Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Úrsula ROMERO (1984 -)

41220151708 Curled Indian Bean Tree Leaf (Catalpa bignonioides) 37° 10’ 31.3” N / 3° 41’ 28.7” W

Watercolour, over a pencil underdrawing.

Signed and inscribed Jess Shepherd / 041220151708 in pencil at the lower left.

Further inscribed, signed and dated Catalpa bignonioides / Found while I was raking the back / garden in Belicena, Granada, Spain. / Jess Shepherd / 2015 in pencil on the verso.

128 x 188 mm. (5 x 7 3/8 in.) [sight]

138 x 209 mm. (5 3/8 x 8 1/4 in.) [sheet]

The artist Jessica Shepherd, who recently changed her name to Úrsula Romero, lives and works in Andalucia in Spain. This watercolour was drawn as part of the artist's Leafscape project. The series began one day in 2015 in London, when the artist picked up a Catalpa leaf from the pavement. As she recalled, ‘At the time I felt the condition of the leaf reflected my own story – city-bruised and unanchored, so I decided to paint it larger than life size to capture all its blemishes.’

As her work and technique have been described, ‘her under-the-microscope watercolour paintings of leaves in varying degrees of decay glow with carefully captured texture, light and life…Shepherd works for up to 10 hours a day meticulously layering sometimes as many as 30 translucent washes of watercolour. She usually outlines the leaf, the midrib and the primary veins in pencil but will do a lot of the drawing after this stage in paint with a brush. “This is my way of avoiding graphite, which can dirty the colours when painting with watercolour.” She also learned…that burnishing the paper helped maintain the vibrancy and luminescence of pigments.’

The titles of Romero's watercolours reflect the precise circumstances of her contact with the particular leaf depicted. As she notes, ‘Life just seems so incredibly random and yet not. Once I started questioning mankind's use of scale and measurement to record size and space, I realised that to refer to time as a measurement in the collection was an absolute must. So the titles record the exact time I found the leaf.’ The present sheet was painted in Granada in Spain, as the artist recalled, ‘The leaf was from a Catalpa tree growing in the garden. The leaves would fall off from the tree and dry so quickly in the sun that they would retain their colour for months afterwards, thus making the ideal specimen from

which to paint from.'

The Indian Bean Tree (Catalpa bignonioides) is native to the southeastern United States but was introduced into England in the early 18th century, and is now widely found throughout Europe.

Artist description:

Born Jessica Rosemary Shepherd, Úrsula Romero is a British artist and botanist, as well as a fellow of the Linnean Society. She obtained degrees in botany at Plymouth University and plant taxonomy at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. After working as a Curator of Natural History at the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, she joined the staff of the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, where she worked between 2010 and 2014, while also active as a freelance botanical illustrator. In 2013 she was elected to the Florilegium Society of the Chelsea Physic Garden in London. Her work is in the collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, The Wellcome Trust, the Royal Horticultural Society and the British Library in London and The Box (formerly the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery) in Plymouth, as well as the Shirley Sherwood Collection of contemporary botanical art and the Botanic Gardens in Denver, Dublin, Edinburgh, London, Madrid and New York. Most recently, her watercolours were included in the exhibition Ellas ilustran botánica in the Casa de las Ciencas in Logroño in northern Spain. The artist lives and works in the village of Albuñuelas, in the Lecrin Valley of Andalusia in southern Spain.

As the artist has stated, 'I trained in botany before committing myself fully to painting so that I would understand the processes of plants more comprehensively. Equipped with this scientific knowledge, I am now testing new approaches to my artwork to push the capacity for botanical illustration to bring greater awareness of plants and our interaction with them. I hope to inspire people to think beyond their experience whilst enriching our current perceptions of botanical illustration, its applications and how it sits within the larger scope of the visual arts.'