

A Portrait of the Garden

THE JENKINS FLORILEGIUM PROJECT

At Jenkins, where each season brings subtle shifts in color and form, three artists created a lasting record of the landscape—not through planting, but through the precise layering of graphite and watercolor. Since 2019, three accomplished botanical artists, Carol Ashton-Hergenhan, Debby Dion, and Susan Mintun, meticulously observed, sketched, and painted select members of Jenkins' plant collection. Their goal: to create a florilegium—a timeless, visual archive of Jenkins' most iconic plant species, rendered with scientific accuracy and artistic grace.

A “florilegium,” from the Latin *flos* (flower) and *legere* (to gather), is more than a collection of beautiful illustrations. It is a carefully curated record of plants representative of a particular garden or region—an artistic herbarium of sorts. Across centuries, florilegia have served as both works of art and historical documentation, preserving a snapshot of botanical diversity and horticultural accomplishment.

The idea germinated in 2018, when Carol, Debby, and Susan, longtime friends and fellow artists, discussed collaborating on a project that would reflect their shared love for botanical painting. They envisioned a body of work that not only celebrated plants as artistic subjects but also highlighted the rigorous discipline of botanical illustration. After conversations with then-Executive Director Harold E. Sweetman, Ph.D., the idea of partnering with Jenkins gained momentum. With enthusiastic support from the Board of Directors and staff, a plant list was developed, and by spring 2019, the first strokes were laid on paper.

Unlike traditional floral paintings, botanical art merges beauty with scientific accuracy. The artists do not merely capture the spirit of a plant—they carefully depict how it truly exists in nature. Each painting is the result of deep observation: from measuring petal length and leaf shape to noting growth and decay throughout the seasons. Using watercolors and graphite, they render these subjects with delicate precision on paper or vellum.

The process is as meticulous as it is patient. Much of the work begins in the field where the artists study living specimens growing within the landscape. They collect cuttings to bring back to their studios, where sketches and studies unfold over weeks or months. Color swatches are often painted on-site, using natural light to capture the subtle hues of a fading dogwood bract or the soft underside of a fern frond. Their sketchbooks can quickly become scientific journals filled with notes, observations, and drawings made over multiple seasons, as plants reveal different phases of their life cycles.

Timing is everything. Some species must be observed at a precise moment: when flowers open, fruits ripen, or leaves unfurl. This sometimes means halting progress on a painting and waiting until the following year to complete it.

Over the course of seven years, the three artists have completed 35 works, each a visual tribute to the botanical richness of Jenkins. From native azaleas to towering oaks, the Jenkins Florilegium captures the story of the garden's unique collection.

This spring, the complete Florilegium will be exhibited at Jenkins as part of our 50th Anniversary Celebration. It will offer visitors a new way to see the garden through the eyes of artists who have spent years immersed in its seasonal rhythms and quiet splendor. The Florilegium serves as both a gift to the garden and a legacy for generations to come; a reminder that science and art, when intertwined with patience and care, can deepen our connection to the living world and each other.



CAROL ASHTON-HERGENHAN 🌿

Carol opted for egg tempera and metal points for her exploration of *Tiarella cordifolia* var. *collina*. She chose to capture the essence of the plant's mounding habit by indicating its outer edge in detailed drawings using both silver and copper point (pointed wires of sterling silver and pure copper). Carol tested colors first on paper, then did a practice painting on gesso with egg tempera (which uses egg yolks as the pigment binder) before starting the final piece.



DEBBY DION 🌿

Debby's method is to research the specimen, take notes, do sketches, photograph and color studies, spend a good deal of time on the composition, and do a graphite value study. Sometimes she paints parts of the plant as in the *Carex* study. She kept a dedicated journal for the Florilegium to stay organized. Outside of the Florilegium, Debby keeps individual 'job jackets' for other plants, a practice learned from her days as an art director and commercial illustrator.



SUSAN MINTUN 🌿

Many botanical artists choose to reflect interconnectedness of nature in their work. For her bog plant compositions, Susan depicted a variety of species cultivated at Jenkins, capturing them at different stages of growth. She collected specimens at various stages of development, did sketches, color studies, and photographs of each, then arranged them in a mixed composition. Many layers of paint are required to build the color and depth of values needed to portray each plant realistically.



Plants Featured in the Jenkins Florilegium

This curated selection of canopy trees, understory plants, shrubs, perennials, and vines captures a botanical snapshot of the garden as it stands today, offering a vivid portrait of Jenkins' unique living landscape.

TREES & SHRUBS

- Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) 🌿
- Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) 🌿
- Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) 🌿
- Dwarf fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*) 🌿
- Franklin tree (*Franklinia alatamaha*) 🌿
- Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) 🌿
- Sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) 🌿
- White oak (*Quercus alba*) 🌿
- Rosebay rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) 🌿
- Pinxterbloom azalea (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*) 🌿
- Bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) 🌿

PERENNIALS & VINES

- Northern maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*) 🌿
- Green dragon (*Arisaema dracontium*) 🌿
- Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) 🌿
- Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) 🌿
- Winecup (*Callirhoe involucrata*) 🌿
- Plaintainleaf sedge (*Carex plantaginea*) 🌿
- Spotted pipsissewa (*Chimaphila maculata*) 🌿
- Yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*) 🌿
- Wild bleeding heart (*Dicentra eximia*) 🌿
- Trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) 🌿
- Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) 🌿
- American waterlily (*Nymphaea odorata*) 🌿
- Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) 🌿
- Cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*) 🌿
- Purple passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) 🌿
- Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) 🌿
- Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) 🌿
- Pitcherplant (*Sarracenia* sp.) 🌿
- Indian pink (*Spigelia marilandica*) 🌿
- Stokes' aster (*Stokesia laevis*) 🌿
- Heartleaf foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia* var. *collina*) 🌿
- Red trillium (*Trillium erectum*) 🌿
- Broadleaf cattail (*Typha latifolia*) 🌿
- Yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*) 🌿