

Hunt displays Donovan watercolors

Exhibit of 19th-century botanical paintings

The flowers from the United Kingdom’s botanical gardens of the 1820s may be relics of the past. However, Edward Donovan’s watercolors of them make his exhibit in the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation the next best thing.

Donovan, born in Cork, Ireland in 1768, was a natural history collector, illustrator for natural history publications, and owner of the London Museum and Institute of Natural History. His published works included natural histories of British birds, plants, insects, shells, and fish, as well as the insects of China and India.

The Hunt exhibit focuses on Donovan’s fascination with plants and flowers and shows his collection of watercolors that depicted the exotic flowers of the decade, which were all drawn between 1823 and 1830. The flowers were owned by wealthy estate owners, who placed them in their personal gardens. Donovan came from a wealthy family himself, and thus ran in the same social circles. The flowers were obtained from colonial leaders and explorers from locations all around the world, including China, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, Nepal, Siberia, and the eastern United States. Many of them were sent as gifts to the estate owners.

Donovan’s watercolors are delicately depicted, each with his initials, E.D., etched in pencil in the lower right-hand corner. The careful preservation of Donovan’s work makes them look relatively recent, in no way appearing as watercolors done almost 200 years ago. Although drawn two-dimensionally, the flowers look realistic and, at first glance, it is hard to tell that they have been painted.

The bottoms of the paintings include not only Donovan’s initials, but also a series of hyphenated numbers. While at first scholars were not familiar with these numbers, they later realized that Donovan had documented the Linnaean arrangements (a biological classification method) of each of his depicted flowers. Some of Donovan’s writings on the bottoms of his watercolors even include the names of estate owners from whose gardens the flowers came from.

A part of the exhibition puts the open pages of *Curtis Botanical Magazine* side-by-side with some of Donovan’s depictions of the same flowers. The clerodendrum, for example, looks remarkably similar in both representations, which are from the same year, 1824.

The flowers in Donovan’s paintings include begonias, chrysanthemums, azaleas, and a number of unique hybrids that were completely new to the people in the United Kingdom, as the plants had only previously been known in their native areas. However, Donovan’s work was part of a larger movement of flower identification by amateur naturalists and trained botanists worldwide.

The 1820s were a decade of great growth for horticultural and scientific societies. Donovan himself was a member of two such organizations, the Linnaean Society and the Wernerian Natural History Society. The largest group of this type, the Horticultural Society of London was established in 1804 and created its first garden in 1821, a botanical garden open to the public. Donovan depicted several flowers from this garden, as noted by the “H.S.” in the lower right-hand corner of many of his watercolors. The wealthy estate owners also greatly expanded their flower collections during this time into arboretums, greenhouses, gardens, and conservatories.

Donovan’s watercolors were tipped into five albums and combined into a book published in 1830. However, despite the success of Donovan’s publication, his life worsened soon after the book was released.

In 1817, the Napoleonic wars resulted in the closing of Donovan’s museum, the London Museum and Institute of Natural History, which caused an economic depression that severely hit Donovan and his family and did not allow him enough money to continue his career. Although his book remained popular, he had sold 50 percent of its rights to his publishers. The publishers took advantage of Donovan and kept an even higher percentage of the proceeds. Donovan published an essay in 1833, pleading for the public’s assistance and threatening to sue the publishers. However, the response to his plea was minimal at best. Consequently, Donovan lived in poverty until 1837 when he died in London of natural causes. His family was left impoverished.

Donovan’s legacy lives on through his many watercolors. The works currently on display came from Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt’s personal collection. Hunt, born in 1882, had a strong affinity for plants and gardens from her youth, as well as a fascination with rare and old books. Thus, Donovan’s botanical book was keen to her interest. Hunt’s collection alone contains 709 of his works, only some of which are displayed in the exhibit.

Sabrina Porter | News Editor

The exhibit, in the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation on the fifth floor of Hunt Library, runs through June 29.

Everything you need to know

About cheating and falling out of love

Dear Rachael,

At what point do you decide that your feelings for your significant other aren't going to grow into everlasting love, and call it quits? I want to like my S.O., I really do, but it seems like I want to be single in the morning and with him in the evening or single when everything's normal and with him when something's particularly bad or particularly good. What do I DO? Heeellp meee pleeeassee.

—Definitely Dazed Darling

Oh you dazed and confused victim, you,

So maybe I’m doing too much with all of this alliteration. Nevertheless, I think you, my dear, should invest in your gut feeling. No matter how big your gut is, the feeling that it provides is probably the easiest way to find out how you really feel about a situation. Without thinking about repercussions or other people’s feelings, think about *you*.

If I was your gut I’d tell you to break it off. Then, I’d demand delicious Girl Scout Cookies — because a gut has got to do what a gut has got to do. If you have to remind yourself to like your boo, or convince yourself that he’s worthy, then that’s already too much work. If you were really into him, then you wouldn’t be constantly doubting yourself. So really, in this situation, maybe you should go for the Trefoils and do some serious gut-listening. Not only will you figure out what to do, but you’ll get cookies either way, and that can’t be bad.

Get it on!

—Rachael

Dear Rachael,

What do you do when your girlfriend cheats on you? Can you make it work by cheating on her for payback?

—Clearly Confused Codswallop

To another dazed and confused victim,

Did you note the sarcasm? If so, you’re just one step closer to becoming a real man. Okay, so that was harsh, but obviously you need tough love or something like it because you are just acting like a child. A child that was never hugged.

If you want to work out your relationship with your significant other, then paying her back by cheating on her is probably not the smartest thing to do — especially if she has any sense. Deny her your sex for a while, give her the silent treatment, make her realize what a sham life would be without you in it. If you’re all hotness or she genuinely cares and the cheating can be explained as confused boredom or a drunken mistake, she’ll crawl or walk or run or skip back to you. And if she doesn’t, well, maybe you are better off without her. Or you could just talk to her and give her a piece of your mind. But you should definitely deny her your sex.

Work it out!

—Rachael

Need advice? Send queries to advice@thetartan.org.