

Pierre Joseph Redoute exhibit at the Mint Museum

By ALAN HODGE
Editor Banner/News

Folks with a flair for flowers will want to take in the Mint Museum of Art's exhibit "Pierre-Joseph Redoute: A Man Passionate About Flowers," March 2-July 14.

The event will celebrate the collaboration between Redoute and his colleague, noted French botanist Andre Michaux. It's tied in with the upcoming (May 15-19) Andre Michaux International Symposium which will be co-hosted by Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, Belmont Abbey College, Gaston Day School, and the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society.

Andre Michaux (1759-1840), was born with gifts for languages and growing plants. He was the son of hard working farmers from Satory, a royal domain in the park of Versailles.

His skills caught the attention of officials with the government of King Louis XVI. Devastated by the death of his young wife after childbirth, Michaux was encouraged by the King's physician to channel his grief into the study of botany in service to the crown. His subsequent studies and experiments brought him under the tutelage of Bernard de Jussieu, the celebrated French botanist who developed the first natural system of plant classification.

After he completed his education, Michaux traveled widely in search of plants to improve the agriculture and forestry of France. Collecting seeds and plants across Persia, the resilient Michaux survived three years of perils ranging from kidnappings by hostile tribes to severe desert storms. The physical trials of his Mideast adventures would serve him well in his next assignment, the exploration of the North American continent.

The main goal of Michaux's American mission was to find new species of trees to rebuild the forests of France. Michaux arrived in New York in 1758 and established a 30-acre garden in Hackensack, New Jersey. His cultivation efforts included relationships with George Washington, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and William Bartram, the lading American botanist of the time.

Within a year, Michaux and his 11-year-old son traveled to Charleston where he set up an 111-acre garden, his base of exploration in the American wilderness for the next 10 years.

Michaux's pioneering explorations ranged from Florida to the Hudson Bay and west to the Mississippi River. He crossed the Blue Ridge mountains and the Piedmont of the Carolinas several times. One of his stops included land along the Catawba River near present-day Mount Holly.

One of Michaux's most important finds was a new, rare species of magnolia found on the west bank of the Catawba in Gaston County. This plant caused a sensation in European botanical circles.

During his travels, Michaux identified 26 genera and 283 plant species new to science in the Carolina alone. In addition to research and shipping American plants to France, Michaux also introduced new plants to America, including the mimosa or silk tree, the crape myrtle, the tea plant, and the camelia.

Artist Pierre-Joseph Redoute, often called the Raphael of Flowers, was the most celebrated artist in the history of botanical art.

Son of a Belgian artist, Redoute came to Paris as a scene painter for an Italian opera company. His particular passion for drawing flowers in his spare time caught the attention and patronage of botanist Charles-Louis L' Hertier de Bratelle and Gerard van Spaendonck, professor of flower painting.

Redoute adopted Francesco Bartolozzi's technique of stipple printing, engraving with dots rather than lines. This gave more delicate graduations in tone and balance. He embellished his work further by adopting van Spaendonck's techniques of watercolor painting on vellum. The results were printing in brilliant colors never before seen.

Redoute first encountered the botanical discoveries of Michaux while serving as staff artist for the Museum d' Histoire Naturelle. Redoute's illustrations of the native American plants became the largest and most important collection of natural-history drawings and paintings in the world. Other Michaux discoveries were illustrated by Redoute in 11 total volumes of work.

When Michaux returned to Paris in 1796, he was met by misfortune. A storm nearly cost him his life and many of his personal possessions. While his American discoveries were acclaimed by scientific colleagues, the new government refused payment promised by its royal successor.

Financially ruined, Michaux none the less began drafting his two landmark books, "The Oaks of North America" and "The Flora of North America." Before finishing, he departed on an expedition to Mauritius and Madagascar in the Indian Ocean where he would die of fever. Friends finished his books, using Redoute as illustrator.

Over forty Redoute works of art, including engravings and watercolor on vellum, and original bound volumes will be on display at the Mint Museum of Art.

Several programs will also be held at the mint to celebrate Redoute. March 18 will see



Left: Strelitzia Regina from Les Lillacees Middle: Amaryllis Undulata from Les Lillacees. Right: Rosa Gallica Aurelianesis from Les Lillacees.

"Antique Roses" by Dr. William Welch. March 19 will bring "A Garden of Earthly Delights: the Influence of Botanical Treatises and Illustrations on Ceramic Decoration" by Lynn Springer Roberts.

March 28 at Barnes and Noble, 4720 Sharon Road, "Learning to Grow Flowers" and "Talking About Redoute" will be presented by a Wing Haven representative.

The Mint Museum of Art is located at 2730 Randolph Road,

two miles from uptown Charlotte. Hours are Tuesdays 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. and Sundays 12 noon until 5 p.m. Admission is \$6 for adults, \$5 for seniors and college students, \$3 ages 6-18, and free for members and children under 5. Free hours are Tuesday evenings from 5 p.m. until 10 p.m.

For more information, call 704-337-2000 or visit the website at www.mintmuseum.org.

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