at the rustic Koringkorrelbaai camp site with an eco-toilet included.

In this almost untouched semi-desert Succulent Karoo region we even experienced rain!

Mostly it is fog originating from the southern Atlantic ocean only that precipitates to support this part of the Succulent Karoo biome. Usually after good rains in the winter rainfall region the veld bursts into a magnificent display of flowers.



Colchicum coloratum
(Rooipatrysbloem) at the
Hantam National Botanical
Garden, Nieuwoudtville.



Succulents at the Kokerboom
Kwekery, Vanrhynsdorp.



The Koringkorrelbaai campsite at sunset.





The display of predominantly few annual pioneer species is often prominent on croplands and also a sign of overgrazing and land degradation.



On day five we travelled inland to the Skilpad Rest Camp for our overnight accomodation passing a kaleidoscopic explosion of colour and carpets of flowers.

Namaqualand is a biodiversity hotspot that boasts the largest concentration of succulent plants of any of the arid regions in the world.

Around 40% of its floral species are endemic to this area of which 18% are threatend. Plants and animals in this region are adapted to cold winters, hot summers and very little rainfall (below 100mm to 400mm annually).

The Nama people (Namaqua) pastoralists alongside the San hunter-gatherers lived here for centuries followed by smallstock farmers and mining companies more recently. All left a distinct imprint on the land of particular utilization and a story to tell. 🌸



Artwork by our members featured in the **Rewilding** magazine.

Left: The illustrations of *Adansonia grandidieri* (flower and trees) by Gillian Condry were used in the article about how women, science and AI (artificial intelligence) are reviving Madagascar's baobab forests.

Below: An illustration of the *Lantana camara* by Julie Ah-Fa was used in an article about invasive alien plants.



Lantana camara is a Category 1b invasive alien plant in South Africa.



2026

The **CAVERN**
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NORTHERN DRakensBERG - KZN

BOTANICAL ART

with Elsa Pooley & Gill Condry

Nature Journalling in the 'berg': 11-15 MARCH

Join Elsa and Gill for the perfect painting holiday taking you into the beautiful mountain surrounds to sketch and paint.

Botanical Art in the Drakensburg: 23-29 NOVEMBER

Suitable for beginners or established artists, with guided walks in the grounds and surrounding mountains to source plant material, all while enjoying the Cavern's legendary cuisine.

Reservations: 083 701 5724 | info@cavern.co.za

