SMITHSONIAN PRESENTS BOTANICAL ART EXHIBITION
“A Passion for Plants: Contemporary Art from the Shirley Sherwood Collection”
Opens March 27

With their heady profusion of shapes, sizes and colors, plants have ignited the passion of artists and scientists alike. “A Passion for Plants: Contemporary Art from the Shirley Sherwood Collection,” an exciting new exhibition that highlights the interplay of art and science through botanical watercolors, pen and ink, pencil and lithographs, will open March 27 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. The exhibition comprises 100 masterworks by the finest 20th century botanical artists and are all part of the Shirley Sherwood collection, the most comprehensive private assemblage of contemporary botanical art in the world. “A Passion for Plants: Contemporary Art from the Shirley Sherwood Collection” will be on view through Sept. 2.

“Botanical art has entered a new golden age, a renaissance,” said John Kress, chair of the Botany Section at the Smithsonian’s Natural History Museum. “Shirley Sherwood’s collection of botanical art has significantly raised the profile of botanical illustration as both an art form and an appreciation of nature. We are proud to exhibit such an important collection.”

The purpose of botanical illustration is to record plants with scientific accuracy and to show botanical detail. The practice began in the 15th century and saw a time of heightened public appreciation in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Seventy-six artists are represented in this exhibition of 100 beautiful and meticulously detailed paintings of plants from all over the world. From endangered species only found in a single remote region to popular well-known flowering plants, the exhibition allows the museum-goer to take a journey through 500 million years of plant evolution.
Exhibition highlights:

- “Cycad: Male cones of Encephalartos woodii” by Leslie Carol Berge, 1999
- “Nepenthes truncata” by Mariko Imai, undated
- “Cannonball Tree: Couroupita guianensis” by Margaret Mee, 1956

“Botanical art has been described as the meeting place between the arts and the sciences, and perhaps because of my training as a scientist, its rigor and precision appeal to me as well as its beauty,” said Shirley Sherwood, who organized the exhibition.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Sherwood will present an illustrated lecture, “Shirley Sherwood’s Passion for Plants,” on Friday, March 28, at noon in the Natural History Museum’s Baird Auditorium. Sherwood will lead a tour of the exhibition on March 28 at 2pm. Admission is free for both events.

In celebration of spring, botanical art and gardening, children and families are invited to a Sunflower Fest on Saturday, May 17 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Natural History Museum. Many hands-on activities are planned including sowing sunflower seeds in take-home, earth-friendly containers, creating seed art, and drawing and illustrating plants. Costumed characters, storytelling and educational displays will also be part of Sunflower Fest. The National Garden Bureau is the sponsor of the all day public event. Admission is free.

Shirley Sherwood, Oxford-trained botanist, independent scholar and collector of botanical watercolors and paintings, is the author of two books, “Contemporary Botanical Artists” and “A Passion for Plants: Contemporary Botanical Masterworks,” which chart the current renaissance in botanical works. Sherwood began collecting contemporary botanical art in 1990 and now has one of the most comprehensive private collections in the world. Her collection currently numbers 491 works by 191 artists from 27 countries. Her life-long love of plants began as a young girl exploring orchids and azaleas in the Himalayas. Now, she spends much of the year traveling, collecting artwork, visiting artists and organizing exhibitions.

The exhibition was made possible through the support of Clairol Herbal Essences. Additional funding was provided by The National Garden Bureau Member Companies.

A selection of paintings from “A Passion for Plants” has been on tour since 1996, traveling to the United Kingdom, Scotland, Australia, Japan, South Africa, Sweden, Italy and the United States.

The National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W., welcomed more than 6.1 million people during the year 2002, making it the most visited natural history museum in the world. Opened in 1910, the Museum is dedicated to maintaining and preserving the world’s most extensive collection of natural history specimens and human artifacts. It also fosters critical scientific research as well as educational programs and exhibitions that present the work of its scientists and curators to the public. The Museum is part of the Smithsonian Institution, the world’s largest museum and research complex. The Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History is open from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Special summer hours, 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., commence Memorial Day through Labor Day. Admission is free.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Images are available upon request.