

# ORCHID ALLIANCE PROJECT-BRIDGING ART & SCIENCE

PATRICIA LASPINO

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As a professional artist, Patricia Laspino's forty year career has been inspired by the beauty and diversity of the natural world and its power to influence. She has chosen the floral, specifically the orchid, as a primary focus of interest. By using orchids as a metaphor in her paintings, she explores cultural and biological evolution, biodiversity and environmental stewardship. The *Orchid Alliance Project-Bridging Art & Science* is her ambitious endeavor which has global significance. Weaving together two disciplines through scientific inquiry and collaboration, her art provides fresh perspectives on the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world.

## Prelude to a Fascinating Pivotal Plant

Orchids have been an object of desire for thousands of years, with a rich cultural history that spans the globe. Some of the earliest references to orchids in art and literature can be traced back at least 2,500 years, with the earliest written records dating from the time of Confucius around 500 BC. Today, orchids represent one of the largest, most diverse flowering plant families, with an estimated 25,000 naturally occurring species on every continent with the exception of Antarctica. With an additional 130,000 man-made hybrids, Patricia views orchids as artifacts of modern society. The cultivation of orchids has become an international multibillion-dollar a year industry. Today's "orchid mania" is testament to the collective passion the orchid continues to inspire worldwide.

From the perspective of **art and cultural evolution**, the human fascination with orchids has been compelling, laced with passion, mystery and intrigue. We are beginning to appreciate the vast multicultural implications of orchids within different societies. Patricia believes exploring ancient attitudes about orchids and their function, through the lens of art and culture, may shed some light on the present power orchids have on us - a power she believes that can transform our future in terms of global stewardship.

From the perspective of **science and biological evolution**, Patricia considers orchids to be a flagship plant family that draws the attention and support of the general public, while in the process gets things accomplished for the broader ecosystem in which they occur. Her orchid paintings explore and inform the viewer of the complex interdependencies and balances inherent in the orchid's environment.

The orchid's habitat is as varied as its shapes, sizes and colors. From the shoreline to elevations greater than 13,000 feet above sea level, orchids have evolved into virtually every conceivable habitat, including tropic and subtropical regions. Some orchids grow on sand dunes, some species thrive on bare rock. Others live high atop trees, or hidden underground, and there are even some in semi-aquatic environments. The most outstanding characteristics of orchids are their diversity and adaptability through survival strategies developed over the past 80 million years.

Nonetheless, orchids depend on other plants, animals and insects for pollination and survival. They display a delicately balanced interdependence on the organisms that coexist within their habitats. Most orchids have evolved to attract one single specific pollinator to one specific species of orchid. These complex interdependencies make orchids extremely susceptible to the effects of global warming, deforestation (whether man-made or naturally occurring), or even the global spread of pesticides. The loss of an insect or bird pollinator, alone, may spell doom for the orchid that depends on it for pollination. The dramatic effects of climate change on orchid populations are becoming even more evident as wet habitats dry up and dry habitats become more uniformly moist. Habitat change and forest destruction aren't new issues; however, their alarming rate of acceleration has made adaptation extremely difficult for the orchid, its pollinators and the ecosystems that support them. **Patricia considers the orchid to be an environmental indicator or the “the canary in the mine”.**

### **Artist and Process - Layering Medium with Message**

Nature has always been a primary inspiration for Patricia, who considers herself an “artist/scientist”. Her academic studies in Art and Biology broadened her interest in nature’s geometries, patterns and intriguing designs. Following her postgraduate work with the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators at the Smithsonian Institution, she went on to develop her own fine art style.

Reconciling her scientific and artistic character traits, her art process marries both the expressive and the detail-oriented aspects of her personality. Intense research and collaboration with scientists are both integral to Patricia’s studio art practice. Bridging art with science, she thoughtfully studies each orchid species in the context of biology, history and culture and then creates visual narrative stories through her paintings. Her artistic message is as much about layering information as it is about layering paint!

Patricia’s painting process involves 60-80 transparent layers of oil color over a sculptured groundwork of fossilized botanical impressions. Her paintings begin as sculptures, where she presses botanical materials into a special medium; some of these imprints are actual orchid flowers. On this foundation, she begins stacking layers of transparent oil paint glaze, creating abstract fields of color. These backgrounds are complete abstract paintings in and of themselves, their interwoven organic shapes appearing like ghostly fossils. She creates her own distinctive naturalistic vocabulary of reoccurring shapes, designs, textures and colors. Her painted surfaces capture the intensity of light and are animated from within to achieve vibrancy, luminosity and drama.

Upon these botanic tapestries she paints the diverse architecture of the orchid, which Patricia considers an icon of evolution. Although her bold, provocative paintings exhibit a strong fidelity to nature, the artist’s intention is to capture the spirit or essence of the flower, selectively emphasizing the evolutionary marvels of each species. Her large-scale canvases entice the viewer to journey into the orchid’s exotic environment - to experience the world from a bug’s eye view. She often determines physical painting sizes based on the exhibition’s venue, series theme and artistic message.

Patricia's oeuvre explores the fundamental attractive shapes and designs of nature where symmetry, color, and pattern all play important roles on nature's grand stage of attraction. Human beings, flowers and animals inhabit forms that are both aesthetic and functional. Are these forms hard-wired for beauty? She seeks to provide a fresh perspective by finding new connections between humans, their perceptions of beauty and the natural world, furthering her assertion that **in science there is art and in art, there is science**. Her mission is to create art and events, in which the fusion of art and science reveals previously unnoticed beauty, creating a sense of wonder, instilling a purpose of discovery and appreciation, inspiring action to further the long term stewardship of the natural world.

### **The Art of Awareness – Creating Connections**

The idea is to use art, and specifically orchid art, as the vehicle for awareness. Thus, the watchword of the *Orchid Alliance Project-Bridging Art & Science* is “**Awareness**”. Awareness and education form the threads, carefully interwoven throughout the Project, to increase awareness and appreciation for the beauty and diversity of the natural world. This is accomplished by carefully blending the historical, biological and cultural significance of the orchid through the vehicle of art.

Today, more institutions and individuals recognize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration as a means to uncover innovative thinking, and the fields of art and science are at an important crossroad. The timing and approach of the project serves a dual purpose - as a launch-pad for ideas and a catalyst for change. The federally trademarked *Orchid Alliance Project* is strategically designed to elicit global awareness and support for project exhibitions and events from art museums and galleries, botanical and other educational institutions, curators and corporate sponsors. Equally integral to the Project's success are artists, collectors, art critics, the news media and the everyday flower enthusiast.

The *Orchid Alliance Project-Bridging Art & Science* is a collaborative effort of synergistic entities, uniting participants sharing a common sensibility for global stewardship. Participants have specific goals within their own business domains, but all share the purpose of making a valuable impact on the world. Collaborative members are invited to contribute to the Project based on their visionary expertise in their respected fields, their inspiring business and social objectives, and their excellence in leadership.

To elaborate on how founding members Patricia and Andrew Laspino have been creatively collaborating with scientists, scholars, artists and organizations, let's consider several of the Project's participants. For over five years, the American Orchid Society, a leader in orchid education, conservation and research, has been a part of, and has endorsed and supported, the *Orchid Alliance Project*. Dr. Ron McHatton, the organization's Chief Operating Officer and Director of Education, acts not only as Patricia's advisor in her selection of orchid subjects, but also lends educational expertise as subjects are developed by the artist. He also supports educational materials designed to supplement gallery and museum exhibitions.

Thomas Miranda, orchid collection specialist at the Smithsonian Institution, also collaborates on the Project. He helps maintain nearly 8,000 orchids in the Smithsonian's collection, which is quite diverse and extensive. Mr. Miranda continues to play a key role as advisor, not only in the

areas of orchid biology, but also in sharing information about the historical and cultural significance of the orchid in diverse societies. He is an *Orchid Alliance Project* member and has agreed to contribute to a book, now in progress, to the Project. Other staff members within the vast disciplines of the Smithsonian that have provided valuable insights are the Museum of Natural History, the American Art Museum and the Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art. In addition to private art gallery exhibitions, Patricia has participated collaboratively in exhibitions with the Smithsonian Institution, the United States Botanic Garden, Longwood Gardens, and the New York Botanic Garden. Institutions instrumental to the artist's research are Bowling Green State University, Yale University and Wesleyan University, among others.

The Hahnemühle Fine Art Company, Germany's oldest artist paper mill (in existence over 420 years), and Gary Lichtenstein Editions (GLE), collaborated with Patricia to create an environmentally conscious statement through a work of art. The resulting commemorative edition celebrates Patricia's orchid painting, "Illuminated Vandas at Longwood", and its connection to the DuPont estate, Longwood Gardens, in Kennett Square, PA. Hahnemühle contributed the premium archival fine art paper, made of renewable bamboo fibers, and Lichtenstein contributed his printing of the fine art edition at his studio in Ridgefield, CT. Both Hahnemühle and Lichtenstein are collaborative members of the *Orchid Alliance Project*.

### **The Global Platform - Possibilities through Engagement**

So, how does the *Orchid Alliance Project-Bridging Art and Science* use Patricia Laspino's orchid art as a vehicle for awareness? The answer is through its innovative and thought-provoking exhibitions where viewer participation and engagement are key. The orchid paintings themselves are visually stimulating; intertwined with their beauty is the intellectually provocative science component which is of equal importance, creating a powerful statement.

The narrative information accompanying each work of art is an important facet of the exhibition experience; this aspect is pivotal in creating deep human connections that shift values and inspire stewardship. These two layers of communication are presented together to the viewer through exciting exhibition displays intended to be mentally and physically interactive. The project embraces and employs new technologies and multimedia to encourage a more personal interface with individual viewers through the use of tablets, mobile devices and smart technology. Software and digital media in the art exhibitions are used as innovative tools, encouraging the viewer to access an enriched, layered, educational experience of paintings, orchids, stories and their respective relevance.

In addition to curating education into the exhibits, Patricia believes interaction with the public is critical to a reciprocal collaborative effort. Thus, the events develop and deliver interesting artist lectures and gallery talks for all ages whenever possible. Patricia's exhibitions include transformative paintings, as well as collateral educational materials, for example, exhibition catalogs, books, and materials for teachers, when applicable. A selection of high quality ancillary products can be designed and produced depending on available sponsorship and the focus and scope of the exhibition.

## **Sponsorship Benefits – The Value of Partnering**

So, what are some of the strategic benefits of participating in the *Orchid Alliance Project-Bridging Art and Science*? As mentioned earlier, “collaborative members are invited to contribute to the Project based on their visionary expertise in their respective fields, inspiring business and social objectives, and their excellence in leadership.” These attributes set the stage for synergistic partnerships where creative thinking makes it possible to reach shared goals.

Supporting *Orchid Alliance Project* exhibitions and educational programs demonstrates environmental and social responsibility evidenced by investing in individuals, communities, and the world at large. The result creates a positive influence on potential consumers, creates new partnerships and generates new revenues. The Project exhibitions or events are international, national or regional. They are museum quality presentations in design geared to develop seeds that germinate in the mind. Displays are designed to be exciting and aesthetically pleasing, with the supporting information designed to provide media outlets with interesting content. Public educational media representation is ideal for the Project’s message. All this provides corporate sponsors and participating collaborative members with valuable positive publicity.

Participants in the project, no matter the type of business entity, will gain a myriad of exclusive advertising and promotional possibilities. Corporate sponsorship provides their marketers with unique branding opportunities to position themselves in the market place and shape consumer attitudes. *Orchid Alliance Project* branding can enhance an entity’s image and visibility; differentiate each from its competitors; and help develop closer relationships with the public.

In addition to new advertising and promotional opportunities, the Project will provide many benefits in the realm of community relations. Alignment with the Project’s global commitment to environmental sustainability provides a unique way to enhance corporate image, while promoting good citizenship and higher civic engagement. For entities involved in international trade, an investment in the Project means supporting a global conversation about preserving the earth’s fragile ecosystems, through an art project that transcends language, national borders and cultural barriers. The *Orchid Alliance Project* not only bridges art and science, but also helps build a bridge between cultures creating connections regardless of race, gender, religion or age.

**For additional information or to become a collaborative member, contact:**

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**“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious – the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.”** Albert Einstein