

Botanical* Series by Trena McNabb

These paintings were inspired by a trip to a Herbarium** where specimens of plants are pressed until dry and mounted on paper to preserve and record details about the plant - where it was collected, it's scientific name, collector's name and date of collection and more. I was most interested and impressed with the oldest of these samples from the 18th Century.



From the University of NC at Chapel Hill; *Aster umbellatus*
Collected by C.W. Short in 1836 from Fayette County, Kentucky

I remember my family keeping flowers from a grave side or an Easter corsage pressed between the pages of a book. I have continued to do that with flowers and leaves which I use to laminate and decorate a note card or letterhead. I have pressed leaves and flowers in my reference files for use in my paintings. I wanted to perhaps paint some of the images created by the drying and pressing of the plants in a herbarium.

As I was waiting, beyond the holidays and exams at the college, to get into the Herbarium this winter, remembering my own pressed and dried collection of leaves in particular I decided to get them out. I began with paper as the herbarium does, but found that the paper could not take the water based acrylic paints without curling and waving the paper, so began again with paper boards.

The technique I am using is much like the herbarium in that I glue the samples down, but do not add the small pieces of tape which the herbarium uses because I immediately reapply pressure till the glue dries.

On a subsequent trip to the herbarium and in describing to them my technique they allowed that my work would last at least 200 years and indefinitely if preserved under glass.

Possible questions about the work:

Are the leaves and flowers real?

Yes, they have been dried under pressure. I am mixing both the real and the painted images together on the paper.

How are they dried?

I place them between sheets of newspaper, spreading them in a pleasing shape and put heavy books on top or with a plant press.

* Definition of Botanical

Of or relating to plants or plant life

** Definition of a Herbarium:

A collection of dried plants mounted, labeled, and systematically arranged for use in scientific study.

A place or institution where such a collection is kept.

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A herbarium is a collection of dried and mounted plant specimens used in systematic botany. To preserve their form and color, plants collected in the field are spread flat in sheets of newsprint and dried, usually in a plant press, between blotters or absorbent paper. The specimens, mounted on sheets of stiff white paper, are labeled with all essential data, date, where found, description of the plant, altitude, special habitat conditions, and placed in a protective case. Herbariums are essential for the study and verification of plant classification, the study of geographic distributions, and the standardizing of nomenclature. Thus inclusion of as much of the plant (e.g., flowers, stems, leaves, seed, and fruit) as possible is desirable.

How long will they last?

These works should last 200 years and beyond. There are samples of dried and pressed flowers collected in the 1700's that are still viable, and then only lightly glued and taped to paper, and preserved in a file folder.

Do you paint over the leaves?

Like my other works on canvas I have used the leaves as backgrounds for images to overlap and go between. The added acrylic paint is not acidic and will not harm the leaf, but in many ways preserve it more. I am careful with the dried materials as I am working over and around them.