BOTANICA A GARDEN MEDITATION

JEANNINE COOK METALPOINT DRAWINGS

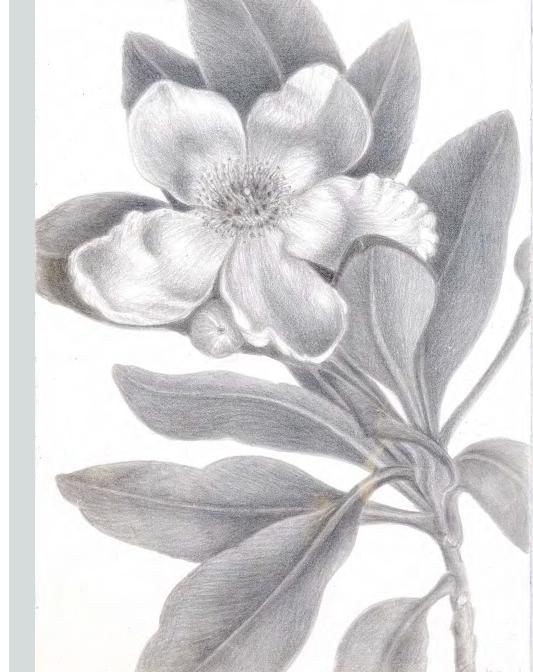
Detail, Fierce but Fragile, Cherokee Rose, silverpoint

Artist Jeannine Cook is an explorer. She observes minute details of nature, seeking to reveal their complex harmonies in metalpoint drawings executed in silver, gold or copper. Searching out tree barks, flowers and stones as she travels the globe, the resultant metalpoint drawings are an intimate record of her devotion to discovering small, quiet, often overlooked moments of grace in the natural world.

Botanica, a gathering of drawings of flowers, herbs and grasses, evokes the spirit in which Albert Einstein reminds us to "look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better". The more closely we look at the natural world, the more we are reminded that nature's structures underpin our lives in ways that we do not often notice.

The human relationship with plants is ancient and intimate. Whether Cook is drawing in one of her two gardens - one in Palma de Mallorca and the other in the coastal marshlands of Georgia in the United States - or in the gardens and wildernesses with which she engages around the world, her dedication to nature recalls the 18th-century botanist-explorers. However, Cook is not seeking to catalogue but to engage in artistic encounters with each individual item. Her approach calls to mind Georgia O'Keeffe's remarks on painting flowers, "When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment. I want to give that world to someone else. Most people in the city rush around so, they have no time to look at a flower. I want them to see it whether they want to or not."

Cook was born in Kenya, and grew up on her family's farm in the Northern Province of Tanzania, near Arusha. From an early age she had a keen interest in agriculture, and worked alongside the Africans, Afrikaans, British and Sikhs employed on the mixed farms. Cook's family were committed environmentalists long before the term became a household word. With her mother, Patricia Wright, guiding her, she learnt the correct botanical structure and petal colour of innumerable flowers grown commercially for seed, whilst also participating in the cultivation of coffee, seed beans and aromatic plants destined for the perfume trade.

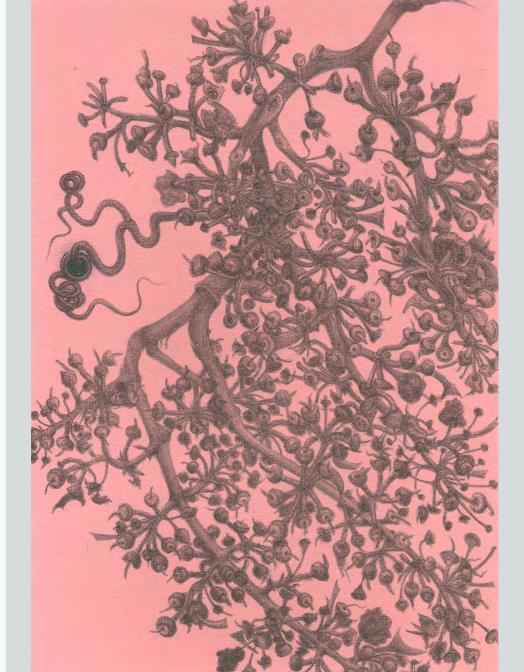


Detail, Loblolly Bay, silverpoint

Cook's explorations of plant structures reveal secret worlds. As viewers, we are invited to look closely and discover, just as the artist has done. But it is not only the subject matter that is compelling. The whisper-soft tonal silvery greys of the work set these drawings apart.

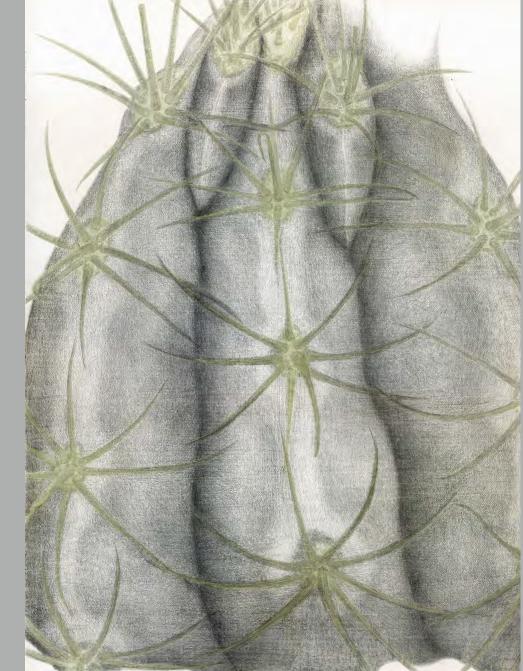
Jeannine Cook is one of a small number of artists worldwide who specialize in metalpoint, a lustrous medium of great antiquity in which silver, gold or other styli are employed for mark-making.

Applying a technique born in the medieval monasteries of Europe, Cook's art aligns itself with the ancient lineage of medieval illuminations while acting as a 21st-century witness. These profoundly present, thoughtful, questioning drawings belong fully to our contemporary world.



Après les Vendanges, silverpoint

"Metalpoint has long been used in so intricate but so individual, become abstract compositions. The details in



Although she draws with various metals, Cook's first love is silverpoint, a subtle medium whose restrained tonal range lends itself to high-key subjects. Whatever the metal, each drawing represents hours of work.

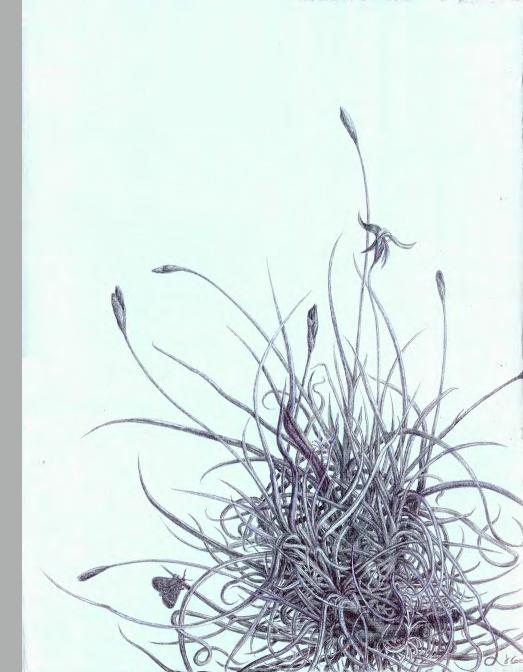
Says Cook of her process, "When I am working plein air I wait for something to call out to me. I then do a rough quick drawing on prepared paper to analyse it, check composition, and learn how the object is put together. I begin drawing almost organically, and work steadily over the whole drawing. Since one cannot easily achieve punchy darks in silverpoint, you have to return again and again to the same place when a layer of silver has oxidised. It becomes a very meditative process."

Schlumbergera, silverpoint, watercolour



What leads an artist to specialize in one medium rather than in another? "In my case, I really fell in love with the lustrous, discreet voice of metal marks on a smooth surface. The sensuous feel of a stylus on the drawing surface, the delicacy and exactitude of the line, the technical fascination of watching how each silverpoint drawing oxidises and evolves with time....all contribute to my love of drawing in metal. While the drawing is slow and meditative there is also a sense of risk. You cannot easily erase the marks, so there is always the latent challenge of 'can I succeed in doing what I want with this drawing?'."

Tillandsia Recurvata Flowers, silverpoint, gouache



Capturing light and shadow while working from nature offers a unique challenge in silverpoint, due both to its narrow range of darks and lights and to the time required to complete a drawing.

"I am in the middle of doing a silverpoint drawing of ginger lilies, those wonderful, fragrant white butterfly-like flowers. I picked the head with the buds half open. With the indoor warmth, the flowers are opening fast, changing all the time, and the play of light and dark is constantly shifting. Since silverpoint is slow, it is a juggling act to keep a coherent composition going, remain reasonably faithful to the flowers and use the light and shadows to tell about the forms of these flowers. Using artificial light, even with daylight bulbs, makes the shadows harsh, so I work in daylight, which brings its own challenges and rewards. Leonardo was right: the play of light and shadow can be the summit and soul of a piece of art."

September Ginger Lilies, silverpoint



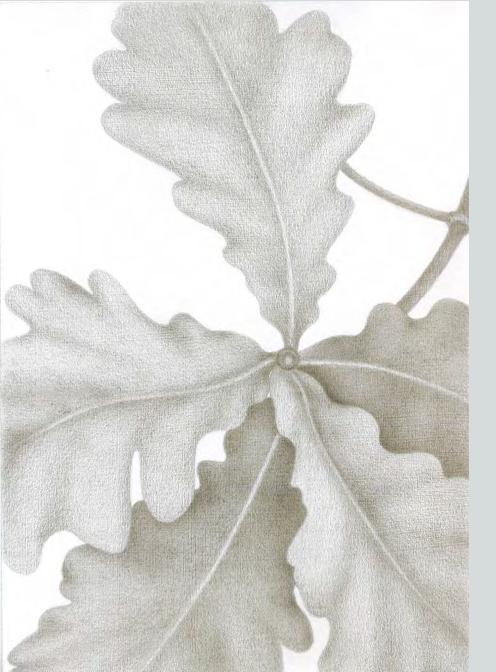
"The 21st-century world needs quietly powerful voices in art as a counterbalance to our overly technological and hyper-stressed lives. I celebrate the resurgence of interest in metalpoint drawing. This medium is a still, pure, voice of profound calm. To draw in metal is an experience in slowing down." Discussing her drawings of flora, the artist says, "As I struggle to draw or paint flowers, I realise repeatedly that flowers are just as challenging a subject as nudes, landscapes or anything else. By the time that an artist has mastered the intricacies of plants, their flowers and leaves, he or she is pretty capable of tackling any other subject imaginable, and in any medium."



"Monet said, 'To see, we must forget the name of the thing we are looking at.' It is as if I need to blank out my conscious mind and just let the rhythms and undulations of the petals and range leaves tell me where to go and how to compose a drawing. The mark-making is driven by only the aspects of the subject that resonate and excite the artist. In fact, as soon as the left side of the brain becomes active, defining or thinking consciously, one gets into trouble with the drawing. And in silverpoint, that is a bad place to reach, given you can't erase the marks made in silver.

In the same way, an artist who embarks on a painting, drawing or other form of depiction of something "real" is, in essence, bringing that thing to life anew, creating it according or her artistic eye. This gives one wide licence to create, to bring existence, and it also connotes a profound personal involvement – assuming that the art is being created with passion. Mercifully, as Monet wisely observed, during the painting or drawing we need first to turn off our brains."

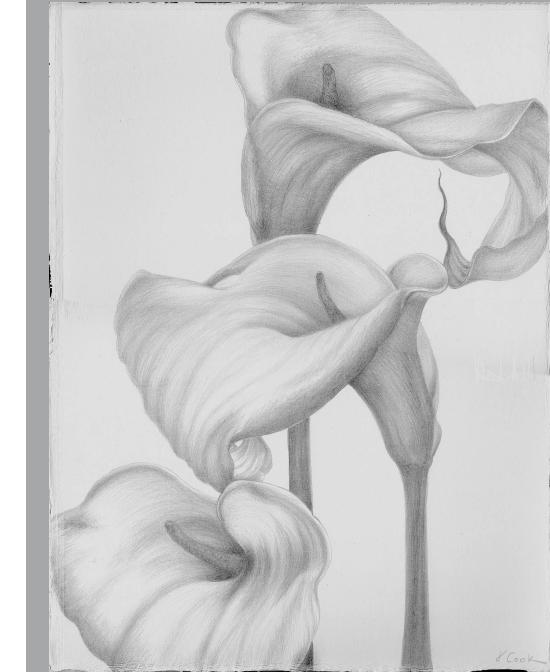
German designer Julie Lohmann said, "There is a paradox at work. On one hand we are distancing ourselves from nature as far as humanly possible, creating our own artificial world, but the more we do that, the more we long to be a part of nature and bring it back into our lives."



Future Growth: The Oak, silverpoint

Within Cook's body of work with plants, certain subjects enjoy pride of place. "Although calla lilies originate in Africa - perhaps why I love them so much, being from that part of the world - they bloom well in the dark of winter and symbolised the passage of the winter solstice for the Romans. They came to Europe many centuries ago, but the first known illustration of them was apparently in 1664, when a calla lily was growing in the Royal Gardens in Paris. Since then, countless artists, from Diego Rivera to Marsden Hartley and Ellsworth Kelly, have depicted callas.

I keep returning to calla lilies. They lend themselves to silverpoint drawing, with their graphic, linear elegance and sensuous forms. They are living sculptures."





"The Regale lily, favoured in paintings about the Annunciation, is an exquisite perfumed lily, which calls me to draw it every time that I find it blooming in my garden in Spain. Each time I am differently inspired: perhaps the light is different, perhaps the flower is slightly different or at a different stage of opening, but whatever it is, I love to return to both callas and Regales just to celebrate their beauty. And while I am drawing them, time stands still, and the world comes into balance."

Lilium Candidium, So Sweetly Perfumed, silverpoint

"The more you delve into a subject, drawing and painting it time and time again, in different lights, in different circumstances and places, the more you realise that you still have a great deal to learn about it. It is a constant voyage of discovery. Even if you understand how things 'fit together' in, say, a flower, each time nature produces some slight difference, some surprise. It all keeps one on one's toes, and reminds one of the need for careful observation, without taking anything for granted. Even drawings done again and again of the same subject afford deeper insights and surprises."

Cook's framing of her botanical subjects often resists classical conventions, her closecropping inviting the viewer too to see a plant more fully - its stem, leaves and other 'supporting' elements rescued from the sidelines and brought fully into the central frame of the picture.

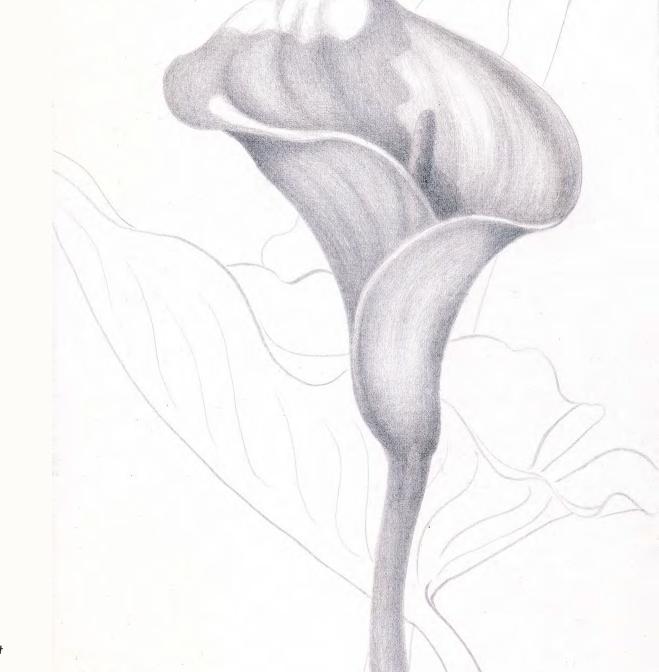
Lilium candidium, silverpoint

"These fragrant Regale lilies were growing in one pot. In another pot was growing another Regale Lily, whose bulb had been purchased at the same time and grown in exactly the same way. Yet one lily produced tight bunches on the head of flowers; the other produced single, far more open flowers, with leaves down the stem that were completely different from the other plants.

Only when I drew them and studied them closely did the differences become really apparent. A casual glance, even an admiring glance, would not have revealed such variations in habit of growth. It taught me to look far more closely at each lily as it grows and flowers."



"Thinking about how I tend to return again and again to the same flowers to draw or paint them, I remember Frank Auerbach, who stated that 'to paint the same head over and over leads to unfamiliarity; eventually you get near the raw truth about it.'"



Truth is not a matter of talking but comes only through labor and observation. And when you have one truth in hand, two others, like the first leaves of a dicotyledonous plant, will probably appear.

John Ruskin

"Every artist who works from real life intuitively knows that familiarity with a subject brings rewards. There is a quiet and insistent alchemy at work when one is involved in depicting natural objects in the studio or painting plein air. The more one observes, the more one sees. The light changes the forms, the colours, the sense of space. The world seems to become quieter, more intense. And the more you paint or draw, beauty appears at every turn. It is as if nature becomes generous with her bounty, allowing the artist to slip on another set of eyes that are keener in perceiving beauty in all its definitions. Perhaps we know the subject matter better in all its complexities after working intensely, but it does often seem that such familiarity allows the brain to relax and see more and more beauty."



Winter Callas I-II Diptych, silverpoint

"I found this generosity of nature at work recently as I started painting and drawing the wonderful southern Azalea indica that had been blooming in our area. The azaleas' beautiful shapes and purity kept "talking" to me. Before they disappeared for the season after their brief burst of glory, I turned again to silverpoint to depict their beauty.

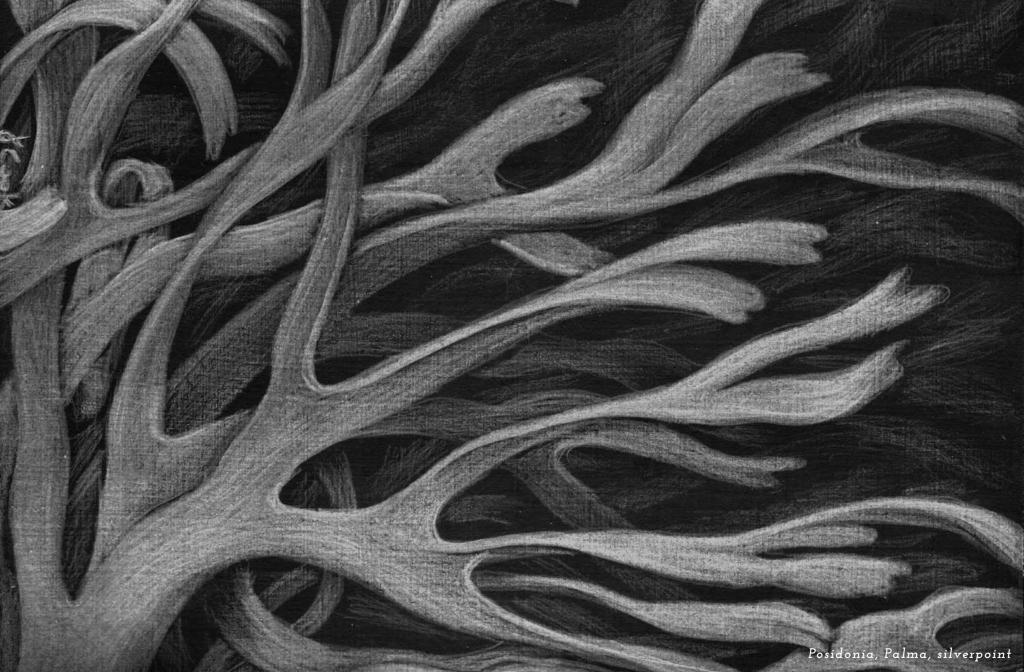
It was as if the azaleas were rewarding me for my close attention to them, each quietly revealing its unique being, a process that deepened as I studied the intricacies of their flower forms, the play of light that described each petal, the individual quirks of each flower and leaf."

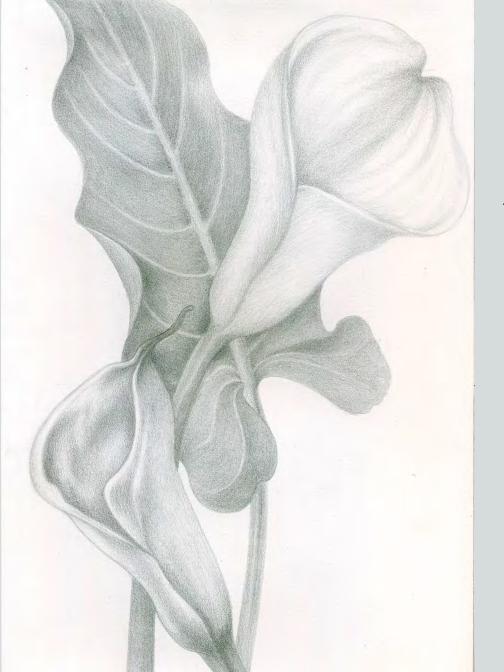
Azalea Trio, silverpoint

"This generosity of nature is consistently available to every artist, I believe. If we can spend enough time becoming immersed in nature, in whatever way we chose to depict its aspects, the rewards of beauty and inspiration, of delight and fascination, of awe and a sense of the marvelous are all there for us if we wish. Our role, our quid pro quo with nature, is to share with others this beauty through our art, to become ambassadors and passionate advocates on behalf of nature."



Grevillea, Palma, silverpoint





What you look hard at seems to look hard at you. Gerard Manley Hopkins

March Calla Lilies, silverpoint



"I owe my mother a big debt of gratitude for any accuracy I may have in colour assessment. As a very young child, barely able to walk, I used to go with her to the brilliantly radiant fields of flowers that we grew for seed on our farm in East Africa. To keep each strain of flower pure and with correct growth, any plant that was of poor quality or with blooms different from the desired type had to be pulled up before it could set seed. I became very accurate in detecting variations in flower colour, and I think I retained that eye in later years. I do remember, too, the countless buckets of beautiful. ebullient flowers that we would take back to the house to enjoy because we hated just to pull up a plant and let it die in the hot tropical sun."

Tropaelum majus, Nasturtium, goldpoint



Live Oak Lines I, silverpoint



Live Oak Lines III, silverpoint



Live Oak Lines II, silverpoint



Live Oak Lines IV,

The leaf that spreads in the light is the only holiness there is.

Botanist Kage Baker

Cook's garden in Georgia has been an extension of her art and a source of her art ever since she created the garden over 25 years ago. "After we built our house and learned about the aspects of living on ancient sand dunes in a sub-tropical climate, I planned out on graph paper what plants to put where. I tried to combine the principles of garden composition and visual pleasures with the practical aspects of a huge amount of shade, sandy soil and a number of old shrubs that had been planted on the site

when it was an oyster cannery.

Over the years, the garden has evolved and matured, with the plants very much choosing where and how they wish to grow. For the most part, I have let nature dictate, for the results have in some ways been more harmonious than if I had adhered more to the carefully manicured look of my British gardening heritage."

Pritchard's Island Palmetto, graphite



"Perhaps the most important element of the garden for my art is the peaceful environment it affords - a backdrop to my daily life and thus to my art-making. The constant visual stimulation and interest combine with my emotional attachment to this garden I created single-handedly. It is also the foreground frame to the marshes and saltwater creeks beyond. Together, these spaces offer tranquillity and the orderliness (most of the time!) of nature, the antidote to our increasingly urbanised society."

"Spanish Moss is a hallmark of coastal Georgia, but this type of moss grows more in Florida. Its delicate flowers burst forth in discrete energy and the elegantly curling leaves are a delight. I drew this silverpoint on a tinted ground to echo the delicate colour of the Spanish Moss, and then used white gouache for the highlights." "I recently spent time in my other home in Palma de Mallorca, Spain. There, it was a green and beautiful spring after bountiful rains earlier in the year, and the island was celebrating with exuberant growth on mountain slopes and down stony valleys.

I had some time to paint and draw, and once again, my sense of place was expanded and extended. I know that wherever one is working outdoors as an artist, you become conscious of all your surroundings. It seemed to be especially the case this spring in Spain: the perfume of orange blossom, lemon blossom, jasmine and roses floated everywhere on the air."

Mme Alfred Carrière Noisette Rose, silverpoint



"As the sun warmed the morning and the sky grew brilliant, the perfumes intensified and became intoxicating. And as I sat quietly, enraptured with all this light and drunk on these exquisite perfumes, I was serenaded by blackbirds singing their wondrous melodies, with tiny serins buzzing excitedly high in the trees above. I was soothed and inspired. As the light changed and the flowers I was depicting opened, moved and faded, I was enveloped in this world in which I was sitting. I felt a bond and a sense of kinship with all the wonderful artists who have worked in the Mediterranean region down the ages - Italian masters like Botticelli or Guercino; Corot, Monet, Renoir, Matisse, Cezanne or Raoul Dufy in France; Spain's Joaquin Sorolla y Bastida. They all responded to the same light, perfumes and sounds. From the flowers painted in ancient Egyptian tombs to the frescoes in opulent homes in Pompeii, artists have always gloried in the floral beauty of the Mediterranean world. I felt it was a great privilege to be immersed in this world of brilliant light, intoxicating perfume and liquid bird song, as I celebrated Mallorca's spring flowers in silverpoint. Promise of Spring, Almond Blossom, silverpoint





Viola, silverpoint

Certain flowers are entwined across the timeline of Cook's life. "Winter in the Mediterranean has definite charms. One of the most delightful of these is the garden fragrant with a carpet of blooming violets. Every time I pick these lovely flowers, I remember the steep banks of Tanzanian mountain terraces bound with violets where I spent hours as a child picking huge perfumed bunches while my mother worked among the flowers in the terrace beds. So it was natural that when I moved to Paris. I was delighted to find there were still ladies selling bunches of flowers on street corners and especially posies of Parma violets, the most fragrant of all violets, said to be from Toulouse."



As for any explorer, even returning home brings discoveries and revelations. "I have been away for ten days. Within the house, I look afresh at things I have not seen during this time: the shapes of orchid petals, shadowed into sculpture, tillandsia flowers which have fully opened in my absence into elegant rhythms amid their undulating tendrils of ephiphyte energy, shadows of ornaments lengthened in the morning sun. These are all aspects of life that can be woven into art-making, I tell myself."

Kalanchoe Madagascarensis, silverpoint



Winter Callas I-II Diptych Silverpoint 15" x 11" 15" x 11" 2007 G-597



Calla Lilies, Palma Silverpoint 15" x 11" 2006 G-560

Corporate collection



Tillandsia recurvata Flowers Silverpoint, gouache 15" x 11" 2010 G-769



Enduring Elegance, Regale Seed Pods Silverpoint 22" x 11" 2009 G-760



Loblolly Bay Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2007 G-612



Fishhook Cactus -Ferocactus emoryi, Silverpoint 12" x 9" 2013 G-906



Lilium Candidium, So Sweetly Perfumed Silverpoint 7" x 10" 2008 G-673



Schlumbergera Silverpoint, watercolour 10" x 7" 2010 G782



Callas Patterns, Palma Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2008 G-672



Kalanchoe Madagascarensis Silverpoint 9" x 7" 2008 G-679



Remembering, Catteleya Graphite, 11" x 15" 2002 G-406

Corporate collection



September Ginger Lilies Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2003 G-457

Private collection



Lilium candidium Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2005 G-534

Private collection



March Calla Lilies Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2018 G-1235



Azucena, Regale Lilies Silverpoint 12" x 9" 2017 G-1189



Mme Alfred Carrière Noisette Rose Silverpoint 12" x 9" 2012 G-820



A Day at Manassas Bog Silverpoint 12" x 9" 2011 G-786

Coastal Wilderness Collection



Future Growth: The Oak Silverpoint 10.25" x 7" 2018 G-1260



Fierce but Fragile, Cherokee Rose, Silverpoint, Prismacolour 7" x 10" 2007 G-606 Birmingham Botanical Gardens



Pritchard's Island Palmetto Graphite 15" x 11" 2005 G-533

Private collection



The First Calla Silverpoint on black 10" x 7" 2012 G-823



Dried Wild Paeony Flowers Silverpoint, watercolour 5.5" x 7.5" 2014 G-970

Private collection



Azalea Trio Silverpoint 7" x 10" 2007 G-603/G-647

Private collection



Posidonia, Palma Silverpoint on black 5" x 7" 2011 G-810



Southern Azaleas Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2007 G-605



Tillandsia recurvata Silverpoint, gouache 6" x 15" 2007 G-663

Private collection



Grevillea, **Palma** Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2010 G-821



Live Oak Lines IV Silverpoint 4.75" x 4.75" 2016 G-1170



Live Oak Lines I Silverpoint 4.75" x 4.75" 2016 G-1166



Live Oak Lines II Silverpoint 4.75" x 4.75" 2016 G-1168



Live Oak Lines III Silverpoint 4.75" x 4.75" 2016 G-1169



Promise of Spring, Almond Blossom Silverpoint 7.5" x 5.5" 2018 G-1224



Après les Vendanges Silverpoint 10" x 7" 2018 G-1241



Live Oak Lichen Silverpoint, white on tinted ground 5.5 x 7.5 2009 G-712

Private collection



Viola Silverpoint 4" x 4" 2018 G-1225



Tropaelum majus, Nasturtium Goldpoint 4" x 4" 2018 G-1232

Contact

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