

# Into the Fold

Lessons from an accordion sketchbook exchange.

STORY BY *Janene Walkky, Oregon Botanical Artists' Circle*

**USING ACCORDION BOOKS FOR OUR ARTISTS' CIRCLE SKETCHBOOK** exchange has inspired creative cooperation in more ways than one. Not only do we have a unifying group project and get to know one another's styles and botanical interests, but we have the artistic challenge of composing an entry that complements the previous artists' sketches on the long stretch of paper.

Our group, Oregon Botanical Artists, is now on its third exchange. We have learned a few things along the way to make the process run smoother and make it more fun, too! For our first exchange, each of our 12 participants purchased a Stillman and Birn Zeta sketchbook. After making the title page, we each filled a single page or double-page spread, then passed the book to the next participant at the end of the month.

Although we liked the Zeta sketchbooks, we had several participants drop out of the exchange when completing a whole page proved too time-consuming due to work schedules or family circumstances. In the meantime, OBA members Alice Debo and Kristine Mackessy started a "mini-exchange" with new members and others who had missed out on the first one. Kristine had been using accordion sketchbooks for landscapes on her travels. She thought that format might lead to a more informal and interactive exchange—and she was right!

As we admired the beautiful line of artwork unfurled across the table from the opened accordion sketchbooks at our monthly meetings, we quickly recognized the unique advantages of this



Members of OBA gather to discuss the finer points of the sketchbook exchange. An informal setting fosters camaraderie and creativity.

format. For one thing, the panels were smaller and less intimidating to fill. Also rather than displaying a single double-page spread at a time, by opening the book you could show ten panels with several artists' work at once—a gorgeously colorful array!

When both exchanges completed their rounds, we decided to join together using Sennelier Urban Sketchbooks (4" x 6") in the accordion format. We showed the

Here are some things we have learned:

- Have clear guidelines, including a set time to transfer the books. We coordinated the book-passing deadline with the date of our regular monthly meetings. It's not only a convenient time to give

the books to the next one in line, but it has become the highlight of our meetings to see the beautiful work spread out on the table.


- Before the first exchange, have each participating artist make an entry on the first two panels, with their name clearly written, and their address either on the front or back, to be sure the book eventually makes it back to its owner.

- Using the same brand book allows participants to adjust their techniques to one kind of paper rather than having to experiment on a different surface each month.

- Organizing the exchange rotation by proximity makes it more convenient for those who can't get to the monthly meeting to exchange the books.

- Flexibility on the size of the entry required relieves the pressure during those busy times that we all experience. Artists can add something as small as an acorn in the corner of a panel or, if time allows, perhaps a leafy tendril that stretches over three panels, leaving room for other entries above, below, or behind it. The books can be flipped over if more space is required as the exchange progresses.

- Have a team to develop the rotation list, guidelines, and deal with questions that arise from members. We had four members who contributed to various aspects of the exchanges: Jane Levy Campbell, Janet Parker, Alice Debo and I.

We had the opportunity to show our sketchbooks in display cases during a recent OBA exhibition, and the lineup of sketches in different styles and media got rave reviews from visitors. Intertwining our artwork seems symbolic of what we are about as an artists' circle—encouraging and supporting each other's work. 

*For more about the Oregon Botanical Artists sketchbook exchange, visit [www.oba-artists.com](http://www.oba-artists.com)*



**CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT.** Working out composition on a very horizontal page. Accomplished artists gather: Front row (left to right): Jane Levy Campbell, Laura Shea, Kip Nordstrom; Back row: Alice Debo, Janene Walky, Dorothy Krogh, Kristine Mackesy, Carol Putnam. Almost finished!

