

Artist Statement: Orchids

Orchids is a multi-panel piece comprised of 21 traditionally gessoed birch panels and painted with images taken from the scientific illustrations of orchids made by Pierre-Joseph Redouté in the early 1800s. Redouté is one of the greatest botanical illustrators in the history of western art. The images were Xeroxed from calendar reproductions of Redouté's orchids, adjusting their scale to fit the size of the wood panels, and then tracing the Xeroxes onto the panels using Saral transfer paper. The shape and form of an orchid is reminiscent of labia and phalluses and they are considered hermaphroditic since each plant contains both male and female reproductive organs and can reproduce themselves. These cause us to see the plant as erotic and sexually charged. The traced images are painted with terre verte, (earth green), and flake white using the material and methods of indirect painting techniques that were often used to create illusionistic and naturalistic painting. The panels are each 5" x 7" and installed in a row on a wall at the same height, leaving a couple of inches between each of the panels. When the piece is fully installed it covers approximately six-teen feet of wall space. When the painted orchids are sufficiently developed Schuster layers them with images that speak to the tension between the human impulse to cultivate and organize nature and the human inability to control our instincts and desires. The images she uses in the overlay are famous images in western art where scientific and artistic investigation converge: Leonardo da Vinci's flying machines, Seurat's speculations and diagrams about the color spectrum, Muybridge's photos of the poll vaulter and symbols depicting the theory of relativity.