

Featuring . . . Donna Aldridge

(Editor's Note: Donna Aldridge was a founding member of Heartland Hosta and Shade Plant Society in the early 1990's. She served initially as Vice President as well as Newsletter Editor and then as President of the society. Donna is also responsible for the design of our wonderful logo which appears on the cover of this newsletter. This biographical piece is printed in the first person so that it remains true to Donna's captivating writing style.)

I came to gardening through my artwork. I'd been buying bouquets from a local florist to paint from life, but began thinking how wonderful it would be to walk out into my own yard for a vase full of flowers. Well, how naive I was—in that I fell so in love with the organizing and growing of flowers that I painted less and less. Hmmmmm—that is, I painted and sculpted my yard with flowers and beds and paths and walls rather than painting my canvases in the studio as much.

It was glorious!!! I began with tall bearded irises and quickly added every other kind of iris that could, in any way, be grown in Kansas City, along with other perennials. But (now I must digress) I'd been an indoor gardener for nearly two decades with so many gorgeously-leaved tropical plants. For some time it was said that, if the painting did not have a plant in it—portrait, still life, room setting or landscape, it surely could not be one of mine! Truly, I reveled in the leaf forms!

So, already I'd developed that (*may we hosta growers agree the term that fits here is...*) sophisticated taste for elegant leaves, not dependent of flowers for their grand beauty! It was natural that, as I agonized over the irises and other plants passing peak (or any expected) bloom, I began to renew my appreciation for the plants that held their foliage most proudly. Hostas! Ahhhhh. Delicious.

It did not even matter to me in the beginning that they had the good sense to grow in the shade all summer. But that became an added advantage, happily! A few of us had a great time organizing the Heartland Hosta and Shade Plant Society. And how fast others gathered around us with the same excitement. So many of us were plant collectors rather than garden designers at heart, so I was one of many who had sweeps of one plant—right next to the sweep of another one! Works for us!

When I began designing the logo for the society, which we also had made into a pin, I knew it had to reflect the lushness and vitality of the hosta. I wanted the heart to be present—and it is, both in the large red heart as foundation behind, then as the leaf coming forward towards you. I wanted the coloring to reflect the lush greenery, but also the coolness of the shade encircling our gardens. The flowers in soft lavender were a nice play against the greens and the



white background. I enjoyed so much forming each leaf and, appreciating the Art Nouveau artist Mucha, whose work if not name you all know. I took great delight in how each line intersected another; how each curve moved over the shape behind it. Even now I'm still so pleased with how our logo turned out.

Nearly ten years ago I became terribly ill and was "horizontal" for several years, then little by little began recovering, finally being able to return to my life's work as a professional fine artist. It was so heartbreaking to see my garden sink into despair. With less time and energy, I'm still not been able to work out there, but the hostas have survived so nobly! So many other plants have been utterly lost, but they are a valiant group! I decided my garden made a great "disaster test garden!" The hostas won! But ever heartbreaking.

I've been fortunate to win a number of major awards in major national and international painting shows and have works in twenty-five countries. As well as gallery shows and painting commissions, I teach several regular classes and occasional workshops. I work mainly in oil and pastel, sometimes digital. I'm the immediate past president of the MidAmerica Pastel Society and still newsletter editor.

Please come visit my web site at www.aldriggestudios.com. I'm looking forward this year to getting out to paint some gardens from life again. If you have a particularly exciting vista, perhaps you might let me know! It would be a joy!