

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden presents the
“California Wildflower Collection of Watercolors”
by Patrick O’Hara

Patrick O’Hara has built a high international reputation in the world of botanical art – reaching around the world from the tiny village of Currabinny in the south-west of Ireland. The “California Wildflower Collection of Watercolors,” specifically commissioned by the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden is the culmination of a lifetime’s deep involvement with plant conservation, and nearly forty years’ experience as an artist. Patrick has studied rare and special wildflowers in wilderness and rugged habitats right around the world and his botanic art has been used to support and highlight conservation projects in many different countries. The extent of his travels around the United States continually surprises Americans, and although, like the first European settlers, it took him a while to reach California, he felt in 1996 that he had finally reached his “land of flowers and honey.”

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The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #1

"The Star Lily and the Iris"

Douglas Iris (*Iris douglasiana*)

Star Lily (*Zigadenus fremontii*)

Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)

Location studied: cliff top woodland edge at Point Lobos

Season: early April 2006

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 620.



The story behind "The Star Lily and the Iris"

Although I had visited Point Lobos State Reserve in 1996 and 1998, and quite fallen in love with this magical headland a short distance from Monterey, with its profusion of marine and coastal fauna and flora, I had not expected to see a virtual carpet of Douglas irises under the pine trees one morning in early April, 2006. Their colors ranged from almost sky-blue through cobalt to mauve and almost purple. One of the advantages of 'being a stranger in a foreign land' (or a 'blow-in' as they say in Ireland) is that one can enjoy as surprises things that natives take for granted. My life-long fascination with butterflies had included astonishment at the life-cycle of the Monarch butterfly long before I ever set foot in America and saw one in flight. Now, here I was, visiting a house nearby where thousands of Monarchs had clustered in the trees to hibernate through the winter, but were now on the move across the whole country. One sat and posed for me on a head of white and yellow star lily flowers, its legs picking up tiny specks of brilliant orange-red pollen from the stamens.

Irises and many other flowers have, of course, featured in both Eastern and Western art for a thousand years or more, usually as symbols in religious art, but at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Albrecht Durer painted his "Great Piece of Turf". This was, arguably, the most remarkable drawing and painting of plants from life and in their own natural setting. He was one of the first to really study and understand the natural habits of different plants, to catch their characters and their relationships, one with another. In 1506, he painted his *Blaublubende Schwertlilie* (Blue Iris) which is still regarded as the classic portrait of the native Iris of Germany at its elegant best. One can but aspire to be as a student at his feet, and he has certainly been the most persistent inspiration for me over the years. 'Be true to the plants' he always seems to whisper in my ear!

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #2

"Flying amongst the Stars"

Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon clevelandii*)

Johnny Jump-up (*Viola pedunculata*)

Goldfield (*Lasthenia californica*)

California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*)

Lupin (*Lupinus sp.*), Fritillary (*Fritillaria affinis*) (leaves).

Anise Swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio zelicaon*)

Location: exposed slopes of Mt. Davidson, San Francisco

Season: April 2006

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 621.



The story behind "Flying amongst the Stars"

Having experienced most of the predictions of Murphy's Law at one time or another, I prefer nowadays to lean more in the direction of the philosophy 'when one door closes, another one opens'. A leading botanist at the California Academy of Sciences, who had seen a picture of an early sculpture of mine depicting a European fritillary, thought I should go and see one of your native fritillaries on Mt. Davidson. I had just experienced four days of non-stop torrential rain coming up the coast to San Francisco: when I got to the site, I found that all the Fritillary flowers had been stripped into ribbons by the storm, and just a few battered wavy leaves left. Walking a few yards further though, I came across the most delightful little natural garden – a true wildlife niche, full of Californian natives. A little colony of goldfields – with largest flowers and shortest stems that I had ever seen - was glinting through the grasses under a lone fritillary leaf. Beside were huge yellow pansies of Johnny Jump-ups: both species celebrating the unusual rainfall, as were the first flowers of Lupins and California poppies, flowering almost before their stems had lifted them above the soil.

Crowning this bright tapestry was a colony of shooting stars bursting in all directions through their flowering sequence atop their rich ruddy-brown stems like pink, white and yellow Catherine Wheel fireworks. As if this was not exciting enough by way of compensating for the lost fritillary flowers, a graceful Anise Swallowtail butterfly glided in like a sunbeam chasing across the hillside, and it just had to become part of the composition of this painting. It reminded me of that beautifully detailed painting of a Tiger Swallowtail that John White painted in 'Virginia' in 1585.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #3

"A Proud Poppy of California"

Matilija Poppy (*Romneya coulteri*)

Western Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio rutulus*)

Location studied: chaparral close to Riverside

Season: Spring, 1996

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 626.



The story behind "A Proud Poppy of California"

On my first journey to California, I had driven across the Sonoran Desert and headed through Palm Springs to Riverside, and I stopped off to explore an area of chaparral where I could see a stand of plants with huge white flowers. I have never forgotten the moment of getting up to them and looking up at the magnificent eight inch wide blooms against the clear blue sky. When a Western Tiger Swallowtail butterfly flew over, and almost seemed to wink at me as it looked down - that seemed to epitomise what I dreamed and expected of California!

The sheer size of the flowers, with their crinkled petals surrounding a magnificent mound of golden anthers set on orange and purple filaments like some rich medieval vestment, would be enough to astonish most people, but couple that with one of the most seductive perfumes and you really have a stunning plant. It also has a delightful Irish connection: this small family of plants was first 'discovered' by the Irish botanist Thomas Coulter (1793-1843), and he named the genus *Romneya*, after his great friend and fellow scientist, the Irish Astronomer Romney Robinson – adding his own name to identify the species.

Another unusual feature of this plant is that the veins on its bluish-green and hand-like leaves are raised on the upper-side and it has tiny prickles on the leaf stems. The tall straight green stems each bear dozens of flowers over a relatively long flowering season, and after several years of trying to strike root cutting from neighbour's garden here in Co. Cork, Ireland, I am very pleased to say that I now have a thriving colony.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #4

"Hanging around in Butterfly Valley"

Western Azalea (*Rhododendron occidentale*)

Interior Rose (*Rosa woosii* var. *ultramontana*)

California Tortoiseshell butterfly (*Nymphalis californica*)

Location: Butterfly Valley

Season: June 2000

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 624.



The story behind "Hanging around in Butterfly Valley"

I suppose that I was really an entomologist – or a natural historian – before I studied botany. I had a great curiosity about insects when I was about ten years old, and my latent aesthetic sense seemingly drew me towards butterflies and moths in particular. This might, in fact, have been inherited: my great-uncle Alfred Scorer had been one of those fortunate Victorian gentlemen able to spend his life travelling around the world collecting and studying insects – one of his books is still a standard work on the food plants of Lepidoptera. He also invented a gun to shoot down huge butterflies in Borneo!

So, how could I resist the opportunity of visiting somewhere called Butterfly Valley in California? In June of 2000, I had been invited to attend, as an observer, a Board meeting of the California Native Plant Society – a very well supported organisation devoted to the protection of the state's flora, and the management of the wildflower reserves. The bonus for me was that the meeting was to be followed by a field trip up the Feather River to Quincy in Plumas County, and an afternoon in Butterfly Valley. This was the furthest north that I had been in California, and I was entranced by the scenery – magnificent river gorges leading up into the Plumas Forest, and then the sheltered balmy calm of the valley itself. No wonder that this is a special Botanical Area – with great hordes of carnivorous plants waiting to ambush the unwary botanist!

Having a passion for rhododendrons, I was delighted to at last make the acquaintance of the Western Azalea, as beautiful as any cultivated variety that I had ever seen: from the deep pink of the flower tube to the flared petals and the long elegant stamens emanating from beneath a glorious splash of orange. What made it especially lovely in this still, calm, wind-free glade, was that even when the flowers were spent, they didn't fall – they just gently slid down the long style of the pistil, and hung on the sticky stigma, like rows of little pink and white lanterns. Tall stems of the Interior Rose were pushing up amongst the shrubs, the scent of their deep pink flowers adding to what was truly a wild 'perfumed garden' – enough to make a California Tortoiseshell butterfly very drowsy.

This work was designed it as a possible partner for No.1– "The Iris and the Star Lily"

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #5

"Desert Gold and Desert Silver"

Blue Paloverde (*Parkinsonia florida*)

Foothill Paloverde (*Parkinsonia microphylla*)

Gulf Fritillary butterfly (*Agraulis vanillae*)

Marine Blue butterfly (*Leptotes marina*)

Location: Nr. Colorado River, Sonoran Desert

Season: May 1996

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 622.



The story behind "Desert Gold and Desert Silver"

Like the early settlers from Europe, I, too, had first landed in America in Virginia, and it took numerous expeditions over twenty-five years to finally make it across the continent to the California border in the Sonoran desert. Somehow, the name blue paloverde conjured up some strange romantic images from an early novel that I had read, but the real vision of the tree in full bloom and covered in pretty, little, bright yellow flowers was a true delight. Each blossom seemed to be made of crinkled silk – the upper petal lightly spotted or blushed with red, and projecting over the large rounded orange anthers. This, with its attendant Marine Blue butterfly (so-named for the color of its wings when open) was discovery enough for one day and the labour of making detailed drawings.

Next day, I realised that there were similar trees growing nearby and occasionally their branches intermingled. Apart from the trunks being more greenish, and the few leaves being almost microscopic, I observed that the upper petal of each flower of this foothill palo verde species was pure white, and therefore perhaps appealing to a different pollinator. My experience was heightened when a large gulf fritillary butterfly landed on the far side of a branch, the orange of its wings fairly glowing in the strong sunshine, and its underside pattern of silver spots glistening in the reflected light from the sand. You can imagine my delight when I later found out that another Irishman had had a similar experience: back in 1830, the Irish botanist Thomas Coulter collected specimens in the Sonoran desert and was the first to categorise these trees scientifically.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG reference: Patrick O'Hara #6

"Channel Island Emblems"

Santa Cruz Island ironwood (*Lyonothamnus floribundus ssp. aspleniifolius*)

West Coast Lady Butterfly (*Vanessa annabella*)

Island monkey flower (*Mimulus aurantiacus* var. *parviflorus*)

Grey Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*)

Location: Santa Cruz Island

Season: June 1998

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 623.



The story behind "Channel Island Emblems"

During visits to California, I had heard people talking about the "Channel Islands" and imagined them to be parched Pacific desert islands in the romantic sense. It was only when botanist Dieter Wilken, Vice President for Programmes and Collections at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden told me that the Garden's emblem was the Santa Cruz ironwood tree, that my interest was really sparked. I had just one day left before flying back to Ireland on 12th. June 1998, so I drove to Ventura just in time to get aboard the little fishing boat that was taking out a party of whale-watchers, who were planning to picnic on Santa Cruz.

Dieter had shown me on a map where I should find Ironwood trees in bloom, several miles from the landing point, and I took a little sketch map with me. My expectation of a leisurely stroll across the island, enjoying the rare and varied flora was rudely shattered by the boat's skipper, who said they would be leaving again in three hours!

I literally ran up a dry river bed, and searching in vain for well over an hour, I finally found a grove of Santa Cruz ironwood trees nestling almost hidden in a little canyon.

Very much out of breath, I started taking photographs of the trees, with their extraordinary almost fissured trunks 'exuding' little tufts of miniature leaves. High above my head, a wide canopy of leaves extended right across the ravine, making a very pretty lacework of the characteristic fern-like leaves that supported the creamy masses of little flowers. Climbing up the side of the ravine I found myself actually amongst the flowers, so I was able to draw them in great detail – and also the trails of bright red Island monkey flowers that were almost mingling with them. These endemics on an island originally part of the Santa Monica mountain range, have survived millions of years on Santa Cruz but are now only found as fossils on the mainland. An American Painted Lady butterfly sunned itself obligingly, and then I spotted a little Gray Hairstreak – whose "tail" cleverly resembles its orange, black and white head, so birds usually peck at the wrong end!

I was so absorbed in my studies that I realised I only had an hour to get back to the boat – I gathered my gear and ran taking a short cut over a grassy hill, and arrived back on board just in time, but with my ankles bleeding from the sharp seeds of some unidentified – and much cursed – grass!

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #7

"A Seaside Romance"

Beach Morning Glory (*Calystegia soldanella*)

Pacific Sara Orangetip - male & female (*Anthocharis sara sara*)

Locations studied: Marina State Beach, Nr. Monterey (and West Cork, Ireland)

Season: June 2000

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 627.



The story behind "A Seaside Romance"

Whilst humans seem often seem to associate beaches with freedom and romance, I am fanciful enough to assume that the same might be true of butterflies, and in this painting I have depicted the male displaying his magnificent orange wing patches as he hovers over the demure female who sits amongst as beautiful a bouquet as one could wish for.

Anyone who comes across Beach Morning Glory flowers during an early morning walk beside the waves cannot but be impressed by their sheer silky perfection as they provide a fanfare for the dawn. My reason for painting them this year, 2007, is as a tribute to one of the world's greatest naturalists, Carl Linnaeus, who was born exactly three hundred years ago in 1707. During his seventy-one years, Linnaeus brought order to the chaos of classifying plants and animals – establishing the bi-nomial system that is the essential tool by which all botanists and zoologists structure their work. From Uppsala University in Sweden, he sent his best students out across the world to find and bring back specimens of virtually every living thing known to Man at that time. Using the Latin descriptions of their key features, and sometimes incorporating geographical or biographical references e.g. *occidentalis* for Western and *orientalis* for Eastern, this system continues to this day, and the use of Latin makes it a truly international scientific language, understood in every country.

We know this flower by our own local names in a myriad of languages – Beach Morning Glory in America, Sea Bindweed in Ireland and so on. Linnaeus named this flower *Calystegia soldanella* and it is as truly international a flower as its Latin language – it is found on seaside sand dunes worldwide, from the Mediterranean to Monterey, from West Cork to West Africa. Later, another botanist placed it in the genus *Calystegia*, but retained Linnaeus' name for the species. It seems to sum up for me the truly global extent of Linnaeus' influence – and I am very proud of having had the honor of being elected as a Fellow of the Linnaean Society of London, which has maintained Carl Linnaeus' collections and intentions since 1788.

Deus creavit: Linnaeus disposuit – what God created, Linnaeus set in order!

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #8

"A Fairy Lantern in a King's Canyon"

Rose Fairy Lantern (*Calochortus amoenus*)

Pretty Face (*Triteleia ixioides* ssp. *anilina*)

Elegant Madia (*Madia elegans*)

Pale Swallowtail butterfly (*Papilo eurymedon*)

Location: Kings Canyon National Park

Season: May, 1996

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 625.



The story behind "A Fairy Lantern in a King's Canyon"

This sounds more like a bedtime story than a botanical experience. People often forget that most botanists are only knowledgeable about the plants that grow in their own country: for me, coming from Ireland to California is like stepping into an almost completely strange world. Any flowers that are familiar are more than likely alien weeds – probably brought over accidentally from Europe by early settlers.

For very many years, I was intrigued by the name Mariposa lily, but I had no idea that there were so many different kinds of them in California – they don't exist in Ireland – And I was thrilled to see tulip-like white ones, yellow ones, and mauve ones in my wanderings across the state. Then I discovered the 'upside-down' ones – the so-called Globe lilies or Fairy Lanterns – some white, some yellow, but the first one I saw was the lovely pink Rosy Fairy Lantern growing on a mossy bank on my way to Cedar Grove in King's Canyon National Park. On another visit from our home in County Cork, four years later, I was able to show that very same colony to my wife, and we spent a glorious day in that woodland-edge meadow enjoying the company of such aptly named flowers as Pretty Face and Elegant Madia. All demanded to be included in a composition and one of your magnificent Pale Swallowtail butterflies behaved like a complete *Prima donna*, sucking honey from the swaying flowers of the Blue Dicks.

And all this was before we had even entered the gates of the National Park. How very fortunate you are to have such a wealth of fauna and flora in California – and the parks and reserves to protect their habitats. The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden plays an enormously important role in the conservation of California's native and endemic plants and widening public knowledge through its education schemes.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #9

"The Cardinal and the Sister"

Scarlet Monkey Flower (*Mimulus cardinalis*)

Deer Weed (*Lotus oblongifolius*)

California Sister butterfly (*Adelpha bredowii*)

Location studied: ravine off the Tioga Road, east Yosemite

Season: early October, 2006

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 619.



The story behind "The Cardinal and the Sister"

With just two days at my disposal in the very dry and desiccated California landscape of early October 2006, I headed up the Owens Valley past Bishop and Mammoth Lakes, over the Tioga Pass and towards the Tuolumne Meadows. Intuition and opinion had it that this might be one of the few places with moisture enough to support a few wildflowers just as the Aspen trees were turning yellow. Climbing away from the road, I stood on the edge of a steep ravine, listening to snow-melt water tinkling between the tumbled rocks and a patch of green vegetation down below.

When I got down to this little niche of eastern Sierra habitat, a profusion of Scarlet Monkey Flowers were thrusting themselves forward to gain attention and pollination. Colored like a cardinal's hat – and bearing the scientific name *Mimulus cardinalis* – it only seemed appropriate that they were being attended by a gently fluttering California Sister butterfly, so named because of its nun-like robes of black and white. The bold and striking colors of this scene reminded me of John James Audubon's watercolor of hummingbirds feeding on Trumpet Creeper – I had been fortunate to see all the originals for his Birds of America in the New York Historical Society in 1972. I wanted to try and capture something of that same drama and excitement of what was there in front of me, with the twining stems and gold, crimson and white flowers of deer weed providing a delicate foil and companion to the monkeyflower.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #10

"Nuttall's Cornel – the Pacific Dogwood"

Mountain, Pacific or Western Dogwood (*Cornus nuttalli*).

Spring Azure butterflies (*Celastrina ladon*).

Bramble Hairstreak butterfly (

Callophrys dumetorum)

Location studied: Kings Canyon National Park, Sierra Nevada Mountains

Season: Spring 1998

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 628.



The story behind "Nuttall's Cornel – the Pacific Dogwood"

I was familiar with the dogwoods of the Eastern states during my early expeditions to America, when I travelled up and down the Atlantic coast and then from Wisconsin right down the Mississippi valley to New Orleans, and was very much aware that I was following in the footsteps of one of my greatest heroes, John James Audubon. So precisely in his footsteps, one hundred and fifty years later, that I found myself studying plants of *Spigelia marilandica* beside the Ohio River, in the very same colony that he or his assistant had painted to indicate the habitat of a particular bird, Henslow's Sparrow. The whole joy of Audubon's paintings of birds and animals was in his composition of the page and of setting each creature within the vegetation or landscape of its natural environment. This, together with the similar approach adopted by Maria Sybilla Merian a century earlier, was to provide the constraints which I set myself from early on – to model or paint only those flowers and insects and animals that I had myself observed in the natural habitat, and to show them as in life, growing and relating to each other.

In dedicating this painting to John James Audubon, I am remembering the extraordinary privilege of having been able to see all of his *original* paintings for 'The Birds of America' when they were on show in New York in 1972. These were, of course, to be later translated into engravings by Havell for the book, but the originals showed every artifice in their composition – textures added with white of egg, extra birds added on other pieces of paper and then stuck on... The most fascinating aspect to me were Audubon's scribbled notes around the paintings, especially that of a pair of Band-tailed Pigeons. Sometimes he had to rely on friends to actually get hold of specimens or skins for him (although he did shoot many himself – and then ate them!) – and in this case Thomas Nuttall brought some back from northern California in 1834, together with a branch of a flowering tree that the pigeons had been sitting in. While Audubon drew the birds, he got his assistant "the amiable and accomplished Maria Martin, to make the beautiful drawing of this branch" that was from an as yet unidentified tree. The only reference book that Audubon carried was the English translation of Linnaeus' *Systema naturae*, to aid his own accomplishments as a biologist, so he knew that the tree must be of the genus *Cornus*, and in tribute to his friend who had discovered it, he named it *Cornus nuttalli*, and this was the first ever description and illustration of the species.

At the time when I saw it growing amongst the giant Sequoias, there were lots of jewel-like butterflies fluttering around under a cloudless sky, amongst them lustrous-winged Spring Azures and Bramble Hairstreaks.

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #11

"Spring Glory on the Pinnacles"

Bitterroot, also known as "Racème amer", (*Lewisia rediviva*)

Sonoran Blue butterflies (*Philotes sonorensis*)

Location: Pinnacles National Monument, San Benito County

Season: late March, 2007

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 630.



The story behind "Spring Glory on the Pinnacles"

Associated with Lewis and Clark's 1806 crossing of the Rockies and Sierras, this was a flower (one of many named in honour of Lewis), for which I had searched unsuccessfully on several of my previous expeditions in the Sierra Nevada mountains, nearly two hundred years later. Having once before been to Pinnacles National Monument, some 35 miles east of Monterey, I knew that it was a mass of towering spikes and spires of hard crystalline granite. This time, I learnt that it was in fact half of an ancient volcano, sheered apart by the San Andreas Fault more than 20 million years ago, and then slowly carried 195 miles north of where its other half remains, close to Los Angeles.

Like entering the setting for a sci-fi movie, with giant Condors circling overhead and glittering hummingbirds darting around the bushes, I climbed a steep trail up to the deeply- fissured, vertical rocks and warily stepped aside onto a hanging ledge to let two strangely clad climbers go by. Glancing down, I nearly lost my balance in the excitement of suddenly realising that there was an amazing colony of these magical Lewisias around my feet, their big flowers gleaming with lustrous pink and creamy white petals. Only that morning, one of the rangers had told me that the spring was late, and he did not expect to see Bitterroot for another week at least! I set to work making detailed drawings in the full heat of the midday sun, counting my blessings.

Racème amer was the name by which early French trappers knew this plant, which translated into *bitter root*, and Meriwether Lewis agreed: he had been told that it was edible and medicinal, but quickly declined a second helping. The three-inch wide flowers each have as many as twenty petals, and seem just too gorgeous for such an arid habitat. When I saw them, the narrow finger-like leaves were barely apparent, but they grow longer as the season progresses. Whilst sitting there making my sketches, two lovely little Sonoran Blue butterflies came gliding past and settled nearby. They are quite unique in having very prominent orange wing spots.

In the watercolour, I have tried to create that sense of space that I experienced on that ledge, with a vast sky above and a sheer drop of hundreds of feet just beyond the flowers.

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #12

"Red Ribbons round the Mountain"

Mt. Diablo Globe Tulip (*Calochortus pulchellus*)

Red Ribbons Clarkia (*Clarkia concinna*)

Scarlet Larkspur (*Delphinium nudicaule*)

Umber Skipper butterfly (*Poanes melane*)

Location: Mount Diablo State Park, Contra Costa County

Season: early June, 2000

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 631.



The story behind "Red Ribbons round the Mountain"

The few isolated mountains that emerge from the Coastal Ranges are really "inland islands" that are themselves unique habitats, like the Farallon Islands off the coast of California – that can be seen from the summit of Mount Diablo. They have all developed or retained their own special flora and fauna, and it is therefore very important for biodiversity that they should be protected by legislation.

Mt. Diablo was created by the massive uplifting of a huge chunk of ancient, red, sedimentary Franciscan rock. This fossiliferous material breaks down to harsh soils to which a remarkably rich variety of wildflowers have become adapted, and I was lucky enough to find some of the most dramatic species in bloom during an all too brief visit. Taking a steep trail towards the summit, I soon spotted two or three plants of the charming endemic – the Mount Diablo Globe Tulip, a golden member of the Mariposa family – glowing in the sunlight against the chaparral shadows. After spending an hour lying down beside them, measuring and drawing and getting to know their character, I climbed further up and discovered more of them, this time growing beside some strange flowers, which turned out to be the first red Delphiniums that I had ever seen. Blue species I had seen aplenty across the United States over the years, but red – that was a wonderful surprise. This Scarlet Larkspur is a gem, and where I saw it growing in rough rocky gravel with the Globe Tulip, it was surrounded by the spreading stems, electric pink flowers and scarlet buds of Red Ribbons Clarkia, that was attracting many small butterflies, including an Umber Skipper, posing like a vertical take-off fighter, two wings up and two wings level.

The Clarkias found all around this mountain are of the family named to honor Captain William Clark of the famous Lewis and Clark 1806 expedition. Both he and Lewis made great contributions to knowledge of American flora through the specimens they collected, and valuable notes that they made of their uses by the native peoples.

*Patrick's approach to portraying such little habitat niches owes much to his study of the 16th century botanical works of Albrecht Dürer.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #13

"California Spice"

Western Spicebush (*Calycanthus occidentalis*)

Giant Swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio cresphontes*)

Location: Kings Canyon National Park

Season: June 1996

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 632.



The story behind "California Spice"

This painting is based on my observations made twelve years earlier in Kings Canyon – and shows how important it has been for me to make very detailed drawings and notes and photographs, and color calibrations, whenever I am first confronted by an interesting wildflower. I never know where or when, or in what season, I might be called upon to model or paint it – perhaps years later and thousands of miles away!

Otherwise known as Sweet Shrub or Strawberry Shrub (on account of its slightly fruity aroma), the Western Spicebush comes from the very small but select genus – *Calycanthus*. Like its East Coast cousin, it grows to about ten feet high, with strong green, elliptical leaves, and large, handsome flowers around three inches across. In her delightful and finely illustrated book *Western Wild Flowers* (1915), Margaret Armstrong describes them thus – ‘ warm maroon in color, shading to brown and purple, with yellow stamens ... they are large and solitary at the ends of leafy branches, the sepals, petals and stamens indefinite in number and in overlapping and intermingled layers.’ Last season's dry fruits hang below the stems, and have an elegant structure seemingly touched with glints of gold and silver.

The first time that I saw this splendid shrub beside a stream in Kings Canyon, I thought that it must be a garden variety that had escaped, it was so glamorous. As a suitor, I chose to paint the Giant Swallowtail butterfly. This species has gradually spread West over the Rockies from West Missouri – where I took a prize-winning photo of one hovering over a flower in a sunbeam in a forest clearing (providing inspiration for this portrayal) – and only reaching California in the last few years.

* Having seen the Eastern Spicebush in South Carolina some twenty years previously, Patrick was delighted to find its western cousin blooming beside a trail in the Sequoia N.P. He managed to photograph a Giant Swallowtail (only found in California in recent years) – hovering over a flower.

When working on this piece, O'Hara was influenced by his idol, John James Audubon. Audubon was a true master of composition.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #14
"Snow Plant in the Forest"

Snow Plant (*Sarcodes sanguine*)
Pussypaws (*Calyptridium umbellatum*);
Maiden Blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia parviflora*)
California Tortoiseshell butterfly (*Nymphalis californica*)
Location: in King's Canyon
Season: Early spring, snow still on open ground
Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed
Artist's own reference: WP.633.



The story behind "Snow Plant in the Forest"

Thrusting themselves up through the forest floor, these extraordinary plants are like glowing red wax candles when caught in a narrow beam of sunlight penetrating the dense canopy of Pines and Giant Sequoias. With no chlorophyll to harvest that sunshine, they draw their nutrients from the natural compost of plant material.

Almost surreal in its form and structure, it was one of John Muir's favorite Sierran wildflowers: looking almost like an orchid on fire, the flowers seeming to shout for help as the flame-like bracts soar and swerve around them in an upward spiral. Very often, I have watched California Tortoiseshell butterflies patrolling between the sunbeams around them.

Beside them, the Pale pink flowers of Pussypaws, with their tissue-soft masses of petals, are raised up by the midday warmth from their prostrate night time habit, and the sprinkling of Blue-eyed Marys look like a chorus waiting to perform.

Although I have studied the Snow Plant many times, during previous visits to California, I have only ever seen it against a deep and dark forest background, so it seemed appropriate to paint this composition set against a black background to complement the drama of the scene.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #15

"A Sphinx sips from a Claret Cup"

Claret Cup Cactus (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus*)

White-lined Sphinx moth (*Celerio lineata*)

Location: Sonoran Desert - Joshua Tree National Park

Season: Mid-May

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: WP.634.



The story behind "A Sphinx sips from a Claret Cup"

I first saw this truly red-flowered cactus in woodland in 1996, when I was exploring the southern deserts from Dallas right across to San Diego, and I knew that I would one day want to model it or paint it. Meeting it again in the south-eastern deserts of California in 2008, I struggled to come up with a design that would truly convey the isolated, castle-like feeling of a small colony of these dramatic cacti.

So, here are four or five stems shown blooming early in the flowering season, with many buds and only a couple of faded flowers – just as I saw them at dusk in the desert, looking especially magnificent in the last glimmer of sunlight against the darkening eastern sky. Below, a few little desert annuals prosper briefly in shade and security, and behind, one can just make out the ghostly outlines of the distant dunes.

This cactus is usually pollinated by hawkmoths and hummingbirds, and I was lucky enough to be able to watch a White-lined Sphinx moth hovering at length to sip nectar from each of the flowers in turn – from a safe distance! The armoury of spines is sufficient to protect its tasty flesh against the boldest of browsing creatures – the buds and flowers being surrounded by tridents of particularly vicious points.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #16

"Cobra Lilies of California"

California Pitcherplant (*Darlingtonia californica*)

Western Labrador Tea (*Ledum glandulosum*);

Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*)

Primrose Monkeyflower (*Mimulus primuloides*);

Elmer's Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium elmerii*)

Longhorned Beetle (*Anastrangalia laetifica*).

Location: Butterfly Valley, near Quincy California

Season: Early June

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: WP.635.



The story behind "Cobra Lilies of California"

California Pitcher Plants – otherwise quite appropriately named as Cobra Lilies – are denizens of isolated bogs and fens in Northern California and are rare carnivorous plants that have a strange life-style enabling them to exist on the most nutrient-poor soils. When I first saw them in 2000, in the beautiful Butterfly Valley, I had been with an expedition of the California Native Plant Society exploring up the Feather River canyons.

Although distantly related to the pitcher plants of the eastern and southern states, these Californians are a family on their own. In this painting, I have tried to record the feeling that I had – up to my knees in the squelchy bog, surrounded by these strange creatures. I had a distinctly eerie feeling that my toes might be in danger, as I listened to the tiny cries of captured insects: attracted by the nectar glands on the "fish-tails" at the entrance to the pitchers, they slip down inside into the liquid at the bottom – there to be devoured by other tiny specialist creatures, who are fertiliser providers for the plant.

Another plant that has similarly adapted to this difficult habitat is the lowly Round-leaved Sundew – found in bogs from Ireland to Siberia to Canada, and California – which has a different technique for trapping plants as a source of their nutrients. The glue-laden hairs on their leaves hold fast any insects– even dragonflies – that are unwary enough to settle on them. The leaf then gradually rolls its edges in and over the prey, which is gradually digested.

On a lighter note - amongst such murder and mayhem! - it is reassuring to see beautiful shrubs like Western Labrador Tea, looking like a tiny white rhododendron, growing nearby (and often attracting bright red Longhorned beetles); the Primrose Monkeyflower and the yellow flowered Elmer's Blue-eyed Grass – are all included in this painting. Also to be seen close-by in this precious habitat are the Western Azalea and Wood's Rose.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #17

"Mariposas and Clarkias"

Butterfly Mariposa (*Calochortus venustus*)
Farewell to Spring (*Clarkia williamsonii*);
Fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menziesii*)
Harlequin Lupin (*Lupinus stiversii*)
Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly (*Battus philenor*)
Location: Sierra Nevada Mountains
Season: Early June
Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed
Artist's own reference: WP.636.



The story behind "Mariposas and Clarkias"

One of the joys of being a visiting "alien" in a foreign land – and what, of course, drove earlier explorers to go further – is the excitement of new sights, new experiences and natural riches just over the horizon.

We still have a few ancient meadows in Ireland, studded with little flowers in spring and summer, but none could match the displays of Mariposa Lilies that I have seen in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

The name alone hints of the Spanish and Mexican influences of the past, and these Butterfly Mariposa flowers always seem to be accompanied by flocks of Clarkias (named to honor one of that pair of bold pioneers) and otherwise known as Farewell-to-Spring. I also saw little orange Fiddlenecks there and a few of the gorgeous pink and yellow Harlequin Lupines.

If you chance to come upon them one day, just try lying down amongst them and waiting for the butterflies to settle. Truly paradise – a heavenly garden!

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #18

"Butterfly Weeds"

California Milkweed (*Asclepias californica*)

Purple Milkweed (*Asclepias cordifolia*);

Blue Lupin (*Lupinus sp.*)

Pale Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio eurymedon*);

Western Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio rutulus*)

Monarch with caterpillar (*Danaus plexippus*)

Location: Yosemite National Park

Season: Early June

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: WP.637.



The story behind "Butterfly Weeds"

A widespread family of very interesting plants, the Milkweeds (they produce a white sap that can yield a latex), they are found right across North America, and some of the Californian species have intriguing, intricate and sculptural flowers. (Well worth a close look with a hand lens.) One of their common features is that they are most attractive to butterflies, even though they contain high levels of toxic chemicals (some used in heart medicines). Monarch caterpillars are cleverly immune to these toxins and feast on the plants, thereby storing up the toxins in their bodies, making themselves very distasteful to birds!

In this painting, I have included one of these caterpillars turning its head – as if to say “Hi” to (possibly?!) his Mum or Dad, plus two different Swallowtail butterflies of the many that were feeding there as I watched. The softly furry California Milkweed is a statuesque plant with large and evidently delicious leaves (to a caterpillar), and in one foothill location I saw it growing beside a plant of the rather smoother and well-shaven Purple Milkweed, with wild Blue Lupins all around.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #19

"Saguaro and the Desert Ironwood"

Saguaro Cactus (*Carnegiea gigantea*)

Desert Ironwood (*Olneya tesota*)

Location: Sonoran Desert

Season: Late May

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: WP.638.



The story behind "Saguaro and the Desert Ironwood"

The Saguaro cactus is at the extreme western edge of its Sonoran Desert habitat, in the Picacho area of Imperial County in south-east California. One of the most impressive and iconic of all cacti, and beloved of Western film-makers, it can grow to as much as fifty feet high and apparently weigh more than nine tons!

In the flowering season, garlands of impressive white and silky flowers adorn the tips of trunks and branches – but how to try and portray this mammoth "triphyd" on a small piece of paper? First, I wanted to capture an impression of the immensely tall, straight trunk - each of its evenly spaced ridges clothes a single, un-branched, spongy wooden rod, some two dozen of which provide amazingly strong vertebrae to support it for decades and decades. The spines on the trunk gradually break off.

Secondly, I wanted to share the rare experience of a close view of the flowers. I was lucky: I found one Saguaro with a branch unusually curving downwards, so that I could stand and draw the flowering tip at eye level, face-to-face and actual size, complete with buds and faded blooms all protected by a full complement of spines.

The Saguaro flowers are a rich source of nectar and are visited by birds and bats, as well as bees and wasps – I watched one of the latter and felt that its inclusion lent scale to this magnificent species.

Where I studied these cacti, they were surrounded by beautiful Desert Ironwood trees, making a pink mist of their flowers up to twenty feet high, from which the Saguaros emerged like some pre-historic rocket-launch.

*The Saguaro Cactus is the Arizona State flower

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #20

"Pitcher Sage beneath Coast Live Oaks"

Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*)

California Honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula*)

Lace Lichen (*Ramalina menziesii*)

Pitcher Sage (*Salvia spathacea*)

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*)

Caterpillar of California Oak Moth (*Phryganidia californica*)

Location: Los Osos Oak State Natural Reserve

Season: Spring

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 639.



The story behind "Pitcher Sage beneath Coast Live Oaks"

Over the years, landslides and road repairs have thwarted my several attempts to drive the Pacific Coast Highway – the one successful journey being undertaken in torrential rain, and unable to see anything but the median line. However, I was intrigued to notice on the map a tiny wildlife reserve marked "Los Osos Oaks S.P" beside the road between San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay. Knowing that Live Oaks in California have been under threat from Oak Moths and encroaching development, I was delighted to find that this was a protected little forest remnant of a very specialised member of the family, that had long ago adapted to surviving on ancient sand dunes from which the sea had withdrawn several miles.

Wandering down the track was like entering an enchanted forest that would have held even Walt Disney spellbound. Though not tall, these Coast Live Oaks had massive, gnarled gray trunks that divided into enormous and extraordinarily long and twisted branches that stretched low and forbidding over the forest floor. Being springtime, twigs of bright green holly-like leaves contrasted with the dull gray-green of the mature leaves, and sported golden yellow catkins, and just occasionally, stems of pink-flowered California Honeysuckle could be seen twining around the contorted branches.

Adding yet more touches of drama and mystery, long trails of ghostly pale Lace Lichen, like 'Spanish Moss', wafted gently in the breeze, hanging down several feet below the oak branches. Here they met the tall flowering spikes of the magnificent Pitcher-Sage, with their crimson flowers set in deep purple bracts and calyxes, ready to attract their hummingbird pollinators waiting nearby. As if this scene was not magical enough, a Great Horned Owl flew silently up onto a shady branch, where it steadily glowered at me as I was drawing the flowers.

These trees and the plants around them have to be drought-tolerant, living on well drained sand, so it is just the sea mists and wind-borne moisture that support them, and the festoons of lichen. What a wonderful and almost unique habitat. It felt like the experience of an early settler and yet here it still is today, thanks to the efforts of volunteers and government conservationists.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #21

"Secrets in Desert Spring"

Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*)

Chuparosa (*Justicia californica*)

Desert Canterbury Bell (*Phacelia campanularia*)

Western Tiger Swallowtail Moth (*Papilio rutulus*)

Costa's Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*)

Location: Anza-Borrego State Park

Season: February 2008

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 640.



The story behind "Secrets in a Desert Spring"

In February 2008, I made an expedition from my home in Ireland to the Anza-Borrego State Park in south-east California, in the hope of arriving there just before the Spring flowering. I was so lucky, as it turned out to be one of the best blooming in the desert for many years. Rains had come at the right times in November and January, and the plants were expressing their gratitude.

I had seen Ocotillo in flower only a few times before, but this time it was with the added bonus that the tall spiny stems were also clothed with bright green oval leaves and the scarlet flowers were just opening by rolling back their petals. It is obviously difficult for a life-size study to do justice to such a large plant, but, as it happened there had been storms in previous years, and some of the older, thicker stems had snapped off half way up, more or less at my eye level. In most cases, new shoots and stems were radiating out from the break, offering their flowers at just the right angle for hummingbirds to drink their nectar, pollinating as they went. Facilitating this urgent need for reproduction in a good year is a characteristic for most plants, and true also of the Chuparosa brush, with its pale lavender grey stems and long red flowers, attracting both birds and insects: I saw several Western Tiger Swallowtails on a bush right beside an Ocotillo, whilst lovely bright blue Canterbury Bells had stretched up between branches.

To anyone who has not seen the desert in bloom, I would heartily recommend a trip during that short spell of brilliant color in an otherwise arid habitat – and you might even be lucky as I was to discover a tiny female hummingbird sitting beautifully camouflaged on her nest. It is only at this time of year that one really appreciates the need to protect these areas - especially from our sometimes thoughtless recreation in that seemingly "barren" desert during the drier months.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #22

"Blue Smokescreen"

Smoke tree (*Psoralea argophylla*)

Blue Paloverde (*Parkinsonia florida*)

Desert Iguana (*Dipsosaurus dorsalis*)

Arizona Red-spotted Purple Butterfly (*Limenitis arthemis arizonensis*)

Location: near Picacho, California

Season: Summer

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference: W/P 641.



The story behind "Blue Smokescreen"

This painting features the beautiful Smoke Tree with its deep purple blue pea flowers that I saw growing through a yellow flowered Blue Paloverde bush, far further into the extremely hot and arid Colorado Desert than I had originally intended to go. (And a warning that one should not venture along so-called roads in sandy deserts in anything but a 4x4! We were lucky that a friendly Irish-American happened along in a truck with his tough-looking cousins and got us back to harder top.)

Not the first time I had used the hours of a transport hold-up for botanical purposes: six hours in the forest swamps of southern Mississippi beside a broken down Greyhound bus years before had yielded drawings of some very interesting species. Now it was a shimmering Arizona Red Spotted Purple butterfly that had led me across the dunes to the Smoke Tree at the end of May 2008, in the extreme southeast corner of California, several miles from Picacho, north of Yuma.

Having settled myself on a rock with my sketch book, the most extraordinary this was that I was drawing these intricate flowers for a full ten minutes before I noticed a beady eye looking back at me. I could not believe that this large Desert Iguana was so well camouflaged as to be almost invisible where it had 'frozen' on my approach, whilst it was straddling thin branches about five feet above the ground. Fortunately, the creature is a vegetarian so the butterfly was not in danger.

Few people are lucky enough to see the flowers of the Smoke Tree as it blooms in the hottest month of the year in the hottest California desert – around 110 degrees F. when my wife and I were there.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #23

"Desert in Bloom"

Desert Lily (*Hesperocallis undulata*)
Dune Evening Primrose (*Oenothera deltoides*)
Hairy Sand Verbena (*Abronia villosa*)
Chia (*Salvia columbariae*)
Fremont's Pincushion (*Chaenactis fremontii*)
Desert Chicory (*Rafinesquia neomexicana*)
Sulphur-throated Forget-me-Not (*Cryptantha flavoculata*)
Coulter's Lupine (*Lupinus sparsiflorus*)
Brown-eyed Evening Primrose (*Camissonia claviformis*)
Mining Bee (*Andrena rozeni*)
Location studied: Anza-Borrego Desert State Park
Season: February, 2008
Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed
Artist's own reference W/P 642.



The story behind "Desert in Bloom"

This watercolour is based upon my observations in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in late February, early March, 2008. About fifty miles east of San Diego and the same distance south of Palm Springs, this is one of the most accessible true deserts in California, and I was privileged to spend a few days there just before the park rangers reckoned that it would be the best flowering for several years. All my life living in well-watered Ireland, I had dreamt of someone calling me up to say "the desert is flowering—come as quick as you can!" Well, now it was really happening and as I walked across the flats and into the various canyons, the miracle was there to see—thousands and thousands of flowers of dozens and dozens of different species. A few weeks before that there had been nothing to see except sand, gravel, rocks, and a few dry sticks of shrubs and the odd quietly resting cactus.

The first flowers to really catch my eye were the almost lurid pink primula-like blooms of the Hairy Sand Verbena, with its long, sticky reddish stems sprinkled with sand grains and forming a lacy carpet on the desert surface. The next most prolific were the large and magnificent white flowers of the Dune Evening Primrose—its golden stamens shedding pollen over the lowest of the four huge petals. Its orangey buds and pink spent flowers showed that they each had just one night to glow. Between these low spreading plants, occasional towers and spikes of different species stood out—amongst them the rich blue flowers and delicate, spidery leaves of Coulter's Lupine and the grey-green stripy buds of the Desert Lily. This was a flower that had long eluded me, having only previously been able to find the extraordinary long, wavy-edged grey leaves, so it was a special treat to see its snow-white flowers fully open and being visited by hummingbirds.

Amongst these larger flowers, I hugely enjoyed many smaller species, each with their own special characteristics. Sweet little white Sulphur-throated Forget-me-Nots contrasted with the deep purple heads of the Chia, whose lovely blue flowers seeming to have an extra lower petal desperately hanging on and its little blue-green, almost fern-like leaves etched with crimson veins. The pinks and reds of the other flowers were also taken up by the Desert Chicory, the deep red calyx sending a blush of crimson striations under the white petal rays. Occasionally, I came across a tall nodding composite with a ring of yellow anthers surrounding a tight geometric pattern of buds that proved to be a plant called Fremont's Pincushion, although I can hardly imagine that rugged pioneer, General John Fremont, doing dress-making or embroidery as a hobby!

Sprinkled liberally amongst this horde were varieties of the smaller Evening Primroses, many being pink, white, and yellow relations of the Brown-Eyed Evening Primrose, which has a unique inter-dependency with a little Mining Bee that only pollinates this one species of flower. A decade into the 21st Century, we are discovering that the world is experiencing a rapid decline in bees, not just our domesticated honey-bees, but also hundreds of species of wild bees. A huge section of our human food supply is dependent upon pollination by bees, so research into their conservation and protection is even more vital to us than preserving the last of the endangered carnivores. This truly underlines the importance of the work being done by universities and botanic gardens around the world.

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Original Work

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The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #24

"Canyon Suspense"

Canyon Dudleya or Live-Forever (*Dudleya cymosa*)

Harry Blue or Pipevine Swallowtail (*Battus philenor*)

Location studied: Kings Canyon National Park

Season: February, 2008

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference W/P 643.



The story behind "Canyon Suspense"

My observations of this plant date back to my first visit to Kings Canyon N.P. in 1996, when I marvelled at its ability to survive - and flower profusely - even on vertical cliff faces. Although not strictly a desert plant, it shares the ability to survive extreme and prolonged drought, and seemingly come back from the dead when some moisture finally reaches its habitat. Its seeds are carried on the wind with just a very few lodging in tiny crevices in bare rock surfaces. It is hardly surprising that gardeners and horticulturalists in the past have lusted after this brilliant gem of a plant, not least for its geometric rosettes of bluish succulent leaves: perhaps one reason why this plant has disappeared from some areas - emphasising the serious need for the conservation and protection of wild flower species. There is little excuse for such collecting from the wild when most species and varieties are now available from garden grown stock.

One realises why this Canyon Dudleya sports such eye-catching flowers, after puzzling how it can possibly attract pollinators in such isolated and wind-blown locations. I was lucky enough to see a Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly zigzag slowly up the thermals to reach the only visible plants within a thousand feet in any direction - and there to clasp hold of a flower to sample its nectar, beyond even the most tenacious artist-climber's reach! In this watercolor, I hope that I have caught something of that incredible feeling of suspense in a breath taking situation.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #25

"Desert Concerto"

Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*)

Great Purple Hairstreak butterfly (*Atlides halesus*)

Large Carpenter Bee (*Xylocopa californica*)

Location studied: Anzo-Borrego Desert

Season: February, 2008

Dimension: 18.5" x 21.5" Framed

Artist's own reference W/P 644.



The story behind "Desert Concerto"

I was first introduced to this beautiful flowering tree in the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, and could not believe that this was in fact a desert species that grows as far east as the Chisos mountains in Texas and right across into southern California. In a subsequent expedition into the desert washes of south-east Arizona, I came across groves of Desert Willow with delicate white flowers, their furrowed throats decorated with fine purple and yellow lines and being regularly visited by hummingbirds. Later, I found a colony of trees bearing magnificent pink and red-purple flowers in the Santa Rosa Mountains between Palm Springs and the Anza-Borrego desert, and it is these that I have chosen to depict in this painting. The flowers are usually at the tips of long stems up to ten feet high, but I happened upon a tree that had been pushed over by wind or beast, and its short flowering shoots arose from these horizontal branches like musical notes on a score.

A member of the Catalpa or Bignonia family - its tubular flowers with colorful frilled and flaring lobes proving that it is not really a Willow, and reminding one more of exotic orchids. That I should spot one of the most glorious of California butterflies there, the Great Purple Hairstreak, was a real bonus, but I also discovered a thief! Although the Desert willow flowers are so shaped and angled to facilitate its hummingbird pollinators, its violet-scented nectar also attracts those huge, shiny black Carpenter bees, but they don't bother to climb up inside the flowers. I watched as several of them landed on the flowers, grabbing the tops of the tubes and piercing them with their sharp jaws, and sucking out the nectar without getting any pollen on themselves. So this painting is also a record of a crime scene!

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #26

"Calypsos and Coral Roots"

Fairy Slipper Orchid (*Calypso bulbosa*)

Summer Coralroot (*Corallorhiza maculata*)

Creeping Mahonia (*Mahonia repens*)

Hoary Comma butterflies (*Polygonia gracilis*)

Location studied: Mendocino County – near Caspar.

Season: late June, 1998

Dimension: Unframed

Artist's own reference W/P 645.



The story behind "Calypsos and Coral Roots"

The inspiration for this painting dates back to some time that I spent in Mendocino County about twelve years ago, and was lucky enough to happen upon a little pinewood habitat where I was able to study two charming little orchid colonies growing in close proximity. These were the purplish-pink Fairy Slipper Orchids, with their beautifully patterned lip petals and single ovate leaves, and the leafless Spotted Coralroot Orchids, which have no need of chlorophyll as they are saprophytes and derive their nutrients from fungi attached to their roots. The flowers are quite tiny, with their white lip petals dotted with bright crimson.

Between these two colonies, amongst the fallen twigs, cones and pine needles on the forest floor, was a sort of harlequin splash of colours – a little shrub, Creeping Mahonia, in full bloom with its slightly scented masses of tiny yellow flowers and an extraordinary array of different coloured holly-like leaves – pink, bright red, cream and dark green. The flowers were attracting various butterflies, including a pair of Hoary Commas – so named because of the silvery punctuation mark on the underside of the hind wings. With their ragged profile, these insects are so well camouflaged when resting amongst fallen leaves that they are virtually invisible.

California is blessed with so many lovely and intriguing wildflowers and insects – these are amongst the gems.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #27

"Blazing Star in a Jewelled Canyon"

Blazing Star (*Mentzelia laevicaulis*)

Mountain Jewelflower (*Streptanthus tortuosus*)

Elegant Clarkia (*Clarkia unguiculata*)

Farewell-to-Spring (*Clarkia deflexa*)

California Tortoiseshell butterfly (*Nymphalis californica*)

Location studied: Tulare County

Season: early June 2008

Dimension: Unframed

Artist's own reference W/P 646



The story behind "Blazing Star in a Jewelled Canyon"

Although I have made around eight expeditions to various California habitats over the previous twelve years, I had only once before ever come across a famous California native, the magnificent Blazing Star, and then just a single plant. In 2008, however, perhaps being a little later in the season, I had the huge pleasure of meeting hundreds of them, on my way to King's Canyon National Park. Heading into the Sierra foothills beside Cedar Brook, they seemed to dominate most of the other flora, except for the extraordinary Mountain Jewelflower. The latter's leaves unusually achieve a wonderful blue colour in this and a few other habitats with certain conditions of soil and climate.

Following ancient tracks alone through the undergrowth, one immediately feels a kinship with those early pioneers Lewis and Clark, living on in a multitude of flowers named after them, in this case two different species of Clarkia: the Elegant Clarkia, with its carefully spaced geometric petals, alongside the carmine-blotched cups of the lovely Farewell-to-Spring. Such typical California wildflowers could, of course, only be attended by another true daughter of the state – the California Tortoiseshell butterfly.

Coming over, as I do, just on special flower-hunting trips from my home in Ireland, I am envious of the great wealth of the California flora. It is a truly precious commodity and world heritage treasure: maintaining the health of its diversity is the challenge we face – for the sake of following generations.

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #28

"Blue-curls in the Pinnacles"

Woolly Bluecurls (*Trichostema lanatum*)

Chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*)

Sticky Monkeyflower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*)

Golden Stars (*Bloomeria crocea*)

Variable Checkerspot butterflies (*Euphydryas chalcedona*)

Location studied: Western approaches to the Pinnacles National Monument,
San Benito County

Season: Late-May, 2000

Dimension: Unframed

Artist's own reference W/P 647.



The story behind "Blue-curls in the Pinnacles"

Stopping in Soledad on my way up to San Jose, I decided that I just had time to spend a couple of hours exploring the approaches to the extraordinary volcanic Pinnacles. Thanks to the suggestions of the duty ranger, I was pointed at an area of chaparral seemingly clothed only in sea of soft white flowering stems of the Chamise or Greasewood. On closer inspection, I saw orange clumps of Sticky Monkeyflower, and then, as a total surprise, great tall spikes of blue Woolly Bluecurls. So appropriately named, with long arching stamens reaching out from the centre of the smooth blue petals, looking like precious jewels threaded on silk and set against the blue and pink furriness of the buds and stems.

Down below were a scattering of Golden Stars and a few little Pine seedlings, all being regularly patrolled by a pair of rather special California butterflies – Variable Checkerspots .

(Talking of patrols, I had to hurriedly complete my drawings when I was moved on by a rather cross park policeman for having parked in the wrong place! A brief visit, but it did encourage me to return several times in later years to climb high up in this truly magnificent National Monument.)

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #29

"A Donner Pass Tribute"

Mahala Mat (*Ceanothus prostratus*)

Sulphur Buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum*)

Azure Penstemon (*Penstemon azureus*)

Congdon's Monkeyflower (*Mimulus congdonii*)

Mourning Cloak butterfly (*Nymphalis antiopa*)

Inchworm geometrid caterpillar (*Meris alticola*)

Location studied: granite outcrops above East end of the Donner Pass,
West of Truckee & Lake Tahoe.

Season: Mid-June, 2008

Dimension: Unframed

Artist's own reference W/P 649.



The story behind "A Donner Pass Tribute"

Having once read the history of the Donner family and their companions, I knew that this was one California location that I would *have* to visit at the end of a 2008 study trip, that had taken me from Yuma in the far South-East California up through the Sierra Nevada to Lake Tahoe and Truckee.

The grandeur of the scenery was certainly impressive, and even in mid-summer, with snow patches still evident high up above either side of the pass, it was not difficult to imagine the horror of being trapped there in the depths of winter nearly 175 years ago. Like some echo of a psychic happening, a beautiful Mourning Cloak butterfly led me up into the massive rocks and boulders to a sheltered little habitat where I found several delightful wildflowers. Creeping low over the ground were the branches of a *Ceanothus* called Mahala Mat, with masses of pale blue flowers, with their characteristic petals looking like tiny propellers. The yellow Sulphur Buckwheat is well known for attracting butterflies of many species.

The striking red blooms of Congdon's Monkeyflower were growing out of crevices in the rock, whilst the beautiful Azure Penstemon raised a cloud of sky blue flowers, whilst also providing a salad lunch for an Inchworm caterpillar that was far more magnificent than the drab moth that it would eventually turn into.

(Maria Sybilla Merian, who painted many European insects and their larvae, famously travelled from Holland to Surinam in South America in the 1690's, to spend many months in the jungles there observing and painting not just many species of moths and beetles and butterflies, but also recording their caterpillars, crysalids and cocoons. She was the first person to actually record the metamorphosis of insects.)

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Presents Patrick O'Hara

SBBG Patrick O'Hara #30

"Gold Rush over Luther Pass"

Sierra Onion (*Allium campanulatum*)

Lemmon's Onion (*Allium lemmonii*)

Nuttall's Larkspur (*Delphinium nuttallianum*)

Western Blue Flax (*Linum lewisii*)

Western Hawksbeard (*Crepis occidentalis*)

Low Scorpionweed (*Phacelia humilis*)

Applegate's Paintbrush (*Castilleja applegatei*)

Sierra Nevada Parnassian butterfly (*Parnassia behrii*)

Lustrous Copper butterfly (*Lycaena cupreus*)

Location studied: Luther Pass, between Carson River and Lake Tahoe,
border between Alpine and El Dorado counties

Season: early July, 2008

Dimension: Unframed

Artist's own reference W/P 648.



The story behind "Gold Rush over Luther Pass"

These days, one tends to associate the California gold rush with the romance of finding a few large nuggets, giving the finder's family previously unknown security. However, it was the sheer industrial scale of some of the mines (the Cornstock Lode Mine yielded \$400 million in silver and gold over twenty years) that really hit the headlines across the United States and the world. No wonder one can still see the wheel ruts of the thousands of wagons that struggled across the untamed wilderness of the Sierras.

As I walked along this trail, I thought of the Ira M. Luther after whom this 7,740ft pass is named, and wondered if he had turned over those same stones as I did, hoping to see a glint of gold! One thing for sure, he would have seen the same treasury of wildflowers, and might even have dug a few of these onions to flavour the evening stew. It was the great swathes of their pink flowers that first caught my eye, dotted with upright blue spikes of Nuttall's Larkspur, looking like blue-coat soldiers standing guard against the 'Irish brigade' that Mark Twain thought Luther belonged to, and mentioned in his book "Roughing It".

Thomas Nuttall had in fact travelled through this region in 1834, some twenty years before Ira Luther, and shared his collected specimens of birds and plants with his old friend artist John James Audubon.

The blue Flax, the yellow Hawksbeard, the golden orange Paintbrush and the violet Scorpionweed are also all common across these open rocky slopes, a habitat favoured by the Sierra Nevada Parnassian, a rare and primitive black and white butterfly, a true Californian endemic. This array and the glittering beauty of the Lustrous Copper butterfly was ample compensation for not finding any real gold.