



## President's Message

# THE GENTLE GIANTS AMONG US

It is no surprise that most of those who visit The Huntington are particularly drawn to our botanical collections. The 120-acre gardens are a wonderland of botanical diversity—an ever-changing feast for the senses that keeps people coming back season after season.

Anchoring it all are the gentle giants that punctuate the landscape: the trees. Across the property, there are some 3,770 “accessioned” trees—that is, trees that are documented and considered part of the collections. They represent a healthy diversity of some 76 families, 286 genera, and 780 species. It is impossible to imagine any garden, especially this one, without trees, not least because they are so integral to the beauty of the landscape and essential to the health of the environment. And yet they are under siege, from both natural and manmade threats.

It is against this backdrop that we are presenting “Out of the Woods: Celebrating Trees in Public Gardens,” an exhibition continuing through Aug. 27 in the Brody Botanical Center. The show, the third triennial of the New York Botanical Garden and the American Society of Botanical Artists, highlights the role public gardens play in communicating the importance of trees, and pays tribute to the work being done by researchers and staff to care for, conserve, propagate, and study them. Included in the exhibition are 43 works by international artists, each one depicting a tree cultivated in a public collection.

The Huntington is represented by artist Deborah Friedman’s spectacular watercolor and ink study, “California Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*),” which includes detailed renderings of the tree’s leaves, flowers, seed balls, and bark. One of the specimens she used as inspiration for the work is a stately Sycamore (*Platanus spp.*) located adjacent to the Orbit Pavilion.

The “Out of the Woods” exhibition is both an exquisite display of these magnificent plants and a poignant reminder of the state of the world today: trees are being destroyed by deforestation, by development, and by the effects of climate change. Closer to home,

trees throughout Southern California are being lost in alarming numbers to invasive pests and diseases. Here at The Huntington, we are fighting a formidable battle with a variety of borers and other destructive pests, including a tiny beetle called the polyphagous shot hole borer. Botanical staff members and their partner scientists at the University of California, Riverside, are actively researching ways to eradicate them.

I was particularly alarmed to hear a recent report from Jim Folsom, our Telleen/Jorgensen Director of the Botanical Gardens, that we are having to remove several large deodars that are succumbing to pests and drought. It is true that all trees have a natural life span, and some are simply aging out. But many others are struggling from the drought and are more vulnerable because of stress. In fact, since 2016, we have lost about 250 trees.

In response, our Botanical team is hard at work with an active monitoring and pruning program, and for every tree lost, two are planted to take its place. Researchers at UC Riverside note that recent aerial photos of The Huntington actually show a somewhat thicker tree canopy than before the December 2011 windstorm that took out hundreds of trees in one extreme-weather event. But it is a constant battle, as more and more pests look for trees to call home—or to make a meal of. Some biological remedies, such as green lacewings (an insect that eats aphids, thrips, and other slow-moving bugs), might work in our favor.

As the “Out of the Woods” exhibition shows, trees are among our planet’s most vital life forms: they clean our air, stabilize our soil, and provide habitats for an incredible variety of flora and fauna. At The Huntington, they offer the shady respite on which we rely so heavily in these intense southern California summers. I hope that you will come see the exhibition and then walk outside and ponder the gentle giants among us, and the important work that we are undertaking to preserve them.

*Steve Hindle, Interim President*