

Wildly Exquisite: Florida's Native Plants

By Jan Sjostrom

Botanical art is an exacting art form. A successful work not only has to be technically proficient and aesthetically pleasing, it also must be absolutely accurate. So why would an artist choose such a demanding means of expression? Let artist Carol Woodin explain. She's the organizer of Wildly Exquisite: Florida's Native Plants, opening Jan. 18 at the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach. "The variety of plants is endless," she said. "There are really hundreds of thousands of things out there to paint and there's always something new to find."

Visitors might make similar discoveries when they tour the exhibition, which features 34 artworks by 29 members of the American Society of Botanical Artists. The exhibition might nudge viewers "to see that there is beauty within these species of plants that are not always perceived as being beautiful," said Amanda Skier, the Foundation's Executive Director. As Woodin said about the maypop, "it's so interesting to look at." It's also a host plant for longwing butterflies. Woodin can't grow passion flowers in her garden in the Catskills, because it's too far north. But Florida residents can.

Encouraging the return of native plants to the landscape has become an increasingly important part of the Foundation's mission to preserve Palm Beach's distinctive character. The exhibition presents a case for native plants through a medium that's popular with many South Florida residents, Skier said. Foundation horticulturalist Susan Lerner's captions include information about where the plants grow, how they've been used over the centuries and wildlife they sustain. After touring the show guests can go next door to stroll Pan's Garden, the Foundation's native plant garden. While there they might see a ruby-throated hummingbird sipping on a coral honeysuckle, as it is in Karen Coleman's colored pencil drawing, as well as many other plants in the exhibition.

The juried show features some of the society's most accomplished artists. Jean Emmons is one of the best colorists working in the field today, said Woodin, who is the society's director of exhibitions. Viewers who look closely at her watercolor of the white-topped pitcher plant will see "a festival of colors," she said.



Carol Woodin, the American Society of Botanical Artists' director of exhibitions, chose the maypop passionflower as the subject of her watercolor on vellum entry.



Wendy Hollender's detailed colored pencil and watercolor pen and foundation horticulturalist Susan Lerner's favorite works in the exhibition.

