Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Brigid EDWARDS (London 1940 -)

Plane Tree Leaf

Watercolour, over traces of an underdrawing in pencil, on vellum.

483 x 356 mm. (19 x 14 in.)

As the collector and scholar of botanical art Shirley Sherwood has recalled of Brigid Edwards, 'In 1994 she had a remarkable show at Kew Gardens Gallery where the critics compared her work with that of Rory McEwen, one of the standard-bearers of today's renaissance in botanical painting. Like McEwen she often works on vellum, painting with a glowing, quiet brilliance, sometimes framing her pictures like medieval treasures…Brigid Edwards is undoubtedly one of today's finest botanical artists and I am particularly attracted to her work on vellum.'

Edwards almost always paints her watercolours on smooth, prepared vellum. As she recounts of her working methods, 'I get my vellum from William Cowley Parchment and Vellum Works who also mount and stretch the skins on board to my specific dimensions. A white gesso ground is applied which smoothes the surface but inevitably because it is a natural skin there remains an irregularity of texture and pigment. In the past I have made my own boards but it is very time-consuming and expensive if things go wrong…So far there have been no problems with splitting or cracking. I think I decided to "anchor" them because I found the wavy edges rather distracting…I use Winsor & Newton or Rowney & Schminke watercolours, depending on pigment. I choose vellum rather than paper because I have always found paper too absorbent and difficult to rectify. I use ophthalmic surgical blades to remove paint from vellum where necessary.'

Drawn in 2015, the present sheet depicts a leaf from a plane tree (Platanus). Native to the Northern Hemisphere (in North America, Europe and Asia), these tall trees are characterized by large, deciduous leaves. The three main species of plane trees are the American sycamore (Platanus occidentalis), the Oriental plane (Platanus orientalis) and the London plane (Platanus x acerifolia), which is a hybrid of the previous two and is almost always found in urban areas.

Artist description:

Born in London, the botanical artist Brigid Segrave Edwards studied illustration and graphic design at the Central School of Art in London and enjoyed a successful career as a television producer and director before turning to botanical illustration in the mid-1980s. She first exhibited her work at the Summer Exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1990 – an unusual honour for a botanical artist - and has also had her work shown at the Linnean Society in London, the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation in Pittsburgh and the Kew Gardens Gallery, as well as at commercial galleries in London and New York. Early in her career as a botanical artist, Edwards was commissioned to paint 115 watercolours of species of primulas from life as illustrations for the book Primula by John Richards, published in 1993; the watercolours for the project were later exhibited at Kew Gardens. Edwards has won a number of gold medals for botanical illustration from the Royal Horticultural Society, and in 2005 her work was included in the exhibition A New Flowering: 1000 Years of Botanical Art at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. She also paints watercolours of insects (some of which were exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. in 2003) and takes black and white photographs of plant forms. In 2018 Edwards was commissioned to design a postage stamp as part of a series featuring endangered species for the United Nations, and also designed the cover for the novel El ala izquierda (The Left Wing) by the Romanian writer Mircea Cartarescu. She lives and works in the town of St. Just in Cornwall. Watercolours by Edwards are today in the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation in Pittsburgh, the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and the Shirley Sherwood Collection of contemporary botanical art.