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The Canberra Times

It's become one of Australia's most internationally famous artworks, but few people have probably heard of Armidale born, self taught artist Susannah Blaxill.

"There is no doubt that she is one of the great contemporary artists", writes Dr Shirley Sherwood, vice chairman of the London Royal Horticultural Society's botanical painting committee and author of the gorgeously illustrated "A New Flowering: 1000 years of Botanical Art".



"Some contemporary artists are going much further than echoing the triumphs of the past. They are painting new interpretations of familiar subjects, so that I will never be able to see a humble beetroot again without thinking of Susannah Blaxill's amazing portrait."

That meticulously detailed watercolour of a humble beetroot has certainly caught the world's attention and imagination, featuring in numerous exhibitions across America and Europe.

The New York times featured the Beetroot on its front page when Sherwood's travelling exhibition of botanical art arrived. In a review headed "Beetroot descending a staircase" (a cheeky reference to Marcel Duchamp's famous artwork), the newspapers art critic enthused that "a spot of light – really just unpainted paper – glowed from somewhere inside the beet, making the vegetable float in pure white space like an abstract object in a void.....there is an intimacy to this beet, a vigour so condensed that it verges on the surreal". (This) spectacular beetroot is so notable that it has been chosen by virtually every exhibition curator when Shirley Sherwood's collection has been shown around the world.

Blaxill is also represented in this major exhibition of the world's botanical art (A New Flowering: 1000 Years of Botanical Art, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, May to September 2005) with a sumptuous watercolour of an aubergine and a delicate white cyclamen.

A solo exhibition of her work in London in 1992 received rapturous reviews, including this one from the usually staid Country life magazine: "Painted with a botanist's eye and an artist's visual sensibility, the isolated images start out from their black or white backgrounds and demand to be seen afresh; but we are not used to seeing ordinary vegetables presented in such an idealised and brazen way, and it is subtly disquieting," wrote viewer Polly Chiapetta. "One almost wants to blush and avert one's gaze."