



FINE ARTS | MICHAEL HUEBNER

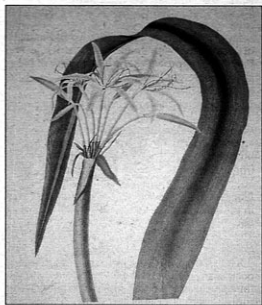
Antique nature art blooms this week at Aldridge Botanical Gardens

Those with more than a passing interest in nature, art and history, or are looking for a secure investment in an unstable economy, would be wise to check out "A Passion for Natural History," a benefit for Aldridge Botanical Gardens.

More than 300 historic prints, some dating back three centuries, will be displayed at the Lorna Road park Wednesday through next Sunday. The exhibition comes courtesy Birmingham native J. Gilbert Johnston, whose company, Antique Nature Prints, deals in original prints and reproductions of birds, quadrupeds, botanicals, insects and other subjects. Some of the world's most renowned nature artists are represented, including John James Audubon, Mark Catesby, Prideaux John Selby, Robert John Thornton and Alexander Wilson.

In his eight years as a dealer, Johnston has seen the value of these works gain steadily despite a roller coaster economy.

"Prices for these original prints can be tracked over time, and you see that they never lose value," Johnston says. "We all know of stocks that are supposed to be secure and all of a sudden they've lost 70 percent of their value. These prints never do that."



SPECIAL

Priscilla Susan Bury rendered this image of a *Crinum cruentum* in the early 1830s, part of "A Selection of Hexandrian Plants." It is one of hundreds of original prints that will be shown starting Wednesday at Aldridge Botanical Gardens.

An original Audubon "Ruff-necked" hummingbird sells for \$20,000, says Johnston, and he has several other selling for "multiple thousands." But don't let that scare you away.

"The William Curtis botanicals are \$100 for 200-year-old prints," he says, noting that several other prints sell in that price range.

He also has first-rate Audubon replicas on hand.

"You can get a Great Blue Heron for \$1,800, a fraction of the original \$200,000. Other reproductions sell for as little as \$400. You can get an image of the Sandhill Crane for a very reasonable amount of money."

An avid nature lover himself, Johnston has trekked, backpacked and kayaked in the Arctic, Africa, South America and the Himalayas, and has lectured extensively about his collection. At 2:30 p.m. today, Johnston will kick off the week-long exhibition and sale with a lecture at Hoover Library Theatre. Here's the schedule for the week:

► **Today, 2:30-3:30 p.m.** Hoover Library Theatre, 200 Municipal Dr. J. Gilbert Johnston, "A Passion for Natural History."

► **Today, 3:45-4:45 p.m.** Hoover Library Theatre, John Hall, University of West Alabama, "William Bartram in Alabama."

► **Tuesday, 6-7:30 p.m.** Catered reception. Aldridge Botanical Gardens, 3530 Lorna Road.

► **Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; next Sunday, 1-5 p.m.** Aldridge Botanical Gardens. Benefit exhibition and sale.

All events are free. Call 682-8019 for more information, or visit www.antiquenatureprints.com or www.aldridgegardens.com. Johnston can be reached at 251-7353.

TOP MOP ORCHESTRA PERFORMS AT INDIAN SPRINGS

Today at 3 p.m., the Alabama Youth Symphony will perform under the baton of its new conductor, Jon Remley. The AYS is the premiere ensemble of the Music Opportunity Program, and consists of advanced high school musicians. The free program will include the March from Verdi's "Aida," Biber's "Battalia" and Grieg's "Peer Gynt" Suite No. 1, Op. 46.

The concert takes place at Indian Springs Concert Hall, 190 Woodward Drive. For more information, including MOP events and audition information, call 231-9504 or go to www.musicop.org.

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