

A Cordial Word

Since I was a child and no matter where I have lived, I have always loved flower gardening. Digging in and preparing the dirt, carefully arranging seeds or fragile young plants, and then watching all grow and bloom in the summer sun with birds, bees and butterflies flying around - pure magic. An amateur gardener, I am always anxious for the first hint of spring so I can rush out into the garden and start the seasonal round again.

My personal appreciation for flowers has been reflected in the visual arts where, for millennia, flowers have been a common theme explored by artists. One reason for this is their unquestioned beauty. A second reason for their popularity with artists is that, traditionally, flowers have been rich in both religious and secular symbolism. In Ancient Egyptian mythology, for example, the lotus flower symbolized the sun and had strong ties to the concept of creation and rebirth. Lotus flowers are thus a feature in Egyptian wall paintings and relief sculptures. During medieval times flowers appeared in the borders of illuminated manuscripts and as details within larger paintings or decorative backgrounds in tapestries. In these early art works the flowers rendered were often symbolic in nature. A white lily, for instance, was a symbol of purity and many paintings of the Virgin Mary contain white lilies for this reason. In 16th and 17th century Dutch still life paintings, meanwhile, flowers, shown wilting or decaying, are often symbols of mortality.

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the use of flowers as independent subjects in art began in earnest. This was due to an increasing fascination with this subject, facilitated by advances in the study of botany and by the importation of numerous new species of flowers into western Europe. During this period new species, such as the tulip, were very precious and expensive and this encouraged their botanically exact rendering by artists. By the 19th century the decorative potential of flowers became the most enduring impulse behind their use in visual art and through the art movements of realism, impressionism, post-impressionism and ultimately abstraction, artistic representations of flowers came to focus on explorations of pattern and colour.

The exhibition *A Cordial Word*, featuring works from the collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, shines a spotlight on flowers and the flower garden. Expressing a variety of artistic styles and media, the art works in this exhibition invite viewers to reflect on the beauty of these natural wonders and appreciate and nurture the flowers in their midst.

The exhibition A Cordial Word was curated by Shane Golby and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA TREX program is financially supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition to venues throughout Alberta. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves over 60 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

Our Thanks

The artists

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

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David More, *Poppy Pink Morning*, 2000, Oil on masonite
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

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Maureen Scott
Amaryllis Phase #1, 1990
 Watercolour on paper
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation
 for the Arts

Amaryllis is a small genus of flowering bulbs with two species. The better known is *Amaryllis belladonna*, a native of the Western Cape region of South Africa. Plants of this genus are also known as belladonna lily, Jersey lily, naked lady, amarillo, Easter lily and March lily, although Amaryllis is only distantly related to true lilies.

Amaryllis belladonna was introduced into cultivation at the beginning of the eighteenth century. A hybrid was bred in the 1800s in Australia but the hybrids are quite distinct as the many shades of pink also have stripes, veining, darkened edges, white and light yellow centers.

The amaryllis is most commonly found with a bold crimson hue. It is, however, also available in white, yellow and pink.

According to Greek Mythology, Amaryllis was a shepherd woman who loved another shepherd named Alteo. Alteo only loved flowers and said that he would love the woman who brought him a blossoming plant. Amaryllis therefore dressed up in white and stood at Alteo's door every night for 30 nights. During her visits she would pierce her heart using a golden arrow. When Alteo opened the door on the 30th night, he found a red flower that came from the blood of Amaryllis' heart.

In the Victorian age the amaryllis came to be symbolic of success after a struggle. It also represents a job well done and is given to people as a token of recognition. When this flower is given to an artist, it is a way of encouraging creativity. The amaryllis is also related to the Christmas season. Known as the Christmas lily, it adds joy to the home during Christmas.



Janine Hall
Geranium, 1992
 Oil
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation
 for the Arts

Geranium is a genus of 422 species of flowering annual, biennial, and perennial plants that are commonly known as cranesbills. They are found throughout temperate regions of the world and the mountains of the tropics, but mostly in the eastern part of the Mediterranean region.

A number of geranium species are cultivated for horticultural and pharmaceutical use. Many species are perennials and winter-hardy, grown for their attractive flowers and foliage. They are long-lived and most have a mounding habit. Other species are not winter-hardy in cold areas and are grown in specialized gardens or containers.

The symbolism of the geranium flower is usually associated with the type or colour of the flowers. Common symbolic meanings include

- Horseshoe Geranium - symbolic of stupidity or folly
- Ivy Geranium - favor
- Lemon Scented Geranium - symbolic of unexpected meetings
- Oak Leaf Geranium - symbolic of true friendship
- White geraniums - once believed to repel snakes - also thought to promote fertility
- Red Geraniums - according to Wicca beliefs, red geraniums planted near a home's door will warn of approaching strangers by facing the direction of the stranger. Red geraniums are also considered protective and symbolize good health
- Pink Geraniums - used in love spells

A geranium's message also depends on the situation. As a house-warming gift, it may represent friendship or wishes for good health. In North America the geranium flower is usually seen as a symbol of happiness and positive emotions.



Sharon Simonds Chia
Chinese Marble Vase with Tulip
 1990
 Oil on masonite
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation
 for the Arts

Tulips are members of the lily flower. They are spring-blooming perennial flowers. The flowers are usually large, showy and brightly coloured and often have a different coloured blotch at the base of the tepals (petals and sepals).

Tulips are indigenous to mountainous areas with temperate climates. They thrive in climates with long, cool springs and dry summers and correspond to a band running from south-east Europe (Ukraine, Russia) and Turkey through Syria, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Jordan through Azerbaijan and to central Asia. They can also be found in the western Himalayas, southern Siberia, Mongolia and as far as the northwest of China.

It is believed that cultivation of tulips began in Persia during the 10th century. In the sixteenth century tulips were imported from the Turkish empire to Europe. By 1594 tulips were grown in the Netherlands and the Dutch tulip industry began.

Tulips are called *lale* in Turkish. When written in Arabic, *lale* has the same letters as Allah and so tulips are a holy symbol. As tulips were associated with the Turkish royal House of Osman, tulips are also a symbol of abundance and indulgence. While tulips in Turkish culture represented paradise on earth and had almost a divine status, in the Netherlands they became associated with the brevity of life.

Different tulip colours have different meanings. Yellow tulips symbolize cheerful thoughts while purple represent royalty. The symbolism of red tulips may derive from a Turkish legend. According to legend, a prince named Farhad was in love with a maiden named Shirin. When Farhad learned that Shirin had been killed, he was so grief-stricken that he rode his horse over a cliff and died. It is said that a scarlet tulip sprang from each drop of his blood and so red tulips came to symbolize 'perfect love.' In Christianity tulips symbolize passion, belief and love. White tulips represent forgiveness and both white and purple tulips are important symbols for Easter.