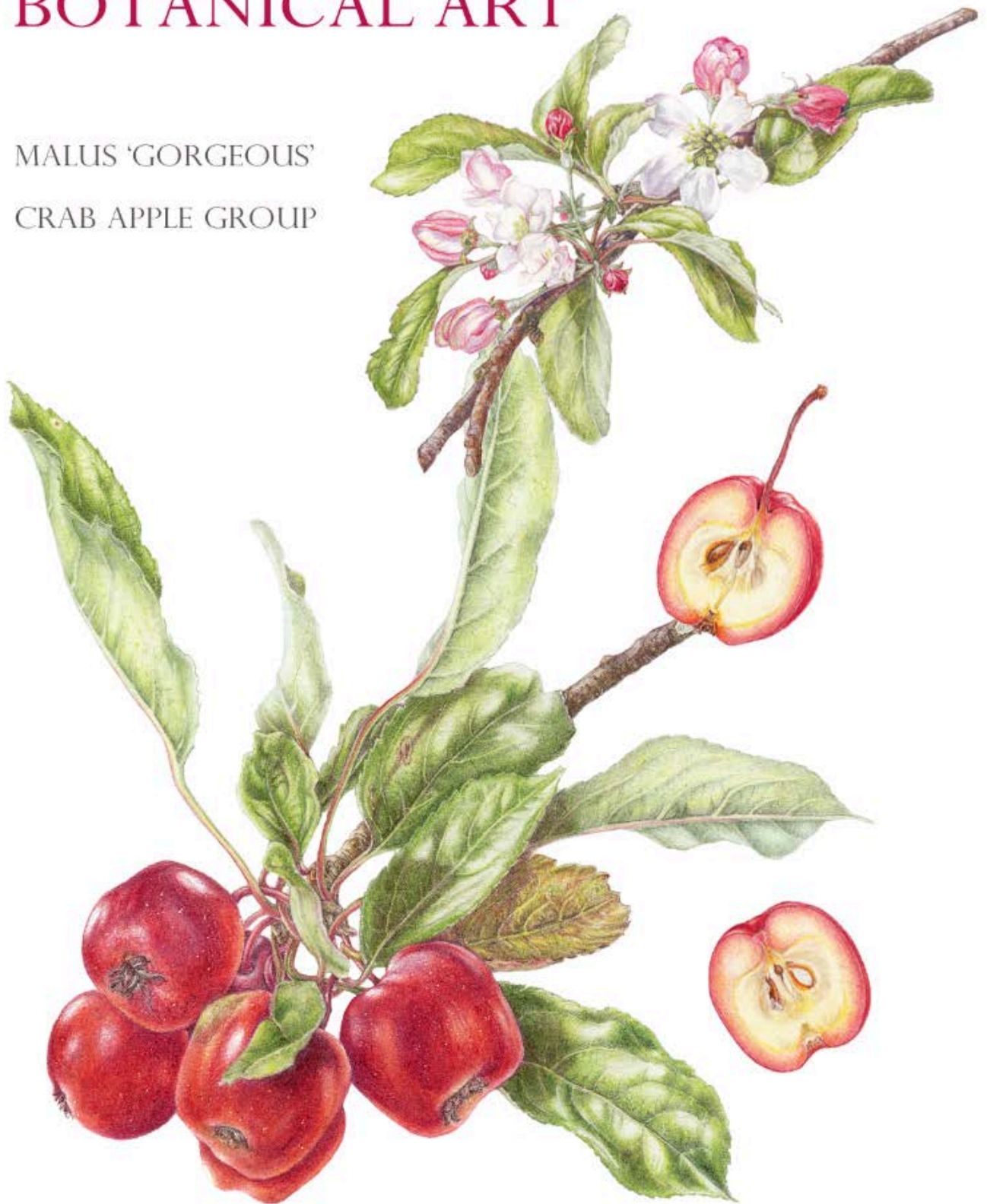


AN INTRODUCTION TO
BOTANICAL ART

MALUS 'GORGEOUS'
CRAB APPLE GROUP



by Gaynor Dickeson

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Botanical art depicts plants in a fairly 'tight' manner. It is pleasing to the eye and would grace the walls of any home.

Its very nature is time consuming, but enjoyable and the effort spent on it is worthwhile!

The use of coloured pencil rather than watercolour in botanical art is a newer phenomenon, but becoming increasingly popular.

This guide accompanies the ArtTutor video course,

[Click here to get the video series.](#)

But at the bottom of page 12, there is a link to the first video as a 'taster' for you to try out.

A Word from Gaynor

I have been interested in botanical art since 2005. It is surprisingly addictive for someone who likes to paint in detail. I hope to get you equally addicted, but the most important thing is to enjoy yourself.

This guide is suitable for people of all levels of expertise, from the experienced to those who have not used coloured pencil, or painted plants before. The main thing is to be interested and want to use coloured pencils in botanical art.

I will lead you through the materials you need and show you how to use them. I will go through the intricate details in the picture I have painted. If you follow my guidance, with practice you will be able to paint similar pictures or your own composition.

The picture is of Malus 'Gorgeous', a variety of crab apple with juicy red fruit. I have chosen to paint different stages from a year in the life of the plant, and included a dissected apple.

You may not want to paint botanically; you may prefer to just paint plants or other forms from nature. The techniques that I will show you are not specific to botanical art, but can be used in all detailed colour pencil painting.

Enjoy!



An Introduction to Botanical Art



I am often asked about the difference between botanical art, botanical illustration and flower painting.

Botanical art is an artistic representation of plants. The aim is to create an aesthetically pleasing picture of a specific plant, and although it can be recognised in detail, it may not stand up to scientific scrutiny.

Botanical illustration, on the other hand, is a scientifically accurate representation of plants, making it possible to identify the plant in question. Its purpose is to help the identification of individual plant species.

Botanical art and illustration can cross over into each other, so that the results of both can be portrayed in an aesthetically pleasing manner.



Flower painting is a more general artistic representation of flowers. Its results can be looser in form and produce purely beautiful pictures.

Such is the extent of precision required in botanical art and illustration the judges scrutinise the paintings with magnifying glasses! Now that's nerve-wracking for the artists!

I love botanical art. Yes, it's very time consuming, but although I have very little patience, I will happily work on my paintings for hours at a time – so if I can do it, so can you.



One of the most important things in botanical art is the ability to observe. To produce an accurate painting you must spend time looking at your subject. You need to see how leaves and flowers arise from a stem, how the various parts are attached to each other and, how the light falls and reflects from various parts of the plant. Also, think how colours are put together – in particular the green in leaves, or the colour changes that occur as a plant or part of it gets old and dies. Note highlights and blemishes – everything that gives that particular plant character or attracts you to it.



You can probably understand why it can take me months to complete some of my studies and pictures!

Many of my students have told me that having learnt to observe in my classes, they have transferred this newfound ability to their everyday living. They now see the world and nature in ways they had not done before.



Traditionally botanical artists almost always used watercolour. But now as coloured pencil quality has improved, they are gradually making their mark as a popular and convenient contender.

Sketchbook studies of your chosen subject in the field is where coloured pencil obviously comes into its own, as you do away with the necessity for finding water. But coloured pencils are also well suited to final, studio-based botanical art studies due to their ability to capture quite fine details. But for this you will need them sharpened to a very fine point.

Mistakenly, people think that using coloured pencils is easier than using watercolour. It is not easier, only different. With coloured pencil one lays colour very gently and in small sections at a time. The risks are not the same as with laying larger watercolour washes.

Either watercolour or coloured pencil pigment on your paper can stain it and is difficult to remove entirely.

If, like me, you have got it into your head that you want to paint with coloured pencil, you will do so without wondering if it is easier or more difficult, you'll just get on with it. It gives me a thrill each time I paint a picture with coloured pencils.



Materials

Pencils

Coloured pencils are translucent, and it is this translucency that enables you to layer and blend colours on your paper to achieve the final colour you want.

For botanical art in general, I use the dry variety of pencil and a basic set of 22 carefully chosen colours. Some people manage with fewer than this and others use more. I have given the names of the pencils I used in the picture. Each picture you paint will help you to extend your collection of colours. I've built up my coloured pencil collection over time and have a whole host of different colours and brands to choose from.

Faber-Castell Polychromos:

- FC101 white
- FC103 ivory
- FC102 cream
- FC184 dark naples
- FC118 scarlet red
- FC142 madder
- FFC133 magenta
- FC193 burnt carmine
- FC225 dark red
- FC123 fuchsia
- FC134 crimson
- FC139 light violet (limited availability)
- FC138 violet
- FC170 may green
- FC168 earth green yellowish
- FC172 earth green
- FC173 olive green
- FC174 chrome green opaque
- FC278 chrome green oxide
- FC179 bistre
- FC178 nougat
- FC175 dark sepia



Over time you might want to build up a collection to rival mine!

I expect that you will be aware of the danger of dropped pencils. The pigment through the centre of the pencil can break and then it is useless as you will be unable to get a long stable point for fine details.

Surface

I work on hot pressed Fabriano Classico 5 paper. I cover the area I'm not working on with more paper to protect it from loose pigment and dropped pencils (yes dropped!). Skin oils in particular, even from well-washed hands, can change the surface of the paper acting as a resist for the coloured pencils. For this reason I also wear a cotton glove on my right hand with the fingertips cut off.

Other Materials

In addition to the pencils I would recommend in order of importance:

- Rotary pencil sharpener.
- Grey putty eraser.
- White plastic eraser.
- Eraser shield - for taking out small mistakes without disturbing your work.
- Embossing tools – used for indenting the paper prior to painting as in narrow veins, very fine hairs, or tiny stamens.
- Soft brush or feather (for dusting away loose pigment or eraser).
- Colourless wax blender. Used on the final stage of work, in areas of the painting that might benefit from this i.e. shiny surfaces, edges of highlights etc. Some textures will not benefit from blending the colours – as in the rough branch in this picture.



Set Up

Wherever you decide to work, make sure you're sitting comfortably. You need a chair that supports your back well, as the nature of botanical art is such that you are likely to sit for long periods of time.

Make sure that the light is on the opposite side to your working hand, so that you don't cast a shadow over your work. Keep your pencils and tools within easy reach so that you don't have to keep on stretching to get them.

Take regular and frequent breaks away from your work during the day. Be aware of your working position, as even something as basic as crossing and uncrossing your legs can affect the angle and pressure of your pencil on the paper.

I prefer to work on a slanted board or table easel. I keep my reference material close to my work area so I can glance between the two easily. If practical, keep your reference material straight in front of you. This cuts the amount of head turning you will need and thus the strain on your neck.

Working position is all-important.

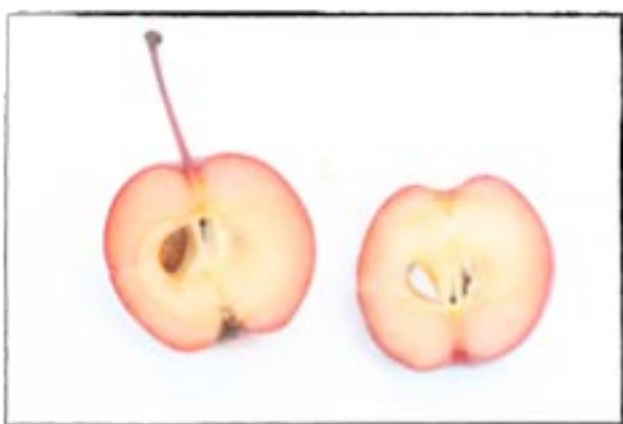


Reference Material



Above all, your botanical art will be better if you work from life. This allows you to really see your subject at all times throughout the development of your picture.

A magnifying glass helps to see the detail on the plant and also to check the neatness of your edges in the painting.



When you're setting up your subject, it's best to have natural light that comes in naturally from the opposite side to your working hand; if you're left-handed, light from the right and vice versa. At times you might want to use a lamp, in which case daylight bulbs shining from the same side as the natural light source won't change the colour of your specimen too much, nor your painting.



As I have said, working from life is the ideal in botanical art, but if you're working on something for months like I do, you can imagine how much your living subject will change and eventually wilt!

For this reason I take photographs and make sketches of my initial set up, so that I can work on the painting for a long time, changing leaves or flowers as they die. In some instances, I have had to wait until the next season to get fresh 'spare' parts!



As an example, I painted a picture of a savoy cabbage in watercolour. As the cabbage began to smell, I got a new one. I used three in all. You all know what rotting cabbage smells like, don't you? Painting a beautiful picture is not always beautiful in the painting of it.

Techniques

There are many techniques in coloured pencil and each artist develops their own. As a person's style of work begins to develop, so the technique in producing that style develops. No one technique is right or wrong, it is the result that counts. Using coloured pencil for botanical art, precision is important.

If you already use coloured pencils, as long as you observe the fine details of a plant, and can portray them using your own technique. This means you will be able to use coloured pencils in the same way you normally would use them.

This is how I generally work:

1. Work Dark to Light in Layers

Working from dark to light is the opposite of watercolour. In watercolour you can intensify a colour by adding layers of the same colour. But, with coloured pencil you cannot intensify a colour by either repeatedly layering or pressing extra hard. I still find myself doing this occasionally and it never works.

The colour you see through the centre of the pencil is the colour you will see on the paper and as I have just described, more layers of the same colour will not deepen it. Remember that coloured pencils are translucent and one takes advantage of this to create other darker or lighter colours. The first layer of colour will shine through the next layer, so that optically you are creating a third colour.

In coloured pencil, you mix colours on your paper, not on your palette.

One of the main reasons for working from dark to light is that light colour pencils have more binder mixed in with the pigment than dark colours. The binder is normally wax or oil based, depending upon the make. The more binder you apply to the paper in the form of light colour pencil, the less easy it is to add darker colour on top. The lighter pencil can act as a resist. Therefore, one generally puts the dark layers on first and the lighter layers last.

However, in some instances rules can be carefully broken. You might apply a very thin and gentle layer of pale colour to tone down the next layer applied over it!

Observed highlights should be left as clean white paper. Nothing will be as white as the white of the paper. Nothing will promote the

intense contrast between a colour and white as the white of the paper.

2. *Keep a Sharp Point*

By keeping your pencils as sharp as possible, you're able to fill the valleys in the uneven surface of the paper. It also helps you to have more control over your work. I use a rotary pencil sharpener and, if necessary, hone or dress it by rubbing the side of the point on a piece of scrap paper.

3. *Press Lightly and Apply the Colour in a Circular Motion*

All paper has some form of 'tooth', an uneven surface with valleys to fill and mountains to climb – at least for the pigment in your pencil. If you scoot across the surface of the paper with your pencil sharp or blunt, you will not fill the valleys. Even with several layers of colour on top, you will see the white valleys underneath and you will have difficulty attaining a saturated colour. The intention is to fill the valleys too so that the resulting colour is rich.

When you apply the colour, therefore, do this lightly and work in tiny circles to get an even coverage. If you press too heavily you risk putting on too much pigment without filling the valleys properly, the paper becomes impregnated too early and you will be unable to add more colour. If you try to put on more colour at this stage, either the pencil skids across the surface, pigment builds up in lumps or you damage the paper.

4. *Blend to Finish*

With coloured pencil you can create many types of finishes to better show the surface texture of your subject. In some instances you may want a rough surface and for others a very smooth one; equally these may be shiny or matt. You can create this effect by blending – or not, as the case may be.

In the shiny crab apple, I needed to blend the colours, as there was a gradual transition between shades, highlights and shadows. You can do this by applying many layers of colour so that the surface is effectively saturated with colour, or if you haven't quite got that far, by using a wax blender to gently push the underlying pigment into the paper. There are several ways of doing this, but these are the two most common. The result is a rich colour.

The undersides of the leaves might not benefit too much from heavy blending, as they are matt. The branches are mostly rough and ready so that it is better to build up sufficient colour and texture and then leave them.

The Crab Apple



Pencils You Will Need

- *Faber-Castell Polychromos*: 225 dark red, 223 deep red, 173 olive green yellowish, 194 red violet, 128 light purple pink, 121 geranium lake, 185 naples yellow, 102 cream, 175 sepia, 101 white
- *Derwent Artist*: 2210 Heather, 2220 Soft Violet, 4140 Distant Green
- *Caran d'Ache – Pablo*: 371 Bluish Pale, Full Blender
- *Prismacolor Premier*: 924 Crimson Red, 923 Scarlet Lake, 927 Scarlet
 - Red
- *Prismacolor Verithin*: Crimson Red, Tuscan Red

These are the pencils I used in this section. As I said, I collected my colours over the last few years. I have learnt which colours work in botanical art and those that are less likely to. I also have some favourite colours that I tend to use again and again. Some of these colours also appear in my basic list of pencils.

You will see that my composition from the photograph has changed in my final painting. This is because it was drawn from life and I was able to paint the leaves at different angles to best show off their shape and colour. As the original leaves died I replaced them with other leaves that I felt were more pleasing and interesting to the composition. (This is partly why botanical art can be better than photography!)

[Click here to watch me paint the crab apples.](#)

Dissection



In botanical art it is not so important to include all aspects of the subject being painted as it doesn't necessarily have to stand up to scientific scrutiny, but I choose to do so in this picture.

This is why I painted all the elements of this crab apple tree – I wanted to capture all its characteristics. These differ slightly between varieties of crab apples: with differences between leaves, flowers and fruit.



A dissection of flowers or fruit is often the best way to show them and therefore I chose to paint a dissected fruit.

Obviously to paint a dissection from life you have to work very quickly. Luckily there are ways of slightly delaying oxidation (browning) of the apple, such as dipping the cut sections in lemon juice.

But, the apple is quite small and hopefully there will be others on the tree giving you the opportunity to paint from life. Again this is where the photograph comes in useful to find an appropriate 'spare'!

Pencils You Will Need

- *Faber-Castell – Polychromos*: 101 white, 102 cream, 103 ivory, 108 dark cadmium yellow, 283 burnt sienna, 177 walnut brown, 186 terracotta,
 - 223 deep red, 194 red violet, 225 dark red, 126 permanent carmine,
 - 168 earth green yellow, 121 geranium lake,
 - 179 bistre
- *Caran d'Ache – Pablo*: 371 Bluish pale
- *Prismacolor Verithin*: Carmine

[Click here to get the remaining series of videos from ArtTutor, including 'Painting the crab apple dissection'](#)

Foliage

The crab apple has relatively simple foliage, but to show those leaves botanically you need to illustrate both the upper and under-side of the leaf. You can tell the difference between the two sides as the underside is paler and bluer than the upper side, the veins have a hint of pink showing on the underside as well as being raised. The veins on the upper side are indented.



Pencils You Will Need

- *Faber-Castell – Polychromos*: 175 sepia, 223 deep red, 278 chrome oxide green, 172 earth green, 174 chrome green opaque, 103 ivory, 205 cadmium yellow lemon, 170 may green, 249 mauve, 168 earth green yellowish
- *Derwent Artist*: 5120 Light Moss, 4140 Distant Green
- *Caran d'Ache – Pablo*: 371 Bluish pale, 231 Lime green

[Click here to get the remaining videos from ArtTutor including ' The crab apple leaf'](#)



Branch and Flower

The final step is to paint the flower and branch of the crab apple.

Even if you don't want to paint the rest of the crab apple group, you might want to have a look at this section particularly if you want to know how to paint beautiful, delicate flowers.

However, a few words of warning:



- Paint the leaves first.
- White flowers are best done with a dark background already in place.
- Remember to keep a very light touch.
- Nothing is whiter than the white of the paper.
- Only blend if absolutely necessary.
- The flowers are very small and delicate with very fine detail.
- It is easy to overdo them and difficult to undo.
- Be careful.

Pencils You Will Need (Flower)

- *Faber-Castell – Polychromos*: 106 light chrome yellow, 174 chrome green opaque, 172 earth green, 135 light red violet, 139 light violet, 119 light magenta, 232 cold grey III, 271 warm grey II, 187 burnt ochre, 188 sanguine, 283 burnt sienna, 129 pink madder lake, 127 pink carmine,
 - 126 permanent carmine
- *Derwent Artist*: 1800 Rose Pink
- *Caran d'Ache – Pablo*: 371 Bluish pale, 015 Olive yellow
- *Prismacolor Verithin*: Carmine

Pencils You Will Need (Branch)

- *Faber-Castell – Polychromos*: 175 sepia, 177 walnut brown, 180 raw umber, 186 terracotta, 230 cold grey I, 263 caput mortuum violet
- *Derwent Artist*: 4140 Distant Green

[Click here to get the remaining videos from Art Tutor including the flower and branch.](#)



The Finished Painting

Together the three elements make up the picture of a year in the life of a Malus 'Gorgeous' Crab Apple. But in Botanical art, there are no rules to say that you can't just paint the bits you like best!

The key things to remember are practice and enjoyment! Practice a little every day, working slowly – botanical art is not a loose discipline!

I hope you've learnt a lot from this guide and have picked up some of the enthusiasm I have for botanical art.

And even more importantly, I hope you have enjoyed it and will go on to enjoy hours of painting lots of different pictures.



About Gaynor

Gaynor is a distinguished and award winning botanical artist. She works in watercolour, coloured pencil and graphite and has pictures in collections in Europe, the USA and Australia. Gaynor is passionate about sharing her expertise and teaches regularly in the UK, USA and Norway, and has online students as far away as Australia and Canada.

Visit her website at:

www.gaynorsflora.com

