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Annie Farrer: Plant Forms on Paper: a Fresh Approach
An exhibition at The Folly, Settle, North Yorkshire from 21 March to 6 May 2008

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‘My paintings are a bit like snorkelling!’ So says Annie Farrer, one of the country’s foremost botanical artists. Her analogy refers to the high degree of precision required in observing and representing the parts of a plant, sometimes down to a fraction of a millimetre, for the purposes of botanical identification. ‘There is a whole new world to be found when you look closely into a leaf or flower and you never look at vegetation in quite the same way again’.

Annie has pursued a freelance career, working frequently for the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the Royal Horticultural Society and in many parts of the world, contributing to numerous books and journals and illustrating specialist monographs. She has received a number of major awards and exhibited widely at home and abroad. Her work is well represented in international and private collections.

As a child, Annie grew up at the heart of the most spectacular limestone scenery in Yorkshire, in a house filled with the paintings, photographs and writings of Reginald Farrer, the great plant collector and ‘Father of Rock Gardening’ who wandered the slopes of Ingleborough in his own childhood. The world of botany and exploration was her natural environment, and in 1977 she won a Churchill Fellowship to travel overland to the Himalayas to draw for a book *Flowers of the Himalaya*. Thus began a great love for the region to which she has returned 25 times during the last 15 years, leading treks for Exodus Expeditions.

Working in the south of France in 1998, gave Annie the chance of stepping outside the traditional English approach to painting plants, an experience which she found very liberating. She discovered greater choice in what to paint, for example a torn leaf or a single tendril in its own right. She became very interested in Chinese calligraphy and the idea of ‘negative space’, i.e. the blank space around an image. This led to a desire to experiment with new ways and techniques of working.

A course taught - outside and sometimes in the rain - by Malham-based artist, Katharine Holmes in the summer of 2007, has further inspired Annie to break away from some of her previous methods of painting, not least in her choice of materials and the scale of her work. The Folly exhibition thus represents an important period of transition for Annie. As she herself says, ‘I do not want to leave detail behind, but to show it in new ways. The pictures in this exhibition are the beginnings of a new direction for me, using my experience over years of precision to reveal that there is a lot more in front of your eyes than you ever thought’.

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