

Natasong Yuan

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Process Reflection Essay

Botany and the aesthetic of plants has always captivated me. As a child, I was amazed at its colorful displays, and as I grew older, I was amazed at its anatomy and function – leading me to major in Plant Sciences here in UC Davis. A guest speaker appeared in one of my lectures for the PLS 6 – Flower Power class I was taking, and introduced us to Botanical Art and to the American Society of Botanical Artists. Botanical Art, the amalgam art and science, originated since our earliest days and has played a significant role throughout our human history, contributing to our knowledge of medicine, evolution, and biology. It is a scientific, mathematic and artistic aesthetic that very few would find them unpleasing to the eye. Because of its scientific contributions, unique artistry that requires botanical expertise, and my personal fascination in these artworks, I decided to conduct research into the American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA) as a Discourse Community for my UWP 001 project. As I researched, I found my project’s purpose was to raise awareness on the historical significance of botanical art and its form and practices in this present time, while hopefully enticing audiences to appreciate and support this art form as I had while composing my paper.

My initial outline was based on my pre-existing knowledge and surface level research based on what I thought was necessary to include, and the parts that would best fit my project requirements. My annotated bibliography, as assignment for students to begin their early stages of research, reflected my attempts in identifying which pieces of information would help present my message as one impactful, interesting, and cohesive piece. These parts initially included definition of terms, botanical art techniques, history, and discussion of the ASBA as a discourse community and their main activities. I completely focused on drawing information from the organization’s website directly, to which my instructor suggested to look in other credible sources.

The broadness of my topic – Botanical Art – and my initial flimsy and vague purpose statement made the task of finding credible sources overwhelming. When you don't know where to look, a library becomes a room of infinitely stacked bookshelves, because every word in there may or may not help with your research. I ended up using only 2 out of the sources my Annotated Bibliography assignment, since I looked for information based on my limited prior knowledge, and relied too much on a single type of source – the website of the discourse community I was researching. My instructor suggested to draw from other sources such as research or literature, which led me onto a new path that strengthened my paper by solidifying the foundation of the piece and inspired new sections that improved the impact of the paper. Using my knowledge on this subject that accumulated as I researched, I expanded on each information I found to search for more and more specific information. For example, after reading through the ASBA's website about the history of Botanical Art and reading about Georg Dionysus Ehret, it made me research more on this person's life and found other historically prominent figures that influenced Botanical Art that needs to be mentioned. These people included Carolus Linnaeus, and Captain James Cook, branching out further on how Botanical Art played an important role in developing the Binomial Nomenclature system, and the Age of Discovery. Throughout the process from my first draft to my final draft, I added more sources, from primary sources (the ASBA's website, paintings and illustrations) and secondary sources (publications including books and articles).

While writing my paper, I would initially depend on the Google Scholar search method to find credible sources of information. Although online blog posts would often contain similar, but summarized version of the information, I found that articles or official publications of the specific topic I wanted were able to give me more insight and guidance to how Botanical Art should be fully represented. For example, through reading the sources that a website (<https://www.botanicalartandartists.com>) used, it led me to more original sources such as a BioScience Oxford Journal on Botanical Art, and a book describing the golden age of botanical art. Through the author's writing I was able to identify which elements to botanical art that were essential, such as its benefits over photography. Moreover, the various sources

with overlapping information helped me cross-analyze its credibility and parts which were the most repeated in these sources (e.g. the botanical expertise and artistry required for each illustration) indicated its importance and helped me choose what needed to be mentioned.

The recursive rounds of review and feedback for the discourse community research project throughout the quarter provided many opportunities for extensive revision. After the first round of different feedback from two peers, adjustments I made based on the suggestions or questions of my peers was by adding the history section, the advantages of botanical art (the So What? Factor as my instructor commented), and deleted some unnecessary parts in the introduction of the ASBA community. I added pictures, as my paper was very art-centered and I believe the visuals would help keep the readers interested as well as help their understanding of botanical art if they saw it themselves. This was inspired by my own initial fascination in botanical art, which began with being able to see many examples of botanical art, an aesthetic that words can only do so much to describe.

Previously, I settled on using any credible and relevant artworks I could find online which was quite limited. The numerous, vibrantly colored, and high-definition botanical artworks by current members of the ASBA were what attracted me to research on this topic in the first place, but they were copyrighted. The few paintings from public domain sources that I looked at were all satisfactory, so I added them in. After the discovery of the UC Davis's online library search engine, I was led to archives of hundreds of paintings and drawings since the 18th century that were all public domain, including an extensive, digitally scanned 19th century magazine called Curtis's Botanical Magazine which were filled with paintings and description, and the JSTOR Global Plants database which contained illustrations with important description such as artist, collection, date, herbarium, distribution location, and many more.

By the submission of my third draft, knowing it would be the last submission to receive feedback, I formalized my citations and tidied the paper to look clean and well-organized. Based on my instructor's comments, I revised the paper with the comment in mind that each section should be explicitly related to the main argument, and replaced the old illustrations I found with the new, credibly sourced and

historically relevant artworks. By working on this project throughout the quarter, I was able to utilize rhetorical concepts, perform extensive research, and practice metacognition through reflecting on my writing and researching processes. Meanwhile, I learnt more about this fascinating subject, and was exposed to the beauty of botanical artworks that developed through the centuries, hoping that my paper will be able to inspire readers to appreciate this form of art as I had.