
Broadly speaking, florilegia are a kind of commonplace book, compendiums of excerpts from other works. One specific type is the collection of botanical illustrations that faithfully catalogs the contents of a private garden or serves as a reference for other artists, such as a painter of still-lifes. These florilegia are usually organized by the season and within that, by the order of blooming. The Green Florilegium likely represents a catalog of a private garden but it is unknown which one.

The Green Florilegium includes new contextual materials to complement the reproduced seventeenth-century manuscript held by the Royal Collection of Graphic Arts at the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, Denmark (SMK). The original manuscript recently underwent extensive restoration that provided new information about the volume and ensured that the final result for this publication would be the illustrations at their most pristine. The publishing house, Prestel, reproduced beautifully the full set of 395 images on 178 leaves in full color on high quality paper. The Prestel edition is cloth-bound and slip-cased.

The original medium is gouache on parchment and the manuscript is bound in green sammit, or velour, lending the volume its name. The illustrations are idealized representations of flowering plants, the intent being to showcase the beauty of the plant and not the structural reality. The colors here are more muted; the shapes more idealized than in another recently reproduced florilegium by the artist, Hans Simon Holtzbecker, Das Moller-Florilegium (Hirmer, 2007). Also worth noting, the volume was produced before Linnaeus introduced his classification system for the biological kingdom, based, in part, on the reproductive organs. Like other works that predate him, less attention has been paid to those aspects of the plant here. Even with the illustrations in this pre-modern state, botanists at the University of Copenhagen have completed an identification list of the flora included in the Prestel edition.

The Green Florilegium includes an introductory essay with parallel text in English and German, written by curator and senior researcher at the SMK, Hanne Kolind Poulsen. In it, she gives a good overview of botanical florilegia, the history of this volume and the artist, Holtzbecker. Not much is known of his history or that of this florilegium, but the essay does a good job of summarizing the existing theories. The essay and accompanying bibliography would be useful to any beginner in the topic, from amateur to undergraduate. For libraries with collections in botany and flower art, or those with an interest in manuscript material, this book will be a good addition.

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