

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 in **SEEDS/ SAMARAS** and **FLOWERS** of *Banisteriopsis caapi*. / Upon the **TABLE**, the superior-plant is one **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** of 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 AYAHUASCA*; also first *TO INGEST A CAAPI-POTION*, made from its stems, in 1851) were, and remain, invaluable to those who came after him.