

A LETTER FOR RICHARD SPRUCE

Donna Torres

Oil-on-canvas: 18 X 12 IN. [45.7 X 30.5 CM; *DETAIL* on cover]
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The interior-view in this painting has a hung-photograph of the Spruce-Collection of *AYAHUASCA*, that presently resides at Kew Gardens, in England. The potted plant is *Nicotiana tabacum*, and we see it flowering. The WALLPAPER is decorated by SEEDS (SAMARAS) and FLOWERS of *Banisteriopsis caapi*. Upon the TABLE, the superior-plant is a BRANCH of *Diplopterys cabrerana* (from a photograph—courtesy of Kathleen Harrison). Beneath this BRANCH lie the SEEDS; and beside it, *two* yellow FLOWERS of *Diplopterys cabrerana*. To their right sits a POSTCARD, from Jonathan Ott's NATURAL PRODUCTS COMPANY (which CARD is adorned by Tim Girvin's drawing of *Amanita pantherina*). Towards the bottom of the TABLE lies a CUTTING of *Banisteriopsis caapi*; the twining, WOODY STEMS of which mark the lower right-hand-corner. Through the window, we see a lush LIANA of *Banisteriopsis caapi*. Through the opened door [and to the left] we view a flowering *Nicotiana tabacum*; likewise at the center-rear. Behind the *Nicotiana* [to the left] blooms *Psychotria viridis*, with its white flowers; while behind that, is a lavish *Brunfelsia grandiflora*, with its white flowers that turn violet. Just to the right of the doorway, hovers *Brugmansia suaveolens*—with huge and aromatic pink «trumpet-flowers». It felt to me as if this painting were like A LETTER TO THE PAST—thence my *Title*. The pioneering studies of Spruce (the first scientist *TO COLLECT* and *NAME* the plant; and first *TO INGEST* a *CAAPI-POTION*, made from its STEMS, in 1851) were and remain invaluable to those who came after him.