



**The Tapestry of Life: A
Botanical Artist's Miscellany**
by **Susan Christopher-Coulson**



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- This retrospective 'exhibition in book form' draws together the threads that have formed the warp and weft of the artist's profession: the natural world and her love of drawing woven together with skills in design and making.
- An intensely personal but relatable story where the artist shares her compulsion to collect and then record the treasures she finds as well as her sources of historical inspiration – from medieval prayer books to seventeenth-century Florists.
- An inspirational guide to working with coloured pencils on board or watercolour paper, where readers can't help but be infected with the artist's enthusiasm for joyful juxtapositions of colour and form.
- A step-by-step tutorial to painting a broken English Florists' tulip provides all the details readers will need to try the medium for themselves, showing how layers of colour are gently built and combined to form glowing representations of these gorgeous flowers.
- More than 80 full colour illustrations.

Susan Christopher-Coulson: An award-winning botanical artist and tutor, Susan trained at Kingston School of Art as a fashion designer and worked for several years in London as a designer and illustrator, before her interest in the natural world led her to take up botanical art. She has been awarded two Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) gold medals, as well as awards from The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists, the Society of Botanical Artists, and The Society of Floral Painters. She is an elected fellow of the Society of Botanical Artists, where she was vice president for eight years, and a member of The Florilegium Society at Sheffield Botanical Gardens. Her original artworks are in private collections in the UK and abroad, as well as in the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art collection at Kew Gardens, the RHS Lindley Library and the archive of The Florilegium Society at Sheffield Botanical Gardens. An experienced teacher, Susan was the coloured pencil tutor for several years when the Society of Botanical Artists established their distance learning diploma course.



Autumn Leaf Shade Card
Woven Twiggy 'Nest'
with Guinea Fowl Eggs
Guinea Fowl and Pheasant
Feathers

As I grew older, we would go on more adventurous walks further afield, exploring the wealth of wild areas such as the Yorkshire Dales, the Northumbrian coast and the North Pennines, which were all relatively short journeys away. There was so much to discover and memories of these times, when every sense was alert, are still vivid. I can still conjure up the curious, earthy smell of the disturbed leaf-mould when we gathered a small sackful from the woods to use in the garden. And I can clearly remember my first encounter with the startling blue of the spring gentians or the intriguing sundew plants surviving in the exposed conditions of Teesdale, often viewed with an accompanying soundtrack of buffeting wind and the distinctive wuthering cries of the curlews. Those big skies with views of uninterrupted countryside and the quality of the light on the landscape are so evocative of this time of exploring and learning and still draw me back to the uplands.

The weft: design and making

In weaving, the weft thread can determine the pattern of the weave, changing the nature of the fabric.

My mother was a talented needlewoman who could turn her hand to millinery, tailoring and glove-making as well as any form of decorative needlecraft. Consequently, there was always a project under way with an array of materials and threads for me to investigate. I was taught to sew, knit and embroider and eventually became quite proficient, although I spent most of my time drawing and painting.

There were so many things that delighted me in the world of textiles—colour, pattern, textures, design, structure and the magic of conjuring three-dimensional things from flat cloth. To this day, I find a yarn shade card spellbinding, with its possibility of colour combinations—a very similar feeling to opening a new set of coloured pencils.

When I was elected to membership of the Society of Botanical Artists in 2001, I discovered that although a variety of different paths had led other members to botanical art, many had fashion or textile backgrounds. Perhaps it's not surprising as there are many shared skills: an eye for detail as well as proportion and balance, plus a focus on presentation and respect for precision and, of course, working with colour. The natural world, and plants in particular, have frequently been a source of inspiration for textile design—from medieval tapestry hangings with plant-scattered landscapes and the designs of William Morris to the current trends for bold plant-inspired surface patterns for interiors and fashion.

