

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Brigid EDWARDS (London 1940 - )**

**Heliconia, Tjampuhan, Ubud**

Watercolour, over an underdrawing in pencil, on vellum.

762 x 608 mm. (30 x 23 7/8 in.)

This very large sheet depicts one of the species of the genus of tropical flowering plants known as Heliconia, which are sometimes more commonly known as 'lobster-claws' or 'toucan beaks'. Most of the nearly two hundred species of Heliconia are indigenous in the tropical Americas, but a few are found in some western Pacific islands and in Indonesia, where Brigid Edwards studied the plant depicted here.

Edwards drew the plant on the grounds of the Hotel Tjampuhan in Ubud, on the Indonesian island of Bali, which was opened in 1928 as the royal guesthouse of the Ubud Palace. This was one of several works made by the artist in Bali, which also included drawings of a lotus, torch ginger, a durian fruit and a jackfruit. As Ian Burton has noted of these five works, 'their exotic origin permeates the portraits she makes of them. That is to say, she made the preparatory drawings on Bali but the moist atmosphere of Indonesia made their transference to vellum impossible and so this part of the process had to wait until she returned to England.' As the same writer further notes of the present sheet in particular, '[Edwards's] green and pinks have become very expansive; two large paintings of Torch Ginger and Heliconia rejoice in these colours, where the wonderfully complex flowers are pink (in the case of the Heliconia they resemble Japanese paintings of cranes)...set against a variety of contrasted greens.'

In another catalogue of an exhibition of watercolours by Edwards at a London gallery, Burton also noted of her work that 'The fine painting of the detail on the vellum is uncanny, but when these single objects

are arranged and suspended in a contemplative space, they achieve their greatest power, and as a result of this creative act of attention, they have an almost religious intensity.'

### **Exhibitions**

New York, Beadleston Gallery, Brigid Edwards: Flora on Vellum III, 2000.

### **Literature:**

Ian Burton, 'Brigid Edwards: Flora on Vellum III', in New York, Beadleston Gallery, Brigid Edwards: Flora on Vellum III, exhibition catalogue, 2000, p.6.

### **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.