

# PARTING SHOT FROM DANNY MILLER

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



A flock of birds takes flight near the South Jetty of the Columbia River at Fort Stevens State Park in June.

## ODDITY

# Flower power

Exhibit combines Impressionist gardens and paintings

By KATHERINE ROTH  
Associated Press

**N**EW YORK — Many American painters, inspired by French Impressionists at the turn of the 20th century, flocked from East Coast cities to sun-dappled garden havens in places like Appledore, Maine; Old Lyme, Connecticut; and Long Island's East End.

The gardens they sought, known as "grandmother's gardens," were utterly unlike the formal Victorian gardens of the time. These were homey, Colonial-era flower gardens, densely packed with bright and abundant blooms red and orange poppies and enormous peonies in pastel pinks and purples set against backdrops of towering blue delphinium, digitalis with their tiny bell-shaped white and purple blooms, and yellow sunflowers. The delicate foreground might include violas, calendulas and violet sage.

Grandmother's gardens were designed so that no matter what season, something was always blossoming and bright, with blooms planted close to houses and porches to encourage lingering, touching, tinkering and inhaling.

"Impressionism: American Gardens on Canvas" is a multi-disciplinary show at the New York Botanical Garden, in the Bronx, through Sept. 11. Along with flowers, it includes 20 Impressionist paintings inspired by such gardens.

### Bold, painterly strokes

Artists featured in the New York Botanical Garden's Rotunda gallery include William Merritt Chase, Childe Hassam and John Singer Sargent among others. Some of them gardened, and all were known for their skill at painting outdoors and for bold, painterly brushstrokes.

"The positive reception of Impressionism in the United States coincided with a burgeoning garden culture, and these interpretations of well-tended residential gardens resonated with American ideas of the good life," said guest curator Linda S. Ferber, a senior art historian at the New-York Historical Society.

The paintings are easy on the eyes, she said: "Americans have always had a sweet spot for landscape, which carries many messages about national and cultural identity. Here, we can see how deeply enmeshed in the American psyche gardening was."

Impressionism was considered edgy in its day, which was the same era when the New York Botanical Garden, now celebrating its 125th anniversary, was founded, along with some of the East Coast's most famous parks, museums and gardens.

### Public-minded spirit

The paintings, gardens and optimistic, public-minded spirit of the time are captured in two books published to coincide with the show: "Impressionism: American Gardens on Canvas" (New York Botanical Garden, 2016), about the featured painters and paintings; and "The New York Botanical Garden" (Abrams, 2016), about the garden's history.

Preparing for the show



Robert Benson/New York Botanical Garden via AP

A Colonial-era style garden, or "grandmother's garden," planted around the facade of a house inside the Botanical Garden's Enid A. Haupt Conservatory in New York.



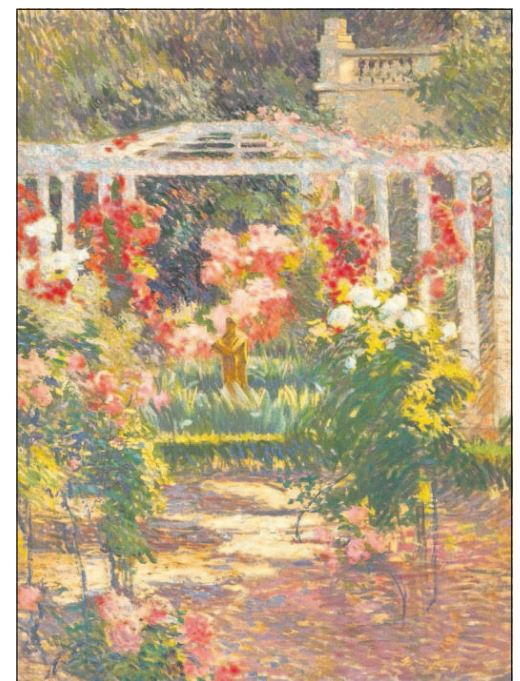
Edmund William Greacen/Private Collection/New York Botanical Garden via AP  
Edmund William Greacen's painting "In Miss Florence's Garden."

involved training a dizzying array of flowers to bloom all at once for maximum impact. That took much of the past three years, numerous greenhouses and the garden's enormous team of experts, who grew and trained around 50,000 plants for the exhibit.

"In real life, you would never see all these flowers blooming at the same time. It's

a living work of art, an ideal garden in perpetuity. So don't try this at home," said Todd A. Forrest, the garden's vice president for horticulture and living collections. "And many are flowering off-season, so don't expect to see them in the shop."

Once a week, whole sections of the garden are replaced, if needed, so the



William de Leftwich Dodge's painting "The Artist's Garden."

William de Leftwich Dodge/ Neville-Strass Collection/ New York Botanical Garden via AP

display continues to look perfect.

"The result is that if you squint, you should be able to see a living Impressionist garden," Forrest said.

### A model porch

To put the grandmother's garden in context, much of the exhibit is nestled around a model porch, the type of architecture often included in the backdrop of American Impressionist paintings.

"We invented an Impressionist garden from whole cloth intimate, comfortable and colorful, so that walking through the doors it evokes the brilliance and boldness featured in so many Impressionist gardens," explained Forrest.

The exhibit is accompanied by a program of poetry, lectures, tours, music, dance and even an "1891 Ale House," offering snacks and drinks in keeping with the era.

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