



Andrey Avinoff
botanical paintings

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Exh/1965

Andrey Avinoff—botanical paintings

An Exhibition

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HUNT BOTANICAL LIBRARY
CARNEGIE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

1965

Apropos



ANDREY AVINOFF (1884-1949), born and raised in the *milieu* of Russian aristocracy, with a heritage interlocked with Czarist courts and Byzantine empires, needs no introduction to anyone familiar with Pittsburgh's cultural environment of the second quarter of this century. It was in 1926 that Avinoff, already the sponsor of forty-two scientific expeditions into Asia and himself an honorary mandarin of Kashgar, in Tibet, was appointed Director of the Carnegie Museum, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh. Initially, he was an entomologist, but gifted with artistic talents as exemplified in his drawings of butterflies, genre scenes, and flora, his reputation as an artist rapidly gained momentum and may yet be that which gives his name immortality.

Dr. Avinoff's stature as a cultural leader, scientist, artist, and above all as a gentleman and a scholar, never levelled at any plateau—its growth was ever expanding. Of interest to this exhibition was his abiding passion to produce a collection of paintings in water color of western Pennsylvania's wildflowers, abetted in no small measure by the enthusiasm and infinite field knowledge of the subject on the part of his botanical colleague—and successor as director—the late Professor Otto Emery Jennings (1877-1964).

The completion of more than 250 wildflower portraits was accomplished in a period of two flowering seasons, often causing him to work late into the night to capture the form and color of some rarity brought to him earlier that day, of a flower that would have wilted beyond recognition by the morrow. There is but little doubt that the strain of this pressure to accomplish so much in so short a time, and with his penchant for perfection in every anatomical detail, contributed substantially to the heart attack that forced his retirement to the residence of his sister, Elizabeth Shoumatoff, at Locust Valley, on the north side of Long Island, New York.

Here, through friendship with William Rogers Coe, whose Planning Fields estate was nearby, he had at hand a vast collection of exotic conservatory plants and especially orchids of the Cattleya group. What began as a rehabilitation activity became again a passion, responsible in large measure for his production of more than one hundred life-size portraits of orchids. For the most part, these are flowering Cattleyas, Laelias, Laeliocattleyas, and named varieties, all exquisitely painted in finite detail and with utmost clarity. His fondness for orchids and roses was well known, and he said many times that when drawing and painting them he felt as if he were a part of his subject, so enraptured was he with the beauty and wonder of Nature.

Dr. Avinoff had little sympathy for the artist who encumbered himself with bulky equipment and materials; for his part, he accomplished all from a tiny tin black-Japan box (displayed in this exhibition) measuring scarcely 2" x 4" in size and containing a dozen tiny pans of pigment. This he would hold in one hand, together with his notebook, and, standing before his subject, would complete the preparatory study essential to the final portrait. Once, while sketching some rarity in color at a crowded flower show, a lady stopped to observe; her curiosity piqued beyond containment at seeing a gentleman impeccably dressed and thus engaged, she was emboldened to enquire with some sincerity, "Tell me, sir, are you a crank?" Without so much as a side-glance, or losing a brush stroke, he replied unhesitatingly, "Yes, madame," and appraising him with a look of incredulity she lost herself in the crowd.

About three-fourths of Andrey Avinoff's wildflower paintings were beautifully reproduced in full color gravure in the two-volume classic (now nearly out of print and destined to become a collector's item) *Wild Flowers of Western Pennsylvania*; its text was by Dr. Jennings and it was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press (see item 78). The present exhibition, through the generosity of Dr. M. Graham Netting, director of The Carnegie Museum, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, presents a selection from the unpublished Avinoff paintings of that collection, now the Museum's property, together with a few of those that have been

published—accompanied, for purpose of comparison, by examples of their reproductions. The exhibition has been staged, and the major part of this Schedule prepared, by our Curator of Prints, Mr. John V. Brindle.

From the 110 orchid portraits, the noted orchidologist, Mrs. L. Sherman Adams, selected fifty for reproduction in full size and full color. These were published as a sumptuous portfolio in 1960 by Mr. C. Harrison Conroy, of New York City (see item 79). All but a few of this collection of orchid paintings are on loan from Mrs. Shoumatoff at the Hunt Botanical Library. From them have been selected for inclusion in this exhibition thirty-four unpublished plates, and it would be difficult to say that one is less beautiful than another.

Lest anyone, and particularly the non-botanist, think of Dr. Avinoff solely as a botanical illustrator, it is necessary that other examples by him be included in this exhibition. In doing so, no attempt is here made to approach the near-definitive exhibition of 234 examples of his work so capably organized and beautifully staged at the Carnegie Museum in 1953-1954, an exhibition presented jointly by the Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Department, University of Pittsburgh, and the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute. To give some concept of the man's breadth and artistic versatility, Mrs. Shoumatoff, and her daughter Mrs. Zoric Ward, with unstinted generosity, have here made many paintings available on loan. These enable us to present a range of examples of Dr. Avinoff's work, including works in the Dutch manner, roses in the style of Thornton's *Temple of Flora*, a Cineraria in the mood of Matisse, and a Begonia in the mood of Van Gogh. Two recent gifts to this library by Mrs. Shoumatoff, and exhibited here, are Dr. Avinoff's pencil studies of a rose in four stages of maturity, and a pair of his signed sketches of hybrid tea roses.

This small and selective representation of the work of Andrey Avinoff is largely restricted to his botanical interests, and it complements the rich holdings of this library. Those who remember the great display in Pittsburgh of December, 1953, will know him also as one whose deep religious strength was reflected in many of his mood paintings of fantasy, allegory, and symbolism,

will know him for his landscapes in charcoal and in color, and for his galaxy of portraits of such friends of yesteryears as Nijinsky, Rachmaninoff, Paderewski, and of many more persons residing in Pittsburgh's environs.

This representation is one of such distinction. It is also most appropriate because few scholars of the Pittsburgh scene were ever more close to the heart, or were the recipient of a more genuine affection, of the late Rachel McMaster Miller Hunt than was Andrey Avinoff. It is doubtful if the passing of anyone not of her immediate family brought more genuine grief and a deeper sense of irreplaceable loss than did the passing of this man.

George H. M. Lawrence

13 April 1965.

Orchid Portraits

Numbers 1-34 of this exhibition are water color portraits of flowering orchid plants (natural size) of the *Cattleya* group. These were painted by Dr. Avinoff in 1947-49, while residing at Locust Valley, Long Island, with his sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Shoumatoff, from plants growing at the nearby estate of William Rogers Coe. Of the 110 executed by him, fifty were reproduced in 1960 (see no. 79 below). Those displayed in this section have not been reproduced; the names are those on the plant labels as recorded by Avinoff on each drawing. Except for items 8, 13, 17, and 28, all have a mat aperture size of approximately 17" x 13". All are lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff.

- 1 *Laeliocattleya* Archer (LC. Herscentia x *Cattleya labiata*)
- 2 *Cattleya mossiae*—WINTER CATTLEYA
From specimen collected in Venezuela
- 3 *Brassocattleya* Albion (BC. Wm. Kleinheinz x *Cattleya trianae*)
- 4 *Brassocattleya* Vilmoriniana 'Edgemore' (*Brassavola digbyana* x *Cattleya dowiana*) x *Cattleya mossiae*
- 5 *Cattleya* Cybele 'Alba' (*C. gaskelliana* x *C. lueddemanniana*)
- 6 *Cattleya percivaliana*—CHRISTMAS CATTLEYA
From a specimen collected in Venezuela
- 7 *Cattleya schroderae*—EASTER CATTLEYA
Native of Colombia, botanically a variety of *C. trianae*
- 8 Four preliminary studies in water color for orchid portraits.
A *Brassolaelocattleya* Xanthilion C BLC. Dawn Angela
B *Laeliocattleya* Alamo D Unidentified

- 9 *Brassocattleya* Sindoro (BC. Vilmoriniana × *Cattleya* Empress Frederick)
- 10 *Laeliocattleya* St. Bell
[Label name, not recorded in Sander]
- 11 *Laeliocattleya callistoglossa* (*Cattleya warscewiczii* × *Laelia purpurata*)
- 12 *Cattleya trianae alba*—WHITE WINTER CATTLEYA
Native of Colombia. Shown with it is the artist's preliminary sketch.
- 13 Preliminary studies
A Four water color sketches on paper (*Laeliocattleyas*)
B Pencil sketches on letterhead
C Pencil sketch, two aspects of a *Laeliocattleya*
- 14 *Cattleya trianae*—WINTER CATTLEYA
Native of Colombia
- 15 *Laeliocattleya eximia* (*Cattleya warneri* × *Laelia purpurata*)
- 16 *Cattleya theyeriana* (*Cattleya intermedia* × *C. schroderae*)
Named for the firm of Eugene Thayer, Lancaster, Mass. The spelling of *theyeriana* was deliberate.
- 17 Four preliminary studies in water color for orchid portraits
A *Laeliocattleya* Canada C BLC. Carinus
B *Cattleya* (unidentified) D *Brassolaeliocattleya* (unidentified)
- 18 *Laeliocattleya* Derna (LC. Nugget × *Cattleya dowiana aurea*)
- 19 *Laeliocattleya* Norseman (LC. wellsiana × *Cattleya* Monarch)
- 20 *Laeliocattleya* Haroliana (*Cattleya hardyana* × *Laelia tenebrosa*)
- 21 *Cattleya fabiana* (*Cattleya dowiana* × *C. labiata*)

- 22 *Cattleya* Enid (*Cattleya mossiae* × *C. warscewiczii*)
- 23 *Laeliocattleya canliamiana* (*Cattleya mossiae* × *Laelia purpurata alba*)
- 24 *Sophrolaeliocattleya* Lilian Gomez
[Label name, not reported in Sander]
- 25 *Brassolaeliocattleya* Mithra (BLC. Amber × BC. Sofrano)
- 26 *Laeliocattleya* Frederick Boyle (*Cattleya trianae* × *Laelia anceps*)
- 27 *Cattleya triumphans* (*C. dowiana* × *C. rex*)
- 28 Four preliminary sketches for orchid portraits. Subjects unidentified.
- 29 *Brassolaeliocattleya* Aprica (BLC. The Baroness × *Laeliocattleya* Ixion)
- 30 *Laeliocattleya* Fascinator (*Cattleya schroderae* × *Laelia purpurata*)
- 31 *Brassolaeliocattleya* Agnes McWilliams (*Brassolaelia* Helen × *Cattleya leda*)
- 32 *Cattleya leda* (*Cattleya dowiana* × *C. percivaliana*)
- 33 *Brassocattleya* Dietrichiana (BC. Mrs. L. Leemann × *Cattleya* Fabia)
- 34 *Brassolaeliocattleya* Constance Meren (?)
[Label identity unclear, name not reported in Sander]
-
- 35 Roses with the Owl butterfly
Water color, 16" × 12"

Wildflower Portraits

Numbers 36-66 are unpublished water colors of wildflowers, mostly of western Pennsylvania, painted in the period 1943-44. They are exhibited with a mat aperture size of approximately 11.5" x 8.5". A few of the portraits are of tree and shrub foliage, and not of wildflowers. All are lent by the Carnegie Museum, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

- 36 [Left] *Cichorium intybus*—Chicory
[Right] *Achillea millefolium*—Yarrow
- 37 *Arctium lappa*—Burdock
- 38 *Helianthus tuberosus*—Jerusalem Artichoke
- 39 *Vicia cracca*—Cow Vetch or Canada-pea
- 40 *Helianthus giganteus*—Giant or Wild Sunflower
- 41 *Fraxinus americana*—White Ash
- 42 *Drosera rotundifolia*—Sundew
- 43 [Left] *Quercus imbricaria*—Shingle Oak
[Right] *Quercus velutina*—Black Oak
- 44 *Phytolacca americana*—Pokeweed
- 45 *Quercus palustris*—Pin Oak
- 46 *Thalictrum polygamum*—Meadow-Rue
- 47 *Hydrophyllum appendiculatum*—Water-Leaf
- 48 *Solidago serotina*—Smooth Goldenrod
- 49 *Aster puniceus*—Purple-stem Aster
- 50 *Linaria vulgaris*—Butter-and-eggs, Toadflax
- 51 *Aster undulatus*
- 52 *Dicentra eximia*—Wild Bleeding-Heart
- 53 [Left] *Sanicula marilandica*—Maryland Sanicle
[Right] *Dactylis glomerata*—Orchard Grass
- 54 *Cornus florida*—Dogwood
Autumn foliage with winter buds
- 55 *Rhus radicans*—Poison-Ivy
Foliage only
- 56 *Dactylis glomerata*—Orchard Grass
- 57 *Quercus alba*—White Oak
- 58 *Dipsacus sylvestris*—Teasel
- 59 *Commelina communis*—Dayflower
- 60 *Rhus glabra*—Smooth Sumac
- 61 *Cypripedium calceolus* var. *pubescens*—Yellow Ladyslipper
- 62 *Podophyllum emodi* var. *major*—Himalayan May-Apple
A garden plant, introduced from Asia
- 63 *Aster macrophyllus*
- 64 *Lilium philadelphicum*—Wood Lily
- 65 *Echinacea purpurea*—Purple Coneflower
- 66 *Malus angustifolia*—Southern Crab-Apple

Tapestry

67 Jamaican Landscape

Tempera, 13" × 9.5", ca. 1930, featuring two tree trunks with bromeliads, wax palms, cacti in the center foreground, and butterfly. This drawing was the basis of the adjoining tapestry.

A sophisticated primitive, inspired by Avinoff's idea as to how a Jamaican negro might have painted the scene.

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

68 Tapestry of Jamaican Landscape

Made by Edgewater Looms, Edgewater, N. J., ca. 1930, 73" × 48". The scene is produced in reverse image from that of the original drawing (see no. 67).

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

Floral Compositions

Numbers 69-77 are framed paintings of formal floral compositions executed in the last period of his career. Dimensions are of inside of frame.

69 Pink Roses, with Swallowtail, in the style of Thornton's *Temple of Flora*

Water color, 16" × 13"

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

70 *Lilium longiflorum*—Easter Lily, with South American butterfly

Water color, 14.5" × 11.5"

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

71 *Tulipa gesneriana*—Garden Tulips, with Red Emperor butterflies (♂ & ♀)

Water color, 15.5" × 12.5"

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

72 Flower Arrangement. Tulips with Emperor Butterfly

Water color, 29.5" × 21.5"

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

73 Flower Arrangement. Tulips and yellow Tiger Swallowtail

Water color, 29.5" × 21.5"

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

74 Dutch Arrangement

Water color, 21" × 16"

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

- 75 Begonia, in the mood of van Gogh
Gouache, 19.5" × 15.5"

Lent by Zoric Ward

- 76 Cineraria, in the mood of Mattise
Water color, 12.5" × 9.5"

Lent by Zoric Ward

- 77 Spring Flowers
India ink and water color, 21.5" × 16.5"

Lent by Zoric Ward

78 Wall Case—Wildflowers

- A *Rosa palustris*—SWAMP ROSE
Water color, 11.5" × 8.25", reproduced in *Wild Flowers of Western Pennsylvania* (plate from that work shown beside it).

- B *Kalmia latifolia*—MOUNTAIN-LAUREL
Water color, 11" × 8.5", with plate of same from *Wild Flowers of Western Pennsylvania*.

A & B Lent by Carnegie Museum, Carnegie Institute

- C *Wild Flowers of Western Pennsylvania and the Upper Ohio Basin*
Text by O. E. Jennings. Water-colors by Andrey Avinoff. 2 vols. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1953. [Printed by Davis & Warde, Inc., Pittsburgh with color plates by Beck Engraving Company, Philadelphia. Jackets and title-pages designed and hand-lettered by Theodore Bowman, Pittsburgh. Typography designed by Thos. C. Pears III.]
An edition of 3,000 copies was published, with assistance from the Buhl Foundation, Pittsburgh. Volume 2 contains 200 plates, of 253 plants, reproduced in full 3-color sheet-fed gravure.

79 Wall Case—Orchids

- A *Cattleya fabiana alba* (*Cattleya dowiana* × *C. labiata*)
Water color, 18" × 12"

Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

Beside it is a reproduction from the Avinoff portfolio (1960) described below.

- B *Andrey Avinoff's Portraits of Orchids*; faithfully reproduced from original water-colors. With bibliographical notes by Helen H. Adams. New York, C. Harrison Conroy, 1960. [Engraved and printed by L. J. Van Leer, Amsterdam, Netherlands.]

A folio of 50 unreduced full color reproductions of flowering orchid plants of the *Cattleya* group, being selections by Mrs. L. Sherman (Helen) Adams from a larger collection in the possession of Elizabeth Shoumatoff. See also nos. 1-34.

80 Wall Case—Memorabilia

- A *Lilium auratum*—Goldband Lily, unfinished water color, 21" × 15"
B *Tulipa gesneriana*—Parrot Tulips, unfinished water color, 21" × 14.5"
C Orchid—unfinished water color, 16.5" × 12"
D Water color and pencil sketch of orchid
E Notebook with orchid sketches, 9" × 6"
F Tin Japan-black water color paint box, 12 pans, used by Andrey Avinoff when making his paintings.

A-F Lent by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

81 Table Case—Roses

- A Four pencil sketches. A progression depicting stages in the maturation of a rose, from bud to wilted remains. Mat apertures 7" × 5.25".
B & C Pencil studies of a tea rose, signed, 8" × 5".
D Water color of hybrid tea rose, signed (reproduced in full color on cover of this Schedule), 10.75" × 7.25".

Gift to Hunt Botanical Library
by Elizabeth Shoumatoff

A-D from Hunt Botanical Library

