

Garden NOTES



NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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BOTANICAL ARTISTRY

LINDA PLATO



Fall Bouquet watercolor © Jean Emmons

YOU HAVE LIKELY seen Jean Emmons botanical artwork on the Heronswood plant catalogs, Ann Lovejoy books, Northwest Horticultural Society invitations, and if you're really lucky, on the walls of your home. A botanical artist on Vashon Island, Jean's intense observation skills translate into minutely-detailed plant portraits that appear to be more lifelike than those in a real garden.

"I have a compulsion to paint plants. I can never make a sunflower or a dahlia as beautiful as it looks in real life—the form, the design, the color, the mathematical precision of the center, the way the light goes through the tissue—each one of these aspects is a lifetime of study. It is very humbling," writes Jean in her biography.

Jean didn't always draw plants. She started out as an abstract painter, creating large minimalist color fields. But her interest in the natural world, scientific illustration, and a compulsion to garden lead her to botanical painting. She learned her current technique—based on medieval manuscript illumination—from the late

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SNAILS AND SLUGS

TONI CROSS

THIS IS THE STORY of a girl who loved living things. She loved people and animals and butterflies, and plants most of all. This is the story of how she learned to kill.

I love big-leaved plants. The bigger the leaf, the closer to God. Tropicals, hostas, even plain old *Bergenia cordifolia* make my mouth water. I planted big-leaved vegetables, even if I didn't eat them, just because I liked the way they looked. Notice I say "planted." This is my tale of snails and slugs—my nemesis, my albatross, my cross, my scourge. Patricia Highsmith ("The Talented Mr. Ripley") collected snails as pets. She tucked them into her shirtfront when traveling. Patricia was, let's face it, an odd bird. But are we not all odd birds, arriving at a place we never imagined we could be?

My hadj, my journey, began a number of years ago when I got my first job in the green industry. I was hired to be the second gardener on an estate in Medina, where big-leaved plants abounded. It was also my first close meeting with, I shudder to say, snails and slugs. The head gardener had a shocking way of snipping the snails and slugs in half with a pair of scissors, a practice I found disturbing at the time. Couldn't we all just get along? No, in fact, we couldn't. He would blithely encourage me to do some snipping of my own, but I tried to avoid it. Instead, I used many bottles of bait on the estate, around the perimeter of every big-leaved plant. Baiting on a good day could take two-and-a-half hours. It didn't always make a difference.

Later, when I worked for landscape architecture companies, I could forget the damage done by those creatures. If

we installed a landscape but weren't hired to maintain it, one never had to see the ruin. It remained in amber, perfect. Not so in my Ballard garden.

Old-timers say Ballard once had very few snails. The bergenia seen in every Ballard rockery was as smooth and unblemished as a baby's behind. "Why," they say, "our hostas were as big as Dick Cheney's head and never got eaten! Didn't have any o' those critters here! Musta come in from Queen Anne."

I began, gently at first, to fight back. What did I use? What didn't I use? Before gardening organically, I used Corry's powders—what a mess! When the liquid products arrived, I tried those. I have no pets and maybe I could sacrifice a kid or two just to preserve the cannas—especially one of the really mouthy kids. Those products did no good, and the snail population exploded. Rarely seeing a slug in the garden, I became convinced that the snails had become carnivorous and were consuming them.


I placed strips of copper around every glorious big-leaved plant. Apparently "my" snails liked that little vibratory shock. I spread hazelnut shells. The squirrels had a field day looking for nutmeats that didn't exist. Sluggo was no-go. I dropped snails in buckets of water. They lived, backstroking, for hours. This slow torture offended me, for a while. A shred of human kindness remained. However, my transformation



soon became complete. I decided on a more direct approach.

Gingerly plucking a snail by its shell and tossing it into the street, I hoped a good "thump" would scare them off to the sewer or another garden. (All is fair in love and gardening.) Then I progressed to snipping the snails in two—until I heard that snipping leaves the eggs inside viable.

Next, I crushed the snails between bricks. Extremely disgusting, it still provided a strange sort of satisfaction: those "pops" as the shells exploded. After one rain, I emerged in my robe to get the newspaper and spent an hour crushing snails. The neighbors' curtains fluttered, but I was relentless, gripped by a feeling I can't describe. Snails collected in my basement stairwell outside. I turned it into a snail abattoir. Did you know snails can climb to second story windows? A riveting moment when first observed, it defines the parameters of the game. Tiring of using bricks or boots (the remains stuck in the treads), I began—the horror! the horror! —using my gloved fingers. Their deaths became personal and intimate, as all deaths between hunter and prey should be.

I am Shiva, Vishnu, She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed. I take off the gloves... 

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