

## On Marianne North's Paintings



What draws me into further study of Marianne North's work is the beauty of the paintings. The flowers are exquisite, sometimes exceptionally so. She is one of the best and most natural leaf painters ever. The landscapes are vast, or very close up, or both at once. The other things that draws me to her work is its scope. She is the first painter to try to paint the whole earth, its biomes, its places, its plants and landscapes. Frederick Church is a great draftsman, no doubt about it, but his subject matter is limited, and the number of really good works is small. Church knew Marianne North, and assumed the

mantle of maestro in relation to her, but actually, though many of his works are very fine, hers overall are better, more scope, more detail, more accurate study.<sup>1</sup> Even her weakest area, pictures of people, is interesting and largely, as yet, unexamined. She pictures social relations in many studies of people, towns and villages. All over the world. Some of these prove her lack of racist attitudes, unusual for an upper class woman then.

Marianne North is good at still life, landscape, flower studies, tree studies, architectural studies, space relations, foliage, Cactus, Orchids, Grasses, rivers, mountains geographical areas, the dust of Chile, the wet cloudiness of Sarawak, the clear lines of Japan, the opulence of India, the dry vegetation of South Africa and the fecundity of Brazil. And this merely scratches the surface of what she did. In the work below we are in the presence of a great ecological painter of landscape and flowers. This is part of the problem. Experts in Botanical illustration want her to do only what they do; people who study human relations want her to do only that; professional art critics want her to paint more like post-modernists and fit neatly into their false and dogmatic understanding of art history. Marianne North goes beyond all these concerns while touching on them and much more. I think she is one of the great artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more exact and universal than Turner, more scientific and accurate than Van Gogh, better at many kinds of landscape than John Everett Millais and Frederick Church.

But it is a mistake to see her as merely a botanical artist, though she is great at doing both flowers, trees, bushes and grasses, all expressing an early ecological consciousness. When one starts to study her work, it is usually the flowers that attract, but the longer one studies her, the more one sees that this is really just a surface, she is much more complex than that.<sup>2</sup> Critics of Marianne North miss the ecological point of much of her work entirely. Nor do they get its artistic scope or Darwinian value. They dislike her multifaceted break up of the spatial plane into foreground and far distance; They want flat illustrations. In fact, this is a primary way she shows the ecology of a plant, tree or bird. Her critics are often limited by their own point of view, and so misunderstand her.

She is an artist of great specificity and poetry, spatial variety and local feeling. If one takes, say, her studies in Japan, one begins to see that she did works of marvelous specificity. There is her observations on how they made cloisonné. There is for instance, her painted study of drying rice on the beach in Japan. There are cultural studies of the Temple at Hottomi. She did a great still life of Japanese flowers and vases. She also did a

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<sup>1</sup> She mentions Church a number of times in Her Recollections. She first meets him when he is younger, and in health, and 10 years later when he is old and sick with Rheumatism and cannot use his hand. It is a said story, and by the time she meets him a second time, it is clear that she has done a lot more than he has, even though what he did was tremendous.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that her botanical work is not important, it is, as the Hemsley's 1882 version of The Gallery of Marianne North's Paintings of Plants and their Homes: A Descriptive Catalogue, shows.

study of a woman in simple Japanese clothes walking down the street carrying a child, toward a temple gate, which is worthy of a Haiku by Issa or Basho. It is nearly a perfect painting, a maestro-piece, as it were (see #812, below). In South Africa she paints # 425, which she calls a “View from the Steps of Table Mountain through a Wood of Silver Trees”, and it is veritable poem of praise to these trees and the place where they live. She takes away general stereotypes about a place and shows us the real thing as it was in the 1870’s, No where else is this done so well, most of these places are off the map for most photographers and artists. Close up and distance: this is how she often shows continuity of species, and how they live in a given living space. It is profound, though many of her critics, born of art as art for art’s sake speciality, cannot see it. Their clueless views are locked in internal affairs of an increasingly internal art world.

Calling her an “amateur” is an insult. One could say she is an amateur in the sense that Van Gogh, Thoreau or Darwin were ‘amateur’, but this is hardly a criticism. Van Gogh condemns the gallery owners as “dealers in men”.<sup>3</sup> This is a condemnation of the notion of art as a profession. Often the use of the term ‘amateur’ in art is meant to demean, particularly 19<sup>th</sup> century women artists. Now they sell Van Gogh’s for 50 million dollars or more. Many Van Gogh’s and North’s have been removed from the ‘market’ by Kew and the Van Gogh Museum and that is a great thing. Making art as an extension of corporate capitalism is a mistake. The problem of course is that art is too much defined by “patronage” when in fact any decent artist avoids patrons as much as possible. But in the case of North, one cannot subject her to the dictates of patrons if one wishes understand her. She stands outside of the art market. North is a feminist and ecologist, and an early one, but her critics do not see that either. The category of “amateur” is largely meaningless, Making art about making money or not making money is to determine it as an economic activity and this renders it meaningless. It is beside the point to make art about itself or money, as Leonardo and the painters of the Lascaux and Chauvet caves knew. As the Japanese poet Issa said in a famous Haiku, somewhat shockingly to today’s Americans---

Writing shit about new snow,  
for the rich,  
is not art.

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<sup>3</sup> One thing that Vincent has going for him is the seamless interface between his art and his letters. The Van Gogh museum on Amsterdam has organized the letters and paintings into an amazing 6 vol, work on Van Gogh. I think it is by far the best primary resource on him, and perhaps one of the great books of the last century. I hope Kew Gardens will eventually correlate the writings and paintings of Marianne North in a similar way and make their website as easy to explore her recollections and paintings together as the Van website makes his paintings and letters one seamless whole. I am trying to give some semblance of what that might be like here.

Marianne North was not about money, most of her works have never seen a cent pass over it to buy them, to her and her art's credit. Like Van Gogh she largely placed herself outside the capitalist system. She is not an amateur but a "citizen scientist", traveling around the world, painting sculptures and plants, trees and landscapes. Her work is about biology and geographical beauty. Indeed, compared to North, "professional" creative people are questionable at best, mere commercial "post-Modernist" hacks at worst. Real art is rarely, if ever, about making money. Nor is it about slicing and dicing multiple quotes and sources into a pastiche of inanities. That is all "post-modernism" is. North was an artist who worked with intelligence and sympathy, and one we should take seriously.

Thoreau is a great writer as well as a great botanist, though he had no training as either in a formal sense. He is also a citizen scientist. The notion of a "professional" elite is an economic fiction, a power play--- in nearly all domains, one that privileges those who make most of the money, often unfairly. Power is always a rigged game, and the elite rarely lose. The truth is however that the more they win the more all the rest of nature, people and the world loses. Those who do all the work rarely win. CEO culture is one of the most unjust things on earth. The fact is that North's inheritance of large amounts of money put her beyond caring about money, and she was able to spend the last years of her life painting images of flowers, towns and forests in the best way she thought possible, and she did this well and often beautifully. In the end she gave it all away, to us. We are the inheritors of the great heritage of an effort free of profiteers. The world she gave us is ours, and the trees, animals and human beings she painted. Thankfully, she betrayed her own class.

This in itself is already a betrayal of the English imperial system, which is about hoarding power and money, and doing nothing socially useful with it. Modernist and "post-modernist" art reflects this emptiness. She was the inheritor of title and wealth, and she gave it all to ordinary people, after living a life of devotion to nature. This is opposite of imperial, or colonialist. She ends up, like Charles Darwin or Bertrand Russell, being one of the fairest and most equality minded of English aristocrats. Like them she moves out of aristocracy and the dictotomy professional/amateur into citizen science. I am grateful for this, enough to make this page about her, to praise what she did.

I wish to specifically defend her against the charge of being imperialist/colonialist as well as defending her art. She is far from being an agent of the British empire. Yes, Kew Gardens did collect plants from all the colonies. But though she collected plants and gave them to Kew, I do not see the harm. Indeed, Kew is one of the greatest gardens in the world, and they help nurture endangered plants. She does decry the British empire

in Delhi, and complains also, “alas! the hideous barrack buildings and other atrocities introduced by my countrymen” in Delhi, ----and she is thus critical of the British army, as well as of the negative effects of colonialism. She is also innocent of the charge, made by Susan Morgan and others, of “crimes” committed by British imperialists, namely the stealing or appropriation of things like rubber from the Rubber Tree or quinine from the Cinchona Tree of Peru. She had nothing to do with these events. In some places in the Recollections she even decries the damaging planting of Cinchona in some places.

Nor is there reason for blaming her for doing what she and her father did all her life. They visited political dignitaries on private pleasure or painting trips. To blame her continuing this is hardly just. It was part of her life, her father’s life really, and does not mean she is herself a colonialist. Her early Further Recollections of a Happy Life, does not record her fathers death until pg 231, and so we giet a vivid picture of how confiedent and happy she was with him. His loss is a great blow and she beomes very vulnerable. It is very clear how she needed local guards, police, officials or well known men to protect a single woman traveling alone and sitting out and painting. She was often exposed and in some danger.

Her point later in life was to travel as she and her father did in Europe, but go beyond him. She stopped traveling as a pleasure, now she travels in favor of a global Darwinist equality of plants around the world. She did this at a time women did not do such things, and to confuse this need of protection with colonialism is a misatke. She wants wonder and amazement, not power and wealth. She says this specifically. This is, again, the opposite of colonialism. She adapted the travel style of her father, a British member of parliament (MP), to world botany, specifically a botany that is done by a woman, which was unheard of at the time. To call this colonialist is to misunderstand what she was doing and why. She subverts the colonialist impulse in favor of a universalist insistence on the global rights of plants and biomes. She clearly dislikes the high class parties and fetes of the ultra-rich. It is clear too that she usually seeks out the wealthy and well positioned only because she is a woman and feels vulnerable in places where there is real danger.<sup>4</sup>

The ideal of preservation of rare plants implied by many of her attitudes does not exist as yet, globally, even if it is approximated in a few places, and this makes her relevant not just now, but for a long time to come. We live in a world where plants and animals have no rights and are “externalized, because only the rights of fake corporate persons matter. Such a world is a world that is destroying itself. Ours is the age of herbicides, and she hated things like what we are now doing to the Milkweeds and Monarch butterflies, killing them off with glyphosate and the neonicitoids. Indeed, many thousands of plants and insects, frogs and reptiles are harmed by these poisons, just as

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<sup>4</sup> ( see page 10 volume II), where she is afraid and seeks safety

many species are harmed by greenhouse gases created by billionaires that take no account of the harm they are doing to the earth and the species of plants and animals that are trying to live on it.

She would be opposed to this. No wonder there are critics who want to dismiss her. She is much more a threat to the power structure and the abuse of nature by capitalists and the rich, than she is a servant of that power. Most of the critics of her accuse her of complicity with imperial powers, and that is not right at all. She says clearly and early that she wishes to make painting her master, and that is what she did, and the other master is nature and she is faithful to both everywhere. To fault her for this, is to project on her an agenda she just does not have, and to impose one's own false ideas on her, without reason or justice.

Did she use botanical illustrations to help her? There is no good reason that it should be a fault if she did so. She herself says she used Beccari's drawings of the "fairy lantern" below, as I explain, below. She did not apologize for this and does not need to. But it was very seldom that she did this, and it is hardly a fault. She says repeatedly that she did her work in front of the subject by hand, and there is no reason to doubt her. For the most part, it is abundantly clear that she was an easel painter and sat before her subject wherever she worked. Her manner and style are so consistent over so many years, that there is no question that she did all the work herself. For the many years she paints from life; she arranges, she meditates on what she sees. Her compositions are compositions, not mere imitation of what her eyes see: she selects, as is done by any artist. I see she had minor help here and there from botanical illustrations, which are often very good, as they made her paintings even better than her own observations, which were already excellent.

There is some evidence that she requested such illustrations from Kew late in life to help her finish a given painting. So what? Anyone who has a problem with this is condemning a woman who was doing very hard work, both in painting from life and augmenting this practice, rarely but possibly, with checking herself against illustrations of the same subject. Any decent artist does this. She is a scientific realist and I have no problem with her fixing or improving her work by any means necessary. Using the Beccari illustrations of the Fairy Lantern was a fine thing to do. She improved it, quite a lot. She was trying to do a painting of one of the rarest plants in the world and any help was helpful. The evidence suggests she is honest and worked very hard, painted from her subjects and thought about what she painted.. Anyone who has a problem with what she did is missing the main point of her work, which is the study of life, nature and culture, and is about the ecological celebration of our world. She writes, movingly, "Did I not paint ?—and wander and wonder at everything ?" Yes, she did, marvelously so, amazingly so.

Did she use photos,--- probably very few, if any, as there was no, or few, color photographs then, and moreover drawings from photos is often not an advantage as life offers far more variety and interest. Her works are full of original observations, as one can see in her Pitcher Plants of Borneo or her Blue Puya and Araucaria Trees of Chile. It is, in any case, hard to work from photos and I do not fault those who do. It is hard to use photos well. Their work is often less inspiring than North's who nearly always worked from life, amazingly and well. Photos can be helpful but they are a far cry from painting from life. Sure she makes mistakes, painting is an hard craft. But her craft was very good.

The following rare drawing by North shows herself up high on a rather dangerous rock doing a Palm tree<sup>5</sup>



This is one of only a few self-portraits by Marianne North. I am pretty sure she was painting this painting below:

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<sup>5</sup> Anka Ryall, *The World According to Marianne North, a Nineteenth-Century Female Linnaean*  
<https://ugp.rug.nl/tvs/article/download/10748/8319>  
*this drawing appears in a letter in the Kew Collection and states*

”I know Mrs. Allman will forgive my sending you the above sketch of myself in [the] Seychelles instead of sending it to her. I feel that you will better enter into the delight of the situation. How I got up and how I got down is still a mystery to me – but I know that if a cramp had seized me, you would have seen little more of your friend, for the boulder went sheer down some 30 feet or more on all sides!”



She writes about this in Vol. II of Recollections, (vol II. Seychelles pg.291) and says:

“There were many of these trees [Coco de Mer] on the island of Curieuse, and a path was cut to one of the biggest, with a pile of boulders behind it, on which I climbed, and perched myself on the top ; my friends building up a footstool for me from a lower rock just out of reach. I rested my painting-board on one of the great fan leaves, and drew the whole mass of fruit and buds in perfect security, though the slightest slip or cramp would have put an end both to the sketch and to me. Bright green lizards were darting about all the time, over both the subject and the sketch, making the nuts and leaves look dull by contrast. There were twenty -five nuts on that tree, and countless imperfect ones. After descending safely from the boulders, we returned to the shore through some swampy ground”

The male flower and female fruit of this Palm are very sexual looking, below. Was that a concern to her? It may be the reason that North was interested in them, though generally her work is not sexual like Georgia O’Keefe, despite over Freudian critics who



like to say the contrary. So, it is an open question, similar to the poems of Emily Dickenson, which are widely and differently interpreted. My own interpretation of this is that North knows very well that flowers are sexual and have to do with reproduction by their very nature. She is neither surprised by this or obsessed with it. She merely pictures its loveliness, does not glory in it as a self-portrait, but values the flower in its own right, and is unashamed of this.<sup>6</sup>



Painting 475

Male inflorescence and Ripe Nuts of the Coco de Mer, Seychelles.

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<sup>6</sup> a typical example of reductive Freudianism and badly done Gender Theory is Eadaoin Agnew's essay "An Old Vagabond': Science and Sexuality in Marianne North's Representations of India" <http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue72/agnew.htm>

For instance she takes a lovely passage from Recollections like the following:

“Ceylon looked even more lovely than it did the year before.

The cocoa-nuts, with their endless variety of curves, were always a marvel to me, how they kept their balance, with their heavy heads and slender trunks leaning over the golden sand, and within a few yards of the pure clear sea waves. The moon shone gloriously, silvering all the bananas and palm-trees, and the phosphorus glittered on the sea. (vol. 1 page 322)

Agnew interprets this lovely and poetic passage about Ceylon's trees as follows “The vision of India as a curvaceous and sexual woman is further supported by a number of North's paintings, which have clearly invited comparisons to Georgia O'Keefe's work” Not only does she wrongly name the country, North is talking about, but she projects on North a sexual nonsense that is not there. She does this often, trying to turn North into an imperialist by sexual innuendo, which she wasn't.

The one critical work about North is Lynne Howarth Gladston's rather conventional Duchampian and Derridean diatribe that tries to show that North is really an imperialist, amateur colonialist. This is hardly accurate criticism, as North was not following the rather conventional ideology of botanical illustration. North is really an ecological painter, to her credit. Many of her paintings combine flower illustration with very interesting landscapes in an early ecological context of showing plants and trees in local habitations. While there are elements of British upper class values in North's character and upbringing, she largely overcomes this, as did Darwin, through her love of plants, flowers, forests and indigenous peoples. Botanical illustration, while useful for ID, is of little or no ecological intent. North's intent was to be popular, beautiful and scientific. But she was not only scientific and this meant painting what she actually saw, not only what was useful to other scientists. North's work has an ID function while still having a real beauty and excitement in it, and is universal, ecological and encyclopedic. She is far ahead of her time in this respect and one need not apologize for it.

In other words, the public criticism of North misses the point and employs a very conventional and dogmatic approach to art as a rigid modernist/postmodernist structure. Marianne is delightfully beyond these mercenary/ideological concerns. When one looks closely at Gladston's critique, it falls apart, dependent on it is on the erroneous ideas of David Hockney and the unproven slander that most artists cheated with Camera Obscura or Camera Lucida. She upholds Duchamp as a great man, when in fact, he is a very bad painter who was prone to esoteric cruelty in his late work, and is the virtual father of Andy Warhol whose capitalist art is vacuous and overpriced. Derrida is also a guru of emptiness and hyper-criticism. His efforts, like those of Duchamp are mostly a negative attempt to destroy art and steal it for himself. Derrida, like Duchamp, cannot be taken seriously, as both are anti-art clowns. What one loves in North is precisely that she is not a dupe of them, their ideology, or corporate modernism. She goes far beyond them in rendering the world of the 1870s and 1880's in bright colors and wonderful realism. Her work is way beyond Duchamp and his followers, is not human centered, but nature centered. She is a "amateur", or rather a 'citizen scientist', in the best sense of not being weighed down by the markets and professional pretensions of those who profit from increasingly bogusly "official art", corporate galleries and increasingly corporate "science". She is in short, not a corporate apologist as are most modernist artists, and that again is quite to her credit. They are the colonialists and imperialist globalists. Warhol is an adjunct to the corporate destroying of climate, biomes, plants, and cultures, whereas North points towards solutions to destruction of nature and excessive greed.

## **Marianne North and Slavery**

All that I have said so far, does not include my misgivings, only my hopes. I have had a few misgivings about her, which I feel I have resolved in her favor. I love Marianne

North's art. But small parts of her writing are problematic. I will explain why this is a poor reading of her writing and why. I was myself led into error about her work, an disvered one must look deeply to see the truth of the matter.

Her art and writing do not seem to always see eye to eye. In her art she is cosmopolitan, and liberal in her outlooks, treating people and plants as equals in the world. So for instance in these two works, below, she shows Brazilian slavery, in the first. In the second work she shows a South African tribal people. Both are shown in benign ways. In the first one, which is neither a protest work nor an endorsement of slavery or racism, she shows Africans working and tasting sugar. In the second she shows mostly women, one with a baby, near their village on a hill and the birds nesting above them. These are images of sympathy with local populations, and accurate historical records of how it must have been, in fact.



Painting 045



Painting 401

Titles:

Painting 045---Harvesting the Sugar-Cane in Minas Geraes, Brazil

Painting 401---Vegetation of the Addo Bush with Kaffirs and their Habitations

While it can be said with some certainty that in her art she is not a racist, imperialist nor a colonialist, in her writing she is a bit elitist, with a great sense of her own entitlement. She does not come off as an imperialist, but she is an aristocrat, She likes to be carried around in human carried conveyances<sup>7</sup> in some countries. But when one sees that painting 226 is, in fact, a self portrait, the view of this as morally objectionable disappears. In fact she was an old or at least aging woman and she was often deathly sick with rheumatism. She often says she cannot walk. So the need to be carried is a fact, and she was in a good pace where this was not too expensive to do:



Painting 226

View of the Himalaya Mountains from Mussooree.

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<sup>7</sup> She mentions the use of 'coolie' laborers and the use of 'rickshaws' to move her by running while pulling the cart, she was riding. What she does not mention is that many of these laborers were indentured servants. Such arrangements were largely the result of the unjust caste system in India and resulted in large scale migration out of the country as it was hard to live there. They were exploited labor used for instance in the sugar cane fields of Jamaica, Brazil and British Guiana. Mahatma Gandhi's first efforts in India were to stop the exploitive indenture profits.

Marianne often mentions riding horses in her travels too, which can't have been easy for a woman with rheumatism.



self portrait  
detail of above

Here she shows herself being carried in a chair. Above is a small section of that work and the old woman in the chair is her. One feels sorry for her, but glad she could afford this conveyance, as she needed it. It is amazing and a little haunting, that she decided to paint herself like this. The self-portraits she did are not like any others in the history of art.

She shows herself both very helpless and very brave, but in both cases, very matter of fact. It shows her as a woman disabled by her illness, nevertheless going on in a carrying device so she can continue her work. This shows great bravery.

It is clear she does not like to be feted by the wealthy and well born, but at the same time, she often seeks out the well born and wealthy or heads of state for help in her desire to find places she wished to paint. She and her father had always done this.

Is she a racist? The simple answer is no. The claim that she is looks false. I thought she might be originally, to my dismay, but this original perception was wrong. I have examined most of the evidence and find it untenable. So I will show that this too is a slander against her.

Her father was a fair man it seems. I did a little research on him his record in Parliament looks pretty good, He appears to have helped poor fisherman around Hastings, where they lived. She records herself how worried he was, in the 1860's, when some men on board a ship they were on wanting to fly the French flag because it will allow them to do some slave trading. This what she thinks anyway, the facts are rather different, because

France ended any and all slavery in 1848 with a general and unconditional emancipation.

She writes

When we started my father had refused to have one,[the English flag] thinking it would hurt the Frenchman's feelings, but now to his horror he found he had hoisted the tricolor [the French flag] on board, and as both he and Achmet talked of buying slaves, my father thought it was time we had the English flag over our heads to render such traffic illegal. (Some Further Recollections, vol 3, pg. 125)

So he had the French flag taken down, which is confusing since France had outlawed slavery too. But Mr. North put up the English flag, stopping the slave traders, who seem to have thought that France was a better flag to do illegal activities under, even though slavery and its trade was illegal on all French ships in 1848. This is interesting historically and fairly complicated. But it shows Frederick North as a man who acts on his belief in slavery as an evil. He is a good man and does what he thinks is he right thing. He thought the English flag was better. England had outlawed slavery in 1807, because of William Wilberforce, but it was not formally enacted until 1833.

What this makes clear is that Marianne's father was a decent man who abhorred slavery. Why did Marianne go against this? Or did she? Now, with her father dead in 1869, it is clear she continues to seek the protection of the wealthy out of fear. But does she endorse slavery in Brazil out of fear too?---Maybe it is not an endorsement at all.

Let's compare her with Darwin. Darwin was much less obsequious to the ultra-rich. He needs them less. He was a thinking man who broke down his own prejudices. Darwin travels to Brazil in 1831, and deeply horrified by the screams of a slave being punished. It is worth quoting Darwin on this at some length, as it puts in perspective North's opinion that slavery in Brazil was a benign thing in perspective: Darwin writes:

“On the 19th of August we finally left the shores of Brazil. I thank God, I shall never again visit a slave-country. To this day, if I hear a distant scream, it recalls with painful vividness my feelings, when passing a house near Pernambuco, I heard the most pitiable moans, and could not but suspect that some poor slave was being tortured, yet knew that I was as powerless as a child even to remonstrate. I suspected that these moans were from a tortured slave, for I was told that this was the case in another instance. Near Rio de Janeiro I lived opposite to an old lady, who kept screws to crush the fingers of her female slaves.

I have stayed in a house where a young household mulatto, daily and hourly, was reviled, beaten, and persecuted enough to break the spirit of the lowest animal. I have seen a little boy, six or seven years old, struck thrice with a horse-whip (before I could interfere) on his naked head, for having handed me a glass of water not quite clean; I saw his father tremble at a mere glance from his master's eye. These latter cruelties were witnessed by me in a Spanish colony, in which it has always been said that slaves are better treated than by the Portuguese, English, or other European nations. I have seen at Rio de Janeiro a powerful negro afraid to ward off a blow directed, as he thought, at his face. I was present when a kind-hearted man was on the point of separating forever the men, women, and little children of a large number of families who had long lived together. I will not even allude to the many heart-sickening atrocities which I authentically heard of;--nor would I have mentioned the above revolting details, had I not met with several people, so blinded by the constitutional gaiety of the negro as to speak of slavery as a tolerable evil. Such people have generally visited at the houses of the upper classes, where the domestic slaves are usually well treated, and they have not, like myself, lived amongst the lower classes.”<sup>8</sup>

Marianne must have read this passage as she is one of the first botanists to really understand Darwin and knew him and looked up to him. Indeed, to be more exact, she is the first great painter to have understood Darwin and based her art largely on him. She must have read the Voyage of the Beagle, in which this passage occurs, as well as his Origin of the Species. She may even have read his Descent of Man. She dealt with colonialist prejudices, I believe, in her paintings, successfully, I think. But her writings show a somewhat erratic learning process, eventually she was forced to flee race prejudices in South Africa in 1882-83. But it is a long trajectory through life to learn this, and her Recollections records the rather tortuous process of her slow education.

I speculate that painting, particularly realist painting is not linguistic, and that racism is largely an affair of language. For her, language is superficial. If she was a racist, one could speculate that it was a temporary thing, and perhaps derived from Louis Aggasiz, who she knew in America, as did Thoreau, indeed, it ties her to Thoreau, even if she did not know it.<sup>9</sup> Thoreau had the sense to reject Aggasiz's racism in favor of Darwin,

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<sup>8</sup> Darwin, Charles, Voyage of the Beagle, Barnes and Noble, 2004 N.Y. pages 430-31

<sup>9</sup> Was North influenced by Louis Aggasiz, who she knew well in Boston, spending time with his wife and himself, who was a known racist? It is doubtful, and much more likely not, as her conversations with him and his wife seem superficial by her own account.

rightly, as Agassiz's racist creationism and hatred of Darwin eventually ruined his reputation. But Marianne does not have the education that Thoreau had, and draws conclusions about Brazilian slaves and Chinese workers, based on their supposed superficial appearance of happiness or misery. She does this with aborigines in Australia and Native Americans in America too. She tends to blame the victim for their poverty, not seeing that it is the economic system, be it imperial or capitalist, that hounds, kills and condemns them. Or more accurately, sometimes their appearance of poverty mistakenly condemns them in her mind. But then she turns on her own perceptions, and implies she does not agree with herself on such things. But is this rather elitist concern with appearances, or racism? No, it is not racism. Yes, she sees too much through the glasses of her class, but that is not racism.

It is an early classism that she often overcomes, with her "bohemianism" and her love of eccentrics like herself.

In Brazil, early in her journeys, she writes with seemingly racist attitudes, and says ignorant things like "it is a mistake to suppose that slaves are not well treated"<sup>10</sup> But one must remember that Darwin says much the same thing. He is on a plantation and says that "there is no doubt that the slaves pass happy and contented lives" (Voyages, pg. 20)--- but he is careful to identify that some plantations that are better to their slaves while condemning the institution itself. Is she repeating white Brazilian opinions or Darwin? That is a fair question. I suspect she knew Darwin's words pretty well, and she is just repeating things she heard. Perhaps she just had a protected view of what was happening to slaves and did not understand. Or perhaps she is referring, as Darwin was, to the lucky slaves who were not badly treated.

I think it is important that racism does not reach her paintings, which are more about the person she actually was. I do not mean that racism is present in her writings, only that she is ambiguous about it, and maybe a little confused by what others are telling her. Her paintings are the better part of her and show an amazing woman who loved the facts of life wherever she went. Her paintings show compassion and care for the poor, including the poor of other races. But in her writings and letters a dislike of poverty comes out occasionally, which is awful and should have been faced. Or am I reading her unfairly? There is doubt that early on she had racist opinions about poor African Brazilians and poor people in India, as is shown in her Recollections and letters. Is she here supporting the Brazilian slave system? She states:

I could not see much discontent or sadness in these poor slaves, and do not believe them capable of ambition or of much thought for the morrow. If they have

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<sup>10</sup> Recollections. Macmillian, London, 1893, vol 1, pg, 121



abundant food, gay clothing, and little work, they are very tolerably happy. <sup>11</sup>

But I need to think this through. Look at the facts. She says virtually the same thing Darwin says in his Voyage. This is not racism, but is a description of a small number of slaves who are apparently happy. Let's think about what she actually says. She follows up the above with this "seven years of good conduct at Morro Velho gave freedom, which they have just enough sense to think a desirable thing to have." In her understated way I think she is saying she abhors forced labor. Which is to say she is not seeing actual slavery, but a sort of indentured servitude, which is terrible and should have been outlawed too. This is supposed to be one of her worst violations on the subject of slavery, yet if one reads what she actually says it is not just harmless, but is forward looking to the elimination of slavery. Where is the problem?

Her father hated slavery. Darwin certainly approved of North's paintings and says so in a letter. Yes, I think he would have seen no harm in what she says, and quite a lot of sympathy. Darwin was a man that worked for the abolishment of slavery in the US and the rights of animals in the UK. Darwin was not a sloppy thinker or an effete racist. Like Marianne he is often understating things.

But does she try to justify slavery? Only if read in the most negative way, she sounds an awful lot like the slave owners in the American south: 'the slaves are happy so why get rid of it', was a common argument in the American south. But actually she says nothing like this. Having read many of her writings now, I think such an interpretation is mistaken. But no, actually, she is just stating an objective opinion, some slaves were treated fairly well. But by the time she voices her opinion on Brazilian slavery the Civil War was already over. Having the opinion of slavery as a 'tolerable evil' was only possible in a place like Brazil, where slavery would soon be outlawed too, in 1888, precisely, because it was an intolerable offence. Brazil was the last major nation to end slavery. So her comment that the slaves were aware enough of their own condition to want freedom is full of weight, since she is writing when they were still in bondage. It had the most slaves too, 10 million by some estimates. Holding that some slaves are

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<sup>11</sup> Recollections page 148, Univ. of Virginia Press 1993 Edited by Susan Morgan. The Introduction to this book is powerful, where she relies on evidence, that is, rather than guilt by association, where her argument often fails. I don't think every British scientist is an "imperialist", nor is every English traveler a "colonialist". Her "racism" is not established as a real thing and is not a "Social Darwinism" in any case, even if she was an admirer of his.

treated well, is not a crime, it is quite true. She did not know what Darwin knew about slavery was in Brazil, so how can she be guilty of supporting it?

So since her comments on slavery actually indicate that she did not support slavery in Brazil, let's look at more evidence. Maybe the whole thesis that she was a racist needs to be put to rest.

According to Susan Morgan, North writes to a Dr. Burnell, a friend of hers, in India. He had been living in and helping the poor in India and states that "I would have you help those who are nearer yourself—and further from "monkeys"". As these two were good friends<sup>12</sup>, it is possible that this is a private joke about all the monkeys that are in India. Yes, this could well be. Morgan thinks she means a racist metaphor or slur--- that the "monkeys" are the poor humans of India. Morgan looks to be wrong here.

It would be a strange anti-Darwinian phrase, particularly from a woman who speaks often and well of the awareness and intelligence of Monkeys throughout the Recollections. This painting for instance is wonderful example of her attitude towards the monkeys and apes.

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Burnell was introduced to North by Edward Lear. He helped her get around India and was a friend.



Painting 545

Forest Scene, Matang, Sarawak, Borneo

This is reproduced in Laura Ponsonby's text , Marianne North at Kew Gardens, (pg. 54) and shows her to be very positive about the "Black Apes" of Borneo. I am not sure why Ponsonby calls this a 'black ape" or why Kew Gardens calls this painting an Orangutan. It could more likely be the 'Macaca nigra' or Crested Macaque. I am unsure what species this is. In any case, it is a good composition. It is sympathetically done and clearly based on her own observations. So her comment about Monkeys in the letter to Burnell might not be so bad, given her positive take on Monkeys and Apes in general. One could read into the supposition of her racism in Brazil and elsewhere a 'Social Darwinism', which is not at all Darwinian, which perhaps makes her say this sort of thing. But actually she never speaks like a "Social Darwinist" about anything. Social Darwinism is a false social construction which pushes hatred of others as a means of shoring up the power of a small coterie of business friendly whites. Or maybe she just means Monkeys, when she

says this word. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. So I doubt that the comment in the letter to Burnet is a racist comment.

Susan Morgan condemns North as a Social Darwinist. But I do not see that. So, I doubt Morgan is being just. Indeed, I think Morgan is unfair to North. I doubt she read carefully what North actually wrote. Like Gladston, she wants to skewer North. She has decided in advance of actually studying it, that North is a racist, colonialist and imperialist. In Gladston's case, it is clear that this is a political desire to harm her. She wants to uphold the colonialism of the self serving global art market, and as North is decidedly not a part of this, she attacks her. Gladston's attack is a narrow minded, free market and ideological attack. In Morgan's case, she wants to attack all males and "male" science as evil. It is hard to see how the study of plants that occupied Marianne is evil. Indeed, it is impossible to see most science as "male" or in any way sexual. She is innocent of all the complaints Morgan lays at her feet. Yes, even granted these Brazilian or Indian comments are off the cuff, and not entirely serious comments, is what Marianne says still questionable, inappropriate speech? No, she is not inappropriate. She is recording what was the case, not what she herself thought. If anything, through the objectivity, compassion shines through. Maybe they are guarded statements or jokes and not meant to be serious.

Darwin condemns the views of people that are so "blinded by the constitutional gaiety of the negro as to speak of slavery is a tolerable evil". I don't think this refers to Marianne North, even when one looks at the most harsh interpretation of her words. One can excuse her on the grounds that she is using too much understatement, or trying to impress her audience with a certain kind of guarded rhetoric, which makes her comments less harsh. Or one could say with some justice, she just does not know what she is saying, she does not know what slavery was in Brazil. But even if this is the case, so what? In any case, none of the criticism of her actually hold up to the evidence, which suggests the contrary. She is no racist.

I am inclined on the evidence to think Marianne is innocent of all the charges leveled by Morgan, Gladston and others. The real question, which would be another study that I do not have time to do, is why they need to slander Marianne North. It looks like North wrote these comments in 1878 and later, perhaps. Her supposed racism simply is a fabric of Morgan's imagination, and I do not agree with Morgan.<sup>13</sup> Gladston does not

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<sup>13</sup> It would be good if the Journals on which the Recollections are based would resurface again, as we could tell that much more about what she really thought. Marianne mentions basing her Recollections on the Journals in a letter. So they did exist and may still do. Perhaps the North family has them, as well as all the sketches and drawings she mentions that have not been published. If so, whoever has them has a responsibility to put them in the Public Domain. The original MS of the Recollections still exists too, I read, so since, according to Morgan, the text was changed quite a lot by her sister, it would be interesting

appear to mention Morgan's racist comments at all, though she mentions other attacks on North. If these are racist comments, and that is not at all certain, why does she say it? There are no explanations because she has no reason to be racist at all. Certainly large sectors of the Brazilian upper class were still racist, though they would slowly have to give that up. It was common to hold racist views at the time, as slavery was just coming to an end in Brazil. All that can be said is that she wrote that slaves are happy. That was clearly not the case, most of the time, as Darwin well knew. It cannot even be said that she is guarding herself against the painful recognition of the facts that Darwin and Thoreau were able to face. Darwin himself says that slaves were often happy in some situations.

So the most that can be said, unless one wants to believe things against the facts, or to slander her, that Marianne North was not a racist, and even if she speaks ambiguously about poor people she is not a racist. Susan Morgan and other critics of North miss this fact. It is an important fact that by the time she gets to Australia in 1881, her thinking has developed considerably. It is also possible, indeed, more likely, that there was no racism and she merely records the views of those she observed in Brazil. For instance she has a conversation with a Catholic traveler who tells her that:

“the whites are to blame for the treachery of the blacks, as they treated them like wild beasts, and often stole their children from them” (vol. II pg. 107)

North accepts this, I think, as she writes reflecting these views later. But no one has proved she is a racist, indeed, the evidence suggests she is a compassionate woman, ahead of her time. The fact that if she ever was a racist, which I doubt, she changes her views. She already notes in Australia that the Black Swans are being murdered off, and “like the emus, are fast disappearing before the killing race of Europe”. She notes that it is the Europeans who are doing most of the harm, ecologically and humanly. She later notes, (vol. II, pg. 163) that there are cases in Australia of “kidnapping the poor blacks, and selling them off as slaves” as well as “murdering natives”, and this is a “bad beginning for a new country”.<sup>14</sup> She agrees with this and abhors it, I think. She often

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to see what was changed and how. Ponsonby mentions that a troubled scenes with traveling companion of Norths' in America was removed by her sister, as are most comments about her sister too, Morgan states. She vacillates on this point, When she reaches California after being in Australia and Tasmania, she writes that :

“Those who still have sentimental ideas  
of the cruelty of white races in driving out the blacks have

calls them “poor blacks” which is hardly a racist epithet, but one of care and compassion.

She abhors the racism of South Africa by 1882-83. In fact, she notes the rapacious behavior of white Europeans all through her travels. She did a lot of very good work. I can see her comments in Brazil, like her artwork, to be merely objective. Even her writing is progressive and not racist at all. And if I put her comments in context, there is no racism at all, just a momentary lapse into ambiguous speech. Her writing can sometimes be not very clear. I grant she is not as good a writer as Darwin.

And then lastly, she appears to have left South Africa, one of her final voyages, because she was disgusted by the rise of racist hatreds there. She has to face people who are so full of hate for Native peoples, she finds herself having to despise them. She states clearly a position which sets herself as siding neither with those who hate Zulus nor with those who want to kill whites. She allies this objective position with her own love of nature and her paintings.<sup>15</sup> She praises Zulus and other darker peoples because they were “the merriest savages I ever saw”. (vol. II pg. 276) yet the people around her were consumed with race hatred. We know what happened in South Africa and how race hate

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not even seen the little I have seen of them, or they would soon change their ideas.” (vol. II pg. 198)

Or actually she could mean that those who have ‘sentimental’ ideas that try to justify whites for their cruelty towards blacks, would soon “change their ideas”, if they knew what she knows. This is what she is actually saying, if her ambiguous text is read with care.

So what she writes is the opposite of what it seems. Yes she calls them ‘hideous’, which is a comment on their poverty, not their race, but also “miserable creatures with uncombed locks”, which describes poverty with some sympathy. So my original reading that this is a racist comment is wrong. It is the opposite. She blames the victimizer, which means she is condemning the Europeans who impoverished the Native Americans. Those who have “sentimental ideas” about the virtue of the “cruelty” of Europeans towards blacks or natives, are the ones at fault here. She is only guilty here of writing poorly, and being ambiguous. She is here talking about Native Americans in Yosemite and not ‘blacks’, but is confusing the two, just as she confuses the Aborigines and the Africans. One must wonder if the return to America provoked this strange comment. It seems very likely. She was encountering the racism that harmed Californian Indians and responding to what happened to them. She is commenting only on their awful appearance which is a fact at that time.

<sup>15</sup> She tries to talk a woman named Frances out of her hatred of Zuluism, and tries to give her the “courage to go on painting from nature”. At the time this is a radical thing to do, as the English hated the Zulus and had the Anglo-Zulu war against them (1879). Marianne is writing of the 1884, and thus facing the entrenched and bitter attitudes of the English, who lost to the Zulus in 1879. There are many pro-English propaganda paintings of this done at the time. This shows both the non-racist view of her own art, and her changing politics, which is not allied with any racism. She has come to a position very much like Thoreau, who likewise watched nature closely and based his politics on it. ( see Recollections, vol. II pg. 279)

took over, until finally Mandela came and the whole Apartheid system collapsed. She is present in South Africa as Europeans are just beginning to enshrine their race hatred as public policy. She seems to be so disgusted by the rise of this race hatred, she flees from South Africa. Her paintings done there are amazing and do not show any of the hatred that she records.

In conclusion I think it can be intelligently maintained that Marianne North is no racist, is no colonialist and is no imperialist. I learned from her a lot about the biological, botanical and poetic aspects of South Africa, for instance. Indeed, I learned a lot I did not know about many places. But I also learned that the human beings there were terrible, and created a social cancer called Apartheid. She was against the early manifestations of this. Just as she was against the killing of plants, flowers and trees, everywhere. She is the Rachel Carson of the 1800's, and one should praise her, not tear her down with false histories and invented fictions about her supposed racism.

Maybe her writing is closer to her art after all? In her art, there are villages of poor people of nearly all colors in her work; there are lovely paintings of people in South Africa, Jamaica and India, Japanese works that are well thought out and composed, marvelous works from Australia and Indonesia and a many other places. She is a sympathetic lover of families and women, kids and animals wherever she goes, in her paintings as in her writings. I think she did some of the best art work of the 1800's. She is deeply neglected by the current art world, and marginalized by the science world. I think this needs to change. The notion of her colonial racist and imperialist self is a slander that comes from the imagination of those who hate her. She was not this, she was a great realist, and I have come to accept her as a great artist.

I was originally horrified by the apparent racism in her, but the more I have read her and looked closely at her art, the more can see this horror was mistaken. I was mistaken, like others. I was misled by the fictions of Susan Morgan and others. When she gets into the mood and seems to be judging the poor, it is always because she is judging too much by the appearances of poverty. It seems that maybe she was horrified by a certain untidiness, and as someone I know said, she tended to walk around in an "English bubble". But this seems unlikely too, as she is not really a stickler for her own looks much less those of others. It is true that those who cannot face the facts of excessive poverty, are led to deny suffering. People who in denial are unlikely to admit the horrendous conditions of slavery. But is that Marianne? No, not really. I don't want to condemn her supposed weakness on this, as it is not clear, as she could be well saying the opposite of what she seems to mean, so one cannot entirely blame her either. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that she is a very open and liberal minded person made even more so by her extensive travels.

Her paintings are more honest and tell a story of a woman who does not have a racist bone in her body. I admire that she traveled around the world several times and managed to overcome any prejudice she might have had. There are many alive now who would do well to learn from her on this. You will see below how profound her vision of this green world really is. But if one studies what she actually said, she is a woman of deep sympathy, not perfect perhaps, but a great artist and writer all the same.

Of course I say all this as an example of how scholars need to be careful about jumping to conclusions, as Susan Morgan does. I did it too at the beginning of this inquiry. But I learned that this is what clear thinking is, one makes mistakes, corrects, makes more mistakes and corrects, over and over, until one comes a little closer to reality. This is writing like Marianne's painting, staying close to the facts. I am not disparaging North's paintings or her three books of Recollections. On the contrary, the more I read her books, especially the second volume of Recollections, the more I respect her. She tries so hard to be clear and honest, even about slavery.

She is similarly ambivalent about the treatment of elephants, and the eating of sea turtles and their bad treatment on the Seychelles. Yes, she sometimes takes a seemingly cruel view of violence and suffering in nature. Darwin does this too. Yet, her books are full of care about humans and animals and many anecdotes about nature and her art. An example is this painting of the people on the Seychelles Islands keeping Sea Turtles as pets.





This seems both a descriptive painting and a compassionate and possibly even a protest painting. She shows the Turtle tied to a tree and a boy feeding it. Her description of this is objective. She discusses the eating of these turtles and then buys a female turtle that is pregnant and raises the eggs and lets the babies go into the sea. This implies a concern with their welfare. The outlawing of the sale and capture of Hawksbill Turtles and others was not accomplished until 1977.<sup>16</sup> The following painting also implies a concern for them as she paints the moonlight on the Seychelles Islands and put in the middle of this lovely work, a rather gruesome Turtle pen, again suggesting some kind of protest, perhaps. The moon is reflected into the turtle pen, like a journalistic light of truth illuminating a crime.



I admire her incredible effort to turn Darwin into paint and to see the world as a whole and paint what she saw. Sometimes she protests, sometimes she only describes. But she does not flinch from anything. She is often delightful, full of painterly descriptions of the natural life, vivid descriptions of human culture, plants, flowers and places all over the world. She shows herself to be the woman of deep concern for others, including animals, that one sees in the paintings, from Sea Turtles or Bougainvillea plants and shrubs, and from Palm Trees to Lizards, Puya flowers to Araucaria Trees, Koalas to Platypuses. I will show this to be true below. Many of her paintings below are part of the narrative and mentioned or described in the Recollections. I include quotations from her books in what follows.

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<sup>16</sup> See IUCN report on the turtles of the Seychelles  
<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/1984-002.pdf>

I have tried to look at Marianne North as objectively as possible and have given her the benefit of the doubt on the charges of Imperialism and Colonialism and the slave question, on the strength of her artwork, which is considerable. I love her art. Anyone who loves the natural world would love these.. She gave these works to everyone and we have the pleasure of enjoy them. I seek here to apologize for her somewhat, and defend her against those who slander her, and nevertheless to praise her good works as she would wish us to do.

Like all of us, she was imperfect. She is “impure” as Pablo Neruda would say. Yet, Marianne North belongs in the ‘tradition’ of realism, like Da Vinci or the English artist George Stubbs. Marianne North was largely free of the patronism that ruined so many artists. She ‘wandered and wondered’, as she says, and that is the source of her great art. Realism is the one ism that is not an ism, but a direct continuance of real art as knowledge and inquiry into the nature of nature and the facts of the real world and its ecology. Marianne was devoted to this, and I thank her for her hard work to advance this. She did well and her work is a joy.

Chile



Painting 021

Parasites on Beech Trees, Chili

These are among her last works, and some of her best: little colour symphonies really. Yet they are botanically accurate, studied pieces, specific to a time and a place.

**Plants:**

Chilian Beech, *Nothofagus obliqua*

*Loranthus*

*Gunnera scabra*

*Drimys Winteri*

**Animals:**

Butterfly



Painting 026

### The Blue Puya and cactus, Chile

One of my favorite works of hers. This plant is nearly as tall as an average man. I love the grey harmonies in this work and suddenly the huge plant, azure, ultramarine and turgoise, standing in various stages of growth and decay, amidst the mountains of the Cordillera, white snow covered peaks in the distance.

I begin at the end of North's painting life, in Chile. I begin at the end, I think, having proven that her temporary racism is faced and over. Marianne North and Pablo Neruda, the great Chilean poet, have a lot in common. Both are world travelers, both went to Ceylon, the South Seas, Europe, Brazil and Chile. Both are great lovers of the natural world, and both are poets that care about flowers and stones, trees and life. I love her work, because as a painter, she shares so much with someone like Neruda, or Thoreau.

The Puyas can be green or blue, Marianne North painted the blue one (Puya berteroniana) several times.

She describes the Green one as follows ( vol. II, pg. 311-13):

After much searching, I saw

for the first time great masses of the Puya Chilensis, the flowers of a light yellow green, with intensely orange stamens, growing in bunches which were arranged spirally round the head of an aloe-like stem, eight or nine feet high, forming nearly a yard of thick head, as big as that of the agave. The bunch of leaves at the base of the huge flower was like that of the pine-apple, its relation. The group looked grand as I first saw them, standing out from the cliff with the deep-blue sea and sky for a background. That species of puya always grows near the sea.

Pablo Neruda writes of the green one as follows:

"No one will know it outside my homeland, it only exists on these Antarctic shores, it is called chahual (Puya chilensis)." This ancestral plant was worshiped by the Araucanians, and the ancient Arauco no longer exist: blood, death, time and then the epic harp of Ercilla closed the ancient history: the clay tribe that abruptly woke up from the geology and went out to defend the homeland against the invaders, seeing their flowers emerge again, on signs of the dark dead, on layers and layers of bloody oblivion, I believe that the past of the earth blooms against what we are now, only the earth continues to be, defending its essence. It is a bromeliad with sharp leaves and serrated. It burst on the roads like a green fire, accumulating in a panoply its mysterious emerald swords. But, suddenly, a single colossal flower, a cluster is born from the waist, an immense green rose of the height of a man. This unique flower, composed of a crowd of little flowers that are grouped in a single green cathedral, crowned by golden pollen, shines in the light of the sea. It is the only immense green flower I have seen, the lonely monument to the wave (Neruda: from A House in the Sand, Prose Poems 1965)



Painting 019

View near Quilpue, Chili

Plants:

*Calceolaria*

Puya, *Puya chilensis*

Boldo, *Peumus fragrans*

The green Puya Chilensis, which Neruda speaks of, is up on the cliff in this work.

She describes finding the Blue Puya as follows:

My great object now was to find the blue puya, so I got a guide and a horse and started up to the mountains. We tied

up the horses when it became too steep, and proceeded on foot right into the clouds; they were so thick that at one time I could not see a yard before me, but I would not give up, and was rewarded at last by the mists clearing, and behold, just over my head, a great group of the noble flowers, standing out like ghosts at first, then gradually coming out with their full beauty of colour and form in every stage of growth; while beyond them glittered a snow-peak far away, and I reached a new world of wonders, with blue sky overhead, and a mass of clouds like sheets of cotton-wool below me, hiding the valley I had left. Some of the groups had twenty-five flower-stalks rising from the mass of curling silvery leaves; about sixty branchlets were arranged spirally round the central stem, each a foot long, and covered with buds wrapped in fleshcoloured bracts; these open in successive circles, beginning at the base. The three flower-petals are at first of the purest turquoise blue, then they become darker, a mixture of arsenic green and prussian blue, the third day a grayer green, after which they curl themselves up into three carmine shavings, and a fresh circle of flowers takes their place outside, so that the longer the plant has been in bloom, the larger its head becomes; and as the ends of the spikes or branchlets bloom the last, it gradually loses its perfection of form, and looks ragged and disreputable. Its orange stamens shine out like gold upon the blue green of its petals. (Vol II pg. 316)



Painting 004

### Puzzle - Monkey Trees and Guanacos, Chile

The Araucaria trees also called Monkey Puzzle trees, are why Marianne went to Chile: she wanted to paint them, she says. They are in the foreground and go way back on the distant hills too. No one travels to a distant country to paint a plant, except a real artist. The notion that she had some dark imperial or colonialist motive is not a reasonable explanation. The fact is that Marianne is painting before her time and goes beyond the specious categories of the art world. Not able to leave the human-centered realm, they do not understand what she is doing, so it is easier to dismiss her art as being not Botanical illustration, not modernism, not post modernism. It does not make sense to them that this woman is painting what she loves. They want to colonize her with their incessant pigeon holing. They want to reduce her to an adjunct of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, or make her a “hybrid” post-modernist. But she is not either of these things.



Pablo Neruda wrote about the Araucaria tree's ancient beauty and called their cones a "wooden rose" from which came the pine nuts that nourished many generations of Native Chileans.

"They lift you high above the earth  
- tough, beautiful Araucaria  
of the southern heights.  
Tower of Chile;  
crown of the green domain;  
pavilion of winter; ship of fragrance . . ."

Pablo identifies the trees with the ancient people of Chile and also with himself. He knows the killers of these trees are those he fights against. For Neruda the Araucaria Tree is the "green crown" of his homeland and it is a great tree, worthy of hard travel to see, a homeland of "brave bread" as Pablo put it, a tree that may have fed dinosaurs and native Americans, -- a tree still living in the mountains of Chile. What an unlikely pair, here Marianne and Pablo! they are similar in what they love in Chile and elsewhere. They agree on necessity to honour and preserve the same tree!

Araucaria araucana,  
aquí me tienes!

Pablo writes and I think Marianne would agree, both of them under the Araucaria trees saying "Here I am". Existence and Nature, this is the realist credo, and both were realists.



Painting 006

Seven Snowy Peaks seen from the Araucaria Forest, Chili

**Plants:**

Burning Bush, *Embothrium coccineum*

Ground Orchid, *Chloraea*

*Libertia ixioides*



Painting 010

## The Baths of Cauquenas in the Cordilleras South of Santiago, Chili

Plants:

Cacti, *Pitcairnia*

Cacti, *Alstroemeria*

Cacti, *Echinocactus*

Cacti, *Calandrinia*

“The baths of Cauquenas have often been described by travellers, but the one thing I was anxious to see there—the swinging-bridge—was gone. Some of the servants of the new manager of the baths had gone across and got drunk on the other side, so the bridge was pulled down, and people now had nine miles to go before they could cross the torrent ! But it was a glorious situation, and many kinds of cactus and other prickly things were to be found in perfection, as well as alstroemerias. The mountain views were grand, too, but there were more idle visitors than suited me, and I did not stay more than a week.” (vol II, pg. 325)

I love many of her Chilean paintings and this one is very fine. Showing some of the Cacti in Chile.



Painting 023

A Chilean Cactus in flower and its leafless Parasite in fruit, 1880s

**Plants:**

Cacti, *Cereus Quisco*  
*Loranthus aphyllus*



Painting 015

Armed Bird's Nest in Acacia Bush, Chili

Great bird painting with an amazing purplish grey and yellow tonality. It suggests the idea of nature's rights, since the small bird is defending its nest using thorns. I have seen the American Robin do the same thing in Hawthorne trees. She writes of this and says:

One little wren, "omnicolor," made an exquisitely

finished nest, shaped like a small funnel ; and I found another specimen of the same nest, with a loose, untidy dwelling on the top of it, built by a dowdy little brown bird, which had used the other as its pedestal. The *Acacia cavenia*, with terrible thorns pointing every way, was used to defend a curious nest by a delicate little bird called *Izuallaxis sordida*. It was entirely formed of these thorns, woven in and out, and the bird was very rightly called " the worker " by the natives. I tore my hands to pieces trying to get one of these nests, and had to give up the attempt ; yet the tiny bird sat comfortably on a soft lining of hair and the sweet dry flowers of the tree, and seemed none the worse for weaving these terrible spines.



Painting 020

The Permanent Snows, from Santiago; Patagua in front with Hummingbird and Nest

This is a very 'modern'. meaning recent. view. It could have been done recently. It wasn't of course.

## Australia

Darwin told Marianne that she should go to Australia and paint there. She implemented his idea almost immediately. What follows are a small selection of the result. She writes at the end of her first section on this country that:

“It is curious how we have introduced all our weeds,  
vices, and prejudices into Australia, and turned the natives  
(even the fish) out of it.”

This shows again, her lack of racism, and her awareness of the bad treatment that the land, animals, plants and local people get under imperial and colonistic control. The racism that seemed to occupy her in Brazil is gone, to be replaced by what Thoreau called “sympathy and intelligence”.



Painting 767

Study of the Bunya-Bunya

**Location:**  
Australia

**Plants:**  
Bunya-Bunya Conifer, *Araucaria Bidwillii*





Painting 766

Flowers of the Flame-Tree and yellow and black twiner, West Australia

Grey blue, yellow and black, with some green leaves, a very unusual color combination.



Painting 764

Study of the West Australian Flame-tree or Fire-tree



Painting 781

Poison Tree strangled by a Fig, Queensland



Painting 745

Evening Glow over "The Range"

Lovely vista at twilight. I have seen very similar landscapes in western New York state, but with a light that is not quite so soft. Interesting to see such a thing in Australia, she shows the landscape as unconditioned by human culture. It could almost be anywhere in the temperate world, but it is Australia, again.



Painting 771

Nest of the Coachman's Whip Bird, in a Bunya-Bunya, Queensland

The colourful decoration of the nest is interesting and well presented. The famous Bower birds of New Guinea do this too. The build elaborate and intricate nests to attract a mate. Indeed, as Darwin pointed out, birds have an enormous aesthetic sense. Many biologists want to reduce this to merely a survival sense, and thus argue against Darwin. But Darwin was a sensitive man, and one who did not see birds and mere automatons of evolution, but active participants in it. I agree with that. I would even say that flowers do this too, in a different way. The notion that beauty is sought only by humans seems a relic of human centred speciesism.<sup>17</sup>

Marianne's interest in birds was considerable, at a time when photography of birds is impossible, and thus paintings of them are not as good as they are now. Recently the

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<sup>17</sup> An interesting discussion of sexual selection by Darwin and his detractors occurs here: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ca/7523862.0002.015/--animal-aesthetics?rgn=main;view=fulltext>



Extinct endemic Seychelles Parakeet *Psittacula wardi*<sup>18</sup>

She writes of the Whip bird that

We found

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<sup>18</sup> This appears in an essay here

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281839520\\_Animals\\_depicted\\_by\\_Marianne\\_North\\_in\\_her\\_Seychelles\\_paintings](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281839520_Animals_depicted_by_Marianne_North_in_her_Seychelles_paintings)

“Marianne North’s painting of the extinct endemic Seychelles parakeet *Psittacula wardi*, with the tropical garden ornamental *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*, originally from tropical America (photo by Bob Billington, reproduced with permission of Tom North).”

many of the trees hung with whip-birds' nests long hanging pockets of the greenest moss, the entrance often decorated with the feathers of the blue and red parrot, one of the commonest birds there. The whip-bird has a pretty bronze crest, and makes a call like the whistling of a whip.



Painting 747

Tree Ferns in Victoria, with a nest of the Lyre Bird

The Lyre Bird is an exception among mimics. It might be the best mimic in the world. This is the only time I have seen anyone paint its nest, and it is a lovely work.

She writes of doing this one:

“I painted a lyre-bird's nest wedged between two tree-ferns, four feet from the ground, made of great dry fern-leaves. The hen puts her tail over her head as she sits, and goes in backwards. In front is a sort of shelf or terrace on which the old ones perch to feed their one darling, never letting it out till it is old enough to feed itself and protect its own most inconvenient tail. They only lay one egg a year, and I was given two eggs taken in consecutive years from that nest. They were very different in colour, one purplish, the other greenish, but both the same size, and mottled. The birds are very shy, and seldom seen, unless by chance a party of them is found practising the art of mimicry, which they enjoy, and which engrosses them so entirely that bird-hunters have then been able to get close up and watch them. I heard their notes while painting, but never had the luck to see them. My landlady had tried to bring up young birds, but said they died of fright. The eggs too she had put under hens, but they were so thin the hen broke them with her weight.”(vol.II pg. 145)





Painting 774

A Natural Fernery in Victoria, Australia

Another of her most beautiful works, this shows the ferns and a creek in Australia. The color is so well done. Wet mosses, Ferns, a wild creek, all done in a luscious color scheme that make poetry of a creek and the plants that grow beside it.



Painting 787

### A Bush Fire at Sunset, Queensland

Not sure why this reminds me so much of an Andrew Wyeth painting. Maybe it is the somewhat November tonality. I seem to see a Wallaby or two, in the foreground. She creates sympathy by putting animals in the foreground, and letting us know they are safe because of the water nearby. Danger and safety: themes that haunt a lot of her work.



Painting 790

Foliage, Flowers and Fruit of a Queensland Tree, and Black Cockatoo

This is the Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoo. It is one of Marianne's best images of birds



Painting 746

Foliage of a Gum Tree and Flowers of Tecoma, with Flying Opossums

Wonderful animal study and flower study at the same time. The leaves of the Gum tree are great too. She defines the spaces between the leaves and between the animals and the flowers well with color differences. It is a complex image that is utterly life like. It is not easy to do this, yet she does it. She is a maestro now.

North America



Painting 207

An old Red Cedar on the rocks near West Manchester, Massachusetts

This is a great work of hers, with every twist and turn in the tree carefully delineated. I have lived up the coast, In Acadia, Maine and know this is accurate. Nice tree shadow, good light, the sea is right, and the rocks.



painting 204

View in a Redwood Forest, California

This is the best of her Redwood, *sequoia sempervirens*, series. It shows one cut down in the front, many of these still look like this stump, with the little trees growing out of it or to the sides. The river is probably the Russian, which she mentions going to visit. I've seen similar scene on the Eel River. 97 % of the Redwoods were cut down by Logging companies, and few are left and those that remain are under threat of global warming. Marianne thought they might go extinct. She may have been right. The question remains why America takes better care of its rich opportunists who destroy living things like the Redwoods, than they do of their lands, which are wasted, giving the wealthy too much of what they do not need.

Marianne writes of the Redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) as follows:

We reached the redwood forests all of a sudden, and the railway followed the Russ river through them up to Guerneville,

a pretty wooden village with a big saw-mill, all among the trees, or rather the stumps of them, from which it has acquired the common name of Stumptown. The noble trees were fast disappearing. Some of the finest had been left standing, but they could not live solitary, and a little wind soon blew them down. They had a peculiar way of shooting up from the roots round the stumps, which soon became hidden by a dense mass of greenery, forming natural arbours ; and many of the large old trees were found growing in circles which had begun that way : a habit peculiar to that tree.....

Nearer the river it was prettier and more airy, and there I settled to sketch, in the shade of the young shootings from an old stump. There was an undergrowth of laurel and oak, and many pretty flowers : pink sorrel, trillium, aquilegia, blue iris, and a deep pink rose.





Painting 210

### Californian Flowers

The “Snow Flower” is called a ‘parasitic’ plant to the giant *Sequoia Gigantea*, among other conifers, but it is also part of the saprophytes, through there term ‘saprophyte’ is now obsolete and has be replaced by the term, Mycotrophs, since these plants live off the same mycorrhizal fungus which help to conifer or tree survive. It is one the Monotropaceae, or Indian-pipe family. North saw it in the Mariposa Grove of Redwoods, south of Yosemite. It is thus related to the Candy Cane also called the Sugarstick, and the Indian Pipe, which does occur out west but is more of an eastern North American plant.

Ms. North says she painted this near the Marisposa Grove and

“sat still and painted the snow-flower a gorgeous parasite of the purest crimson and white tints, which

grows at the roots of the sequoia, about 5000 or 6000 feet above the sea.



Painting 212;

## North American carnivorous plants

This is a great study of the few carnivorous plants that live in North America. They are pitcher plants, Venus fly traps and possibly, Sundew, at the bottom, among others. Some flowering.

## Teneriffe



The beautiful red dye of Cochineal, used in carpets and other fabrics is made on

“terraces of cacti, grown for the cochineal insect to feed on, and which did not like the shade of other trees. Some of the terraces were apparently yielding crops of white paper bun-bags. On investigating I found they were white rags, which had been first spread over the trays of cochineal eggs, when the newly-hatched insect had crawled out and adhered to them ; they are pinned over the cactus leaves by means of the spines” (pg. 193 Recollections)

She also did the actual Cactus that the Cochineal insect likes, below. She draws the ecological consequences of these plants, and her thinking is not at all in favor of the money makers.



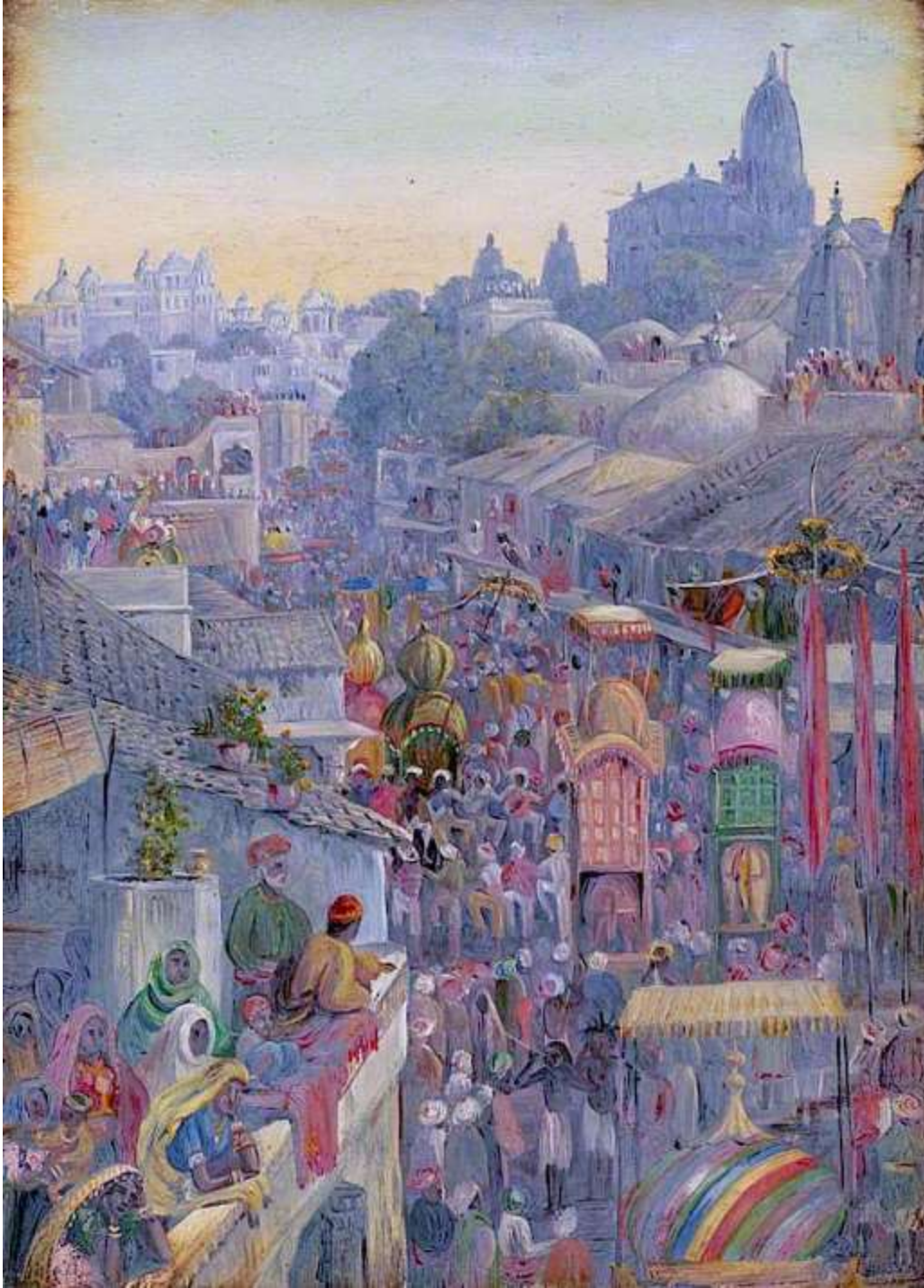
Painting 528

Aloe and Cochineal Cactus in Flower, Teneriffe

This is an interesting and pretty typical, example of Marianne North thinking through the ecological consequences of human centred actions. She complains that the original cochineal cactus was largely destroyed by natives and that the Palm tree that once occupied the heights of Teneriffe are now destroyed by cactus terraces. She writes that “These cactus crops had done another injury to the island besides that of causing it to lose its native trees.” this is not at all a colonialist view but an ecological one. She is decrying both the destruction of the original cactus that fed the Cochineal insect and the destruction of the Palm trees by the planting of Eucalyptus trees. Again, I doubt that those who criticize North have actually read her. Her thinking here is very good. She recognizes that the problem is human caused, and she wants to protect the native plants.

## India

Her paintings in India get more and more accomplished. Some of her best work is done there. With some exceptions, very little of her works look like stereotypes of India, to her credit. She does famous parts of India, too, Elephanta, the caves at Ellora, Amritsa, Taj Mahal, and others, but her take on such places is original and fresh. She does more people, architecture and other human scenes, than she usually does. There is a flavor in her writings of her more youthful tours around Europe with her father. Some of what she does cannot be seen elsewhere, unless one goes there. There is a mixture of things, both colonialistically inspired and objective works. I particularly like the ones she did around Darjeeling. She still does a lot of flowers and trees of India too. She is a good painter and tries to paint what she sees as often as she can.



Festival of Muharram, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India, 1879?

This one is said to be in the Kew collection, though it cannot be found there online. Like other paintings of hers on paper it is not in great shape. The problem with painting in oil on paper is that if one does not use enough gesso, the paint or oil in the paint gets into the paper and rots it, makes it brittle, or encourages the

growth of mold or mildew. Anyway, this is a “sketch” and loosely and probably quickly done, though there is a great deal of detail in it. She says of it, in marvelous peicne of writing:

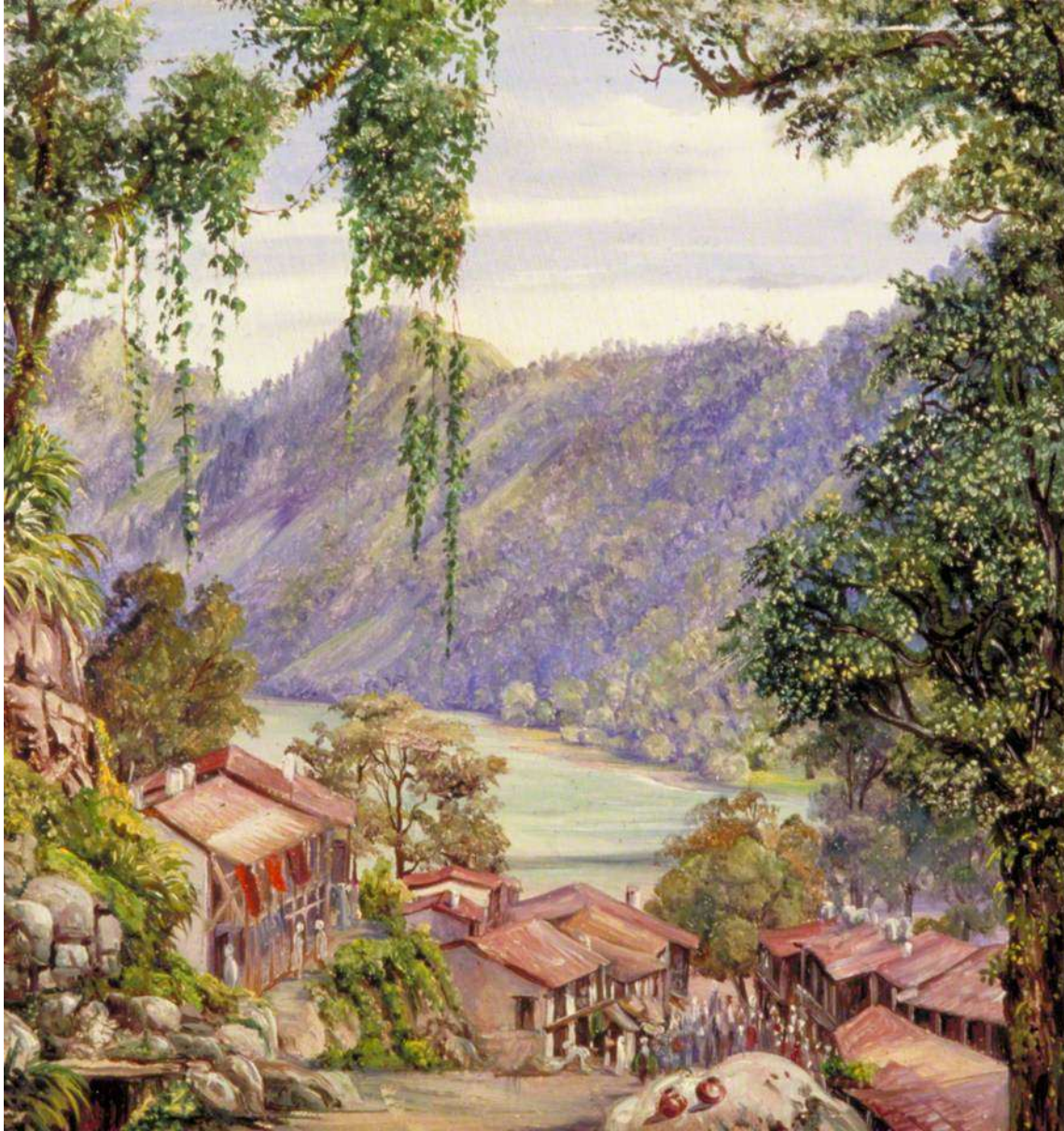
“The great Moslem fete of the Muharram took place while I was at Udaipur. The Doctor [Burnell] came and fetched me from the palace (where I was at work), and took me to a room over a gate in the High Street, where the chief banker, his boys and friends, were looking out at the crowd. He was an albino, as fair as any Saxon, though a real Rajput by birth, and a Jain by religion. He had white hair and red eyes, wore a bright emerald-green satin dress, and a red cashmere shawl over his shoulders. There were often fights, and lives were lost at this Moslem festival ; but this time all went quietly. The Eana had taken off the most turbulent spirits with him to Chitor, and he was not allowed to come back till some particularly lucky day, ten days after the fetes were over. The streets below became crammed with people ; all the housetops were overflowing, and looked like flower-beds of bright colours. Then the models of the tombs of the Moslem saints were carried past, with extraordinary hobby -camels under them; men carrying long bamboos with garlands of flowers and naked swords hung on them, which they set twirling round and round. They stopped most of the cars under our window, formed circles round some drums, and began a curious dance, meant to represent despair and sorrow at the death of the saints, beating their chests, wriggling and groaning in chorus, and laughing at the same time. Then came some fanatic priests, with long lanky black hair, who went through sham tortures, very unpleasant to look at, though one knew they were only make-believe. The colouring of the whole was marvellous : every shade of red was mixed with black, with a sprinkling of turquoise, dark blue, green, and yellow. I made a sketch of the whole procession winding up the narrow High Street, with the Palace and great Temple against the sky above it.” (vol, II pg. 67-68)





Jagdish temple at Udaipur , 1879

There are two or three of these works. Another in this town contains elephants. This temple is especially intricate, and she simplified the carvings somewhat. She was interested in the people. This is often the case with her in India.



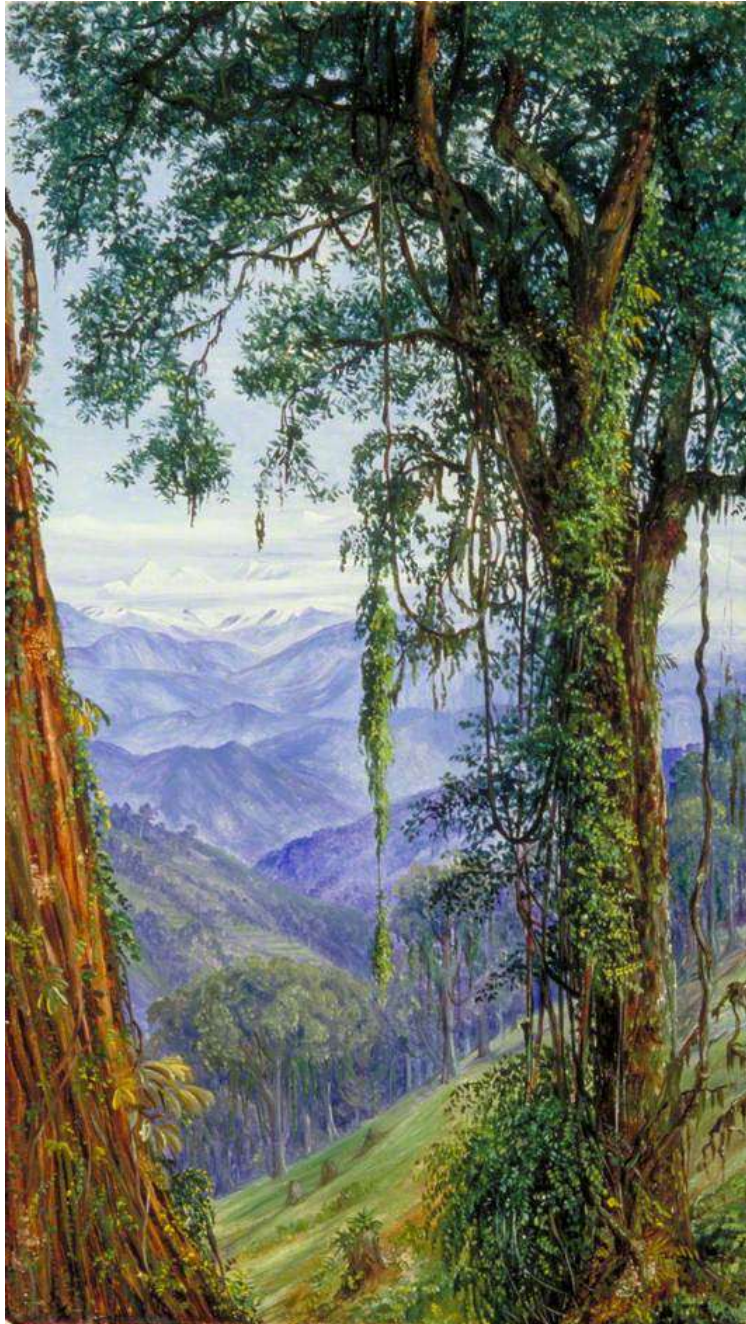
Painting 342

### Looking down on Bazaar and Nyee Kal India

This is a very effective composition. It is not easy to show such a hilly environment effectively and she does really well. It does not read “India”. The aerial perspective is marvellous with the tree up front being very crisp and leafy. The crowd down below is well done. I am not sure if those are plums or apples on the rock in front. This might be the reference in *Reflections*:

“ At the top of the pass, I came suddenly on bazaars and a bustling native village, then descended to the lovely green lake, with a road on each side, high hills all round,...”(vol 1 pg. 346)

This and the next 5 of her pictures in India, are some of her best landscapes, I think. She paints these largely near Darjeeling, in the north all the way to the Himalayas.



View from Rungaroon near Darjeeling, India 1878

The nearby trees are squished into the edges of the picture frame and the hill is steep. Beyond this the foothills stretch out to the far distant mountains. Her ability to paint foliage, leaf patterns, and leaf types is increasing.



Painting 235

Valley of ferns near Rungaroon, India

There are a number of these studies of dense foliage and forest. She is really good at this now, one of the best. Green blue, yellow-green, lighter greens darker greens, she shows the tapestry of the forest, in leaf patterns, suggesting trees, vines and ferns in seeming effortless painting. She has put the light back inside the painting, a little creek coming

down, defines the perspective, and shows a small meadow in the distance. This is not an India one usually sees. Her expression of life in the irregular shapes of the ferns is so well done.



Painting 270

Distant View of Kinchinjunga from Darjeeling

I love this painting. It is one of her great ones. It has such an amazing density of foliage, so well done. And the precipitous path to the left, a man walks on carrying boughs or

branches and is both scary and steep. The distant mountains are misty and high. One can see where the tree line ends, and the upper mountains are all treeless.

She did more than one study of Mt. Kinchinjunga, though the one here I think her best. She talks about doing these as follows:

“The next day took me over the most glorious road, among forests and mountains, to Darjeeling, the finest hill place in the whole world ; and I brought my usual luck with me, for Kinchinjunga uncovered himself regularly every day for three hours after sunrise during the first week of my stay, and I did not let the time be wasted, but worked very hard. I had never seen so complete a mountain, with its two supporters, one on each side. It formed the most graceful snow curves, and no painting could give an idea of its size. The best way seemed to me to be to attempt no middle distance, but merely foreground and blue mistiness of mountain over mountain. The foregrounds were most lovely : ferns, rattans, and trees festooned and covered with creepers, also picturesque villages and huts.” (Vol II page 28)

It should be noted here that Marianne’s version of Kinchinjunga is very different than that of Edward Lear, the poet and painter, who she met in her childhood, and knew all her life. Lear’s painting is very exotic and orientalist, whereas Marianne is straitforward and not romantic. Certainly it is amazing, I do not mean that it is merely dead pan or empty, but rather than it has an objectivity that is lacking in Lear portrait of the mountain. Lear is an orientalist, Marianne is not.



Painting 338

Mount Everest or Deodunga, from Sundukpho, North India

This is the best picture of Everest I have ever seen. Why? Because it does not show the Heroic mountain top that has killed so many mountaineers, in their idiotic desire to “conquer the top”. I have never much liked mountain climbing and never really saw the point. It has become merely a routine money making scheme, and so the mountain has become capitalized and thus cheapened. This shows Everest( Deodunga) from a distance is very much as I imagine it looks like, in fact, most of the time. It is merely a tall mountain, one of many in that area. She is ever the realist and see things often form an original perspective like this. She prefers Mt. Kinchinjunga She says she is not even sure which mountain Everest is in the distance. Notice also she uses the Indain word for the Mountain, Deodunga.

Marianne writes about doing this work as follows:

“It was then too cold for tents. Frost was white on the ground round me when I began, at sunrise, to paint the highest mountain in the world Deodunga, or Mount Everest as it is now called. It forms quite a distinct group, detached from Kinchinjanga by a hundred miles at least, and its form is much less graceful and definite. I did not myself feel sure which was the actual highest point, while no one could make a mistake about the other. The trees were scraggy and leafless, and hung with lichen. There were bluish pines (webbiana,

I believe) with blue cones ; blue monk's-hood, and blue poppies that same preponderance of the colour one finds in other alpine countries. The view was perfectly clear for two hours ; all the rest of the day it was smothered in cold clouds. The second morning I saw a curious effect. While the great mountain was still in cold blue shade, the rosy light coloured the clouds above it, and made them glow with fire ; then the clouds in the valleys between myself and the mountains caught and reflected the colour from those upper clouds, carrying it down into the world below. In the afternoon I tried to drag myself up to the highest point near, only a few hundred feet above the house, but found I could not do it. I sat down once or twice and tried again, but found it too difficult to breathe. It was very cold up there, and there was no furniture in the house, so I piled all the logs close to the fire and within reach of my hand without getting out of my quilt, in which I rolled myself close to it, so that I could poke on the logs and keep the fire alight all night, feeling sure that if it once went out I should be frozen to death. With my hot-water bag under my feet, and the bag which held my clothes for a pillow, that was comfort !





Road up to Nainee Tal, India, in Spring Time 1878

Pink, yellow and Lilac. The colors of spring, and the mountains in the distance, as well as a wide path on the right down which travelers walk.



Painting 273

Flowers of Darjeeling, India

This is the kind of image that is common in her work. But this one is especially well done and the flowers well drawn.



Painting 345

Hedychium Gardnerianum and Sunbird, India

I like the colors and the leaves. More than other works in the Indian series this one has a certain rhythmical feel to it, the bright colors, the leaves all waving, and the red stamens nearly dancing.



Painting 272

Jain Tower and Temple at Chittore, India



## Temple of Kutub, Dehli,, British Library

She tried her hand at this to see if she could do it. Drawing something as complex as this is very difficult. She must of done this freehand, as the perspective is a little off here and there, but all in all it is very good. She got the complexity of the designs, and the feeling of the stone. She notes how hard this is to do herself when she is trying to do the caves at Ellora,

My attempts at painting were much hindered by the ants, which seemed to have an especial taste for oil-paints, and they ate a good deal of me up too on their way to my palette. I wished I could have had a tent and plenty of time in such an interesting place, for such buildings could not be sketched in a hurry. In the plain below were grand tanks, tombs, and trees, and a kind of fair was going on among them.



## Painting 326

View from the Great Cave Temple of Elephanta, with Fan Palms, Bombay. Of visiting Elephanta she says:

I spent a day among its strange  
old idols and semi -darkness, looking out from it on the

dazzling blue sea and sky, lilac hills, and graceful fan-palms. Strange that such a dry spot should be so feverish ! But the poor man who lived near it and acted as guardian, said he was never without fever, and every one who had tried to live there had suffered in the same way.

I looked up fevers associated with Elephanta and do find some evidence of it, along with prescriptions of addressing the sanitation problems there and around Bombay (Mumbai).



Painting 268

Temple in a Dell, Binsur, Kumaon, India

This is an interesting painting of a temple in the woods, next to a creek. One rarely sees Hindu temples like this, and it suggests a religion that is no longer the nature denying religion that Hinduism is want to produce. North was an atheist, but she did a lot of painting of temples in India. Her point of view is unusual on most of these, as the two cave-like temples above this one show. She is painting more of what she sees than what travel books and Tourist guides tell her to paint.



Painting 237

### Gardening at Nainee Tal, India

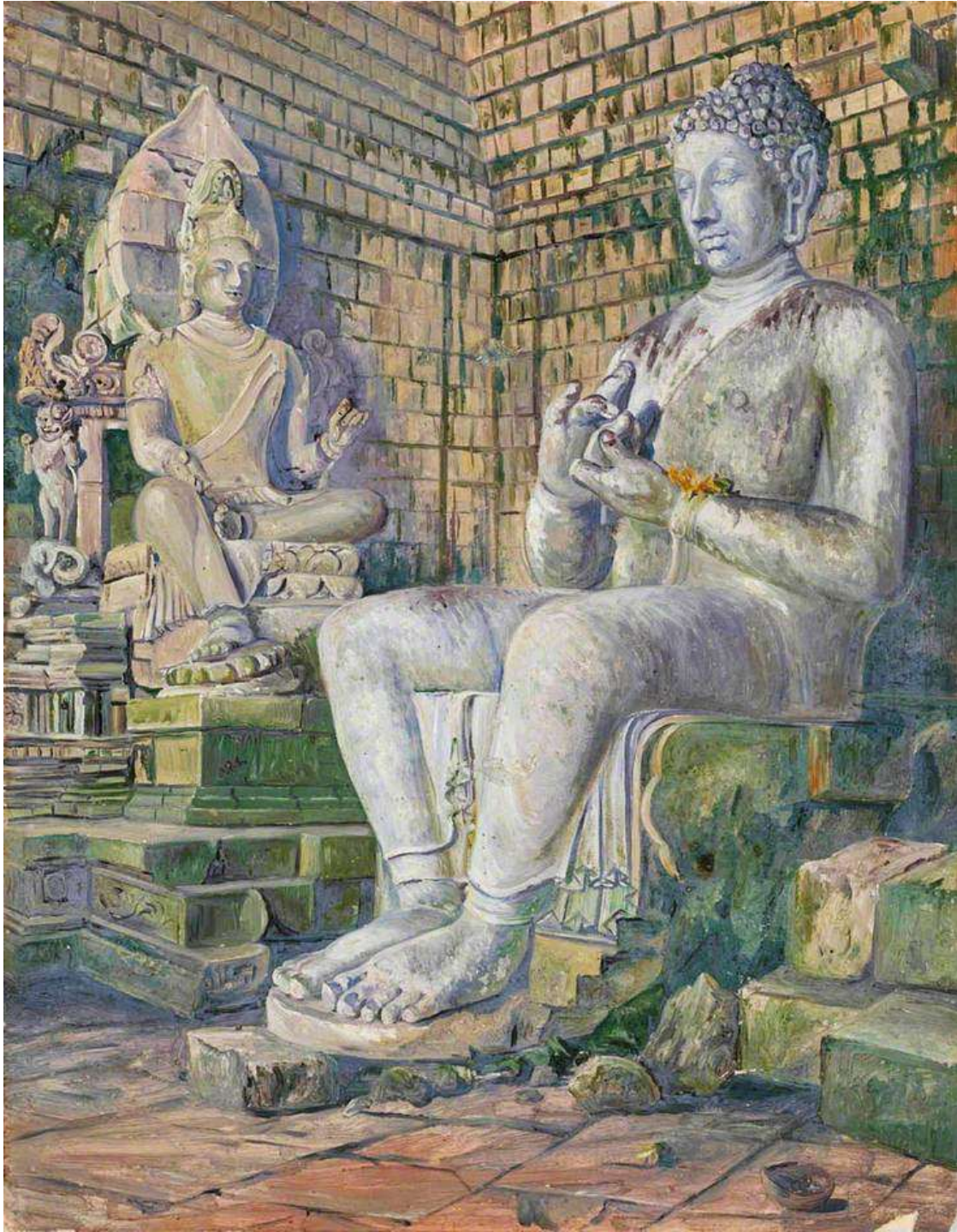
I am not sure which passage refers to this work. Throughout this area of the text she is being very much the visiting English aristocrat. She uses “coolies” to carry her around. She gets more often sick as she goes further north. Her paintings are lovely, but have a flavor of a visiting tourist, in addition to being a Darwinian seeker of plants and ecologies. Of course, she loves gardening, and this one appears to have both men and women gardeners working on it. She often says she feel better in gardens, and I don’t doubt that is true. This one has a peaceful feeling in it, as well.



## Amritsar

“I went on to Amritsar, where the hotel was not bad. At breakfast one of the officers told me he had been there some months, and never yet had had the curiosity to see the Golden Temple ! I went at once, having picked up a garry-driver at the station, who talked some English. It was a real gem, half white marble lace-work, and half gilt copper, with rich dark hangings and carpets, built out in the middle of a clear lake, smooth as glass, in which every line was accurately reflected ; a long causeway of marble leading to it was always crowded with finely-dressed people. The lake was surrounded by trees and picturesque buildings. The holy book of the Sikhs was kept in the temple, and no shoes were admitted all round the sacred tank. I set to work at once on a sketch, and no one interfered with me the first day, but on the second they said, " No orders give chair," and would not let me sit, even on my own, anywhere. However, I had done most of my work, and did not care.”





This is an usual figure study of sculptures. It is extremely well done and one of her best drawings of the human figure. The texture of the stones is utterly convincing, as is the space and the expression of the bodies and on the faces. For those who doubt she could

do people, one only need to look at this. I like the floor and how she did the stone, in particular, as well as the flowers on the closer Buddha's arm.

## Brazil



Painting 070

Palma de Santa Rita, and Atlas Moth, Brazil



Painting 822

Noonday View in the Organ Mountains, Brazil, from Barara



Painting 068

Tree Ferns and Climbing Bamboos in Gongo Forest, Brazil



View of the Bay of Rio and the Sugar-Loaf Mountain, Brazil

Wonderful painting, and a view that hardly exists anymore. Rio is a huge city now, and this is what it looked like when it wasn't. Can we learn from what Marianne saw, and how much humans have ruined the places we live? I wonder.... Many of her works raise this question....



Painting 032

A tall Brazilian Climber

This is a strange flowering vine, and has various forms. It is often red, but here is mostly white with reddish interior. The painting has a pulse of life in it the leaves beautifully done, and the forms are a complex of “S” curves curling and rounding from tendril to leaf and back again to flower. Very interesting and vital.



Painting 075

View from the Sierra of Petropolis, Brazil





Painting 811

### Glimpse in a Glen at Gongo, Brazil

This is an amazing small work of a wall of jungle in Brazil. I say it is like a wall, because all the leaves are very close to the viewer, and I cannot think of a single painting that is so squarely and implacably based on the observation of leaves and forbs. The plants are identifiable. The Kew site identifies the *Melostomacea*, which is the carmine or red plant above and the *Aspilia*, which is the yellow flowers down near the ground. There are Ferns and other trees, such as the yellow one on the upper left, but I am unsure what that is.



Painting 097

Foliage and Flowers of a Chorisia and double-crested Humming Birds, Brazil



## Painting 100

### Flowers of another kind of Coral Tree

She often shows more than one view of a plant or tree. Here is a close-up and then beyond it the same species of Coral Tree as seen from a distance. This is a dramatic piece. One that shows the far hills in a suggestion and the close hills in more definition, and the very close seeds pods and flowers in crystal clarity.



Painting 102

A Brazilian Orchid



Painting 088

Flowers of a Brazilian Forest Tree

**Plants:**

*Pachira marginata*



## Painting 098

### Flowers of a Coral Tree and King of the Flycatchers, Brazil

There are also those who try to maintain that North is not a botanical artist. She shows plants in a way that relates them to the ecology of the area of the plant as a whole. This is much more effective than drawing one plant on white watercolor paper. It is not true that she does not do plants well, she does, but her scope is much wider than most botanical artists, and so those who judge her based on a narrow definition of Botanical art, miss the boat.



## Painting 140

### Tree Frogs, found amongst dead leaves, Brazil

## Jamaica



Painting 110

Night-Flowering Lily and Ferns, Jamaica

See pg, 111 of Recollections





Painting 145

Study of Banana and Trumpet Tree, Jamaica

Marianne complains about the destructive introduction of the Mongoose into Jamaica:  
She writes:

“but one thing had altered for the worse since I was last there : the grass-ticks had crossed the mountains— they were never known on that side thirteen years before. It was generally supposed that the mongoose, which had been introduced from India by Sir J. P. Grant, to eat the rats in the sugar-cane, had preferred chickens, and found there were

more on the Government side, so came over and brought the little vicious ticks with it. These put a stop to all walking in the forest or grass, while the mongese were so bold that they used to run into the houses and carry away any food that was on the table.

This is in the 1880. Naturalists have done a lot of damage around the world introducing invasive species into environments where they do not belong. Cane Toads in Australia, Dutch Elm Disease in America. Gorse plants in California, Kudzu, Asian Carp, Phragmites, Purple Loosestrife, Lady Bugs and many other species have either been introduced on purpose or by accident and done great damage. Invasive species have done harm to local nature plants world wide. I am sure that if she we still alive Marianne would decry all these developments, as well as the takeover of crops by corporate entities like Monsanto and their attempt to make money from genetic engineering of for profit crops, as well as herbicides to kill plants that might compete with them.



Painting 166

One of the Sources of the Roaring River, Jamaica



Painting 030

The Wild Tamarind of Jamaica with scarlet Pod and Barbet



Painting 176

Great Cotton Tree, Jamaica

“A tangle of all sorts of gay things underneath,  
golden-flowered allamandas, bignonias, and ipomoeas over everything,  
heliotropes, lemon-verbenas, and geraniums from the  
long-neglected garden running wild like weeds : over all a  
giant cotton- tree quite 200 feet high was within sight,  
standing up like a ghost in its winter nakedness against the  
forest of evergreen trees, only coloured by the quantities of

orchids, wild pines, and other parasites which had lodged themselves in its soft bark and branches. Little negro huts nestled among the "bush" everywhere, and zigzag paths led in all directions round the house. The mango-trees were just then covered with pink and yellow flowers, and the daturas, with their long white bells, bordered every stream. I was in a state of ecstasy, and hardly knew what to paint first. The black people too were very kind, and seemed in character with the scenery. They were always friendly, and ready for a chat with "missus." The population seemed enormous, though all scattered." (Vol 1, pg 83 Recollections)



Painting 113

Road near Bath, Jamaica, with Cabbage Palms, Bread Fruit, Cocoa, and Coral Trees

Java



Painting 632

Young Leaves and Flowers and Fruit of Cotton tree,

Java



Painting 575

Foliage and Fruit of a Forest Tree of Java





Painting 676

Leaf sticks and Leaf Insects, Java?



Painting 681

Climbing Aroid and Nest of White Sparrows, Java



Painting 630  
Village of Mat Houses near Garoet, Java

I like this one for its anthropological value as a study of ordinary people in Java in the 1870s. It shows women and children near their homes, the kids playing, Mom's holding babies, and women gathering to talk. They are people doing what people do. Again, this shows North, at least in her artwork, is not at all a colonialist or racist, but rather is an ordinary woman herself. Moreover it is a painting that a woman is likely to do, much more than any man. Those who think she is a man in woman's clothing, like Susan Morgan, or who think she is a colonialist, such as Lynne Gladston, are simply mistaken. They have not really looked at her work. This is a painting full of sympathy. Chickens, dogs, babies: it is a picture of life on Java. Maybe I am wrong too about her prejudice against poverty. One thing I have learned in this study is that I am often wrong and self-correction is a virtue.





Singular Plants of the Dark Forests of Singapore and Borneo

This is an extremely rare plant, a small, *Thysanotus*. Marianne says that these were painted “mainly from Dr. Beccari’s figures and descriptions” which may or may not

mean she saw it herself. I looked and cannot find any description of this in the Recollections, unless I am missing something. The plant was not seen for 150 years, and turned up again this year, and was photographed. It was called a saprophyte and now is called a mycoheterotroph. It is sometimes referred to as the ‘fairy lantern’ It is related to the Indian Pipe and the “snow plant” Marianne painted underneath the redwoods, among others. Below is Becarrdi’s drawing of the Thisimis Neptunus. It is listed as being done in 1878. But the North painting is listed as being done in 1869. This is not possible. So she must have had access to his work earlier.



Odoardo Beccari. 1878?



## Painting 570

### Other species of Pitcher Plants from Sarawak, Borneo

Her Pitcher Plants, done in Borneo, are perhaps among her more famous images. Not without reason. It is not just because there are of rare plants, many of which are endangered, but also because they are such well done paintings. The soil and mosses are palpable, and the pitchers themselves are colored just right, some of them full of liquid, others not quite.





Painting 554

Group of Tree Ferns around the spring at Matang, Sarawak

She is so good at these masses of trees, ferns gasses and foliage, This one looks wet.  
Just after a tropical rain.



←

→

View of Matang and River, Sarawak, Borneo 1876



Painting 581

Flowers and Butterflies of Sarawak, Borneo

**Location:**

Borneo, Sarawak

She did a lot of great art in Borneo. This was done at a time that most of this area was completely wild, and she captures something of that in images like this.

## New Zealand

She suffered a lot here, because of her advancing rheumatism and the cold that exacerbated it. But her paintings are still strong.



Painting 724

Fishbone Tree and the Parson Bird of New Zealand



Painting 731

### Entrance to the Otira Gorge, New Zealand

This is one of the best works she did in new Zealand. It was cold there and she suffered increased discomfort of aches and pains of Rheumatoid arthritis when it was cold. I looked this up and Otira Gorge is now a fairly large Road in one of New Zealand's National Parks, on the Lower Island, north west of the city of Christchurch. I thought I found this house near the town of Arthur's Pass, but I think it was not it. So I am not sure exactly where this was. It is a great painting though, and looks like a real home. I think she refers to this (vol II, pg. 187) :

“we went beyond this famous Otira Gorge ; so, after two nights there we turned up the hill again, over the stony river-beds, through driving rain and hail and furious wind,

and took refuge at Mr. B.'s farm or "station," as it was called. He was out when we came, but his two maidservants were delighted to welcome another woman, and were most hospitable. The shearing was only just over; about twenty men were on the premises, and three young gentlemen "helps," two of whom were ruthlessly turned out of the best room to make way for one woman. At dusk the master returned and echoed the welcome, and it was nice to have a roaring woodfire, a rocking-chair, and piles of old newspapers, as well as Scott, Burns, Hood, and, strange to say, Darwin's works to choose from. But Hood was the favourite author of my host, who repeated whole pages by heart in the broadest Scotch dialect."



Painting 714

View of the Otira Gorge, New Zealand

This is the same area, she climbed quite high to get a view like this. The plants in many paintings are very well done and this is not an exception, so it might be a good idea to study them a little, to show an example of how deeply she studied these things and how complex some of these small works really are.

The list of plants here is interesting:

Toe Toe Reed, *Arundo conspicua*

*Dracophyllum Traversii*

*Metrosideros lucida*

*Ranunculus Lyallii*



The last one was not declared as a species till David Lyall, who had been the doctor on the ship that discovered land in the Antarctic, found this flower in New Zealand, probably in 1839 or 40. North includes it in the middle right of this work, growing up high on the ochre rocks. It is the largest of the Buttercups and is white and yellow. The second on the list is the red one, Southern Rata, a small tree that is endemic to New Zealand. The Third form the bottom is *Dracophyllum Traversii*, or Dragon Leaf. Which she did another very impressive study of below. These two paintings taken together give a very good notion of just what these plants look like. The painting below is a close up on the leaves whereas to one above is the whole tree, showing how the leaves can be much smaller than appears below. Both are very accurate and both can be found looking up the scientific name in Google images. The top one is a grass like reed.

Marianne's own description of these plants is as follows:

[We]crossed and recrossed  
the wide river-bed of almost dry stones, a hard pull for the  
horse. After that came a long mount through the dry  
beech-forest ;  
till at the top we reached a completely different  
scene, and a vegetation which rewarded us for all our trouble.  
The most remarkable plant was a tree which looked something  
like a small -leaved dracsena, or screw -pine, but which  
was really a heath ! All its under leaves were purple, and  
its stems bright salmon-colour ; the flower was over, but the  
terminal spikes remained, and were also purple. The whole  
was one of the most curious growing things I had ever seen  
in any land. The great *Ranunculus Lyallii*, or shepherd's lily,  
was there in quantities, with leaves looking like those of the  
Indian bean; and the native holly of light blue-green and  
prickly scented leaves. Nearly all flowers were over, except  
those of the riband tree a lovely bunch of white bells, with  
leaves of three different shapes and ages. The whole gorge  
was lined with small shrubs of every tint and shape. It was  
very narrow, and would have been perilous with any but  
quiet horses ; but ours were most tractable. My cousin got  
quite excited over the different plants and the difference in  
them



Painting 712

A New Zealand Dracophyllum

## Dracophyllum Traversii

She describes the plant shown above as a tree, as follows:

“The most remarkable plant was a tree which looked something like a small -leaved dracsena, or screw -pine, but which was really a heath ! All its under leaves were purple, and its stems bright salmon-colour ; the flower was over, but the terminal spikes remained, and were also purple.”



## Castle Hill Station with a Beech Forest, New Zealand

The cat and the roof and two in the front yard, and the wheel barrow left outside the fence show this to be a settler's house and nearby houses in the back country of New Zealand. One of the cats may be a Calico. This pictures historical fact, not colonial abuses. There were abuses in New Zealand, but they are not here. One could show similar pictures on the Prairie of North America,, in Colorado, or Chile. There was a great deal of movement in the 1800's, all around the world. North is merely recording what she saw in fact, not judging it. She is not a "modernist, not a "post-modernist". All that is nonsense, she is a realist and tries to be as accurate as she can. This is her cousin's house, whom she mentions. (Pg 188) It looks like she stayed there for several days. The area

was called Castle Hill, , after a pile of strange old rocks near; they looked like the remains of some fortified place. His own quarters were at the edge of a black beech forest, which gave a more cosy look to the spot, but they were a hard, cruel sort of trees, the very tallest not more than forty feet high, with leaves as small as the box, under which no green thing liked to live ; their branches feathering to the ground like Cedars of Lebanon. \*

The house consisted of a few single-roomed huts joined together by a verandah. An old man did the cooking in another separate hut, into which we went when the meals were ready.



Japan



Painting 661

Study of Japanese Chrysanthemums and Dwarfed Pine

Wonderfully composed, with the Bonasi and the Mums.



Rice drying in Japan

There are other paintings of rice harvesting too. She wanted to record what people ate and how they made it.





Painting 653

The Hottomi Temple at Kyoto, Japan

He did a number of the old Temples in Japan, making them look very rustic, as they probably did, then.



A Japanese Magnolia

This is a deceptively simple work, each leaf and each petal is lovingly painted in a delicate way. It is a magnolia, smaller than our magnolia, but it evokes the famous song of Japan called Sakura, about the cheery tree and the love of its blossoms that is so characteristic of the Japanese poets and Haiku artists. The idea that life is so beautiful even its loss is a beauty. Marianne was an atheist, yet she loved all things living, and non living. Some of this great joy and sadness is in this work.



Painting 812

Gate of Mariamma Temple, Japan

This is a Maestrowork, a nearly perfect composition, balanced and exquisite. It is one of many favorites of mine. The old woman on the right seems to be spinning thread or wool, maybe silk, I am not sure. The woman closest to us appears to be carrying a baby on her back in a sling or carrier, which she speaks of in the text.. The man through the gate has a yoke on and in carry water, perhaps

[South Africa](#)



Painting 428

Pendulous Sparaxis and Long-tailed Finch in Van Staaden's Kloof



Painting 400

Social Birds and Social Herbs at Malmesbury, South Africa

Nests everywhere



Painting 437

Giant Everlasting and Protea, on the Hills near Port Elizabeth



Painting 448

View of the valley of Ceres, from Mitchell's Pass, "Cabbage Plant" in front



Painting 429

Flowers of the Wagenboom and a Podalyria, and Honeysuckers





Painting 425

View from the Steps of Table Mountain through a Wood of Silver Trees

1882-83

Many of the species have their male flowers and cones on separate trees ; like the silver tree, which only grows on the spurs of Table Mountain, where there are many groves of it, shining like real silver in the setting sunlight. It grows about twenty feet high, shaped like a fir-tree, with its flowers like balls of gold filigree at the ends of the branches. Every bit of it is lovely, but the most fascinating part is the cone, when it opens and the seeds come out with their four feathered wings, to which the seed hangs by a fine thread half an inch long.



Painting 401

### Vegetation of the Addo Bush with Kaffirs and their Habitations

Every now and then there was a clearing in which was a group of beehive-shaped huts covered with skins and bits of cloth dyed of a rich red colour, or topped with black burnt bush. Near them stalked the grandest figures in red drapery and feathers, like stage Mephistopheles, with women dressed to match, their arms and legs covered with metal rings. I had not expected to see such genuine savages so near civilisation. They seemed too good to be real. The women carried the children sitting astride on humps which they possessed naturally, and which ladies of Europe imitate artificially, without the excuse of their being useful as they are among the Kafirs. The children were also tied on with deep-red cloth. All this rich colour was produced by rubbing with a

lump of red ochre. I saw one man, followed by his wives and children, all marching with superb dignity through the bush. They never even turned their heads as the train passed.”

Her language is still 19<sup>th</sup> century England upper class (“Savages”. “Mephistopheles”), she is looking at the people with an open mind, not a bigoted one. I think South Africa was good for her. It was a long education for her, but a successful and good one.

She leaves South Africa disgusted with the race hatred that starts consuming the Europeans there. She sees what racism is clearly, and she flees from it.



Painting 451

"Coming out" of a Cape Beauty

Baby Ostrich



Making Tea

And then. As a sort of after discovery, I was looking through a book on the oil sketches of Frederic Church, who Marianne knew. I see he did a painting of Fern Walk in

Jamaica in 1865. Marianne did the same subject in 1872 or so. Marianne says in that during her visit to the Church's cottage in 1871, he showed her "tropical studies, which made me more than ever anxious to go and see those countries" (vol 1 Recollections, Pg. 68) The painting of Fern Walk is an oil sketch which was later seen on the wall of Olana, the estate Church was then nearly done building nearby. It is rare to see two artists do the same subject. Both have their virtues, though I think over all the North picture is better and more informative. But clearly she was shown this work and inspired by it.



Comparing North's and Church's Fern Walk in Jamaica.



Frederick Church, Fern Walk, 1865, Jamaica.



Marianne North's Painting 179, Fern Walk, 1871 or 1872, Jamaica.

Marianne writes of this place

At last we turned into the forest at the top of the hill, and rode through the Fern Walk ; it almost took away my breath with its lovely fairy-like beauty ; the very mist which always seemed to hang among the trees and plants there made it the more lovely and mysterious. There were quantities of treeferns, and every other sort of fern, all growing piled on one another; trees with branches and stems quite covered with them, and with wild bromeliads and orchids, many of the bromeliads with rosy centres and flowers coming out of them. A close waxy pink ivy was running up everything as well as the \ creeping fern, and many lycopodiums, mosses, and lichens. \It was like a scene in a pantomime, too good to be real, the Vee-fern fronds crossing and recrossing each other like network. One saw dozens at one view, their slender stems draped and hidden by other ferns and creeping things. There were tall trees above, which seemed to have long fern-like leaves also hanging from them, when really it was only a large

creeping fern which had found its way over them up to the very tops. They were most delicious to look at, and, my horse thought, to eat also, for he risked my life on a narrow ledge by turning his head to crop the leaves from the bank, when his hind -legs slipped over the precipice. I said "

Don't," and the Doctor and Agnes laughed, while the good horse picked his legs up again and went on munching in a more sensible position. We rode back by a lower fern walk, still lovelier because it was even damper.

The Agnes she mentions here maybe Agnes Wilberforce. I wonder if it is a Wilberforce of the William Wilberforce family who was the man who got the bill passed through Parliamt in 1807 that ended the slave trade in British, or rather by the British, which was not solidly passed until 1833. That would be interesting if it were so. I looked it up and could not find anyone who knew Marianne North living in Jamaica in 1871. So I don't know.



Volcanoes in Java