

For Immediate Release

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**CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK TO OFFER FIVE CENTURIES OF
BOTANICAL BOOKS IN JUNE**



John Hill, *The Vegetable System*, London, 1773-1786
Estimate: \$200,000-300,000

"The botanical artist finds himself at once and always in a dilemma: is he the servant of Science, or of Art? There can, I think, be no doubt that he must learn to serve both masters."

- Wilfrid Blunt, 1950

Important Botanical Books

June 24, 2009

New York – Christie's is pleased to present the sale of *Important Botanical Books* on June 24 featuring many of the most significant medicinal herbals and fine illustrated botanical books from the 15th through the 19th century. Over 200 works, including many of the most celebrated in the history of the field, document the development of the scientific and artistic studies of plants throughout these four centuries. What distinguishes these works from other scientific books are the quantity, and

HERBA ARGEMONIA.



A botanical illustration of the Argemone plant, also known as the Poppy. The plant is depicted with a central stem and several large, deeply lobed leaves. At the base of the plant, a snake is entwined around the stem. The entire illustration is enclosed in a rectangular border.

A graxia dicitur
Aia
Itali

apetela uel acida.
Sarco collans.
Argemoneans.

AD OCULORVM VICIA VEL
DOLOREM.

Herba Argimonia uicidat per se citat: si aris-
ta fuisse in calida aqua insecta ut facillime

31

The Renaissance saw an immense increase in botanic study and publication. Perhaps the most celebrated botanical work ever printed, Leonhard Fuchs's *De historia stirpium*, Basel, 1542 (estimate: \$60,000-80,000) provided the first comprehensive study of plants and opened up the field to broader, and more specialized, study. The sale includes a superb copy of the first edition in a contemporary binding, as well as a copy of the first German edition, published one year later, and several pocket editions that were intended for use in the field.



Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, botanical illustration reached new heights of lavishness and precision. Elizabeth Blackwell was a pioneering figure, being among the first women to publish color-plate books of such fine execution and beauty. Blackwell's *A Curious Herbal*, London, 1737-39, (*image left*- estimate: \$15,000-20,000) records numerous unusual plants from around the world and was undertaken to pay off the debts of her husband, whose London printing-house had been ruined by rival printers. Some 20 years later began publication of John Hill's *The Vegetable System*, London, 1759-86, (*image on page 1*- estimate: \$200,000-300,000) a monumental work containing over one thousand two hundred hand-colored engravings. Not only is it the largest botanical publication of the eighteenth century, it is also of great scientific importance, being the first to give in the vernacular a comprehensive treatment of the plant kingdom and to adopt the

Linnaean system. The tradition established by publications such as Hill's was carried into the nineteenth century. Regional and focused studies of specific plants were made, such as Francesco Manuel Blanco's *Study of the Flowers, Fruits and Trees of the Philippines, Flora de Filipinas*, Manila, 1880-83, (estimate: \$30,000-40,000) that contained nearly 500 chromolithographs. The sale of *Important Botanical Books* illuminates the great eras of botanical illustration and discovery, where science and natural beauty entwined.

Auction: *Important Botanical Books*

June 24 at 10 am

Viewing: Christie's Rockefeller Galleries

June 20-23

About Christie's

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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