

The Fiery Red Flamboyant Tree

The familiar world around us is a deep, beautiful mystery. All of life emerges from and depends on Light, but Light itself is invisible to us. We can no more look steadfastly at the sun than our bodies could live on its surface. Yet, we depend on it for our being. Mysteriously, Light transforms itself into color and thus becomes visible. This miraculous transformation, this manifestation of color out of invisible light, is a gift of Grace allowing us to see. This is the gift of sight; this is how we are able to see that which is created for us from the invisible.

The first or primary colors revealed are pure, are three, are Red, Yellow and Blue. They are the outward, visible aspect of an inner, invisible quality. The infinity of space, our sky, goes away from us, is reflected on Earth in the cool, deep blue sea. Yellow: the engaging, enlightening glow of sunlight, flitting here and there, radiant. Red seems the most close to us, full of dignity, serious and hot yet other-worldly. Magically it manifests itself as the largest red flowering tree in the world...the Flamboyant.

The Royal Poinciana is named after Philippe de Lonvilliers de Poincy, the 17th century governor of the French Antilles, who is supposed to have brought it to the region from Madagascar. Ranging from a rare, pale yellow through several hues of orange, to deep, majestic, fiery red, it is called by many names: the Flame Tree, the July Tree, the Formosa Tree, the Freedom Tree, but the Flamboyant Tree is the most popular name and is most expressive of the character of its color.

Encircling the Earth in this tropical zone with its vibrant blooms, it is classified as one of the ten most beautiful trees in the world. It loses its feathery leaves and is bare-branched in late Spring, bursts into fiery bloom, cascading to the ground from May to September, then envelops itself in cool dense blue-green foliage, tipped with yellow, and broods in deep shade waiting to explode once again. It has been adopted in our Caribbean region as the national tree and flower of most of our islands, including St. Martin.

From childhood, it has attracted and enchanted me. I love its cool shade, its umbrella shape, its wonderful smell, and most especially its beautiful fiery flamboyant red color. I've spent the better part of the last thirty summers exploring it in my paintings.

by **Sir Roland Richardson**
St. Martin



Images courtesy of Roland Richardson Gallery Museum

