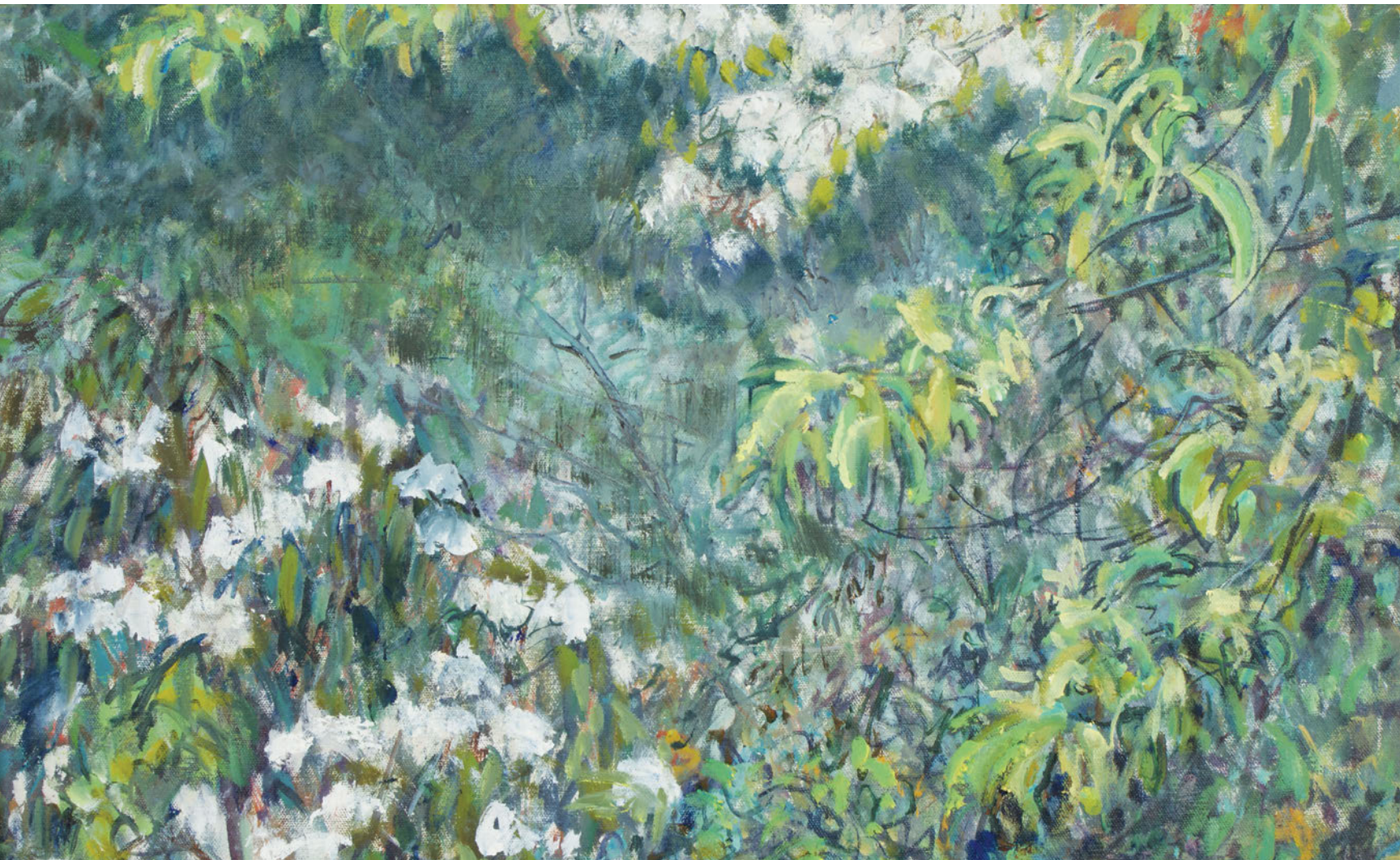


anne meggitt the plant hunter



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Curated by Heather Smith | June 10 to August 29, 2010 | Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery





*Azaleas*, detail, 2008, oil on canvas, 48" x 50", 122 x 127 cm

# Anne Meggitt and the Verdurous<sup>1</sup> Landscape

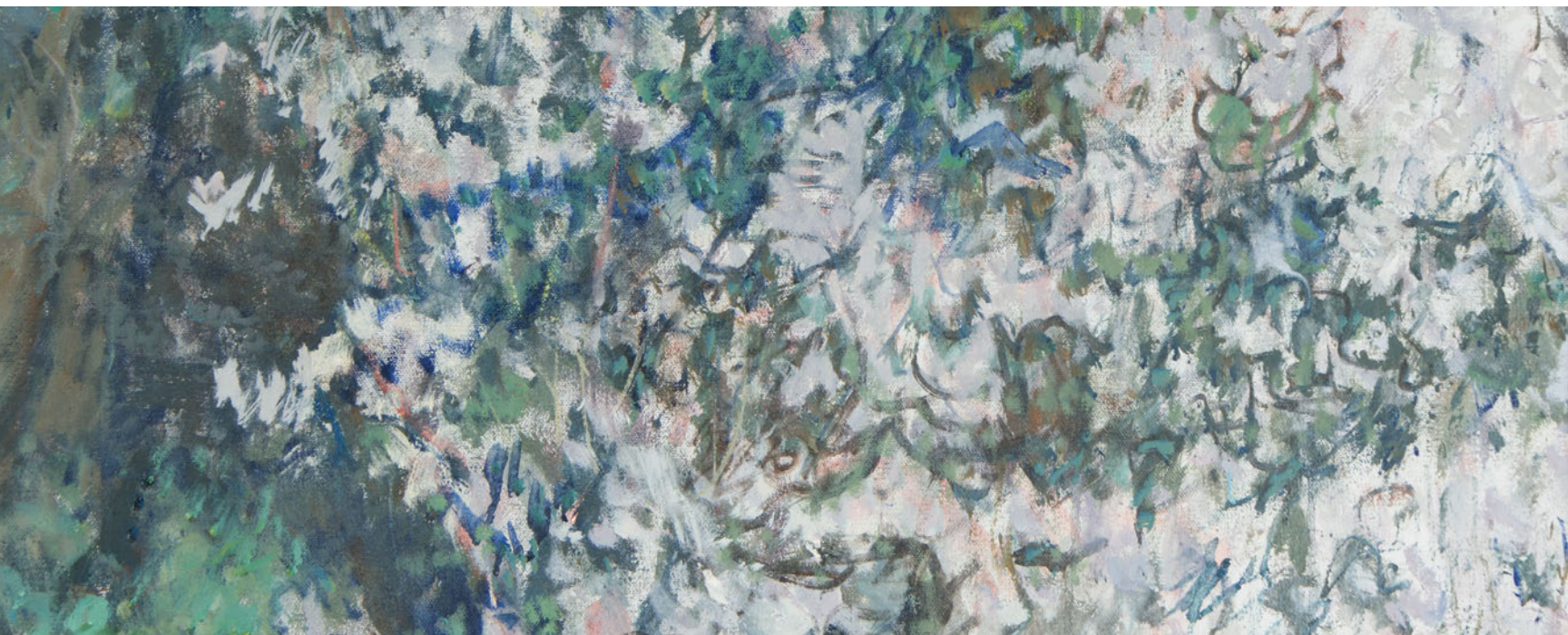
In the summer of 2007, Regina landscape painter Anne Meggitt visited a group of gardens in Cornwall, England, that were profoundly influenced by the 19th Century plant hunting craze.

About 200 years ago garden design was radically transformed by the introduction of exotic plants from around the world. Nowhere was this more popular than in England in the 19th Century where the Royal Horticultural Society funded the travels of a number of important plant collectors, including David Douglas, Robert Fortune, George Forrest and Frank Kingdon-Ward.<sup>2</sup> The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, England, also sent many plant hunters all over the world and invested in introducing economically important species to plantations in British colonies. In this flurry of plant discovery, many new species were recorded for the first

time and the science of botany and horticulture grew remarkably. Sometimes as a result of this study, other times by accident, and eventually through nurseries selling plants to the public, plants were introduced into English gardens and they continue to thrive. These gardens – some now approaching 200 years old – are mature mixtures of exotic and indigenous plants; they are living evidence of the 19th century compulsion towards British scientific discovery, exploration and ultimately, colonialism.

Anne Meggitt, a Regina-based landscape painter who grew up in England, visited and collected the subject matter for these paintings in April 2007. She travelled to four famous Cornish gardens; Trebah, Caerhays Castle, Treliassick, and Heligan. These mature gardens all contain exotic plant material that thrives in the moist, mild coastal climate due to their protected locations.





*Magnolia Haze*, detail, 2007, oil on canvas, 36" x 48", 91 x 122 cm (also on right.)

# The Gardens

Trebah, the first garden Anne visited, was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as a property belonging to the Bishop of Exeter. Trebah means, 'the house on the bay', and the garden is located within a steep-sided gully that runs down towards the Cornish coast. The house and property changed hands many times until 1831, when it was acquired by the Fox Family of Falmouth. Charles Fox first laid out this garden paying particular attention to the exact positioning of every tree. The story is that he instructed his Head Gardener to build a scaffold tower to represent the height of each tree at maturity. He then sent a garden boy up the scaffold with a white flag. From the attic window and armed with a megaphone and a telescope, Charles gave his orders. The tower often had to be re-positioned several times before he was satisfied with the placement of the trees. He was composing a garden whose maturity would only be reached long after his death.



His daughter and her husband carried on developing the garden by acquiring a huge collection of exotic plants and trees from all over the world. Then in 1907, Charles Hawkins bought Trebah and for the next 32 years he and his wife, Alice, continued to develop the garden including by building a pond and stocking it with pink Flamingos! Apparently, the interest in exotic species was not only limited to horticulture.<sup>3</sup>

Mature Magnolia trees and Azaleas were in full spring bloom during Anne's visit in April. There are more paintings of Trebah subject matter than the other gardens visited and that is likely because of the density of the vegetation. Anne Meggitt is a painter of the whole surface of the canvas. Therefore this garden, located in a deep 'V'- shaped valley of dense vegetation, held intriguing content for Anne. The viewer's eye cannot settle within these paintings, but moves continually across the surface. This is quite a feat when one considers a painting such as *Magnolia Haze*, where the content of the painting is a huge blooming Magnolia tree located in the centre of the canvas. The even handling of the other vegetation, which consumes and obscures the Magnolia, enlivens the painting surface. In all the Trebah paintings the strong compositional elements are a result of those foundation plantings, the original trees that were so carefully placed there by Charles Fox all those years ago.

The original Caerhays Castle has been occupied since 1370, but the garden changed drastically in the later 1890's, when the owner, J.C. Williams, agreed to grow a large variety of Rhododendrons for the famous nursery owned by J.H. Veitch.<sup>4</sup> The Veitchs were a very successful family of nursery operators that sent out their own plant hunters on expeditions to find and develop exotic plants species that would do well in the English climate.<sup>5</sup> By 1910, plant materials were arriving at Caerhays from another famous plant collector, George Forrest, whose expeditions were being funded directly by Williams. In particular, the deciduous Magnolia trees that arrived in this area around the turn of the century were remarkable in England because they flower before any leaves develop. This had never been seen on plants in Britain and it is still a magnificent sight when they flower in the spring.

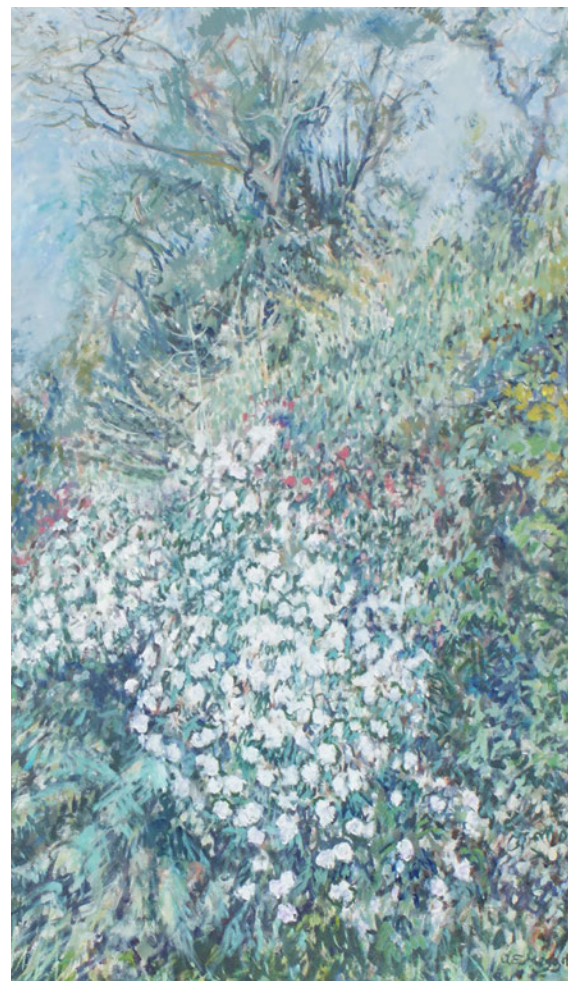
Another garden Anne visited, Treliassick, is almost 400 acres and has been cared for by the National Trust since the mid-1950's. This garden's exotic plant collection was begun by a man named Carew Gilbert, who is described as a 'constant traveller'.<sup>6</sup> He brought back exotic species of trees and shrubs from North and South America, as well as Japan. This garden was further developed in the 1930's when the new owners, Ida and Ronald Copeland, introduced many flowering rhododendrons, plums, hydrangeas and primulas. Many of these flowers appear on the Spode china that was produced by the Copeland family business.



Interestingly, these flower images on china dispersed throughout the world also helped fuel an interest in exotic plants that continues to be so evident in North American gardens.

Anne's painting, *Plum Trees*, is of subject matter found in the garden at Trellisick. The colour is very even toned and attractive (pink, green and blue), but the riotous mass of vegetation is so complicated that one can hardly figure out which limbs belong to which tree. That contrast between the beautiful colour of these paintings and the compositionally complicated vista is what makes these paintings so remarkable. Your eye cannot rest over the entire verdant surface of the painting.

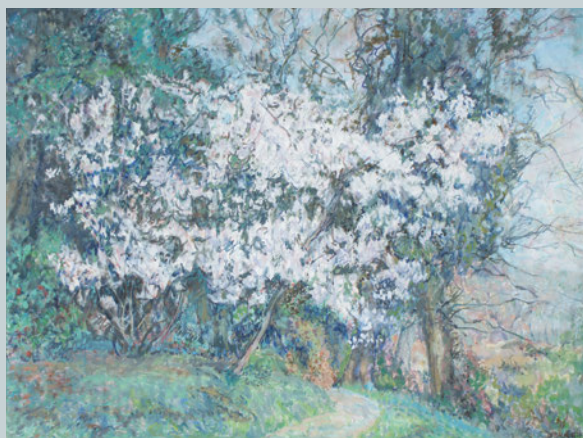
Heligan, or The Lost Gardens of Heligan, as they are somewhat sensationally promoted in their brochure, are the grounds of an estate that was the seat of the Tremayne family for over 400 years. The gardens reached their peak in about 1900, after many exotic plants were established. They fell into rapid decline after all the gardeners left for the Great War in 1914, never to return. In 1991, a restoration project began reclaiming the gardens, but leaving their mature and over-grown look largely unchanged. Heligan is in another steep-walled valley that makes it a particularly hospitable climate microcosm where Banana trees and Bamboo can thrive amongst native trees and plants.



*Cascade*, 2007, oil on canvas, 40" x 24", 102 x 61 cm



# The Artist



*Magnolia Haze*, 2007, oil on canvas, 36" x 48", 91 x 122 cm

Anne Meggitt was born in Florida in 1930, to British parents who moved back to England shortly after her birth. Anne remembers an idyllic childhood where they lived on a hill surrounded by Larch trees in a country house called Windwhistle. Nearby was a wooded area nicknamed Playmore, where Anne would climb into an Oak tree to read or sit making drawings of the dancing Larch trees. From the lane past her house was a track to fields and bluebell woods that led down to a small winding river. It was a childhood overflowing with nature and growing things; pots of plants on her bedroom window sill, helping her father in the greenhouse, and digging up wild primroses and lily-of-the-valley to plant in her own small area of large tended gardens surrounding their home. During the war years she and her mother would take day trips to London to see the galleries and museums. It was safe in London during the day, but at nights the bombing was very dangerous. After attending boarding school, she studied art at Reading University, taught art classes, and studied at the Cordon Bleu school in London. While still in her 20's, her life took a dramatic turn. She met a man attending the Military School of Survey, in Berkshire, near where she grew up. When he was away in Swaziland, on his first surveying mission, he proposed marriage by mail and she accepted. For the next twenty-five years she travelled the globe, raising five children in exotic, primitive and isolated conditions throughout the African bush, and then in

remote South-East Asia. Eventually his work brought them to Regina, Saskatchewan and although their marriage ended, her art making again blossomed. She attended Emma Lake Artists' Workshops and found the critiques and the outdoor painting within the Northern Boreal Forest rich and invigorating. She was also drawn to paint the creeks and coulees of Lumsden and west towards Moose Jaw, located within the Qu'Appelle Valley. She has continued to travel outside Canada, many times to visit and travel with her children who live throughout the world, only to return to Regina and work through the landscape subject matter related to that trip. She has painted vastly different terrain from the Outback of Australia, and China, and from the Orkney Islands at the top of Great Britain to the islands of the Mediterranean. She continues to paint almost every day in a studio attached to her townhouse in Regina.

This series of paintings, while being the mature work of a seasoned landscape painter, also contain nuanced and complicated subject matter. Anne Meggitt, herself, is a kind of new age plant hunter who, like her 19th Century antecedents, has searched the globe for the subject for her work. In the heyday of the plant-hunting craze the British Empire was the largest in the world and the interest in scientific discovery and classification was at its zenith. By 2010, much has changed and most of Britain's colonial holdings, Canada included, have become independent nations. The plant hunter's sense of wonder and exploration remains evident in these gardens, just as it does in Anne Meggitt's paintings. She carries that same impulse towards exploration and discovery as the plant hunters did many years ago, and her paintings are the evidence of how these gardens with their complicated mixture of species continue to fascinate all these years later.

Heather Smith

1     Verdure, which can be defined as the fresh green colour characteristic of flourishing vegetation, was a more common word in the 19th century than it seems to be today. Keats wrote in Ode to Nightingale, “*through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.*” And in Mansfield Park, Jane Austen has Fanny Price reflect that, “*To sit in the shade on a fine day, and look upon verdure, is the most perfect refreshment.*”

2     Musgrave, Toby; Chris Gardner, Will Musgrave. *The Plant Hunters: Two Hundred years of adventure and discovery around the world*. London: Ward Lock, 1998. p. 10.

3     see [www.trebahgarden.co.uk](http://www.trebahgarden.co.uk)

4     This information comes from the Caerhays Castle Gardens Brochure and more information can be found on the gardens website [www.caerhays.co.uk](http://www.caerhays.co.uk)

5     Musgrave, p. 134.

6     The Gilberts owned Treillick from 1844 to 1899. “The Development of the Treillick Garden.” The National Trust pamphlet. 2002, p. 9.



*Azaleas*, 2008, oil on canvas, 48" x 50", 122 x 127 cm



# Biography

Anne Eileen Meggitt was born August 27, 1930 in Sarasota, Florida and currently lives and paints in Regina, Saskatchewan.

## Education

1947-1951 National Diploma in Design (Painting), Diploma in Fine Art, University of Reading, Reading, England

1989, 1990, 1991 & 2001 Emma Lake Artists' Workshop, Emma Lake, Saskatchewan

## Exhibitions

2005 & 2006 'Sylvan Tapestry' OSAC touring Saskatchewan

2003 'Timeless Rocks', Art Gallery of Regina, Regina, SK

2002, 2005 Assiniboia Gallery, Regina, SK

2000 Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, ON

1999 'The Rocky Way', Moose Jaw Art Museum, Moose Jaw, SK

1997 Assiniboia Gallery, Regina, SK

1995 The Gallery, South Audley Street, London, England

1994, 1992, 1991, 1988 Assiniboia Gallery, Regina, SK

1988 Atelier Gallery Vancouver, BC

1986 Canadian Art Galleries, Calgary, AB

1986, 1984 Assiniboia Gallery, Regina, SK

## Artist in Residence

1996 Bundanon Trust, Riversdale, NSW, Australia

## Collections

Bundanon Trust

Canada Council Art Bank

Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce

Crown Management Board of Saskatchewan

Deloitte & Touche

Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan

MacKenzie Art Gallery

Moose Jaw Art Museum

Peat Marwick

Petro Canada

Regina Public School Board

Royal Bank of Canada

Saskatchewan Arts Board

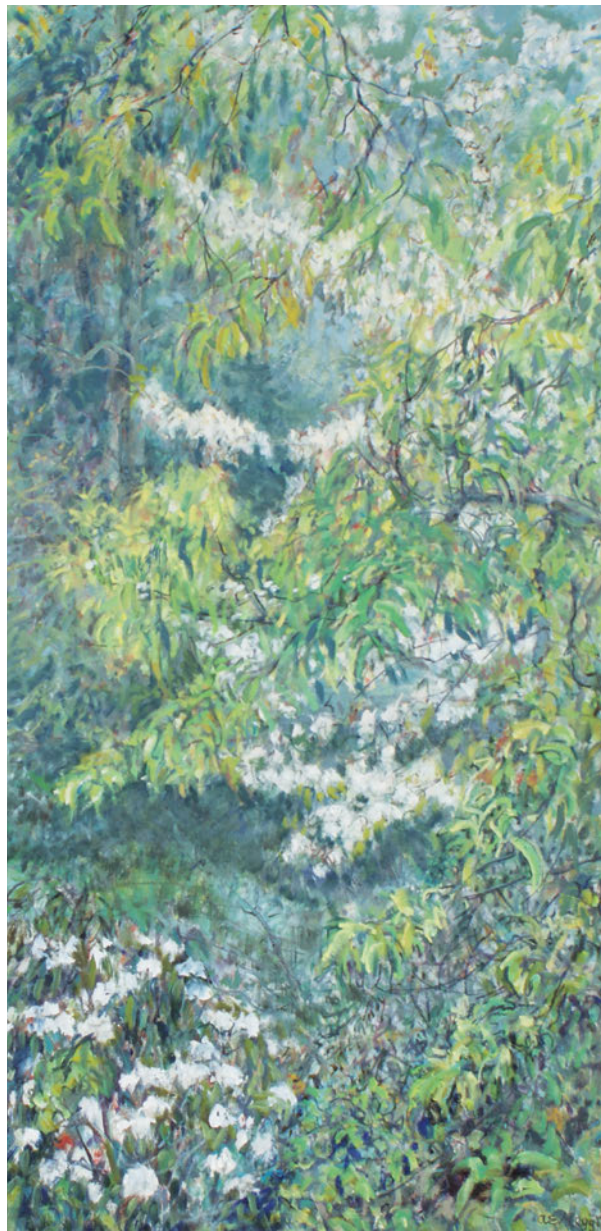
Saskatchewan Property Management Corp.

SaskOil

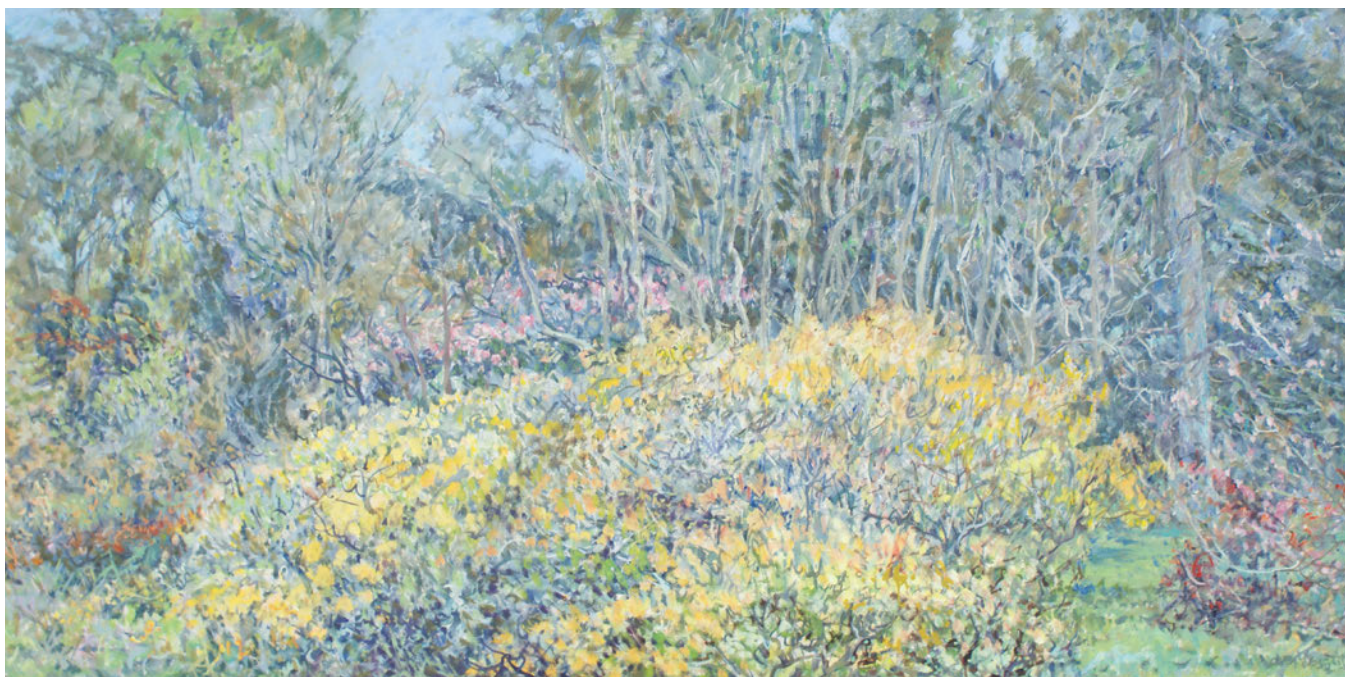
Sask Power

Sask Tel

Westbridge Corporation  
among others.



*Hanging Tapestry*, 2007, oil on canvas, 48" x 24", 122 x 61 cm



*Flurry of Azaleas*, 2008, oil on canvas, 30" x 60", 76 x 152 cm





*Exuberant Garden*, 2008, oil on canvas, 30" x 60", 76 x 152 cm

# List of Work

*Blending  
Rhododendrons*  
2007, oil on canvas  
48" x 50", 122 x 127 cm

*Magnolia Haze*  
2007, oil on canvas  
36" x 48", 91 x 122 cm

*Festive Gardens*  
2007, oil on canvas  
48" x 50", 122 x 127 cm

*Strident  
Rhododendrons*  
2007, oil on canvas  
36" x 48", 91 x 122 cm

*Hanging Tapestry*  
2007, oil on canvas  
48" x 24", 122 x 61 cm  
Private collection

*Heligan Gardens*  
2007, oil on canvas  
24" x 48", 61 x 122 cm

*Peeping Magnolia*  
2007, oil on canvas  
40" x 30", 102 x 76 cm

*Cascade*  
2007, oil on canvas  
40" x 24", 102 x 61 cm

*Plum Trees*  
2007, oil on canvas  
36" x 48", 91 x 122 cm  
Private collection

*The Magnolia Tree*  
2008, oil on canvas  
48" x 50", 122 x 127 cm  
Private collection

*At Caerhays Castle*  
2008, oil on canvas  
48" x 72", 122 x 189 cm

*Dancing Magnolias*  
2008, oil on canvas  
30" x 60", 76 x 152 cm

*Camellias at Caerhays*  
2008, oil on canvas  
24" x 48", 61 x 122 cm

*Azaleas*  
2008, oil on canvas  
48" x 50", 122 x 127 cm

*Rhododendron Tapestry*  
2008, oil on canvas  
50" x 40", 127 x 102 cm

*Exuberant Garden*  
2008, oil on canvas  
30" x 60", 76 x 152 cm

*Distant Inlet*  
2008, oil on canvas  
30" x 40", 76 x 102 cm

*Melody*  
2008, oil on canvas  
30" x 40", 76 x 102 cm

*Spring Forest*  
2008, oil on canvas  
30" x 60", 76 x 152 cm

*Flurry of Azaleas*  
2008, oil on canvas  
30" x 60", 76 x 152 cm

*all work in the collection  
of the artist unless  
otherwise indicated*

# Acknowledgments



Plants, gardens and landscapes have always been a source of inspiration for me and bring me great joy as I strive to capture them with oil on canvas. It is with sincere gratitude that I'd like to thank the staff at the Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery for all they have done to make this exhibit a success. In particular, I wish to thank Heather Smith for her passion, encouragement and for the delightful way in which she has brought my story to life. For their love and support, I would like to thank my children, Corinna, Amanda, Cassandra, Warren and Shireen. Their encouragement knows no bounds, and for that I feel very fortunate. And finally, for the wonderful design of this catalogue, I would like to thank my daughter, Amanda.

Anne Meggitt, Artist

It was a great pleasure to work with Anne Meggitt towards this exhibition and I would also like to thank her daughter, Amanda Maslany who designed this publication. This exhibition was made possible with the assistance of Vivian Barber, Diane Lara, Ross Melanson, Joan Maier, Gabriela Garcia-Luna, Michael Rankin, and Donna Bast.

Heather Smith, Curator

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Communications

**Cover Image** *Hanging Tapestry*, detail, 2007  
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