

Response to Nature

Kessler exhibits botanical watercolors at the Greer Gallery

It's not every artist who is showered with gifts from admirers. Never mind that the gifts are creepy-crawlies.

To P.A. Kessler, a botanical artist who has branched out from plants and flowers to insects, feathers, bee hives and bird nests, the bounty of bugs is pure inspiration.

"The kids in my neighborhood know I collect insects, so when they find a good one, they'll bring it to my door step," said Kessler, a resident of Hilton Head Island. "I get lots of nests, too."

Kessler takes the objects of nature and creates exquisitely detailed paintings often scaled to the actual size of the specimens. The delicate watercolor works reveal wonders of our world few of us ever take the time to appreciate.

This summer, in conjunction with the publication of her new book, *Response to Nature: Botanical Watercolors 1972-2010*, the Arts Center presents a solo exhibition of Kessler's art under the same title. The show, which runs through Aug. 26 in the Walter Greer Gallery, features 45 limited edition giclée prints of her original watercolor paintings.

The framed fine art prints run from \$300 to \$4,000. The 144-page linen covered book, signed and numbered, is \$60. It is also available in a "slip-case" with a signed, limited-edition print included for \$175.

"I typically duplicate the scale of my subject," Kessler said. "But we decided to blow up a few of the images for the show to create a little more

impact. It allows you to see even more detail of the plant."

The enlarged prints, measuring as much as 44 inches by 50 inches, include three orchids, a bird's nest, a "gorgeous" vidalia onion and a series of gourds and squash.

Kessler often spends hours wandering through greenhouses looking for the perfect plant to paint. Working at her antique drafting table, she carefully examines the flower under intense light and magnification, taking note of the smallest details.

continued on page 24

"Paphiopedilum"



Visual Arts *continued from page 22*

Following a long tradition of botanical painting dating back to the 16th century, Kessler uses a pure white background and carefully positions the specimen on the paper to shape and define the essence of the plant. She begins with a detailed graphite drawing and then adds an overall tone. Layers of washes are applied to develop the form and intensity of color.

A member of the Society of Botanical Artists in England and the American Society of Botanical Artists, Kessler is an accomplished painter whose work has been featured in major watercolor exhibitions in New York, Chicago, Naples and Miami. She is also well represented in many corporate and private collections, including the Hunt Institute for Botanical

Documentation at Carnegie Mellon University.

Creating an image that is both an accurate portrayal of a specimen and an aesthetically pleasing painting requires Kessler to walk the fine line between science and art. She describes it as “embracing the freedom of one without discarding the discipline of the other.”

“People may see a flower or nest, but they don’t take the time to really look at it,” Kessler said. “I hope my work provides them with the opportunity to look closely and better understand the natural world.”



In celebration of the exhibit, Madeline Nelson, of May River Orchids, will lead a discussion on orchid culture July 8. Artist P.A. Kessler will discuss her art and sign books at a gallery walk beginning at 3:30 p.m. The event is free, but reservations should be made in advance at 843-686-3945, ext. 233 or at JRichey@artshhi.com.

“Oncidium and Phalaenopsis”