

April 4, 1989 - 16

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NEW VAG EXHIBITION FEATURES DRAWINGS BY  
B.C. ARTIST CHARMIAN JOHNSON

FLORA: DRAWINGS BY CHARMIAN JOHNSON, the first in a new series of VAG exhibitions highlighting the work of contemporary B.C. artists, opens Saturday, April 15 at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Thirty-seven large pen and ink "portraits" of exotic flowers executed through direct observation of plants in their native habitat in Mediterranean North Africa and tropical Hawaii, will be on view through June 5. This is the first solo exhibition of Johnson's drawings.

The former drawing teacher, art educator and lecturer is best known as a potter, particularly for her finely thrown porcelain bowls. Johnson has taught at the University of British Columbia and the University of Saskatchewan and her ceramics have been shown in group and solo exhibitions at the UBC Fine Arts Gallery, the UBC Museum of Anthropology, the Grand Forks Art Gallery. Her drawings have been seen in group exhibitions at the Surrey Art Gallery, the UBC Museum of Anthropology, the Art Gallery of Victoria, the Glenbow Museum, the Museum of Natural Sciences, National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.

Johnson, who completed graduate studies in the UBC Faculty of Education in 1969, gave up full-time teaching in 1977 to pursue a full time career as an artist, potter and traveller. She re-kindled her interest in drawing in 1978, beginning with the series of Flora drawings on exhibition at the VAG.

Johnson has spent the past ten years studying the growth, structure and individual characteristics of exotic flowers through drawing. Her work is imbued with minute botanical detail and a decorative "hedonistic" quality that results in a mode of floral art with a unique aesthetic impact.

This exhibition, organized by VAG curator Lorna Farrell-Ward, is financially supported by the Government of British Columbia.

EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

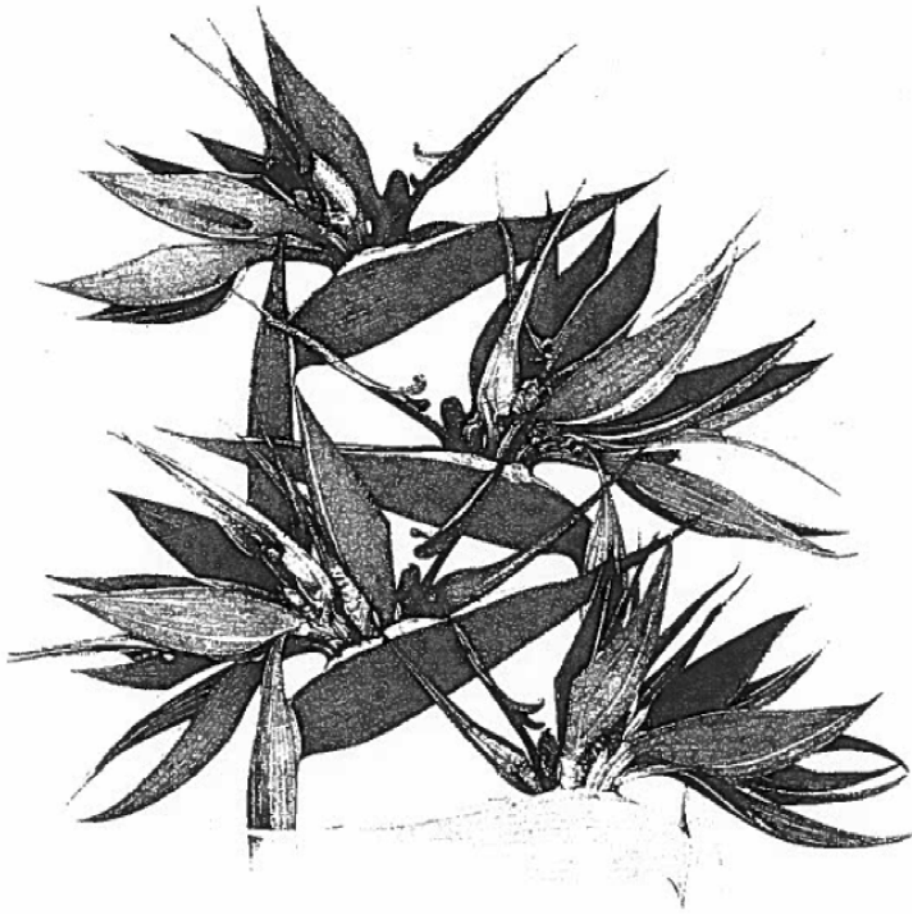
Charmian Johnson will lead a walk-through of her exhibition at 5:30 p.m., Thursday April 20 as part of the Gallery's Rendez-vous with Art series. For reservations, please call the VAG admissions desk at 682-4668. Admission which includes hors d'oeuvres and beverages, is \$2.50 for members and \$3.50 for non-members.

CHARMIAN JOHNSON

April 15  
to  
June 5  
1989

Sponsored by  
Wall Financial  
Corporation

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY



## LIST OF WORKS

All of the drawings are pen and ink, unless indicated.  
All works courtesy of the artist except where indicated.

- 1 *Cattleya Irene Holquin* 1988
- 2 *Cattleya Jane Russell X Cattleya War Chant* 1988
- 3 *Cattleya Portal of Paradise X Cattleya Emerald Isle* 1988
- 4 *Cattleya Empress Belts X Cattleya Princess Belts* 1986

- 5 *Kona Sunset: Brassocattleya Jennel Tokunaga* 1988
- 6 *Spider Orchid: Brassia Verucosa* 1986
- 7 *Vanda Papualau Queen X Vanda Pukole* 1986
- 8 *Dendrobium Cuttings, Kailua Market* 1986
- 9 *Foxtail Orchid: Rhyncostus Violacea X Rhyncostus Gigantea* 1987
- 10 *Paphiopedilum Acmodoneum* 1988
- 11 *Paphiopedilum Winston Churchill* 1986
- 12 *Paphiopedilum Callosum* 1988
- 13 *Antherium Andraenum* 1988
- 14 *Hibiscus, 'Bride', Rosa Sinensis* 1988
- 15 *Fiddlehead, Ama'u Ama'u, Sadleria Cyatheidoides* 1988
- 16 *Bird of Paradise: Strelitzia Reginae* 1986

- 17 *Passionflower: Passiflora Caerulea* 1986
- 18 *Oliva Lehua; Metrosideros Polymorpha* 1986
- 19 *Night Blooming Cereus; Hylocereus Undatus* 1986
- 20 *Shelf Ginger: Awapuhi-Luhiluhii; Alpina Zerumber* 1986
- 21 *Florist's Parrot Tulip* 1985
- 22 *Florist's Chrysanthemum* 1988
- 23 *Calla Lily; Zantedeschia Aethiopica* 1978
- 24 *Lily of the Nile; Agapanthus Africanus* 1980
- 25 *Bird of Paradise: Strelitzia Reginae* 1986 (illustrated)
- 26 *Passionflower, Lilikoi; Passiflora Edulis Flavicarpa* 1985-1986

- 27 *Landscape with two Hibiscus* 1985
  - 28 *Landscape with four Hibiscus* 1985-1986
  - 29 *Landscape with Lady Slipper Orchid (Paph. Insigne)* 1985
  - 30 *Faba Bean; Vicia Faba* 1981
  - 31 *Goldcoast Jasmine; Jasminum Dichotomum* 1980
  - 32 *Etruscan Honeysuckle, Lonicera Etrusca* 1979
  - 33 *Rose* 1980
  - 34 *Lily* 1980
  - 35 *Spring, North Africa; Chrysanthemum Segetum and Oralis* 1980
  - 36 *Windflower* 1980
  - 37 *Tangiers Iris; Iris Tingitana* 1981
- Courtesy of Gary Lee Nova

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Vancouver Art Gallery is grateful to Charmian Johnson for her cooperation and to Wall Financial Corporation and The Canada Council for their generous support. To the staff of the Gallery, my sincere appreciation for their assistance and expertise.

Gary Dufour  
Senior Curator

## INTRODUCTION

The first solo exhibition of Charmian Johnson's black and white drawings introduces her floral art. Johnson's Flora have been chosen because of the artist's interest in and affection for each as an entity. She has studied their growth, structure, and individual characteristics to communicate these in her art. She has not limited herself to the means and methods used for specifically scientific representation of plants but has, through the considered use of techniques of drawing and of design, allowed the viewer to see the flora in a uniquely realistic and dimensional context. They become, in fact, as stated by Charmian Johnson, portraits of flowers.

The thirty-seven large drawings in this exhibition are the result of Johnson's direct observation of living plants in Morocco, Hawaii, and occasionally in Vancouver. The drawings often suggest the geographical area of their origin, some of them even being titled landscapes. The Moroccan drawings are decorative and suggest, usually through configurations of blacks and a resulting labyrinthine effect, the visual richness of Tangier itself and of its outskirts carpeted in myriad flora. The Hawaii drawings are more spatially open, influenced by the vast sea, sky, and endless horizon line of coastal habitat. This is often alternated with a description of dense and intimate jungle foliage. It was also in Hawaii that Johnson's fascination with the orchid began. The abundance of flowering plants found initially in Morocco and then in Hawaii continue to be a resource for Charmian Johnson's imagery and a stimulus within her ongoing series of drawings.

Lorna Farrell-Ward  
April, 1989

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I have always loved the seductive blacks of etching inks and drawing inks, and seem to never tire of the varieties of blacks and greys that the pen, with them, can create on paper. So too, I am delighted with the sense of white light that I perceive in and around the darkly drawn image. Through the use, in concert, of very fine gauges of pen points, I can create areas of translucent palpability which carry, for me, the connotation of rich tropical light, diffuse forest ambience, or mediterranean luminescence. For me they may even suggest colour.

My attachment to flowers springs from my childhood and my mother's beautiful English garden. Each species manifests unique characteristics within a sensual, natural, growth cycle. I observe the intrinsic visual properties of each, much as a portrait artist dwells on the character of each sitter. It is my hope that through slight stylized adjustments I might intimate both the natural inclination and the spatial context of each specimen.

Each drawing is, if you like, a proposal that the flowers unfold on the page in their own inimitable way, just as a delicate and translucent bowl unfolds in the hand.

Charmian Johnson  
April, 1989

## BIOGRAPHY

Charmian Johnson is a Vancouver artist, a potter for twenty-five years particularly known for her finely thrown porcelain bowls. She has taught drawing and art education within the public school system as well as at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of British Columbia. Johnson received her formal training in drawing and graphics in the Department of Art Education at the University of British Columbia, where she benefited from the instruction of several excellent teachers, among them Jim MacDonald and Bob Steele.

In order to concentrate on pottery and on teaching, Charmian Johnson set aside her drawing for some fifteen years, eventually returning to drawing by beginning this ongoing series of pen and ink drawings in 1978.

Charmian Johnson, born in 1939, lives in Vancouver's east end where she has her garden, her pottery, and her drawing studio.