

GARDEN TO CANVAS

Cedric Morris & Benton End

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EXHIBITION HANDBOOK

PHILIP MOULD

 & COMPANY

Exhibition handbook printed on the occasion of the exhibition
Garden to Canvas: Cedric Morris and Benton End at

PHILIP MOULD

& COMPANY

20 May – 18 June 2025

Front cover: Cedric Morris, *Benton Blue Tit*, 1965

Back cover: Cedric Morris, *Flowers in a Portuguese Landscape*, 1968

Acknowledgements

This exhibition would have been inconceivable without the collaboration of the Benton End team: James Horner, Matthew Hodges and Beatrice Prosser-Snelling. We are indebted to all the private lenders for this exhibition, whose generosity has greatly enhanced the exhibition. We would also like to thank the team at The Garden Museum, Dinah and Wilfrid Wood, Mike Hopkins, Tracy Jones, and the brilliant team at Orphans Press.



WORKS ON LOAN



Cedric Morris
Benton Blue Tit

1965

Oil on canvas
25 x 28 ³/₄ in. (72 x 64 cm)

Signed 'CEDRIC/MORRIS/-65' lower right

Private collection



Cedric Morris
Foxglove

1932

Oil on canvas
28 ¹/₂ x 24 ¹/₈ in. (72.5 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS 32'
lower left

Private collection



Cedric Morris
Late Flowers

1934

Oil on canvas
23 ³/₄ x 27 ³/₄ in. (60.3 x 70.5 cm)

Private collection

WORKS ON LOAN



Cedric Morris
Flowers in a Portuguese Landscape

1968

Oil on canvas
30 x 40 in. (76 x 102 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/-68' lower right

Private collection



AVAILABLE WORKS



Cedric Morris
Summer Garden Flowers

1944

Oil on canvas
28 ³/₄ x 24 ¹/₈ in. (73 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/44'
lower right



Cedric Morris
September Diagram

Early 1940s

Oil on canvas
20 x 16 in. (50.5 x 40.5 cm)



Cedric Morris
Plants and the Schnake Pot

1969

Oil on canvas
46 ³/₄ x 37 ³/₄ in. (118.5 x 96 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/-69'
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Cedric Morris
Still Life, Nasturtiums and Pears

1952

Oil on canvas
16 ¹/₄ x 26 in. (41 x 66 cm)

AVAILABLE WORKS



Cedric Morris
Still Life with Vases and Flowers

1970

Oil on canvas
29 ⁷/₈ x 24 ¹/₈ in. (76 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/70'
lower left



Cedric Morris
Little Harvest

1944

Oil on canvas
18 ¹/₈ x 21 ⁵/₈ in. (46 x 55 cm)

Signed and indistinctly dated 'CEDRIC 44/MORRIS'
lower right



Cedric Morris
Ratatouille

1954

Oil on canvas
30 ¹/₄ x 20 in. (76.5 x 50.5 cm)

Signed 'CEDRIC MORRIS/54'
lower left



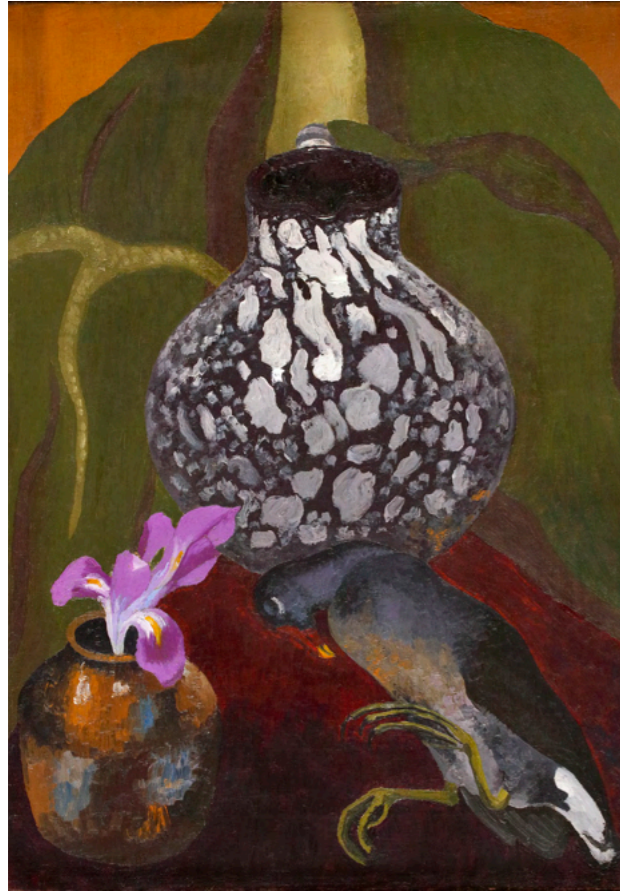
Cedric Morris
Plants and Garden Produce at Benton End

1958

Oil on canvas
39 ¹/₂ x 48 ³/₄ in. (100.2 x 123.9 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/-58'
lower right

AVAILABLE WORKS



Cedric Morris
Natura Morta

1947

Oil on canvas
24 x 20 ¹/₁₆ in. (61 x 51 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS 47'
lower right



Cedric Morris
Still life with a red underwing

Early 1930s

Oil on board
15 ¹/₄ x 11 ¹/₂ in. (38.5 x 29.5 cm)

Signed 'C. MORRIS/C.M.' lower left



Cedric Morris
A View of the Outbuildings at Benton End

1940s

Oil on board
20 ⁷/₈ x 16 ³/₄ in. (53 x 42.5 cm)



Cedric Morris
Cyprus Garden

1973

Oil on canvas
29 x 24 in. (76 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/3 /73'
lower right



*“We may have the same
palette but we are all creating
a different picture.”*

— Cedric Morris



I n t r o d u c t i o n

Benton End was the home of artist and horticulturalist Sir Cedric Morris, and the site of his boldly individual garden. *Garden to Canvas* brings together works that have played a key role in the revival of Morris' historic Suffolk garden.

As a celebrated artist and plantsman, Morris brought the same instinctive and experimental eye to his horticulture as he did to his painting. He favoured rare species, naturalistic groupings, and striking colour combinations that echoed his colourful canvases. From 1940 until his death in 1982, Morris' garden became a gathering place where artists, writers, students, and gardeners came to learn and live creatively.

Following Morris' death in 1982 the garden fell into decline. In 2021, Benton End was gifted to the Garden Museum with the intention of restoring this historically and horticulturally significant site. Under the guidance of Head Gardener James Horner, guest curator of this exhibition, a major programme of

renewal is now underway, aiming to restore the garden's original spirit. As James explains: *"We have painstakingly cleaned, weeded and repaired the garden over the past two years. Watching the surviving flora gain strength under our strong yet organic approach has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the project so far. Soon, with the reintroduction of hundreds of plants Morris grew and painted, the garden will be vibrant and abundant again."*

Identifying rare and long-lost plant varieties and reconstructing specific combinations and seasonal rhythms, Horner and his team have used the works in this exhibition as practical reference points to facilitate the garden's renewal. The paintings also offer a deeper, more emotional truth, evoking the atmosphere of the garden through form, colour, and ecological philosophy. For Morris, painting and gardening were fundamentally intertwined practices. His canvases offer a glimpse into the vibrant, intuitive world he once grew from the soil.

Top: Benton End, 2024.

Bottom: Cedric Morris in his garden at Benton End. Photograph © The Beth Chatto Estate.



Top: Benton End, 1964. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood.
Bottom: Cedric Morris, *Benton Blue Tit*, 1965. Private collection.

B e n t o n E n d

Benton End, a sixteenth-century house on the edge of Hadleigh in Suffolk, was the home of artist-plantsman Cedric Morris and his partner Arthur Lett-Haines (known as Lett) from 1940 until Morris' death in 1982. It was also the site of Morris and Lett's art school, the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing, but this somewhat traditional-sounding name belies its exuberant and unconventional spirit. Far removed from the rigid structures of formal art education, the EASPD offered neither syllabus nor dogma. Instead, teaching happened by example, by conversation, but mostly by accident. The house and the garden were living classrooms where students were invited into a way of life as much as a course of study. If they couldn't afford the fees, students would pay their tuition by helping Lett cook in the kitchen, or by weeding in the garden with Morris. Many artists, including a young Lucian Freud, have acknowledged that it was here where their true artistic identities took root.



Cedric Morris, *A View of the Outbuildings at Benton End*, 1940s.



Cedric Morris with students at Benton End, c. 1950. Photograph © The estate of Cedric Morris, Gainsborough's House.

“I always retain a composite Monet-like vision of Benton End on a summer’s afternoon just before the tea bell, with students, roses, easels, cats, iris-beds, labyrinthine paths, secretive walls, and multifarious palettes all joined in a conspiracy of colour and light.”

— Roland Blythe

The house itself, a glorious, slightly ramshackle affair of twisted beams and rickety staircases, was sparsely furnished and cared for with a deliberate disregard for domestic convention. By all accounts, there was a constant stream of visitors, from renowned artists and writers to passionate gardeners and curious locals. Lett, a magnificent and inventive cook, presided over long, convivial meals enjoyed by all visitors and students every evening. At the weekend, tea and coffee were drunk on the terrace in the easy, languid manner of a European café. It wasn’t always idyllic; passionate arguments would sometimes ensue after one too many glasses of wine, but, as gardener Beth Chatto recalled, *“the roof never fell in.”*

If the house was the heart of Benton End, then the garden was its soul. Morris was enamoured with his garden and worked outside in all weathers, earning himself a reputation as a

“dirty-handed gardener”. His planting philosophy prized natural growth over rigid design – an approach quite at odds with the prevailing tastes of mid-twentieth-century British gardening, which remained largely formal and hierarchical, and often centred around grand country houses with carefully structured designs maintained by teams of gardeners. Against this backdrop, Cedric Morris’ slightly wild, intuitive garden at Benton End offered a radical alternative that inspired a younger generation to rethink the art of gardening.

At Benton End, art did not stand apart from daily life, it emerged naturally from it. This environment, where art, horticulture and community thrived side-by-side, left a lasting impact on British art and gardening.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Benton Blue Tit

1965

Oil on canvas
28 ³/₈ x 25 ¹/₄ in. (72 x 64 cm)

Signed 'CEDRIC/MORRIS/-65' lower right

On loan from a private collection



Morris' paintings offer vital insight into the planting schemes at Benton End, most of which were never formally recorded. This view of Benton End shows the garden in full bloom, with vibrant irises and *Lilium pyrenaicum* arranged in a painterly patchwork of colour.

The view is of the rear of Benton End, with a path leading towards a door opening directly onto the garden. In Morris' later years, this ground-floor room became his bedroom, allowing him easy access to the space he loved most. The vibrant planting includes two striking bearded irises, possibly Morris' own creations, with brilliant orange standards and maroon falls, though these particular varieties

have not survived. Reappearing three times across the scene, the pale yellow *Lilium pyrenaicum* provides a unifying thread, alongside sculptural silvery leaves of *Verbascum bombyciferum*, one of Morris' favourite plants. A wild rose and a *Clematis viticella* softly frame the top corners of the composition, while a single blue tit perches on an *Allium* seedhead, busily pecking for seeds or insects. Blue tits still frequent the garden today, nesting in the old brickwork, beams, and trees, such as the ancient *Cervis*.

Bursting with life, *Benton Blue Tit* vibrantly demonstrates Morris' ethos toward planting as a living, layered composition, full of contrast, rhythm, and abundance.



Benton End, 1964. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Summer Garden Flowers

1944

Oil on canvas
28 ³/₄ x 24 ¹/₈ in. (73 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/44' lower right



Until recently, this painting formed part of the collection of celebrated plantswoman Beth Chatto, a close friend and mentee of Morris, whose own garden was deeply influenced by Benton End. “*I spent many hours with Cedric in the garden,*” Chatto later wrote, “*savouring the plants, where his knowledge and experience flowed as naturally as breathing.*” Her planting philosophy, which emphasised naturalism, contrast, and ecological awareness, traces its roots to Morris’ free-thinking garden. Morris was generous, sharing seeds, cuttings, roots and bulbs with interested gardeners: Chatto credited him with supplying “*the highest proportion of plants in my present garden [...] came from Cedric originally, as seeds, cuttings, scraps, or generous big clumps.*”

Fittingly, *Summer Garden Flowers* features several of these shared plants. The *Kniphofia*, including the rare green-flowered ‘Green Jade’, was originally cultivated by Morris and passed on to Chatto, where it flourished in her garden long after his death. In a poignant gesture of continuity, the Beth Chatto Gardens team has recently helped to reintroduce these very plants to Benton End.

In this painting, Morris captures not just the visual richness of the plants he cherished, but their quiet drama and structure. He distorts space between interior and exterior, the vase of cut flowers sits against a view of a fenced garden, the trees beyond evoked with impressionistic daubs.



Beth Chatto. Photograph © Jerry Harpur.

“I spent many hours with Cedric in the garden, savouring the plants, where his knowledge and experience flowed as naturally as breathing. I taught myself to propagate from the precious screws of paper full of seeds, berries, or cuttings Cedric gave me, as well as from his generous earthy bundles of roots, tubers, and bulbs.”

— Beth Chatto



Top: *Clematis*.
 Bottom: Cedric Morris, *Summer Garden Flowers*, 1944. Detail.



- 1 *Kniphofia*
- 2 Musk mallow | *Malva alcea*
- 3 *Clematis*



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Natura Morta

1947

Oil on canvas
24 x 20 ^{1/16} in. (61 x 51 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS 47' lower right



In *Natura Morta*, Cedric Morris paints more than a traditional still life; it is a quiet act of protest. Featuring a dead moorhen beside a single purple iris and a Nailsea jug, the composition is framed by an oversized, stylised cabbage leaf, a bold and slightly surreal choice that draws attention to the natural world Morris sought to defend. Painted in 1947, it anticipates the growing concern over agricultural pesticides, which would erupt into public discourse in the 1950s. Morris was ahead of his time in his outspoken criticism of industrial farming and its devastating effects on wildlife, particularly the bird population.

At Benton End, Morris cultivated a wildly expressive garden using what would now be called organic methods. He rejected chemical sprays, allowing his garden to thrive through close observation and the natural balance

of its ecosystem. Today, Benton End is being revived in that same spirit, with nature leading the way. For James Horner, paintings like *Natura Morta* offer a unique insight into Morris' ecological ideology, and have helped to guide his approach to reviving the garden: *"The more I investigated it, the more I became aware that Cedric had huge compassion for nature, and this came through in not just his love of plants and animals but in his paintings of birds and landscape, with the titles alluding to the harm agricultural pesticides were doing to wildlife. These protest paintings as well as Cedric's paintings of birds, full of affection for nature, have influenced our approach to renewing the garden. We're doing so fully organically and without the use of harmful herbicides. A recent biodiversity audit proved that the garden is rich in species diversity and a thriving ecology. We're building in habitat creation as well as meadows, rough grassland and scrub into the wilder areas of the garden."*



Cedric Morris, *Landscape of Shame*, c.1960. Tate Gallery.

"Cedric's awareness of the plight of the countryside gives me assurance that the garden can pick up these vital topics and standpoints going forward."

—James Horner



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Foxglove

1932

Oil on canvas
28 1/2 x 24 1/8 in. (72.5 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC/MORRIS/32' lower left

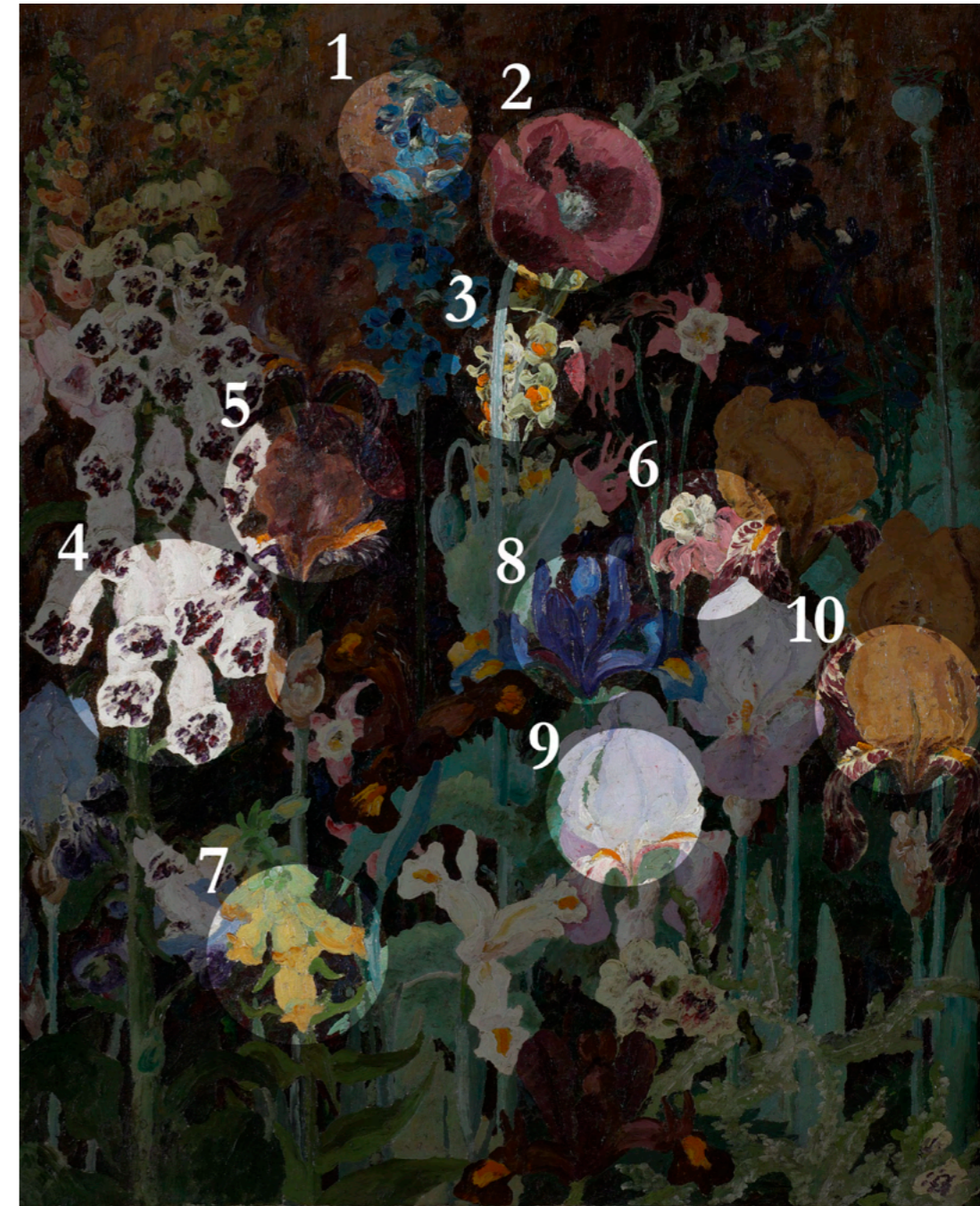
On loan from a private collection



Cedric Morris earned a national reputation for his irises, breeding bold, original varieties that made Benton End a landmark for gardeners. Although this work predates Morris' move to Benton End, it demonstrates his early interest in irises: blooming upwards from the lower centre of this radiant canvas, one white, three brown and a blue Spanish iris (*Bulbous iris xiphium*) are identifiable. Sarah Cook, former Head Gardener at Sissinghurst, has suggested that these irises predate Morris' formal breeding programme, and that this painting may represent an early exploration of the aesthetic possibilities that irises would later offer him in depth at Benton End. Morris' painting, much like his

gardening, was primarily motivated by a desire to capture the beauty inherent in naturally contrasting forms and tones. The lively interplay of organic shapes in this outstanding work reflects his plantsman's eye, keenly delineating a variety of species within a single composition. Compositionally, each interlocking shape and undulating curve fit together tightly, like an expertly planted flower-bed.

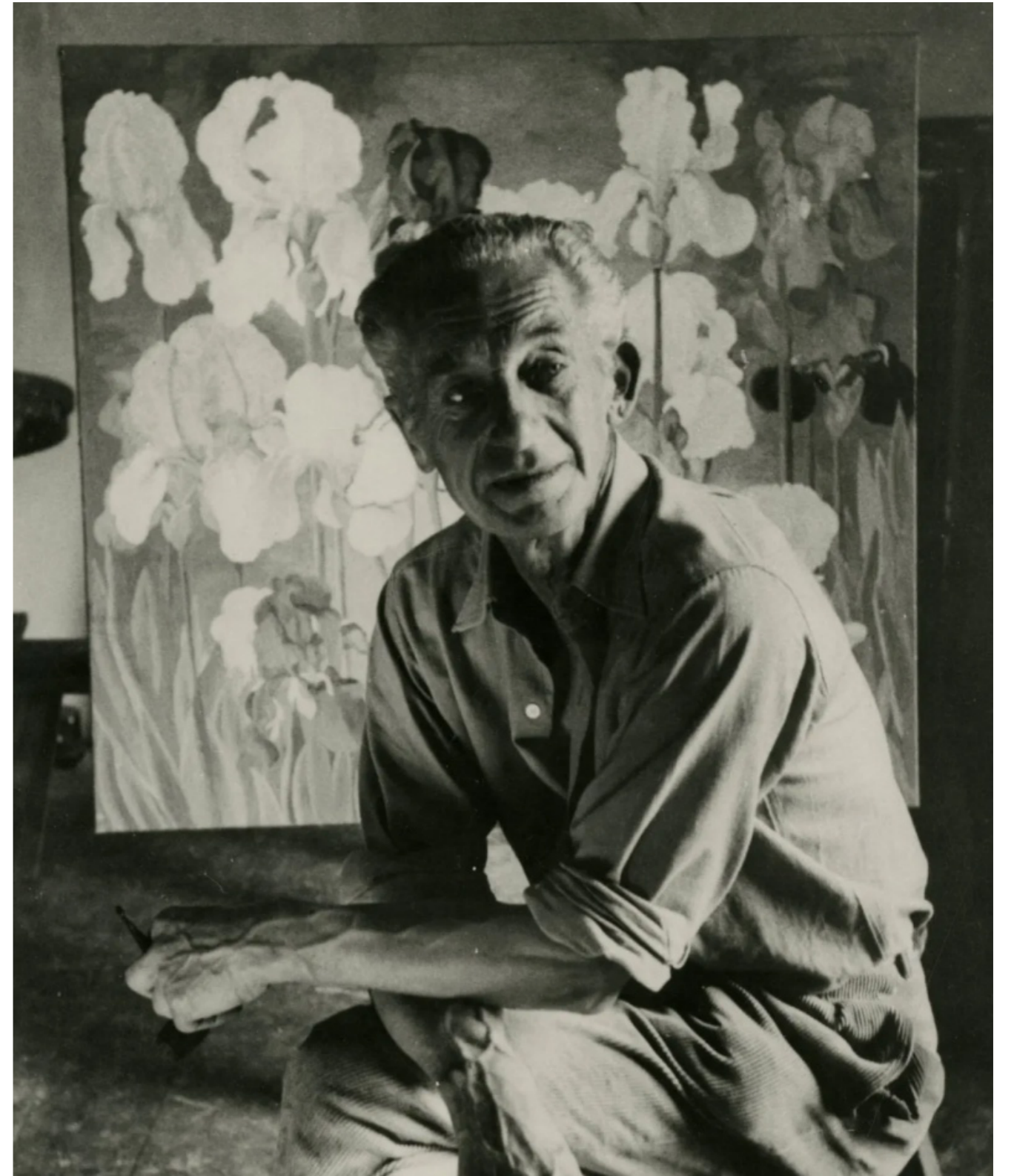
We are grateful to Clive Lundquist and Sarah Cook for their kind assistance when writing this catalogue note.



- 1 Candle larkspur | *Delphinium*
- 2 Opium poppy | *Papaver somniferum*
- 3 Yellow snapdragon | *Antirrhinum hybrids*
- 4 Foxgloves | *Digitalis purpurea*
- 5 Brown bearded iris
- 6 Pink/white granny's bonnet | *Aquilegia vulgaris*
- 7 Yellow foxglove | *Digitalis grandiflora*
- 8 Blue Spanish iris | *Bulbous iris xiphium*
- 9 Pink iris
- 10 Brown iris



Cedric Morris, *May Flowering Irises No. 2*, 1935. Private collection.



Cedric Morris by Kurt Hutton, published in *The Sunday Times*, 1958.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Plants and the Schnake Pot

1969

Oil on canvas
46 ³/₄ x 37 ³/₄ in. (118.5 x 96 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/-69' lower left



Succulents on the windowsill at Benton End, 2025.



Top: *Cotyledon orbiculata*

Bottom: Cedric Morris, *Plants and the Snake Pot*, 1969. Detail.

This distinguished still life is one of Morris' largest recorded works and reveals, on a monumental scale, his intense originality as a painter of nature in all its vivid forms. At the heart of the composition is a pot of *Cotyledon orbiculata*, a chalky-leaf succulent now widely known in horticulture as a 'Cedric Morris'. This particular plant has recently been returned to Benton End by artist and snowdrop collector John Morley, a regular visitor in the 1970s. Such exchanges of plants, seeds, and knowledge defined the collaborative spirit of Morris' gardening circle and continues to nourish Benton End's revival today.

Frances Mount, who moved to Benton End in the mid-1960s to assist Morris in the garden, recalled his childlike excitement when anyone brought him a new plant. She also noted how Morris often selected plants not only for their horticultural merit but for their potential to translate vividly onto canvas: "*Cedric loved plants with definite shapes, the ruder the better. If you look at his pictures, the importance of the shape of each flower, its length of stem is very evident, each flower has to stand on its own.*" At Benton End, painting and planting were in constant, instinctive dialogue.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
September Diagram

Early 1940s

Oil on canvas
20 x 16 in. (50.5 x 40.5 cm)



Cedric Morris at Benton End, 1966. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood.

With few detailed photographs of the Benton End garden surviving, paintings like this are and will continue to be invaluable to the gardening team at Benton End. Serving as a literal primary source in identifying the species and varieties Morris grew, this work depicts dahlias, foxgloves, and *Verbascum bombyciferum*, a silver-leaved mullein, which has recently been reintroduced to the garden from seed shared by Beth Chatto's team.

Not only do Morris' paintings offer an accurate record of what he cultivated, they also offer insight into what planting schemes and plant combinations he implemented in the garden. James Horner muses: "*What is wonderful about Morris' flower paintings is that he was very in the moment in producing them, and that all the plants within the composition would naturally flower at the same time of the year. This gives us a literal inspiration for plant combinations in the garden borders.*"



- 1 White Mullein | *Verbascum*
- 2 Foxglove | *Yellow digitalis grandiflora*
- 3 Yellow Day Lily | *Hemerocallis*
- 4 Pink Clematis
- 5 Yellow Dahlia
- 6 Blue Clematis | *Hederifolium*



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Still life with a red underwing

Early 1930s

Oil on board
30 ¹/₄ x 20 in. (76.5 x 50.5 cm)

Signed 'C. MORRIS/C.M.' lower left



Cedric Morris, 1975. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood.

Morris had a deep affinity for Britain's native flora and fauna, but his horticultural vision was proudly eclectic. He sought out unusual variants and rare species during his travels abroad, planting them alongside English blooms in exuberant combinations that broke with the rigid traditions of the country house garden. *Still life with a Red Underwing* captures the rich colours of an autumn garden. Morning Glory, *Cyclamen*, and toadflax tumble across the canvas, joined by three striking blooms of *Sternbergia lutea*, a

Mediterranean bulb Morris loved that has persisted in huge numbers in Benton End's walled garden. The indigenous toadflax has recently been reintroduced into the meadows at Benton End.

Amidst the vivid patchwork of flowers, Morris places a red underwing moth. The moth, with its muted wings edged in flashes of crimson, reflects Morris' fascination with the natural world's quieter, often overlooked beauties.



- 1 Spider lily | *Lycoris radiata*
- 2 Toadflax | *Linaria vulgaris*
- 3 Brassica, possibly rocket
- 4 Autumn daffodil | *Sternbergia lutea*
- 5 Morning glory | *Ipomoea purpurea*
- 6 Ivy-leaved Cyclamen | *Cyclamen*



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Ratatouille

1954

Oil on canvas
30 ¹/₄ x 20 in. (76.5 x 50.5 cm)

Signed 'CEDRIC MORRIS/54' lower left



“There was a whiff of garlic and wine in the air,” recalled writer Ronald Blythe of his visits to Benton End, “rough and ready and fine mannered. Also faintly dangerous.” Elaborate meals were served daily to all visitors by Lett, who cooked with a Mediterranean influence with the help of the vegetable garden. At a time when British food was still dominated by postwar rationing and a narrow palette, Lett’s garlic-laced dishes and generously plated Mediterranean vegetables were radical. His friend Elizabeth David, the celebrated food writer, ushered in this continental spirit more widely, and her first book *A Book of Mediterranean Food* (1950), containing her recipe for ratatouille, transformed British attitudes to food and flavour.

In *Ratatouille*, Morris reflects this dynamic domestic culture with the same care he brought to his floral still lifes. In this instance, Morris adds narrative to the composition by positioning the various ingredients on a kitchen tabletop; we now sit and wait for Lett to come along and start proceedings.

Vegetables were an integral part of the school’s sustainability and there are long term plans to devote some of the garden to their continued cultivation through a vegetable patch and greenhouses.



The kitchen sink at Benton End. Photograph © Garden Museum.



Arthur Lett-Haines in the garden at Benton End, 1964. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood.



Arthur Lett-Haines, 1964. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Still Life, Nasturtiums and Pears

1952

Oil on canvas
16 ¹/₄ x 26 in. (41 x 66 cm)



This painting once hung in the dining room at Benton End, a fitting spot for a still life featuring the edible flower, nasturtiums. Morris admired plants in their wild, original forms, and the nasturtiums in this painting are shown in full extension, winding across the canvas.

The students who attended the EASPD at Benton End heralded its progressive way of life where visitors “(...) *could garden and work and talk, and where students of all ages could work alongside them.*”

This lifestyle was sustained by Lett, whose famously delicious dinners – often cooked using vegetables grown in the garden – are remembered by all who visited the house. Taking pride of place in the dining room, where it hung until 1970, this painting was privy to all manner of meals from intimate breakfasts to raucous dinner parties.

Top: Nasturtium.

Bottom: Cedric Morris, *Still Life, Nasturtiums and Pears*, 1952. Detail.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Little Harvest

1944

Oil on canvas
18 ¹/₈ x 21 ⁵/₈ in. (46 x 55 cm)

Signed and indistinctly dated 'CEDRIC 44/MORRIS' lower right



Painted in 1944, at the height of the Second World War, *Little Harvest* captures a moment of quiet abundance in a time of scarcity. The Mediterranean ingredients depicted – tomatoes and garlic – would have been especially precious during a period marked by rationing. Throughout the war, Morris maintained productive vegetable gardens at Benton End, making use of the greenhouses and the walled garden to support the household's needs. The walled garden later became the heart of his celebrated iris breeding programme, replacing utility with vibrant colour and excessive experimentation. Benton End are currently on a mission to re-build the National Collection of Cedric

Morris Irises, whilst Sarah Cook holds the primary collection also in Suffolk. Benton End's irises will be woven into the planting of the garden, not held in isolation, and brought to life again.

As a consummate painter of plants, Morris also understood the infinite picture possibilities for vegetables and used his innate understanding of organic shape and colour to enrich them with personality. In due course, there are plans to reintroduce greenhouses and vegetable gardens at Benton End, of which the objects in this exhibition have constituted considerable inspiration.



Cedric Morris' greenhouse at Benton End, 2024.



Cedric Morris, *Still Life in Summer Garden (Benton End)*, 1963. Private collection.



Cedric Morris, *Kitchen Garden, Benton End*, c. 1944. Private collection.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
A View of the Outbuildings at Benton End

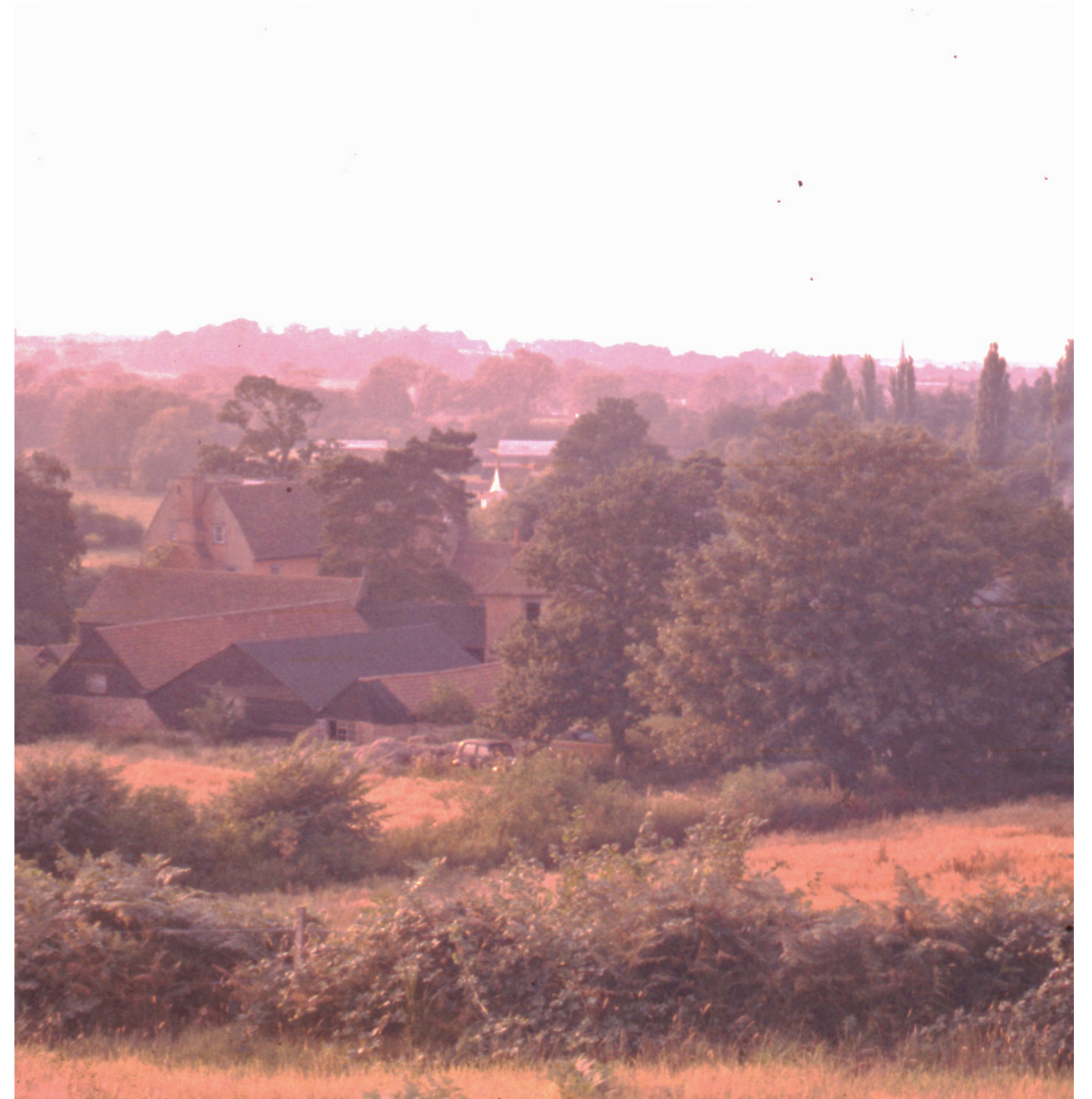
1940s

Oil on board
20 ⁷/₈ x 16 ³/₄ in. (53 x 42.5 cm)



This rare glimpse of Benton End's outbuildings shows the grain silos that once stood on site and the barn that still forms part of the garden boundary today. Like Charleston in Sussex, another artists' house shaped by rural labour, Benton End was set within a working farm landscape. For the Benton End team today, this painting offers a valuable point of reference for understanding how the surrounding landscape has changed over time, and how they might engage with its agricultural history. Reportedly, Morris "*never had an easy relationship with*

the farmer next door to The Pound," his previous house in Suffolk, due to their treatment of wild animals.



Benton End and its surroundings, 1964. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Cyprus Garden

1973

Oil on canvas
29 x 24 in. (76 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/3/73' lower right



Although little documentation survives of the precise garden layout at Benton End, paintings such as *Cyprus Garden* offer valuable insights into the horticultural vision that inspired Morris. This vibrant composition, a tangle of red, pink, and purple blooms set against the cooler blues and greens of Mediterranean shrubs, reflects Morris' profound interest in the flora and fauna of southern Europe. Mediterranean gardens were a crucial influence at Benton End as it shared the same gravelly lime soil that constituted the perfect foundation for Mediterranean plants to thrive. The central path depicted here, flanked by dense planting and cypress trees, recalls

the pathway that originally existed at Benton End, where Morris had planted his own cypress trees.

During the winter of 1973, Morris travelled to Cyprus to paint and collect plant specimens to take home. Each winter, Morris sought out new landscapes abroad, returning with both inspiration for his canvases and seeds to expand his botanical collection. As Christopher Neve and Tony Venison observed, the garden at Benton End became "*a collector's cabinet which came to include many discoveries on expeditions abroad*", a living record of Morris' travels, grafted into the Suffolk soil.



Benton End, c. 1946-1960. Photograph © The estate of Cedric Morris, Gainsborough's House.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Plants and Garden Produce at Benton End

1958

Oil on canvas
39 ¹/₂ x 48 ³/₄ in. (100.2 x 123.9 cm.)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/-58' lower right



“Pale pink-washed walls rising high above us were hung with dramatic paintings of birds, landscapes, flowers and vegetables whose colours, textures and shapes hit me as though I were seeing them all for the first time ... Filling the centre of the room was a long, well-scrubbed refectory table, and round it a rim of heads turned towards us.” Beth Chatto’s recollection of the dining room at Benton End rings true in this monumental still life. Painted in 1958, it is one of Morris’ most ambitious interior still lifes.

Set theatrically before the fireplace of the dining room at Benton End, the table is spread with an abundant array of seasonal produce grown in the garden and greenhouses: apples,

pears, aubergines, carrots, peppers and carrots, alongside a small potted and flowering red *Nerine sarniensis*. Here, garden and kitchen, painting and planting, life and art are united. It is entirely unpretentious yet monumental in feeling, not only in scale, but in its gentle celebration of the rhythm and routines of domestic life at Benton End.

Morris’ luscious still lifes of vegetables, particularly cabbages, are a defining feature of much of his later career. These works have provided considerable inspiration for the planned revival of the greenhouses and vegetable gardens at Benton End.



Top: The fireplace at Benton End, 2025.
Bottom: Cedric Morris, *Cabbages*, 1953. Private collection.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Flowers in a Portuguese Landscape

1968

Oil on canvas
30 x 40 in. (76 x 102 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/-68' lower right

On loan from a private collection



Richard Morphet, curator of the major Cedric Morris retrospective at Tate, once said of Morris: “*His flower pictures can only be by somebody who loves the natural world. His affinity with nature was extraordinary, plants to him had characters and his study of them inspired painters and gardeners alike.*” Painted toward the end of Morris’ career, *Flowers in a Portuguese Landscape* reflects a lifetime’s knowledge of plants and painting, combining botanical precision with artistic exuberance.

Set against a luminous Portuguese backdrop, the foreground of this composition bursts with irises,

poppies, sweet peas, and a profusion of Mediterranean flora. During his sojourns abroad, Morris would dig up wildflowers and bulbs to take back to Suffolk and plant alongside British species, creating the eclectic, painterly schemes for which Benton End became renowned. Many iris varieties native to Portugal inspired Morris’ breeding programme at home. Gifts from fellow plant enthusiasts enriched these displays further, including sweet peas collected in Sicily by artist plantsman John Nash, a variety still prized today for its poise, scent, and abundant flowering.



Cedric Morris at Benton End, 1975. Photograph © Dinah and Wilfrid Wood

For the team now reviving Benton End’s garden, abundant flower paintings like this one are invaluable guides. They offer rare insight into Morris’ plant palette, his inspiration from foreign countries, and his instinctive style of combining forms, colours, and textures. Morris’ planting allowed for the self-expression of the species; boards and boundaries were not a prominent feature at Benton End, but rather a celebration of the wild and sprawling nature of each individual bloom he cultivated.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Still Life with Vases and Flowers

1970

Oil on canvas
29 ⁷/₈ x 24 ¹/₈ in. (76 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated 'CEDRIC MORRIS/70' lower left



This composition reflects Morris' interest in plants at every stage of life, from bud to decay. The seedhead of a crown imperial fritillary – the dried remains of a once vibrant bloom – is rendered with the same poise and attention as the bold, sculptural form of the Arum Lily. For Morris, the beauty of plants was not limited to their fleeting moments of bloom, he was fascinated by their full cycle from growth to decay and renewal.

The crown imperial fritillary appears often in Morris' floral compositions, but it was the *Fritillaria acmopetala* that held his particular affection. "*This is my favourite fritillaria*," he wrote in his gardening papers, "*It has an aristocratic elegance & aloofness such as one finds in a*

few plants." Morris was always on the lookout for fritillaries during his plant-hunting expeditions abroad, from Portugal to Morocco, seeking new varieties to introduce to his garden at Benton End. Crown imperial fritillaries have persisted in his walled garden for several decades and are still a major feature of the early spring garden.

Beyond the flowers, Morris' still life includes decorated ceramics carefully arranged on the table. Remarkably, a piece of slipware similar to that depicted here was recently unearthed during the ongoing renewal of Benton End's garden: a reminder of the layered histories embedded in the site.



Top: Crown imperial fritillary at Benton End, 2025.

Bottom: Cedric Morris, *Still Life with Vases and Flowers*, 1970. Detail.



CEDRIC MORRIS (1889-1982)
Late Flowers

1934

Oil on canvas
23 ³/₄ x 27 ³/₄ in. (60.3 x 70.5 cm)

On loan from a private collection



Morris maintained that, “*Good flower painting must show a great understanding between painter and painted otherwise there can be no connection and truth.*” Morris’ paintings of flowers are so precise that the exact varieties he depicted are habitually identifiable. In this case, the flowers even allow us to date the scene to August or September, just as the title *Late Flowers* suggests. The pale blue *Salvia uliginosa* in the lower left, the reblooming *Delphiniums*, and the rich flush of *Dahlias* offer a direct glimpse into the plants Morris loved and how he instinctively combined them in the garden.

What makes this painting particularly striking is its perspective. The viewpoint tilts downward, as though the viewer is perched at the edge of the flowerbed, stepping into the shoes of the gardener himself. This unusual vantage point draws us into Morris’ world to experience the dense tangle of colour and texture up close, immersed in the details. More than decorative still lifes, Morris’ flower paintings are intimate records of his gardening vision. Today, works like *Late Flowers* provide invaluable clues for the restoration of Benton End, guiding the revival of its distinctive spirit.



- 1 *Delphinium*
- 2 *Delphinium*
- 3 Bog sage | *Salvia uliginosa*
- 4 *Dahlia* (single flowered)
- 5 *Dahlia* (single flowered)
- 6 *Dahlia coccinea*
- 7 *Dahlia* (pompom variety)
- 8 *Delphinium*

