

Looking at the world through the eye of a naturalist



Carl Linnaeus
Magnus Hallman
1774
Oil painting on canvas
69 x 52cm
Museo Nacional de Colombia
Reg. 535

José Celestino Mutis was a man of science

and was interested in the characteristics of his surroundings: climate, temperature, humidity, minerals that could be exploited and particular aspects of plants and animals, as well as the inhabitants, their customs and the diseases that affected them.

For botanical observations he had adopted Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus' classification system, which proposed an order of the vegetal world from the study of plants' sexual characteristics, which due to its functionality and ease of use became universally accepted.

Since his arrival to Nueva Granada, Mutis wrote to Linnaeus and sent him to Uppsala, in Sweden, news about species unknown in Europe, herbarium material, seed samples and image and word descriptions of a distant nature. Correspondence between Mutis and Linnaeus continued until the botanist's death in 1778, and continued with his son, Charles, until 1783.

Communications during that time were not so sophisticated: a letter sent from America to Europe or vice versa could take months to arrive, and even could get lost in any of the journeys. Fortunately, Mutis' findings eventually made their way to Sweden, where Linnaeus published them and spread them among the scientific community.

Recueil des plantes des Indes
Maria Sibylla Merian
Paris, 1768
Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia
Mutis Collection 3865

*Supplementum plantarum systematis
vegetabilium: generum plantarum
et specierum plantarum*
Carl A. Linnaeus
1781
Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia
Mutis Collection 2934

Linnaeus responds to the consignment dated June 6, 1773, expressing his gratitude for the delivery of the *Mutisia*, name given by him as an honor to his friend born in Cádiz. Within the edition of the *Species Plantarum* in Europe, Linnaeus refers to Mutis as the "maximum American botanist."

SYNGENESIA. Polygam. superfl. 57

1421. MUTISIA.

Character essentialis.
Receptaculum nudum. Pappus plumosus. Calyx cylindricus, imbricatus. Corollulae radii ovali-oblongae; disci trifidae.

Character naturalis.
CAL. communis oblongus, cylindricus, imbricatus. Squamae lanceolatae: interiores longiores.

COR. composita, radiata.
Flosculi disci radii triplo plures. Corollulae tubulosae, trifidae. Lacinia exterior lanceolata. Lacinia interiores lineares.

Flosculi radii octo. Corollulae ovali-oblongae, integrae. Unguis linearis.

STAM. Disci Filamenta quinque, linearia. Anthera cylindrica, flosculo longior, basi setis decurrentibus.

Radii nulla. Rudimenta filamentorum duo.

PIST. Disci Germen breve. Stylus filiformis. Stigma simplex. Radii Germen breve. Stylus filiformis. Stigmata duo, fetacea.

PER. nullum.

SEM. oblongiuscula. Pappus plumosus.

REC. nudum.

In memoriam Josephi Celestini Mutis, Americes summi Botanici, qui Historiam plantarum Americanarum, imprimis Palmarum, pulcherrimam parat & plurima nova huic Opusculo communicavit.

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