

Paul and Bunny Mellon.

Courtesy photo



# Spectacular Exhibit Explores Bunny Mellon's Life With Flowers

The late Rachel “Bunny” Lambert Mellon spent a lifetime reverently dedicated to all things botanical. She adeptly appropriated horticulture to form a resplendent living art from the White House Rose Garden to her ultra-secluded gardens in Upperville.

Bunny Mellon, who died in 2014 at age 103, was not only an accomplished garden designer but also a legendary art collector and noted philanthropist. Among her many important gardening and landscaping endeavors, she also created the Kennedy gravesite at Arlington National Cemetery.

Over decades, Mrs. Mellon assembled a distinguished collection of botanical artwork and a library of more than 10,000 volumes on botanical subjects, reference resources that informed her professional pursuits as well as her personal interests in Oak Spring's greenhouses and gardens.

Although the library is open only to scholars, art devotees can get a peek inside by taking a trip north to New York for “Redouté to Warhol: Bunny Mellon's Botanical Art” now on view in the art gallery of the LuEsther T. Mertz Library at The New York Botanical

Garden through February 12.

This stunning exhibition comprises nearly 80 works, ranging from the 14th through the 20th centuries, from the Oak Spring Garden Library. Among the featured works—many never before exhibited publicly—are rare masterpieces by renowned botanical artists such as Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (1533–88) and Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759–1840) as well as 20th-century paintings by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Andy Warhol (1928–87).

This extraordinary exhibition explores the

many aspects of botanical art and

reveals the wide range and breadth of works inspired by the beauty of the plant world. An introductory display in the rotunda of the Mertz Library will explore Mrs. Mellon's legacy as a skilled horticulturist and visionary collector whose Oak Spring Garden Library and Foundation continue to carry out her mission and interests.

In the adjoining art gallery, rare illustrated manuscripts, works on paper, paintings, and three-dimensional objects will make up the

## About the Oak Spring Garden Foundation

The mission of the Oak Spring Garden Foundation is to perpetuate and share the gift of Rachel Lambert Mellon, including her home, garden, estate, and the Oak Spring Garden Library, which comprises a celebrated collection of rare books, manuscripts, works of art, and other related artifacts. The foundation is

dedicated to facilitating scholarship and public engagement on the history and future of plants, including the culture of gardens and landscapes and the importance of plants for human well-being. For information, go to [oakspring.org](http://oakspring.org).





Left, Georg Dionysius Ehret (German, 1708–70) [*Magnolia grandiflora*], ca. 1737 Bodycolor on vellum. Oak Spring Garden Library  
Above, Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973) *Pot of Flowers*, 1958. Colored lithograph with crayon. Oak Spring Garden Library

heart of the works, from Redouté to Warhol.

Among the rare books on display are extraordinarily ornate examples of books of hours, the devotional texts popular in the medieval period, and *La Clef des Champs* (1586), a small pattern book by Le Moyne of natural history subjects for artists and crafts specialists. Watercolors by French artist Nicolas Robert (1614–85) showcase the artist's scientific knowledge and keen attention to botanical detail, which was likely gained by painting the plants on the estate of Gaston d'Orléans, the younger brother of Louis XIII.

The exhibition also features the art and economics of “tulipomania,” the craze for

tulips that seized Holland in the 17th century. It includes still life paintings by Johannes Baptista van Fornenburgh (1585–ca.1649) and Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and watercolors by German painter Jacob Marrel (1614–81) that were made for tulip bulb catalogs.

A central gallery wall in Redouté to Warhol presents a grid of 17 paintings on copper by Dutch artist Jan van Kessel (1626–79). Arranged to emulate a cabinet of curiosities, these highly-detailed works depict plants, insects, arachnids, mollusks, and reptiles.

Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708–70), one of the greatest masters of botanical art, worked for preeminent botanists. They included Carl

Linnaeus, which contributed to his superior knowledge of plant form as shown in his depictions of magnolias and pitcher plants in the exhibition. Redouté, who served as a royal court artist for Marie-Antoinette and later for Empress Josephine, is represented by three watercolors painted in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The time-spanning breadth of Mrs. Mellon's collection is highlighted by a grouping of works by prominent artists of the late 19th and 20th centuries. *Flowers of Poetry* (ca. 1890) by Henri Rousseau (1844–1910) features humble violas, asters, and other common garden plants arranged in a simple still life.

Two of Picasso's still life prints, completed in Cannes in the late 1950s, depict floral arrangements as simplified, boldly colored shapes. Andy Warhol's *Vine Leaf Marinade*—an illustrated “recipe” from *Wild Raspberries* (1959), the handmade satirical cookbook he designed and illustrated with New York interior decorator Suzie Frankfurt—provides a more whimsical and stylized view of plants.

Finally, Sophie Grandval (b. 1936) began her career as a textile designer but turned to intimate paintings of natural subjects, including that bane of gardeners, in *Dandelion* (1990).



**“In partnership with our close friends at The New York Botanical Garden, we have the pleasure of sharing the special qualities of Mrs. Mellon's world with a broader audience through this exhibition,” said Sir Peter Crane, president of the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, which maintains the Oak Spring Garden Library and promotes scholarship and public engagement in the fields of botany, horticulture, and landscape design. “We are deeply grateful for this opportunity and hope that all who visit Redouté to Warhol will enjoy this special glimpse into Mrs. Mellon's unique domain.”**

Photo by Middleburg Photo