



# Why botanical art and illustrations?

By Neera Joshi





**B**orn in 1967 into a family of artists in Kathmandu, Neera (MSc Botany) is probably the only botanical artist/illustrator/painter in Nepal. Her approach of combining art and science first

began in 1999 and was introduced in her book *Flora from Kathmandu Valley*. She has had her works exhibited in Nepal and widely in various parts of the globe. Her major exhibitions include “Fourth International Juried Botanical Art Exhibition 2004”-American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA), New York and “BISCOT 2007”-“Flora of Nepal” Exhibition 2016, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), Scotland. She has contributed scientific botanical illustrations in “Flora of Nepal”- Volume 3, 2011 published by RBGE and national /international scientific botanical research and publications. She works as an independent artist in her home country Nepal.

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Botanical art and illustration can be very effective as a means of communication in plant science, often conveying meaning that is more easily understood in pictures than by the written word. However, to be a successful communication tool botanical art and illustration require specialist skills in observation, description, analysis and depiction. Seeing with hands and talking without words are non-verbal forms of communication that portray the power of images and technical skills.



Botanical illustrations are to be found and known to have reached a peak of achievement in the 19th century (History of Botanical Art, author Wilfrid Blunt). 1740-1840AD is considered as the golden age of botanical art. This era was a great period of exploration, discovery and promotion of botanical art. During this period artists and plant collectors worked together to record treasured plants in

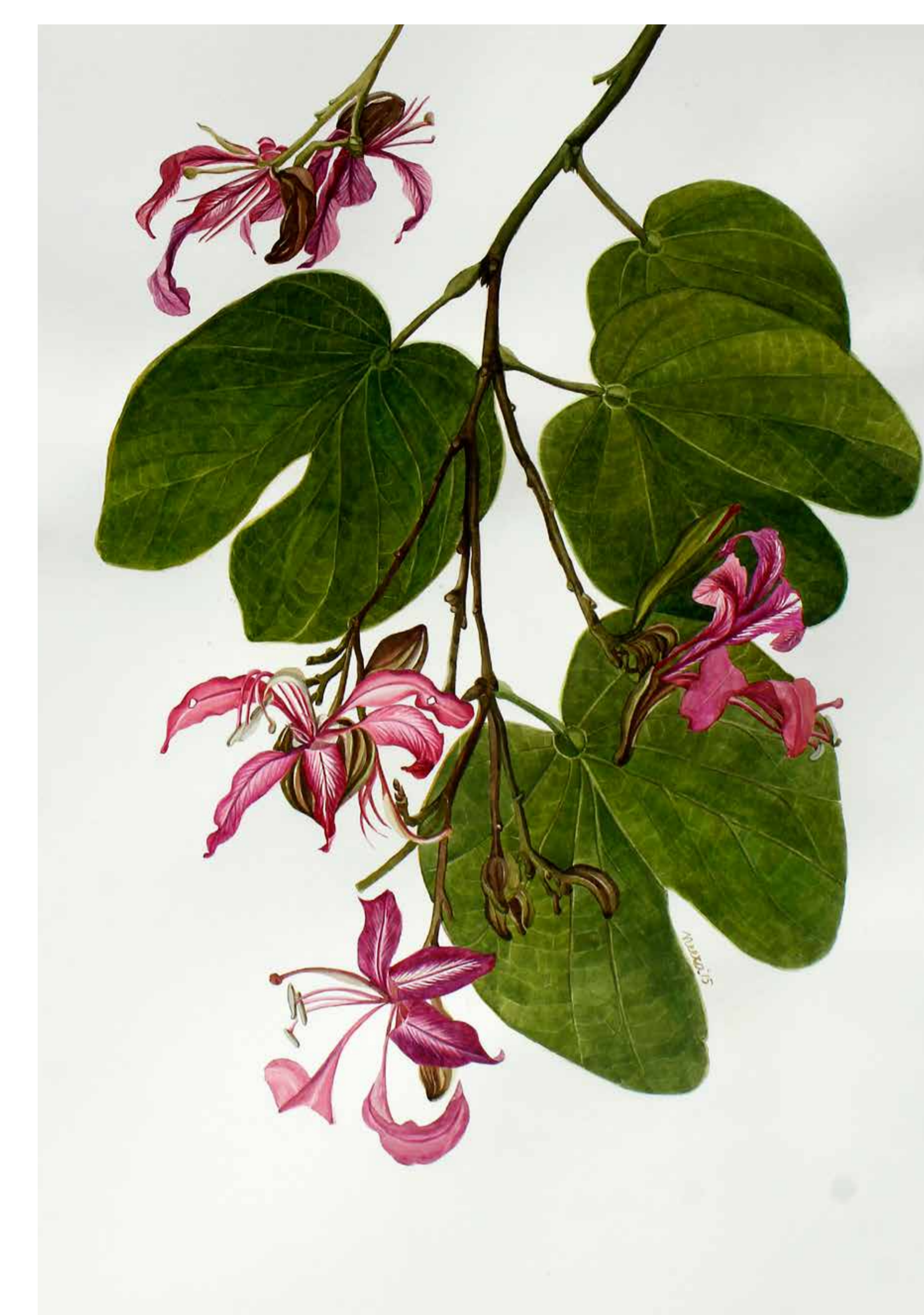
their finest accuracy. Modern techniques such as digital photography rarely captures key characteristics useful for botanists to elucidate knowledge on plants. Botany explains the morphology of an individual plant species as well as its entire life cycle. The study of botany is not complete without the help of illustrations and images of a plant. The art of explaining botany or expressing the beauty of flowers and plants in a pleasing way is known as botanical art. This art varies from purely scientific, such as a scientific diagram of a root section



to the purely artistic appeal of water color of a vase of roses.

The new mode of botanical art and illustration combines not only the science and the art, but also the observational skill to capture nature. The artist must have a full understanding of the science and a passion and skill for art. Artists draw their illustration from live plants collected from fields, gardens and green houses or from

dried specimens preserved within herbaria. Botanical artists have a challenging job to bring live form, from the pressed herbarium plant specimen. There are certain rules, regulation and the conventions to follow to draw a certain diagram through different media such as water color, gouache, graphite and pen and ink. However, it is crucial for the plant taxonomists and botanists to arrive at a scientifically accurate illustration that will lead to research finding as well as aid to identify the plant by representing the salient characters.



The above rightmost image of Botanical Art featured here is a *Bahunia purpurea*, a wild and cultivated plant which is found in the conservation area of Biodiversity Conservation Center at Sauraha Chitwan. It is widely used as fodder for cattle.

This artwork was created during the workshop organized by Art for Nature organization in December 2015 at location Sauraha Chitwan.