

BROMELIANA

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ART, ARTISTS AND BROMELIADS

by Herb Plevier

What is it about bromeliads that attracts and even addicts certain growers to them? After all, broms are not very popular or well known compared to orchids, African violets, and other plant families that have large cult followings.

I believe there is an esthetic sensibility for architectural form in brom growers that leads them to notice and appreciate the rosette architecture in bromeliads. And there is still another narrower sensibility among tillandsia lovers that hooks them to the weird but lovable tillies.

Such sensibilities exist among many interior decorators, movie and TV set designers, etc. as well as many of the people who were active in our society in past years. Those sensibilities also have been displayed by many prominent painters such as Henri Matisse one of the three artists (along with Picasso and Duchamp) who helped to define the revolutionary developments in the plastic arts in the opening decades of the twentieth century, responsible for significant developments in painting and sculpture.



Henri Matisse, woman with *Aechmea fasciata*



Henri Matisse, Paper cutout

In his earlier years Matisse painted a woman seated next to a tall *Aechmea fasciata*, as shown in the picture above. In his very late years he took to creating wonderful art with colored paper cutouts; there was an outstanding retrospective of that creative work shown recently in the New York City Museum of Modern Art. One of those works, shown here, also displays Matisse's attraction to the rosette form.

The great explorer-naturalist Mulford Foster, who was the first BSI President and Editor, was also a talented artist. (See his drawing for the cover of the December, 1952 issue of the BSI Bromeliad Bulletin on page 2 showing *Cryptanthus marginatus*, *C. beuckeri* and *C. fosterianus*.)

Dr. George Milstein, who was one of the organizers of our Society, was a dentist by profession and also a fine pen and ink artist whose botanical drawings filled many of the pages of the early issues of Bromeliana. Siggy Sussman, a fine amateur modern art painter, was on the committee that organized our Society and then

NEXT MEETING - Tuesday, May 5th, 2015 at 7:00 P.M. sharp at the [Ripley-Grier Studios 520 8th Ave. \(between 36th & 37th St\) Room 16M](#)

THE PLANTS YOU ORDERED - We'll display each plant that was ordered and will discuss with members who have grown them before where and how to grow them and potential problems. Please bring in plants for sale and for Show and Tell. You should have pups to bring in and swap.

Reminder: you must pick up the plants you ordered at this meeting!

was our Treasurer and President.

A few years later, Lee Drogin became active and with her husband Jerry; they designed many of the displays we put on at the NY Horticultural Society, one of the Hudson River piers and other places. Lee designed objects for displays at the NYC Museum of Natural History and Jerry Drogin was and is a noted artist and art teacher.



Mulford B. Foster "Season's Greetings" drawing for cover of Bromeliad Bulletin, December, 1952.



Dr. George Milstein drawing of bromeliad leaf structures for Bromeliana, June, 1964, Volume 1, No. 8

Lowell Nesbitt, made many paintings of Guzmanias, but later changed his focus to flowers. If you Google for "bromeliad art" you will find hundreds of artists who are making such art.

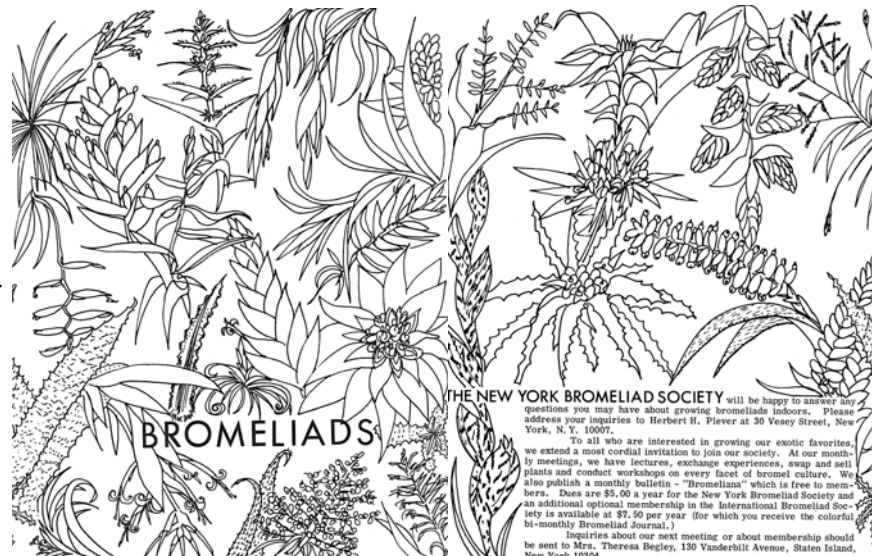
A great deal of art has been exhibited at every World Bromeliad Conference. Many competitive entries in the form of artistic arrangements, paintings, tapestries,

At about the same time Joyce Nozkowski, a fine artist, became active in NYBS. Her husband, Tom Nozkowski designed the covers for several cultural manuals we produced, one of which is reproduced here, and he went on in his artistic career to become one of the outstanding modern artists in the U.S.

Over many decades Tom has explored all the facets of Abstract Expressionism from which he approaches in different ways, but never crosses, the line to representational art. His works are exhibited in many museums and they fetch very high prices in thousands of dollars.

The late Roy Gussow, who was active for many years as a member and then as a director in our society, was an eminent modern sculptor in metal whose large works are still displayed indoors in museums, and outdoors in private estates and in parks. Photos of many of his works were shown in Bromeliana on the occasion of his death on February 11, 2011.

Early in his career, the noted modern art painter,



Tom Nozkowski drawing of bromeliad inflorescences for NYBS Culture Booklet

Tom Nozkowski drawing for back cover of NYBS Culture Booklet

posters etc. at each conference heightened interest in art.

In addition, artists had separate commercial displays of their work. I have selected just a few of the many hundreds of such World Conference art, and they are shown in the following pages.

Sue Sill (mostly known to us as Dr. Sue Gardner) is a talented artist. She was trained in biology and received a PhD degree in taxonomy at Texas A & M. Her PhD thesis on the tillandsias is still considered an important reference source for tillandsia taxonomy. She was a leader and a President of the Corpus Christi Bromeliad Society in the 1970s and 80s.

Sue has continued to grow as an artist and now she is working full time as an artist and teacher in Mcallen, Texas. She has a large catalog of paintings; I think you find it rewarding to see them on her blog at www.suesill.com.

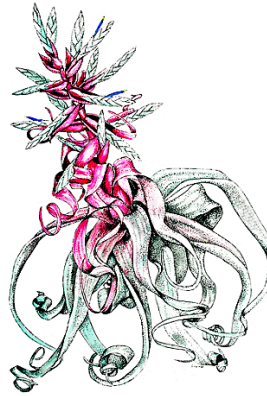
Sue is also a member of the American Society of Botanical Artists, and has created many fine botanical drawings of bromeliads. I have 2 pen and ink drawings



Sue Sill - *B. zebrina*



Sue Sill - *Tillandsia baileyi*



Sue Sill - *Tillandsia streptophylla*

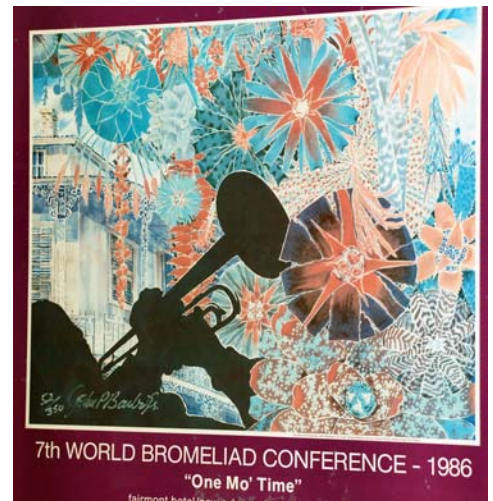


Sue Sill - Corpus Christi WBC '82

made by Sue on my bedroom wall; *Billbergia zebrina* shown above is one of them. But she has vastly expanded her scope to water-colors, acrylic and oils, not only of plants but of people in all walks of life, especially at the markets and in the small towns and villages in Mexico. The brochure cover for the World Conference in Corpus Christi in 1982 was made by Sue Sill (then Gardner). The theme was **Bromeliaceae ole.**



Sue Sill - Mexican herb vendor



John P. Barbie, Jr. painting and poster for New Orleans WBC '86

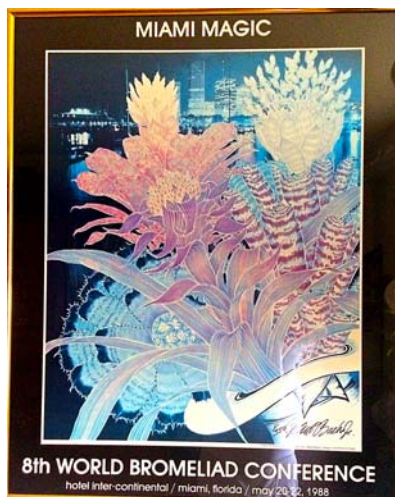
Shown below at the left margin is the Mulford B. Foster memorial that I saw at Bromel-La while attending the World Bromeliad Conference in Orlando in 1980. The plaque recites: "Let The Rain Be Your Tears".

At the bottom, right, is an artistic arrangement that was entered into the judged show at the World Bromeliad Conference in Los Angeles in 1984. In

this column above is the exciting John P. Barbie, Jr. painting and poster for the World Bromeliad Conference in New Orleans in 1986, called "One Mo' Time". It reflects the jazz, old world buildings and broms for which the town is justly famous. Adjacent at the left is Barbie's poster for the WBC in Miami in 1988, called "Miami Magic".



Mulford B. Foster Memorial at Bromel-La



Barbie poster for Miami WBC '88



Artistic Arrangement, Los Angeles '84



“Artistry In Rhythm”, art entry in WBC, Houston, 1990



WBC brochure cover, Houston 1998



Cryptanthus On The River - Applique' on Quilt
Art entry, Chicago WBC, 2004



Billbergia painted on wood
Art entry, San Diego WBC '06



Mini Artistic Arrangement, one of many entries, WBC in Cairns, '08



“Bromeliads On Parade” - a quilt entered in the art competition, WBC, New Orleans 2010

The above photos are just a few of the many excellent works entered by talented artists in every World Bromeliad Conference. They were in diverse categories such as Artistic Arrangements and Artistic Display, or they were entered in an art category on a specific theme, or they appeared on the conference brochure cover. I think they reflect the many different sensibilities of members and activists who are attracted to the beautiful bromeliads we get such pleasure in growing.

Houston will host the WBC in 2016; this will be the 4th time, and you can look forward to seeing some great art as well as well-grown bromeliads. □

site with a treasure trove of habitat and species information and photographs of bromeliads in different regions of Brazil. Check it out at <http://imperialis.com.br>.

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A NEW BRAZILIAN WEBSITE - Oscar Ribeira, proprietor of Bromeliário Imperialis, has a new web-