

## Stilled Life

What is so poignant about the life and death of flowers?

Memento mori and vanitas were sub-genres of still-life painting popular in Holland and Belgium in the 16th and 17th centuries. Such paintings depicted sumptuous fruit and flowers, sometimes wilting and rotting, as an analogy for the brevity of human life, beauty and pleasure.

The short-lived blooms sculpted by Chambers in various stages of sprouting, blooming and withering, are the very symbol of impermanence. We are awed by the vigorous miracle of new life in the thread-like fingers of root reaching from the varicose belly of a bulb in search of water. Or, the triumphant bugle-shaped bloom of a hollyhock erupting from a sturdy stem adorned with tightly curled buds and the delicately drooping folds of a wilted petal. The artist has underscored the precarious lives of these flowers and bulbs by fossilizing them in vitrified clay.

## Of the Earth

What is the connection between ceramics & plants?

Clay is a specific type of fine-grained earth found in areas where water once flowed. It forms as a result of erosion of rocks containing feldspar, which, in turn, is made of minerals, plant life, & animals.

Porcelain is a unique clay composition. Although primarily kaolinite clay, porcelain often contains bone ash, rendering each emergent ceramic object an unintentional monument to unknown creatures.

Earth enriched with carbon & nitrogen from decaying plant and animal life is the fertile ground for plants. However, densely packed clay soils, like those found in Regina, are poor for gardening. The roots of most annuals, perennials, and vegetables are not strong enough to force their way through clay soil.

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## Self-guided tour



Ruth Chambers, *Bulb, Unfolding: Close Observations on Making and Growing*, 2018 – 2021. Photograph by Don Hall.

February 5 - April 11, 2021

**Ruth Chambers  
Tend**

# Botanical Illustration

When is a representation of a flower more than just a flower?

Botanical illustration is the accurate pictorial depiction of plants and plant traits for a scientific purpose, as opposed to flower painting, which is purely decorative. Botanical illustration sprung from discovering and documenting plants for medicinal purposes.

## QR codes

view the QR code through your smartphone camera to access online exhibition materials



exhibition catalogue  
with essay by Julia Krueger



audio tour  
led by Ruth Chambers

# Colonial Expansion



Ruth Chambers, *Looking at Hollyhocks, et alia*, 2018 – 2021.  
Photograph courtesy of the artist.

What kinds of treasures did explorers bring to Europe from other lands?

The Victorian era was a time of exploration. The expansion of the British Empire meant plants previously unknown to Europeans were collected, catalogued and sent back to Colonial powers. Early botanists documented hundreds of plants in the Americas, Asia and Oceania during this period. Many plants, such as potatoes and, in a previous era, tulips, were commercialized by European traders and explorers.

# Apologia

How is botanical illustration feminist?

Chambers recognizes her artistic forebearers in the unsung women who dared to inventory plant biology 18th or 19th centuries. There was a massive appetite for botanical knowledge at the time, but upper-class women often published books anonymously. It was shameful to link a woman's name to any commercial venture at this time. Other botanical artists, such as Berthe Hoola van Nooten who published *The Fruits and Flowers of Java* in 1863, introduced their books with a public apology. Van Nooten explained that poverty resulting from her explorer husband's death made it necessary to profit from her talents as a botanical artist. Can you imagine having to apologize for daring to work and contribute to knowledge?

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