

ASBA Around the World

The Dutch Society of Botanical Artists

By Anita Walsmit Sachs-Jansen

Editor's Note: ASBA member Sachs-Jansen narrates her pathway to botanical art, and her enthusiastic promotion of the genre in her home country:

My first acquaintance with botanical art was through Dr. Shirley Sherwood's first volume. I was so enthusiastic about it that I went out to look for botanical art courses. I started with a course with the London Chelsea Physic Garden, and became even more aware that this was the thing I had looked for all my life. I found out about the Society of Botanical Artists in England, and thought the challenge to pass the selections and become a member would be a logical next step in my botanical art journey. In the Netherlands there was no education for botanical artists, but having been an artist all my life, with a fashion design education at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, The Hague, I submitted my work to the SBA with high hopes and was accepted.

I went to the Botanical Garden in Leiden to draw and the *hortulana* (curator of Leiden's Hortus Botanicus) advised me to go to the National Herbarium Nederland (NHN) to meet Jan van Os the scientific illustrator. And I did, of course! The mission of the National Herbarium of the Netherlands is to generate and transfer knowledge on the nature, extent and origin of botanical diversity. It thus helps to provide a comparative basis for all botanical science and sustainable utilization of the biosphere. Os taught me the scientific part of botanical art and asked me to come and work on the Herbarium also, where I have worked for 8 years.

Thanks to my job at the National Herbarium Nederland, we were invited to send work to the Hunt Institute, and that was my first acquaintance with the ASBA, and with the USA. Of

course I wanted to be a member of such a wonderful, organized society. After several workshops with, to my opinion, the best artists worldwide, and after I had obtained a silver-gilt and 2 gold medals at the Royal Horticultural Society of England, I thought it might be time to try to awaken the Netherlands, and point out to the Dutch people their rich and famous history about plants and art. I decided to start our own botanical artists society. I had started to teach botanical workshops myself and, with the help and support of my best pupils we started the Dutch Society of Botanical Artists, founded on April 12, 2006.

First, I compared the bylaws of the SBA and ASBA and found

a kind of middle ground between the 2 societies. After a few meetings with some further discussion, we were able to go to the civil law notary and legalize our new society. Our aim is to bring botanical art and illustration to the public eye, organize workshops, master classes, lectures, trips, exhibitions etc. We have several types of memberships: working or artist members, aspiring working members, associate members, honorary members and sponsors.

The Society's definition of botanical art is a botanical drawing or painting of a plant showing accurate, detailed and scientific reproduction

of the plant or parts of the plant, with special attention given to the diagnostic features which set one plant apart from another. The present day botanical artist builds on a centuries-old tradition, which combines research with accurate reproduction of plant material, as well as creativity in composition and expression.

Now we are 1.5 years old with about 80 members, of which 6 are international members. We have had several excursions to botanical gardens, participated in exhibitions in museums, have had articles about our members in several magazines and our workshops fill up quickly.

We have a very nice newsletter on line, appearing every 2 months and a lovely website, at www.botanischkunstnaarsnederland.nl. We try to keep our expenses as low as possible and do as much as we can on-line. Our problem is, I think our language, to be able to be an international organization, but we try as hard as possible and we can use every kind of support.



Anita Walsmit Sachs-Jansen (second from right, on far side of table) leads discussion with the newly formed board of the DSBA.



A DSBA organized class in botanical art takes place in the classrooms at the Hortus, Netherlands



Anita's mentor, Jan van Os, winner of the 2007 Jill Smythies award, pictured at the London Linnean Society's presentation ceremony