Our world is changing rapidly, but rarely do we pause to look carefully. Our daily lives focus on the short term: months slip by, and years quickly turn to decades. Forests are lost, cities sprawl, and natural land is replaced by new kinds of habitats created by people. Even small, seemingly minor, changes are amplified, and the world we once knew slips silently into the past. Inexorable change is everywhere: nowhere is insulated from pervasive and increasing impact of human activities. Against this restless backdrop, the rich diversity of plant and animal life, a legacy bequeathed to us over countless millennia, struggles to find a place.

We are latecomers in the 4.6 billion year history of the Earth – but there are many of us – seven, soon to be to ten, billion - and we have awesome power to alter the face of our planet. The cumulative impact of our collective actions has reached the magnitude of major geological force. We have altered the composition of our atmosphere, profoundly, and for the long term. And our lifestyles have flooded the environment with a superabundance of nutrients and other chemicals that change lives of plants and animals everywhere. Forging ahead unthinkingly, we rarely stop to consider our reliance on the life support systems that sustain us and that make our singular planet habitable.

Plants are all around us; so ubiquitous that they are easy to take for granted. But they stand at the center of our dependent relationship on the natural world. They provide shelter, fiber, medicine, and so much more, but most of all they provide sustenance. The miracle of photosynthesis underpins almost all life on this planet and none of us can opt out of our fundamental dependence on plants. Plants provide our daily bread.

With more than half of all people living in cities, often far removed from the land, the world of plants can seem remote. The spectacular collection of plant portraits that comprise America’s Flora aims to put plants back in the spotlight. Undertaken by the American Society of Botanical Artists this is botanical art at its best, highlighting the variety of plant life, engaging us with its ephemeral beauty, and reminding us of the ways in which the lives of people and the lives of plants are intimately intertwined.

America’s Flora is part of a broader collective effort Botanical Art Worldwide that has engaged more than 800 botanical artists from more than 25 countries. Together, this dedicated effort has captured the spectacular individuality of more than a thousand plants from all over the world. As their own contribution to Botanical Art Worldwide each country will exhibit botanical art featuring their native plants, while also connecting virtually to the works on display elsewhere. The result will be a new network of botanical interest that crosses borders and helps us see the world of plants as a whole.

Reaching an audience of many thousands worldwide, all 25 exhibits that are part of Botanical Art Worldwide will be open on May 18, 2018, for a “Worldwide Day of Botanical Art.” By linking people
with plants through botanical art this pioneering effort aims to create new communities of collaboration that recognize the importance of plants and will take that message to the broadest possible audience. In the U.S., America’s Flora will be launched with an exhibition at the United States Botanic Garden in the center of Washington D.C., not far from the U.S. Capital.

Someone once said that beauty is the harmonious relation among parts, a construct fully realized in the plant portraits in America’s Flora. Every portrait embodies the inspiration and dedication of individual artists. Artful compositions and careful manipulation of light and color, combined with painstaking observation and meticulous attention to detail, capture the essence of more than 50 plants that are native to the U.S. These astonishing images are the antidote for plant blindness. They remind of us of the grandeur and variety of the North American flora, and the importance of thoughtful management of the natural world.

America’s Flora, and the network of exhibits to which it is linked, is an international call to action. It asks us to recall our complete reliance on the world of plants, while also appreciating why plants are important for us culturally, emotionally and spiritually. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the hard work and leadership of the American Society of Botanical Artists in making America’s Flora and Botanical Art Worldwide a reality. The resulting global network of exhibits carries a crucial message about the importance of plants. At the same time, it will inspire and enrich the lives of all those who visit any of the exhibits, and who take just a moment to pause and reflect.

— Sir Peter Crane, FRS
President, Oak Spring Garden Foundation