

★ **The Beauty of the Flower: The Art and Science of Botanical Illustration**

Stephen A. Harris

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Visually stunning and astonishing in scope, Stephen A. Harris's *The Beauty of the Flower* is a history of botanical illustration that has all the makings of a classic reference text.

Hundreds of gorgeous images are used to trace the history of botanical art from the 1400s to the present. Harris addresses the artistry, accuracy, and intent of each illustration, including whether they are based on a specific individual plant or a stylized ideal. He notes that each artist's choices and compromises reflected their era, audience, and scientific assumptions: "[Botanical illustrations] are points of transition, where the illustrator is the filter between a living organism and what we think we know about that organism."

Dozens of historically significant works are profiled, including the *Buch der Natur* (1475), which was one of the first books to feature botanical illustrations as information rather than decoration; the massive *Hortus Eystettensis* (1613), which cataloged more than a thousand plants growing in a wealthy patron's garden; and the *Hortus Elthamensis* (1732), considered one of the era's most important books, which depicted rare and exotic plants growing in a royal apothecary's garden. The *Flora Graeca* (1806-1840), considered a masterpiece of published botanical art, was so expensive to produce that only twenty-five copies were created; a leading botanist joked that "it is necessary to have the permission of a Cardinal" to even view the book. This comprehensive work also includes a capsule history of the printing process (impacting the quality and quantity of books produced), botanical expeditions (essential to the variety of species collected and illustrated), and plant-naming conventions (influencing the categorization of illustrations).

The Beauty of the Flower will delight plant-lovers and scholars alike with its magnificent illustrations and captivating account of the history of botanical study.

KRISTEN RABE (September / October 2023)

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