

Charlotte Thodey

AT CHÂTEAU DE VILLANDRY

Two years ago Charlotte Thodey was invited by Monsieur Henri Cavallo and his wife Angelique, the owners of Château de Villandry, to finalise arrangements for an exhibition of her work at the chateau. This invitation followed the highly successful *From Garden to Canvas* exhibition by Charlotte and her students, held in the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney, in August 2010.

The chateau is in the Lower Loire region in France and is best known for its archetypal potager, a kitchen garden with endless geometric patterns edged in immaculate box hedges. It covers 1.2 hectares and is medieval in origin, dating from the gardens cultivated by the monks. Tree roses were traditional in the abbey gardens, and at Villandry they are planted to represent the monks.

In 1906, Dr Joachim Cavallo, a Spanish doctor and the great-grandfather of the present owner, acquired the gardens and the chateau. He saved them from demolition and developed the gardens, which are now viewed by around 34,000 visitors a year.

Today, the kitchen gardens are planted in a rotation of more than 40 types of vegetables, arranged with regard to colour, form, and organic and companion planting rules. Only vegetables used in the 16th century are grown; there are no potatoes, for example.

The gardens at Château de Villandry, of which the potager forms only part, are the finest examples of formal Renaissance

style gardens in France, and are in complete harmony with this Renaissance chateau. They are terraced in three levels and were influenced by Italian gardeners brought to France by Charles VII. On the first level, the highest, at or above the level of the chateau, is the Water Garden. The second level includes the Garden of Music, the Decorative Flower Garden, the Garden of Love and the Garden of Simple Delights. On the lower level is the potager.

EXHIBITING AT THE CHATEAU

Villandry is the perfect venue to showcase Charlotte's exquisite works. Having seen the bright red tomatoes, the purple and white mix of eggplants, the shades of green lettuces contrasting with the red, yellow and green of the capsicums and, of course, the cabbages (Charlotte's passion), visitors will be inspired by her interpretations of the potager. The Friends wish Charlotte much joy and success in this venture. If you are in Europe at this time in 2012, it would be a great opportunity to support Charlotte, and to visit this wonderful UNESCO-listed Heritage garden.

Robyn Macintosh

The exhibition is on from June 15 to November 11, 2012.
Visit chateauvillandry.com for more information about Villandry.



Charlotte with cabbages



Château Villandry and vegetable gardens



Some of the paintings for Villandry