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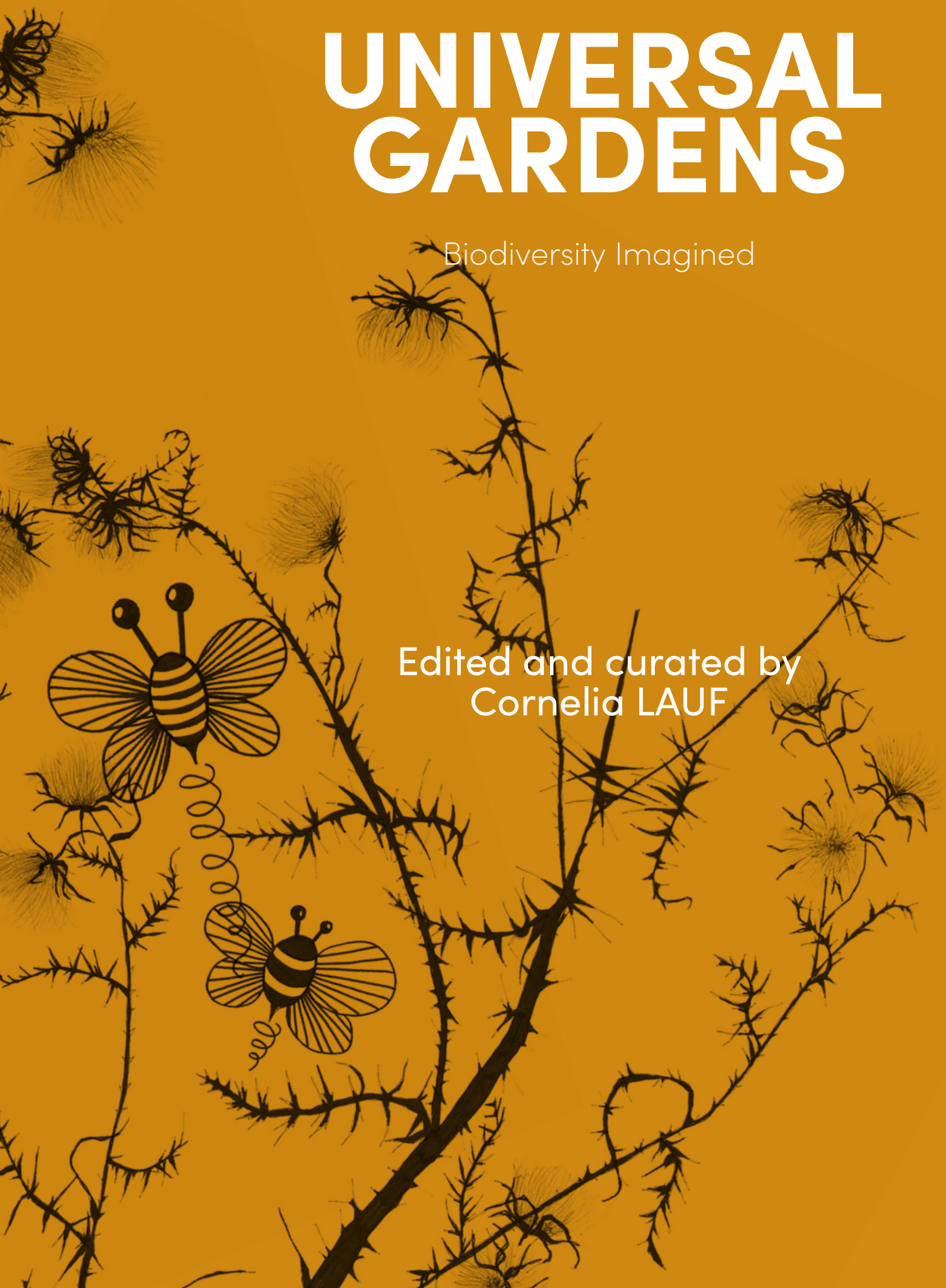
# UNIVERSAL GARDENS



# UNIVERSAL GARDENS

Biodiversity Imagined

Edited and curated by  
Cornelia LAUF



# editor's note

# INTRODUCTION

## Cornelia LAUF

### ART & ECOLOGY AT THE VILLA OF LIVIA, PRIMA PORTA

My sister teaches middle school Latin at Treasure Coast Classical Academy, near Jupiter, Florida. She teaches the story of Augustus and of Livia. She teaches her students about Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. While an outcry over ‘the classics’ dismantles such education in academies both large and small, seeking to relativize any idea of origins, let alone ones with a highpoint in Europe – the students near Jupiter plow ahead, delighting in the language, in tales of abduction, betrayal, love, and ruin. After all, it’s the human condition. And what was once Roman, and before it Greek, and before that, a long and unbroken sequence of doing, saying, relating, that has its origins in the Far and Near East, in Africa and India – well, that chain of history and weddedness to the past, that anchoring, is what motivates the students at Treasure Coast Classical.

The world-famous fresco cycle once belonging to the Villa of Livia, and now in the safekeeping of the Museo Nazionale Romano – this cycle belongs not to Rome, or to Europe, but to all of humanity. Because in it are not only plants from Africa, Asia Minor, and of course, Europe, but others from as far away as Siberia. Plants know no borders, as eminent botanists from Giulia Caneva to Stefano Mancuso, from David Attenborough to Eduardo Kohn, have shown us. And neither does knowledge.

So, what does the villa of Livia Drusilla, a farm and house once on the outskirts of Rome, mean? Today? The invitation by Bernard Anson Silj to create a cultural project for his charming estate in Prima Porta, once the property of Caesar Augustus, but actually the dowry of his wife, Livia Drusilla, led me to think on the ownership of land, and on the nature of a farm used as a theater, as a seat of government, as a temple, and also a home. Leaving aside the well-known stories of Livia, which are ample and abundant in many riveting studies, just a few words on the site. The family of Bernard Anson Silj once owned 15,000 hectares in property north of Rome. This was a time when stewardship of the land was carried out by landowners schooled not only in agriculture and governance, but also literature and art. Thus, without romanticizing feudalism even slightly, custodianship of the land necessarily meant a vision of the land, in its furthest, aesthetic sense. Slowly, land reforms, changing times, changing laws, whittled away at once was a mythic agricultural area north of Rome. Was the apportioning of goods fair? Hard to say, given that agriculture was once based on *mezzadria*, that half-step of sharing with the owners developed to rectify feudalism. I've spoken to many former Italian *contadini* who miss that time. Even those cheery Communists who dreamed of vacations in Havana or Moscow. At the same time, the burdens of land-owning, and 'representing' the state and ownership, can also not be undervalued. Today, the Italian State long owns part of the property once entirely in the hands of the Anson Silj family. The Etruscan-Livian estate of Bernard Anson Silj is largest in his fertile imagination, and Prima Porta, verdant front door to Rome, lies sleeping, awaiting recognition and reclamation for the important portal it once was.

In fact, a ride along the Tiberina confirms that this is Rome's neglected acropolis. Overgrown in many parts, with wilderness that engulfs even Livia's wine canteens, and speckled with seemingly unplanned real estate development, lies a spot of paradise that once was Rome's Monticello.

Rolling hills, part public park, part archaeological site, mark the area of Livia's ancient farm (an enormous property) housing the remains of the villa. A magical feeling persists as one approaches the villa. A still-paved access road between two hills leads one gradually over a hillock, to the villa itself, standing only a few feet high, its walls long ago dismantled, struck by earthquakes, looted, covered over. And yet, standing in the archaeological site, it's possible to feel that uncanny sense of proportion and equilibrium that distills the geometry of Euclid and Archimedes into the architecture of Vitruvius. Perfectly situated, with a view of Rome along the Tiber, this site is a time capsule of the harmonic and perfect balance between nature and man.



To capture the essence of the place, and stimulate its reevaluation, above all by artists, I created, for Anson, and with the additional initial support of Suzanne Deal Booth, a public project that would hover between scholarship and poetry, between public but also private, between contemporary artwork and archaeology, and function, not via mass and monument, but almost subliminally, with perception.

To this end, I began to contact a series of extraordinary people, young, old, established and not, and teased their own gardens of Livia from them, their impressions of the place, of the frescos, of the history.

This publication is a placeholder, a temporary tribute to this project to wed a vision of the past with a firm commitment to the future.

To that end, it features contributions from many types of minds, and the support of many wonderful individuals. We print our future project in full, in Gdansk, where a love of classics and practice of the avant-garde, runs undaunted. And we offer sincere gratitude to all.

What did those frescos mean? The interpretations of scholars leads us to reevaluate the relation of nature to culture, over two thousand years ago, and find it as riveting today as then.

The contributions of living artists – a Herbarium – leads us to map botanical biodiversity once more, in relation to the frescos.

To this writer, the villa demonstrates equilibrium – that manifestation of balance which became the *Pax Romana*. The famous triclinium, to this writer, is a somber hall of judgement, a tribunal, in which Livia - who loved to give the gift of freedom to those enslaved – could decide the fates of others. Far from a hall of pleasure, the stairs lead down to what could have easily been a tomb as much as a naturally air conditioned summer dining room, serving as a seat of power, much as those Medieval and Renaissance blue-skied cityscapes, dotting palaces, town halls, and churches of the Italian peninsula.

Here, in the cycle of frescos now in the Museo Nazionale, we see no human figures or architectural signs, other than a low fence and one bird cage. This unearthly earthly garden is the grandest record of natural order linking Roman culture to all prior examples of wall painting (and the estate to all prior gardens) and evocations of paradise, so beautiful it was admired in place, untouched for centuries, while the villa was still in use. It is a celestial and yet earthly paradise, in which the human actors take center stage - and rule. We see the souls of those departed, in the shapes of white doves fluttering among the burst pomegranates, themselves a symbol of impending decay, as they have not been harvested - with an open bird cage symbolizing both freedom and, perhaps, the constricted life of

its puzzling omnipotent proprietor. Twin trees on either side of the long room, brilliantly decoded in a series of essays in this volume, symbolize the sons of Livia, at least to this writer. One, Tiberius, to-be ruler of Rome, represented by the pine tree. The other, Drusus, the steadfast oak. The pine tree is stretched out in *orans* mode. Is this an image of devotion? Its young branches also uncannily resemble the shape of a crucifixion. A complex warning sign to those descending into the chamber, surely familiar with the Roman execution style, par excellence. In expressive gravity, the tree itself functions much like the *Crucifixion* of Masaccio. As if to enliven the space, and suggest performance. It's a strange and spooky conifer, despite its youth. Other hidden keys to the fresco, at least to this eye, are the beady eye of the artist, perched on a ledge near the base of the pine. Oh yes, he's a bird, and a free one, at that. And we love the plantains, the only plant depicted inside the pictorial space of the room. This weed, also used for medicinal purpose, even now infests the walkways of the actual villa in Prima Porta. Is it a foreshadowing of the dissident religion that would gut the core of pagan Rome? Or the fact that all things crumble in the face of nature? Though the pomegranates rule supreme in the fresco, perhaps the valiant tendrils shooting out of the low-standing walls are my very favorite plant.

This volume is a plant just a bit out of place, as someone once referred to weeds. Eminent voices, finest of poets, most supportive of publishers, growing together, in a logic that defies rational analysis. You will find here a tribute to thinking about history and its protagonists, as if they are still alive today. With little pomp and circumstance, a spiral-like activity has taken place, in a kind of never-ending process, that reminds one not only of the acanthus testifying to the never-ending glory of Rome on Augustus' Altar of Peace, but also a view of those same plants, still growing in Prima Porta, on erstwhile Livian lands. This spiraling motion is the obsession of contemporary artists like Emilio Prini, who studied exactly that meander, that geometry, where things stand still, and yet move, simultaneously. "Tutto è sempre pronto," the great artist once said. This publication is testimony to that thought.





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# Foreword





# Leaves from My Album

This is the story of my garden at Prima Porta. It is not particularly glamorous to the eye but it surrounds a gracious property that my beautiful wife, Eleonora, and I call home. We are hôteliers, entrepreneurs, but also dreamers. And we see a world where gardens are paramount, and people, their willing acolytes.

Through our estate, I will tell you the story of feudal Italy and of how wealth once was tied to an agrarian base. It's a story of ancient Rome, but also of archaic Etruria, north of Rome. It's my family's story, because we have lived here, on what was once a vast property, and have always seen ourselves as temporary custodians of one of Rome's most legendary landscapes. Finally, it's my own story and I am a *raconteur*.

In my own backyard, if you drive along an avenue of pine trees, the mythic plants of Rome, you arrive to our house and our park, which contains many ancient botanical species. They have always been here.

In the garden, there is a very large and bumpy egg, which was supposed to look a bit more like an egg but then developed a point to it, because the worker-artisans couldn't finish it properly. I solved this problem by calling it the *Egg With No Point*. I have a fondness for things paradoxical and metaphoric, like Dada. I have placed some other objects around the garden mostly out of a spirit of provocation, and

my wife, Eleonora, lovingly tolerates me. Visitors to our property (we run a small hotel) are puzzled by the sight of a mysterious manhole, that looks like a Neolithic shrine, and by a mandala shape, marked Avalon – Xanadu, hanging between two cypresses. The real marvel of my garden is its ‘itness.’ These are grounds that saw millennia of history, some of which so powerful as to become myth. To pay tribute to the area’s most important denizen – Livia Drusilla, wife of Augustus – I inventoried and replanted the 24 species that are depicted in the famous fresco of her earthly paradise, which were once located on the vast property that belonged, in a similarly extensive way, to my own ancestors.

Let me go back and tell you my family’s story, so we can better understand the historic density of these places and why the plants are so important in their context. In the mid-nineteenth century, my ancestors, Marchesi Silj di Sant’Andrea di Ussita purchased the one-time estate of Livia, from local landowners. A medieval tower and a castle, subsequently renamed ‘Silj,’ are near the remains of the imperial villa, which became a national heritage site in 1951, when the lands were expropriated by the Italian State.

Castle Silj is built in Gothic Revival style; nearby, is the fifteenth century Tower of Orlando, depicted in a well-known drawing documenting the finding of the so-called ‘Prima Porta Augustus.’ But my parents went to live up the road, in another part of the estate: an eighth century Saracen tower. Here, at Pietra Pertusa, are Etruscan tunnels, a palaeo-Christian church, a huge nymphaeum, burial chambers of Byzantine–Gothic wars and the triumphal arch of Constantine, where emperor Constantine camped his army, in 312 AD, on the eve of the battle that decided Christianity.

After the passing of my parents, I abandoned these dense, rather gloomy, landscapes and made my residence on higher, brighter, grounds, a farm situated on a special part of Livia’s estate. Here, too, were Etruscans remains. Indeed the entire area north of Rome was the land of the Etruscans, who founded Rome and were eventually overcome by the Latin Romans. But, as so often happens, the culture of the vanquished imbued that of the victors and there is a sense of magic which pervades all Roman things with Etruscan foundations. Originally of Anatolian origin, the Etruscans were deeply bound to earth, sea and sky: navigators, traders, engineers, craftsmen, and possibly the last shamans on Western soil.

The property I now inhabit has been documented as the site of an Etruscan oracle. Indeed its Ancient name is Lemniscati and originates from the Greek island of Lemnos, where the Etruscans made a pact with the gods. And in an extraordinary moment that has become lore the whole world over, Livia came to this oracle, to enquire about the meaning of the prodigy of *Ad Gallinas Albas* (white hens), which gave its name to the entire district and is the founding

legend of Rome's first imperial dynasty – the Julio-Claudian clan – that ruled the empire for a decisive and extraordinary period.

Legend has it that Livia was sitting in her garden, one day, when an eagle flew over from Africa and dropped a snowy white hen on her lap. The hen was quite unscathed and carried a laurel twig in its beak. People paid a lot of attention to signs in those days and Livia rushed over to the oracle at Lemniscati.

What the oracle said was that Livia should put the white hen into production and from the first egg would come the name of the next ruler in Rome, after Augustus. At first she was flummoxed about the meaning – hence the Dadaist “Egg with no Point.” But we also adopted Livia's *white hens* again, also because we can't do without the fresh eggs.

Additionally, the oracle instructed Livia to plant the laurel in her garden and the resulting laurel grove – which you can see today in the archaeological site of Villa di Livia and at Lemniscati – produced the laurel crowns for the emperors and, in particular, for the great poets of the time – Virgil, Horace etc; this produced the terms *poet laureate*, *Nobel laureate*, *laurea*, *baccalaureat*, etc.

Livia was a consummate hostess, gardener, villa, farm and city palace manager, not to mention latent governor, for her hand stayed the tiller behind both Augustus, her husband, and Tiberius, her son. Her circle of literati and poets, which gathered in the famous underground dining room of the villa at Prima Porta, was called *Cenaculum*. My ancestors revived this custom in 1949. This informal club, led by my uncle Pio Silj and the artist Paulo Ghiglia – which included the likes of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Arturo Toscanini – was dedicated to the revival of life and culture, after the horrors of war: music, art, theatre, cinema and, of course, good food and good conversation: light but grave, real but surreal, fuelled by recent movements of modern art, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism.... Then in 2017 some old Roman friends called me up to tell them some stories, in the evenings, and the *Cenacolo* continued its existence. After more than 2000 years, we are still captive of this poetic land.

But, above all, it was to nature that we turned, drawn by the natural area of Prima Porta and its mythological gravity. Take the aspect of transformation, such a feature of the garden: the Legend of the White Hen, *Ad Gallinas Albas*, emerges unquestionably as an initiation allegory into nature's mysteries. The same can be said of Ovid's *Apollo and Daphne*, in the *Metamorphoses*. Through these, you can see the following dynamics surfacing:

Augustus elects Apollo as his solar deity but Apollo goes chasing after Daphne (Dafni, Δάφνη in Greek, meaning laurel) into the wild side. Daphne, voted to chastity, cries out for help and is transformed into a laurel plant, which is

subsequently visited upon Livia, by an eagle, and a hen. Then Livia is visited upon Augustus, but with life renewed. Augustus got something different than he bargained for. For sure the rapture-*greening* of Livia is Augustus's conundrum. Emperors don't usually make very good *Green Men*, because of their craving for the limelight of Apollo who, like many old gods, is seduced by the Graces, for which he is capable of crossing to the other side. Following research from the scientific team, under the direction of Cornelia Lauf – which I have helped to sponsor with co-founding sponsor Suzanne Deal Booth – I see a clear correspondence between the use of plants in the garden of Livia and the longest peace ever recorded in human history. Following the research of Giulia Caneva, and Salvatore Settis, with an eye to the plants depicted in the triclinium frescos and Augustus' altar of peace (Ara Pacis), one can extrapolate that a deep knowledge of botany in many ways underscored or even affected, the Pax Romana.

As a *dilettante* (not by chance were my English ancestors founders of the Dilettanti Society) I find it easier to relate to plants via their mythology and lore, than through a whole lot of botanical and scientific data. Plant lore, after all, stands on the high road of man's primal impulses about his habitat: the stars, the elements, the flora and the fauna. Mythology is the ancient psychology.

The 1990s saw this new sensibility, spearheaded by botanist, Stefano Mancuso. Intelligence, wrote Mancuso, used to be considered "what distinguishes man from other living beings." But if intelligence is the ability to solve problems, plants have it better.

Villa Anson Silj today is deeply committed to studying nature and telling its stories. We organize workshops with artists, who have been able to study the newly identified plants in Livia's famous frescos cycle, now housed at Palazzo Massimo, in central Rome. These artists reinterpret the plants in the Gardens of Livia from the proto-Etruscans to ourselves. We are looking for intelligence, consciousness, soul and that deep healing, *greening*, power, safeguarded in the membranes of every living plant.

**Bernard Anson SILJ**



## Here is a list of Livia's plants in our gardens:



*Acanthus mollis*  
*Anthemis* cfr. *cotula* (dog-fennel)  
*Arbutus unedo* (strawberry tree)  
*Buxus sempervirens* (ordinary box)  
*Chrysanthemum coronarium*  
 (yellow chrysanthemum)  
*Cornus mas* (cornel)  
*Cupressus sempervirens* (cypress)  
*Cydonia oblonga* Miller (quince-tree)  
*Hedera helix* (common ivy)  
*Iris*  
*Liliaceae* (lily family)  
*Myrtus communis* (myrtle)  
*Nerium oleander* (oleander)  
*Papaver somniferum* (opium poppy)  
*Phoenix dactylifera* (date palm)  
*Phyllitis scolopendrium* (common scolopendria)  
*Picea excelsa* (spruce)  
*Pinus pinea* (stone-pine)  
*Punica granatum* (pomegranate)  
*Quercus ilex* (green oak)  
*Quercus robur* (common oak)  
*Rosa centifolia* (cabbage rose)  
*Viburnum tinus* (guelder rose)  
*Viola reichenbacha* (sylvan viola)



Bella Oaks labyrinth, © Erin Feinblatt  
photo: Erin Feinblatt, Bella Oaks

Meditation labyrinth nestled within a historic olive grove, designed in collaboration with Andrea Cochran, Landscape Architect, and inspired by the cathedral city of Chartres. A place to become grounded and reflective, this labyrinth is a vital landmark of Bella Oak Vineyard in Napa, California.

Much of my work now is taken up by the vineyard estate, Bella Oaks, I own in Napa Valley, California. There we are producing organically grown grapes for our Bella Oaks wines, incorporating biodynamic principles, and focusing on increasing biodiversity and sustainable agricultural methods, both in the vineyards and in our own domestic use gardens. The gardens of Livia, and this project to bring them back to life, including researching domestic and formal plant selections, reconstruction, and sustainability, truly speaks to my interests. It is a pleasure to support and stand by the side of professionals in so many fields, all dedicated to a holistic vision of the world, incorporating various perspectives from contemporary art to botany to digital preservation of world heritage.

**Suzanne Deal BOOTH**

Bella Oaks  
vintner and philanthropist  
Austin, Texas  
and Napa Valley, California





photo: Henry Thomas Sodt

In my time as the director of the Orto Botanico, my utmost goal has been to share my love of nature, ecology, and botany with the Roman public and all who come to visit us. Established in 1883 as the successor to the papal Botanical gardens at the Vatican, the Orto Botanico is home to more than 3,000 species of plants. Here in the botanical gardens, we marry nature and ancient Roman history, combining Earth's beautiful biodiversity with Rome's stunning architectural heritage. I believe an understanding of plant life is an integral facet of education, and being in nature is uplifting to the human spirit. As you read this book, consider your own relationship to the natural world around you, and what you can do to help it flourish.

**Fabio ATTORRE**

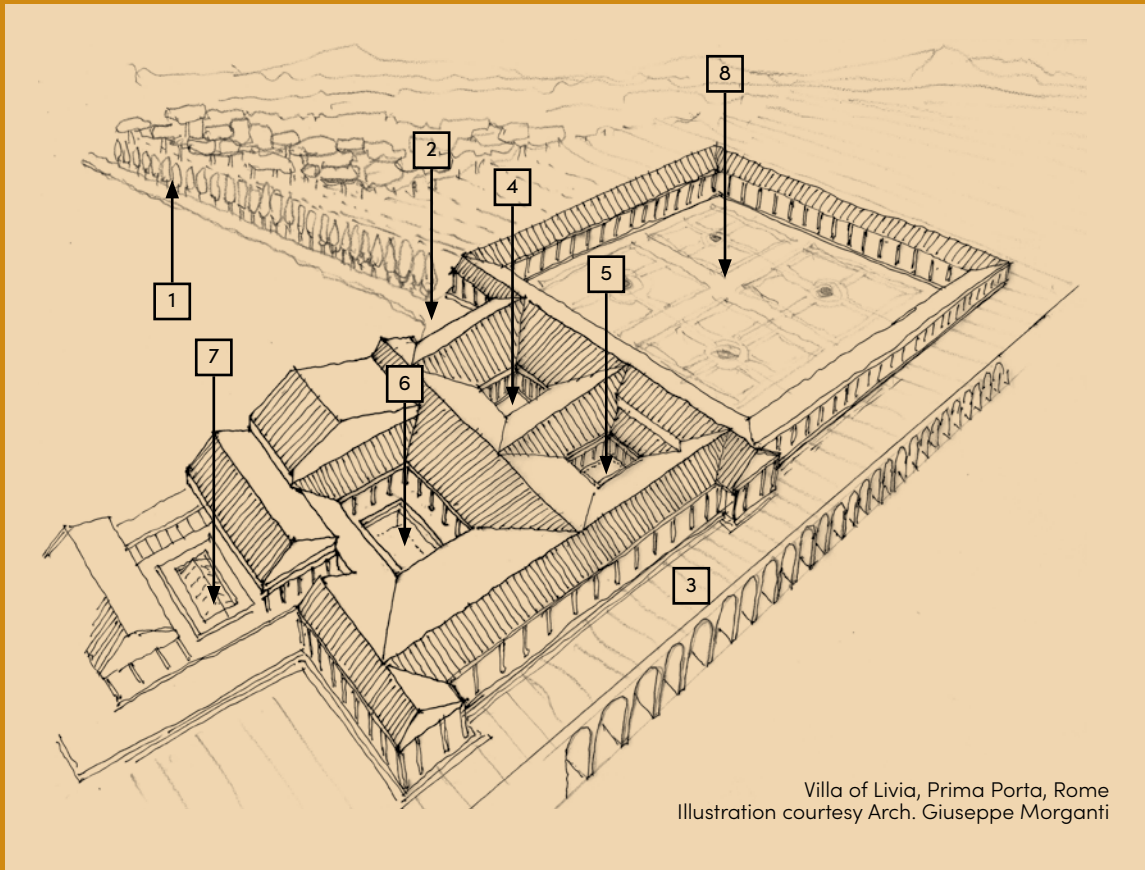
Sapienza University, Rome  
Director, Orto Botanico

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# resen darch







#### LEGEND

1. ACCESS ROAD
2. ENTRANCE COURTYARD
3. *BASIS VILLAE*
4. ATRIUM
5. REPUBLICAN GARDEN
6. PERISTYLE AND *NATATIO*
7. UNDERGROUND ROOM
8. LARGE GARDEN OR *LAURETUM*



# Angelina De LAURENZI

Ministry of Culture, Italy; Director Villa of Livia

## VILLA DI LIVIA

Located on a hill overlooking the Tiber Valley, the villa of Livia still appears with its unspoiled nature to represent that discrete and not overdone place where real power was exercised in the Augustan era. Defining it as a residence of otium and rest, although it responds perfectly to the canons of this type of villa that combined the productive aspect with the residential one, could be an understatement. The apparent simplicity and the constant references to nature seem to echo the importance of the characters who inhabited it and who embellished its garden and its rooms with symbols of power.

The villa is referred to by ancient authors as Gallinas Albas, a name that evokes the prophecy that occurred to Livia Drusilla while she visited her lands in the Veian region, between 39 and 38 BC. Caesar Augustus, after his marriage to Livia, restructured the Republican residence she had received as a dowry, transforming it into a villa characterized by the alternation of building blocks and green areas, confirming the couple's preference it be known "not so much for statues and paintings as for arcades and groves" (Suet. Augustus, 72, 6) in a form of ostentatious simplicity. The residence, renovated several times over the centuries, was divided into functional areas: the large garden, the private area, the representative area, the area dedicated to guests, and the spa complex.

The large garden was a large quadrangular terrace bordered by a three-armed portico divided by pillars, the porticus triplex, with the roof covered with tiles and the entablature decorated with

terracotta slabs and painted walls. The southern side of the garden was scenographically open on the Tiber plain; on this side the area was enclosed by a green belt, as evidenced by the discovery of a long row of perforated jars intended to contain shrubs and flowers. The northern side was divided into large rectangular compartments, plantation „boxes" containing small shrubs. The central space was occupied by the *lauretum*, the laurel grove remembered by ancient sources from which the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty took the twigs for the crowns used in the triumph.

The private area has an Augustan-era structure that has remained unchanged over time with restoration interventions in the second and third centuries AD. Here is the main entrance of the villa, marked by a travertine threshold that leads into a vestibule and an atrium. This area was made up of two building nuclei: in the first, a bank of rooms closing the body of the villa towards the large garden; in the second, a private apartment, consisting of two cubicula and an exedra, arranged around a three-wing portico, erected on Republican structures. A small garden was adorned by small shrubs (oleander, rosemary, aromatic herbs, figs, and lemons) and flowers were contained in ollae perforatae.

The representative and reception area was constructed during the Augustan era, with renovations up to the fourth century AD. Large rooms circumscribed the porticoed peristyle and were paved with Augustan mosaic, originally delimiting a third garden, in which in the Flavian

age a basin (*natatio*) was installed, decorated on the edge in the Severian age with a mosaic representing a marine thiasos. On the north-east side of the peristyle, there was a triclinium and three rooms; in the north wing, flanked by the corridor leading to the private area, two rooms connect to the spa; on the south side large rooms are decorated with opus sectile flooring; in the south-western wing, rooms belonging to a *hibernaculum* (winter apartment) are enclosed by the portico of the *frons villae*.

Every corner, almost every flower, represents a symbol of power recognizable by contemporaries, transported and masterfully received in the large frescos of the semi-interred ancient triclinium. The triclinium was built by the will of Livia and Ottaviano, in 38 BC, the year of their wedding, as part of the renovation program of the previous republican residence. The triclinium was from the beginning one of the attractions of the villa, together with the large garden and the overall green layout of the villa. The owners' willingness to re-propose the beauty of the villa's garden in the basement is evident. Equipped with a single entrance, it was covered with a barrel vault decorated with painted stucco coves and frescoed with a continuous painting of a garden with a symbolic value: in the foreground the cane fence and the marble balustrade, in the background a great variety of birds and plants, including the recurrent laurel in all its forms. The triclinium was no longer in use after the earthquake of 17 BC.

The spa system, built in the Flavian age, connected the private and residential area. Centered on two rooms, *calidarium* and *tepidarium*, delimited by other rooms and initially heated with the 'samovar' system, the complex was renovated in the Severan period. The function of the two rooms changed, one became an *apodyterium* and the other, a *frigidarium*, with the heating system based on the *testudo alvei*.

The outermost strip of the residential district consisted of guest rooms built in the Augustan age with Severian renovations: rooms and corridors with mosaic and opus sectile floors, frescoed in the second half of the second century AD, heated rooms, a latrine.

The villa has had a long life, as evidenced by the restoration interventions and findings datable to the fifth and sixth centuries AD. After abandonment, probably due to a fire, starting from the seventeenth century, the area was subject to devastation and looting in search of antiquities. The discovery in 1863 of the statue of Augustus and of the semi-hypogeal room with the garden paintings gave it notoriety but did not guarantee it protection. Only since 1982, with the Italian State acquisition of this Prima Porta hilltop, has the villa been subjected to protection.

In 2013-2014, on the occasion of the Augustan bimillennial celebration, among other interventions, the Lauretum above ground was reconstituted. It is placed in the space where it was in ancient times, but with the choice of placing the laurel plants in large jars to facilitate any excavation operations and to suggest the discovery of the *ollae perforatae* in the large garden during excavations. The garden, together with the other interventions carried out, reflects a narrative form of spaces and structures that have overlapped over time and that today cannot be dismantled. According to this criterion, the current large roofs of the area of the villa are currently full-scale stratigraphic drawings that take on the color of the sky, like the background of the painting in the hypogeal triclinium, evoking a vision of the sky and at the same time the closure of the rooms.

The Villa di Livia has always been an oasis of uncontaminated landscape on the outskirts of Rome, with a degraded appearance due to the major urban transformations of recent decades. The contrast is evident. As is also evident the predominance of the landscape aspect in the articulation of the villa which alternates structures and green spaces. In this, the intent of the imperial couple Augustus and Livia has remained unchanged and this constitutes the main value of the villa, one of a kind.





Reconstruction of Livia's private domestic garden  
Illustration courtesy Arch. Giuseppe Morganti

# Giuseppe MORGANTI

Ministry of Culture, Italy

## CREATION, RE-CREATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE VILLA OF LIVIA IN PRIMA PORTA

Attempts to reconstruct ancient Rome date back to over five centuries. In fact, starting at least from 1430, when Poggio Bracciolini exhorted the study of the Ancients, the representation, interpretation, and reconstruction of the original appearance of the ruins, together with the study of the sources, have since the age of Humanism become a fundamental component of studies on the civilization of ancient Rome, in particular of its architectural production.<sup>1</sup>

The architects of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were primarily surveyors and designers of ancient buildings. Bramante, Sangallo, Peruzzi, Raphael, Palladio (all born between 1444 and 1508), have “intimately joined the study of the ruins with that of the ancient writers and inscriptions,” in order to learn from them for the new architecture and with the goal of achieving a magnitude similar to that of the ancients. The lessons learned were the basis of their projects and their treatises.<sup>2</sup>

The representation was aimed at ruins, and therefore constituted a necessarily limited and incomplete knowledge base, but the premise for thoroughly investigating the nature and meaning of the buildings was believed to hypothesize their original consistency, recreating them in

their entirety. This is why Renaissance architects employed a “fervent reconstructive imagination” in their work.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the time this has resulted in a ‘transfer’ of spatial culture and the architectural conception of the viewer into the objects represented. An eloquent example is the ‘completion’ with three apses of what has remained of the Basilica of Maxentius in the aftermath of the 1348 earthquake, in turn, the root of the projects for St. Peter’s.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, Pirro Ligorio or Flaminio Ponzio, primarily in a spirit of antiquity, ‘rebuilt’ the Temple of Apollo, the Stadium of Domitian or the Domus Augustana on the Palatine Hill.

The ideal philological reconstruction of ancient buildings starting from ruins always remains a chimera that stretches from Humanism – through Piranesi and the architects of the École des Beaux-Arts – to Viollet-le-Duc and the totalitarian regimes of the last century.

Beyond the ideal or ideological factors, the reconstruction of ancient monuments – moreover impracticable in concrete factuality for technical and compositional reasons – has been definitively condemned by the detachment from the construction tradition due to the industrial

revolution and the advent of modern materials, with the symmetrical affirmation of historicism on which modern theories of architectural restoration are based. Concurrent factors that have definitively exorcised any hypothesis of coincidence of the restoration with the restoration.

However, the need to ‘understand’ ancient architecture has not disappeared, in an attempt to experience its space. Cairoli Giuliani states:

Architecture is a matter of atmosphere, ideas, space, time, not plants or elevations, orders or decorative elements. A building is crossed in successive times, living in it are the various parts of the day depending on the light, climatic conditions etc.; space, that is the third dimension, needs time, the fourth, which implies the memory of what has been seen before and the imagination to foresee it in some way, before verifying it directly, will be seen immediately after. This complexity of elements cannot be addressed by means of abstraction relating to plans or sections ... their study needs reading and interpretative means different from those in use with such positive results in other fields of archaeology. A building sends different messages, in a different language, from an amphora or a statue: therefore a different key is needed. There is a duty to look for it even if it is not said that it is possible or that it exists.<sup>5</sup>

The closest approximation is the ‘model’ (what, in other words, we are also used to call ‘plastic’). With the limit, however, of not appreciating the experience of the interior spaces, if not to a very limited extent, or unless we push the reconstruction up to the ratio of 1:1, which would bring us to an idea of reconstruction of the truth. This type of operation is never or almost never attempted, if not with very few exceptions, the most representative of which is the reconstruction of the Villa dei Papiri in Herculaneum within the Getty Museum in Malibu. Such an operation is valid if

seen as a didactic alternative which does not touch the non-original monument, being out of context and without claims of originality.

Thus, the information technologies applied to this sector of the study of ancient architecture find full legitimacy, and above all efficacy, by offering those “means of reading and interpretation,” the “key” that Cairoli Giuliani talks about.

This is particularly true for a ‘young’ monument such as the Villa of Livia. A complex that remained unknown until the mid-nineteenth century, long known only for the paintings discovered in 1863 in the semi-underground summer triclinium (removed and placed in the museum in the 1950s), and the subject of systematic and extensive excavations that achieved their current consistency from the 1980s onwards.

An exploration that, despite having made it possible to define in an exhaustive way its layout and architectural-decorative events, does not allow us today to view – following centuries of devastation – other than a set of floor plans and wall structures that rarely exceed one and a half meters in height. Moreover, for stringent conservation reasons, the site is covered by a large extension of flat roofs on pillars. A state of affairs that limits an understanding of the Villa of Livia primarily to specialists, for in order to see the building that once was the Villa of Livia, the mental representation of what must have been the original appearance of the villa must be conjured up, before its destruction.

An integral reconstruction of the Villa of Livia using information technology is therefore desirable to effectively proffer the presentation of this monument to the public. A reconstruction based on solid scientific foundations that findings and new archaeological knowledge over the last forty years through excavations and studies have made possible.<sup>6</sup> A work must be done so as to allow even the common visitor to understand the monument in its entirety, mentally reconnecting the concretely visible remains, and giving him or her the possibility of wandering around inside it, through its atriums, arcades, rooms, and gardens





photo: Andrea Venier, Soprintendenza Speciale di Roma

until he understands the link with the surrounding landscape.

The reconstruction of the villa should be integrated by a restitution – also virtual, projected on the walls – of the pictorial decoration (now in the museum) originally present on the walls of the summer triclinium, here too recreating the spatial quality and the symbolic contents of those ‘deceptive walls’ which represent an irreplaceable part of universal cultural and artistic patrimony – currently largely unexpressed – in the present-day Villa of Livia.<sup>7</sup>

### Restoration of the peristyle mosaics in the Villa of Livia

The main uncovered space of the built core of the villa, dating to the first Augustan phase, is the large peristyle, which was surrounded by a portico (22 x 18 m), supported by brick columns resting on travertine stylobates, covered with red and white stucco and probably fluted.

At the center of the open area there was the rectangular basin of the *natatio*, a very large

swimming pool (9.36 x 5.62 m, 1.09 m deep), built in the Flavian age.

The verdant grass strip between the edge of the pool and the portico (the existence here of a third *viridarium* of the villa would be evidenced by the discovery of planting holes and *ollae perforatae*), was raised and decorated with a later black and white mosaic in the Severan phase of the villa, and at that time the tub was equipped with a marble coating and three steps to step down more easily inside.

On the short northern and southern sides and on the long eastern side, the decoration represents a marine *thiasos*, with seahorses and monstrous creatures moving towards the focus of the composition: the Oceanus mask in the center of the north side. On the long western side, in place of the marine cortège, there is a geometric hexagonal motif, to be attributed to a slightly later phase, perhaps a makeover, or an afterthought by the architect.

The state of conservation of both the mosaics and the basin is difficult to appreciate today. The published photographic documentation does not provide clear indications, but, from the little that is available, the mosaics are not in excellent condition.

On the occasion of the 2014 anniversary exhibition marking two thousand years since Augustus' death, the mosaics were covered with pedestrian wooden planks, upon which the most relevant representations of the mosaics were reproduced (Oceanus, the hippocampus, the sea creature). The positions of the columns of the peristyle were marked on the planks with wooden discs. The bottom of the basin was covered with a layer of pozzolan in large grains to protect the remains of the footprints of the marble slabs.

For the reasons just illustrated it is not possible, at this stage, to formulate a real restoration project. This will be possible only after the removal of the wooden structures and the re-illumination of the surfaces (mosaics, cleaning of the mosaics and marble slabs, remains of plaster and perhaps marble slabs, etc.), as well as the in-depth analysis of their state of conservation.

\*

However, it is generally possible to state the following:

Prior to any other operation, a detailed archive search must be carried out to recover the existing documentation, as well as a photographic documentation of the current state should be effected.

For the walking surfaces, a careful global intervention of archaeological removal / cleaning shall be carried out, aimed at bringing to light the ancient floors, freeing them from encumbering materials, from accumulated materials and debris, from any vegetation, from biological weeds and any outcrops or efflorescence settled there. The operation must be performed by specialized restorers, carried out manually with the aid of broom brushes and with the assistance of archaeologists.

At the end, once the surfaces have been brought to light, it will be necessary to proceed with a complete documentation of the plans (graphics, with accurate surveys in adequate scale, both traditional and digital in 3D, and photographic,

even with the aid of drones), all of which today as far as is known - seem to be missing, at least in detail.

This will be followed by a revision of the mosaic walking surface, through a careful cleaning of the surfaces and the re-filling of the fissures, to restore the floor surface in as intact and unified a way as possible and thus avoid the possibility of growth of plant weeds and their root systems in the cracks. In order to allow easier accessibility where it is possible by bringing the passage back to level, re-filling the joints between stone elements and filling the gaps with other stone elements or color-matched mortars (at the discretion of the construction management), also to eliminate or reduce, as far as possible, any dips or hollows in the floor that cause (in the event of important meteoric events) stagnation of water that is certainly harmful and a harbinger of further degradation.

Similarly, work will be carried out on the bedding surfaces of the marble coating of the tank (and any remains of the marble coating itself), with the careful cleaning of the surfaces and - also in this case - at the subsequent survey of what is still in place, carefully restoring and realigning where necessary the stone slabs, while with the other portions we will proceed in a consolidation of the floors and the subsequent protection with a non-woven fabric that also serves as a base for the casting of a layer of mortar based on natural hydraulic lime with the addition of fragments and earthenware powders and stone and marble powders to obtain a chromatic definition that suggests the ancient marble top.

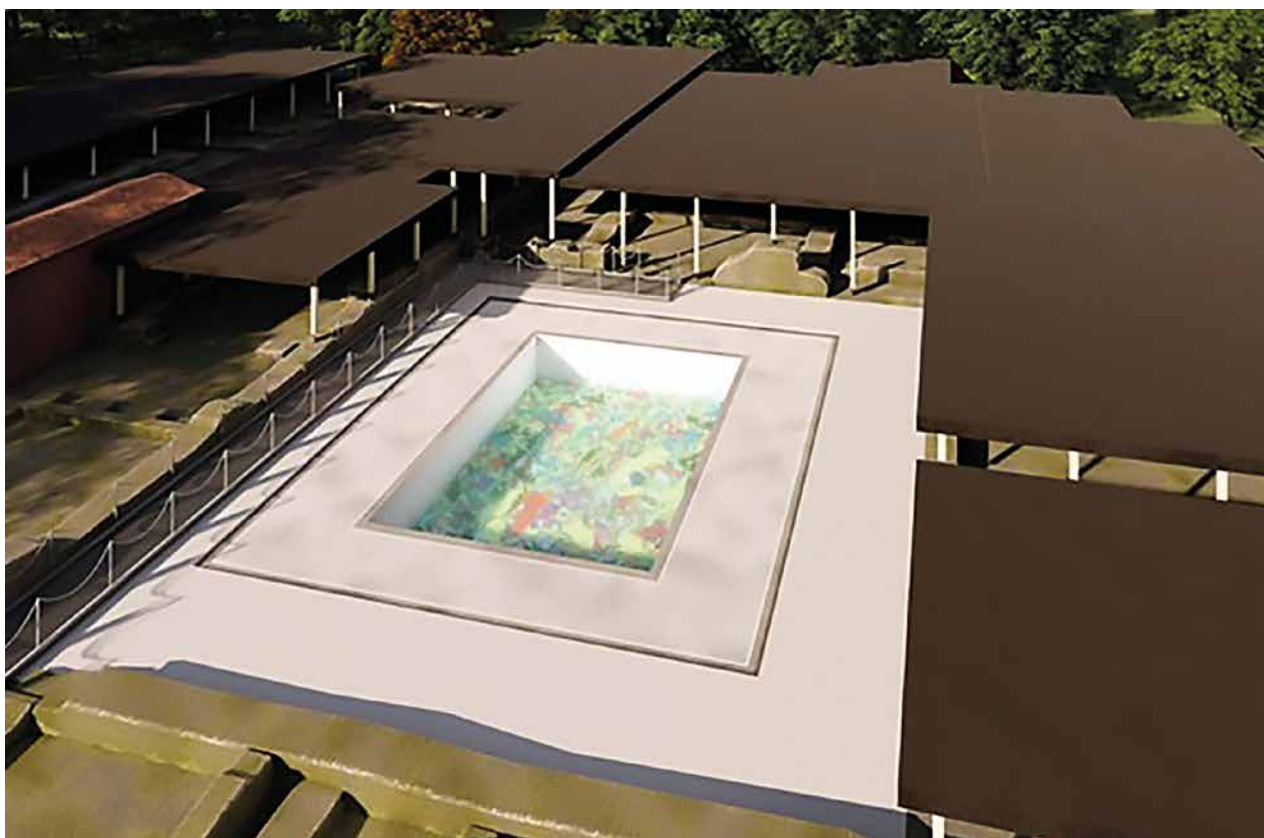


## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, *Historia de varietate fortunae libri quatuor*, 1430 (1513).
- <sup>2</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *La civiltà del Rinascimento in Italia* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1953).
- <sup>3</sup> Albert J. Ammermann, “Adding time to Rome’s *imago*,” in “Imaging ancient Rome. Documentation, visualization, Imagination,” edited by Lothar Haselberger and John Humphrey, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, supplementary series number 61 (2006): 308.
- <sup>4</sup> Udo Kultermann, *Die Maxentius-Basilika. Ein Schlüsselwerk spätantiker Architektur* (Weimar: VDG, Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1996), 25.
- <sup>5</sup> Cairol Fulvio Giuliani, “Note sull’architettura delle residenze imperiali dal I al III secolo d. C.,” *ANRW (Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt)*, II.12.1 (1982): 233-34.
- <sup>6</sup> A first step in this direction has been made based on the research undertaken in the first part of the twenty-first century, in Maurizio Forte et al., eds, *La Villa di Livia. Un percorso di ricerca di archeologia virtuale* (Roma: „L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 2007).
- <sup>7</sup> Salvatore Settis, *La Villa di Livia. Le pareti ingannevoli* (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2008).

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Rendering by Architect Giuseppe Morganti, 2021

# Crispin CORRADO

John Cabot University

## THE SWIMMING POOL OF LIVIA: *NATATIO* AT *DOMUS LIVIAE*

The Villa of Livia at Prima Porta is indisputably unique among Roman villas. The familial estate of Livia, wife of the first Roman emperor, the villa at Prima Porta rose in importance during her husband Augustus's principate from a country retreat to an important symbol of empire, and the first imperial villa. Indeed, it is here where the best-known portrait of Augustus, the "Augustus of Prima Porta," was discovered; it was a discovery that announced simultaneously the statue's continued display here and the villa's ongoing importance after Augustus' death. As historians may attest, it is rare to be able to identify with certainty physical remains that are mentioned in the ancient sources. With the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta, we have just this situation. Indeed, it is the ancient author Suetonius who tells the story of the portent that announced to Livia, here at the villa, that her son Tiberius would be the eventual emperor. It is also an ancient author, Pliny the Elder, who tells of the singularity of the villa's garden, for as empire began, new traditions grew along with it, and it would be from the gardens at this villa that laurel would be gathered for the emperors' wreaths – each emperor had his own laurel tree.

An unassuming property perched upon a ridge, the villa complex and its gardens were surrounded by and integrated with lush greenery and blooming nature. In the first centuries BC and AD, Roman villas were typically luxurious locations aimed at welcoming and impressing guests, and were filled

with manmade and natural wonders that delighted the senses. The villa of Livia had several entertaining rooms and spaces whose confines were natural or, if manmade, were adorned in such a way as to make that distinction ambiguous. The *natatio*, or swimming pool, of this villa was a centerpiece of one such entertaining area. Beautifully adorned with a black and white mosaic with an aquatic theme typical to Roman bathhouses at the time, the pool was an addition to the villa made in the first century AD. Roman villas, even those located on the sea or close to the coast, often included swimming pools for the private use and enjoyment of the owners and their visitors. Archaeological finds attest that such pools were often as ornamental as they were utilitarian, as we have evidence of elegant examples of rooftop pools, 'infinity' pools, and swimming pools that merged into the waters of the sea. The Romans were no stranger to innovation, or to incredible extravagance and luxury. To have a swimming pool in the privacy of your own home (especially a home located far from natural waterways), and one placed delicately within surrounding greenery and sumptuous gardens, was the height of comfort and magnificence. The swimming pool in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta was certainly an example of such a beloved element that provided both visual pleasure and a precious remedy for the heat of the summer.



# Giulia CANEVA

University of Roma Tre, Department of Science

## A GARDEN OF THE SOUL AND AN INTERPRETATION OF THE LIFE: THE HYPOGEAL PAINTING OF GARDEN ROOM OF THE VILLA OF LIVIA

### Introduction

Nature frequently enters with significant prominence into the representation of ancient Rome, playing a leading role in landscapes as the background of human activities, such as in gardens and in views of 'ideal places'.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, a great number of naturalistic details can be detected inside the fantastic world of the 'grotesques,' or in sculpted surfaces, where they appear in a cryptic and metamorphic continuity, which should no longer be seen only as oddity or eccentricity.

Indeed, looking with attention at such naturalistic data, a high number of botanical taxa (78 families, 159 genera, and 168 species), as well as animals (mostly birds, but also mammals), have been identified in pictures and in carved surfaces of ancient Roman culture.<sup>2</sup> Why such a significant number? A first reason arises upon considering that the naturalistic knowledge of the ancient people was remarkable, since they depended on plants and animals for all fundamental aspects of life, such as nutrition, medicine, dressing, protection from atmospheric elements, and managing handicraft activities. Obviously, some elements of nature had

a wider recurrence, but also rare species cannot be neglected.<sup>3</sup> But this is not the only cause.

A further explanation of such a great quantity of represented and useful plants arises when considering a second question: which was their function and meaning? Today, all too often, images of botanical diversity are simply not recognized, and the use of natural elements in the past appear erroneously to have only been employed as elements of decoration. Indeed, they were much more, since devout believers would have necessitated a further and greatly heightened role.<sup>4</sup> In fact, we must remember that ancient people lived in direct contact with nature and to their mentality, nothing was casual, but all was related to the favors of the gods, with each phenomenon signifying something in its display. In the ancient society, both the 'ideal' or 'architectonic' garden landscape, from the simpler to the most complex ones, greatly underscored religious values, and always expressed the idea of divinity.<sup>5</sup> Images represented a powerful tool of symbolic representation and even illiterate people were undoubtedly able to 'read' and interpret the iconographic language, knowing the nature and its phenomena in a deep way.<sup>6</sup>



## Alphabet and Syntax of the Representation in the Garden Room of the Villa of Livia

In this view, the garden representation in the underground rooms of the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta (first century BC), have been studied by many authors with different approaches,<sup>7</sup> but in no manner should be seen as a mere description of an idyllic and beautiful landscape. The Garden Room is often described as a *triclinium* (i.e. dining room), in absence of evidence of specific elements, and because of its rectangular shape and dimensions (11,70 meters long, 5,50 m wide). It has also been interpreted as an interior grotto or *nymphaeum* (i.e. a grotto of the nymphs), which had a sacral dimension, and which were popular in the opulent residences of the Roman elite. In all cases, the room seems to have been designed not only for the private delectation of the imperial family, but also for visitors of a social elite, offering a verdant blessing of peace, a view of blooms or fruiting trees, as the representation of a prosperous era.

Several scholars interpreted the garden view in the whole as a tool of glorification of the fecundity of the Augustan *aurea aetas*<sup>8</sup>. More recently, other scholars underlined “the multiple allusions to Augustan policies and actions, as well as further allusions to deities, areas outside the empire, and foreign power.”<sup>9</sup> It was also suggested that the “illusionistic features seem to portray the illusionistic-escapist spirit of Augustan times from both the social and the religious aspects,”<sup>10</sup> whereas other contributions gave data on horticultural skills, which can arise from an observation of pruned trees.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the illusionistic idea represented by such a special garden is not only a representation of a perfect place, such as in a modern *trompe l'oeil*, ideal to refresh in the hot seasons. The whole representation had a much more complex and detailed meaning, which requires a deep understanding of the general structures, as well as of their particular details.

Here, the natural landscape has the highest space, and *the place* itself shows differences from a typical garden place, lacking any typical garden statues, *hermae*, or fountains, with the only built-up elements being the marble balustrades and the *incannunciate* (made with reeds). The place also differs from a wild nature representation and the context seems to show an emblematic role, displaying some clear characters of a cave (traces of stalactites on the top of the sky/ceiling). Furthermore, the partition of the space, with paths and geometries contribute to its interpretation.<sup>12</sup> This author considers Nature as a cardinal element for such interpretation, and will analyze both the ‘alphabet’ and the ‘syntax,’ indicated in the selection of natural elements as communication for viewers.

The letters of such an alphabet arise from the different represented plants (24 species<sup>13</sup>), and birds (pigeon, quail, blackbird, thrush, oriolus (golden bird), crow, nightingale, and sparrow<sup>14</sup>), each one probably having a specific meaning. In the case of birds, most of them are freely flying and only one is caged. Further, I wish to stress that the highest number of used plants were well known to the visitors of the place, since they constituted (overall wild and some cultivated) a high quantity of autochthonous species in the Latium region, belonging to the Mediterranean maquis and forests (i.e., oaks, laurels, myrtles, boxes, arbutus, such as from ‘flowering elements’). The stone pine has a controversial geographical area of distribution, but it had a clear diffusion in the Roman area still in such times. The few ‘exotic’ elements originate from the Eastern Mediterranean basin (cypresses, quinces) or palaeo-tropical and Iranian regions (i.e. palms, pomegranates), but they were similarly well known; only one species comes from the Euro-Siberian context until the Alps (the spruce), and it was also known considering the wideness of the area of Roman influence.

It is also interesting noting that the plant representation lacks a seasonal consistency, in that some plants are depicted as in springtime (e.g. most flowers) while others are in an autumnal or ‘harvest’ habitus (e.g. most trees bearing fruits, such as quinces, pomegranates, arbutus). It

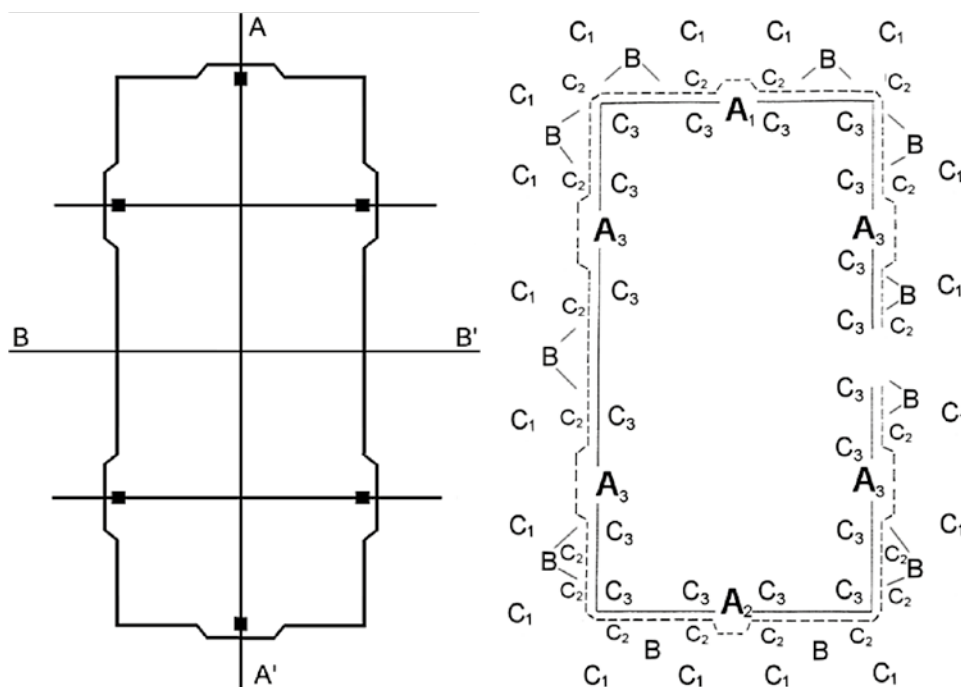


Fig. 1 a) Bilateral axis of symmetry among the plant representation in the Villa di Livia Garden representation; b) A1=*Pinus pinea*; A2=*Quercus robur*; A3=*Picea excelsa*; B=*Punica granatum* + *Cydonia oblonga*; C1=*Cupressus sempervirens*, *Nerium oleander*, *Quercus ilex*, *Buxus sempervirens*, *Phoenix dactylifera*, *Laurus nobilis*, *Arbutus unedo*, *Myrtus communis*, *Viburnum tinus*; C2=*Papaver somniferum*, *Chrysanthemum coronarium*, *Anthemis cotula*; C3=*Phyllitis scolopendrium*, *Viola reichenbachiana*, *Iris*.

probably means that the most relevant objective of the painting is to favor their perception, and they are represented following the season where their most typical elements (flowers or fruits) become clearly detectable.

The syntax of such a means of communication arises from the position of each element, and from the careful and orderly sequence of trees, herbaceous plants, as well as from the representation of birds. The clear symmetry, and hierarchical disposition of the natural elements show a key of interpretation to the entire composition. A special order also arises from the clear symmetry of all the space, with a double bilateral axis, which is

also emphasized by the plant dispositions (Fig. 1a). In fact, the layout of the plants does not appear to be casual: some species have a clear special emphasis, due to their location on a visual plane, whereas others show lower evidence. The most remarkable elements are those which are located inside niches, and despite their low frequency (only one or four repetitions), they have a high visual relevance, as true protagonists of the scene (called A in Fig. 1b, and in Fig. 2). These are a young pine (*Pinus pinea*) in a symmetric opposite position displaying an oak (*Quercus robur*), in the main axis, and four elements of spruces (*Picea excelsa*) in the second axis. A further alternance among

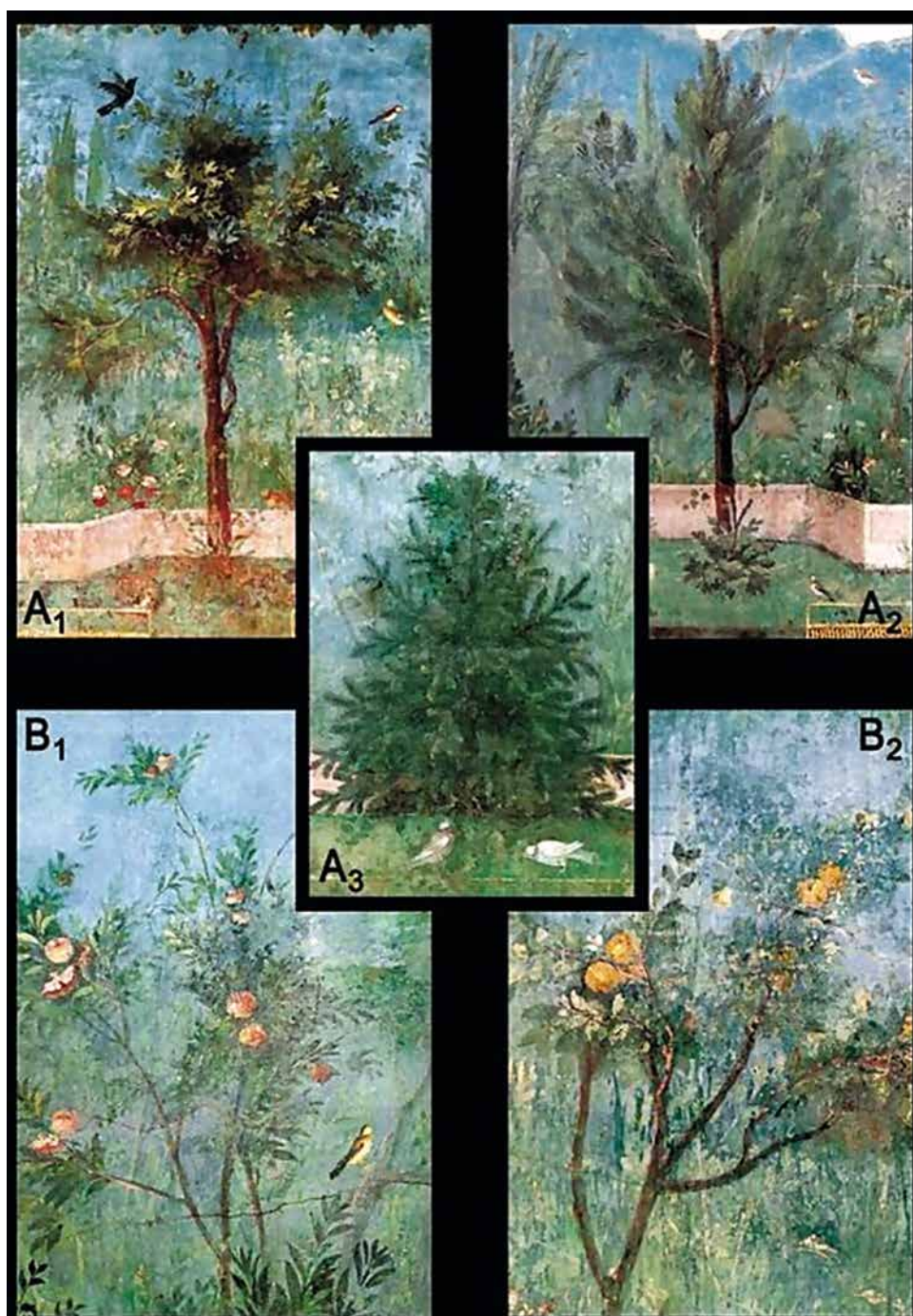


Fig. 2 The most remarkable plant elements of the Livia's Garden: On the top: A1 in the main axis, species, which are located inside niches (oak (*Quercus robur*) in a symmetric opposite position to a pine (*Pinus pinea*); in the central area, plants located along the second axis, A2 spruces (*Picea excelsa*); on the bottom, B, alternance among quinces (*Cydonia oblonga*) and pomegranate trees (*Punica granatum*).



quinces (*Cydonia oblonga*) and pomegranate trees (*Punica granatum*), which are located immediately close to them should be noted (called B in Fig. 1b). In the hierarchical view are plants which occur in the background of the balustrade behind them, or along the small pathways (called C in Fig. 1b).

## The Hypothesized Meaning of Nature's Representation

### The Plants

Following a previous study,<sup>15</sup> I stress that the dominant elements (oak/pine) seem to be joined to the fundamental binomial elements indicating the creation of life, such as divine power, being symbolically related to Jupiter/Jupiter (as the King of the Gods in the Greek-Roman Pantheon) and Cybele/Hera (as the Great Mother and in the role of the Queen and Wife of Zeus).<sup>16</sup> In the classical tradition, all natural phenomena depend on the conjunction and equilibrium among them. Following such valence, some scholars also hypothesized that an ideal linkage could be made to Augustus and Livia<sup>17</sup> in their powerful role. The third element (spruce) has instead a clear funerary valence at the Roman time, considering that Pliny called it “feralis arbor at funebri indicio.”

The binomial continuous alternance among pomegranate and quinces has also a not negligible meaning. Pomegranate is not only linked to the cult of the Great Mother, but also to the moon goddesses Kore and Persephone, besides Dionysus and Aphrodite. It is a symbol of fertility and regeneration. Quinces were consecrated both to Hera and Aphrodite, and they represented the ‘golden apples’ (*mala aurea*) of the garden of Hesperides.<sup>18</sup> Such a garden also was symbolically located in an island where Jupiter and Hera were married and overall, close to the place where the world ends (*finis terrae* and Hesperides originated, *vesperus*, i.e. sunset). Such golden apples represented not only a wish of happiness and prosperity, but also of immortality.

In a striking contrast of meanings, elements linked to death (see *Chrysanthemum coronarium*, *Viola* sp., *Papaver somniferum*, *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, *Nerium oleander*, *Cupressus sempervirens*), are juxtaposed with those linked to the idea of life and regeneration (*Phoenix dactylifera*, *Laurus nobilis*). Even if illustrated repetitively, the plants belong to Aphrodite's sphere (e.g. *Myrtus communis*, *Rosa* sp.pl.) seem to play a secondary role.<sup>19</sup> Plants of the Dionysian sphere (*Hedera helix*, which is not frequently recurrent) or of Apollonian ones (*Laurus nobilis*, which is represented more frequently but only in the background), do not show an evident role as protagonists in such a representation, even if I would not suggest neglecting discussion of their general symbolic role. Indeed, it is well known that the area of Prima Porta had been named *ad gallinas albas* after the legend of a prodigious event, related by Pliny, in which a white fowl holding a laurel branch in its beak, fell from the talons of an eagle down unto Livia Drusilla's lap. Livia soon thereafter became Octavian Augustus' wife. Following the diviners' orders, the emperor kept the fowl and its offspring, then planted the laurel which soon grew in a dark sacred grove and its branches would serve to make the wreaths crowning the emperor's head to celebrate his triumphs.

The botanical selection in which the seasons are thus mixed, substantiates Kellum's.<sup>20</sup> idea that the garden “with its balance of the wild and the cultivated, far more closely resembles the humble garden of the Virgil Georgics, whose owner »matched in contentment the wealth of kings«, and „was the first to pluck roses in spring and apples in autumn.”

### The Birds

We must remember that the number of represented bird species is very high<sup>21</sup> and it overcomes what is detectable in a simply natural place. Various scholars stressed that each species of bird in the ancient representation embodies a different symbolic value<sup>22</sup> in relation to their specific attributes. Here, I underline that, as a whole, they



have a common significance as messengers of the gods' divine will, similarly (but with inferior values) to the angels in Christian religion. Birds were a conduit between the sky and the earth, and they were considered able to carry divine prediction (the word 'auspicious' derives from '*aves spicere* = birds looking,' referring to the ancient sacerdotal powers of interpreting avian messages).

Birds also represented the soul, and, as observed by Jones,<sup>23</sup> the appearance of the domestic caged bird in Roman domestic culture is very striking. Birds are a metaphor for freedom, and the caged nightingale is an image of the human soul trapped in the body. Thus, the predominance of birds in the Livian frescos unequivocally substantiates an interpretation of the place as a garden of the soul.

### The Place

We cannot neglect that the garden is painted in an underground room, where light could enter only through two cryptoporticus windows opened along the main axis, and despite the illusionistic effect of the garden itself, the representation of an underground world is further underlined by the clear depiction of a cave with stalactites, which surrounds the sky. It clearly has an emblematic meaning, since a cave can be seen as an archetype place of rebirth, or initiation, and it explains why, starting from prehistoric times, such rituals were mainly celebrated in a cave.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in the Platonic view, a cave represents a place where the souls are captured by the Gods, and where they are waiting for a light, which could indicate the way to reach truth.

representation of natural species, and such value was certainly detectable by the ancient visitors of the Roman elite.

This garden seems an 'ideal place,' in which the plants (each one referring to different gods and myths) and other natural elements (different birds as representation of the soul) communicate the philosophical and religious representation of human life. The driving forces are represented by the archetypes of 'Mother and Father' of the Gods, as the divinities regulating all natural events and life, and by elements which describe the inevitability of death. Prosperity and good luck are also constant repetitive elements, illustrating that life is transitory, but able to renew and regenerate itself in the cosmic cycle of Nature, and that death is not final, being that the soul is immortal.

### Conclusion

It is appropriate to review the interpretations of these paintings, when they are described only from an illusionistic point of view, or as a simple representation of Augustus' promised Golden Age. A more complex symbolic and philosophical purpose was probably inspired by the selection and

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Giulia Caneva, Ettore Pacini, Maria Adele Signorini and Angelo Merante, “La fitoiconologia per il riconoscimento e l’interpretazione delle rappresentazioni artistiche,” in Giulia Caneva, ed., *La Biologia vegetale per i beni culturali*, vol. 2 (Firenze: Nardini Editore, 2005), 85-128.
- <sup>2</sup> Alma Kumbaric and Giulia Caneva, “Updated Floristic Biodiversity of Roman Iconography,” *Rendiconti Lincei* 25 (2) (2014): 181-193. In such work the species have been identified based on the most diagnostic morphological aspects (the general habit of the plants, typology, shape, size and color of fruits and flowers, such as morphology and layout of the leaves), such as considering the habitat and the likely frequency in the adjacent natural contexts. Historical data, i.e. *The Natural History* of Pliny the Elder and the most relevant palaeobotanical information about the natural potential vegetation of the Roman area.
- <sup>3</sup> Alma Kumbaric, Valentina Savo and Giulia Caneva, “Orchids in the Roman Iconography: Evidence for the First Representations,” *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 14 (4) (2013): 311-316. In general *Acanthus mollis*, *Vitis vinifera*, *Phoenix dactylifera*, *Punica granatum*, *Ficus carica*, *Laurus nobilis*, and *Hedera helix* proved to be the species represented most frequently, due to their strong association with mythological and religious symbolism.
- <sup>4</sup> Giulia Caneva, *Il codice botanico di Augusto. Roma, Ara pacis: parlare al popolo attraverso le immagini della natura = The Augustus Botanical code. Roma: speaking to the People through the images of nature* (Roma: Gangemi, 2010); Giulia Caneva, “Il giardino come espressione del divino nelle rappresentazioni dell’antica Roma,” in Kathleen Coleman and Pascale Ducrey, eds. *Le jardin dans l’antiquité. Tome LX* (Genève: Fondation Hardt, 2014), 301-361.
- <sup>5</sup> Pierre Grimal, *I giardini di Roma antica*, translated by Vincenzo Abrate (Milano: Garzanti, 1994); Zohreh Hosseini and Giulia Caneva, “Lost Gardens: From Knowledge to Revitalization and Cultural Valorization of Natural Elements,” *Sustainability* 14 (5) (2022): 2956.
- <sup>6</sup> Giulia Caneva, Valentina Savo and Alma Kumbaric, “Big Messages of Small Details: Nature in Roman Archaeology,” *Economic Botany* 68 (1) (2014): 109-111; Valentina Savo, Alma Kumbaric and Giulia Caneva, “Grapevine (*Vitis vinifera* L.) Symbolism in the Ancient Euro-Mediterranean Culture. Notes on Economic Plants,” *Economic Botany* 70 (2) (2016): 190-197; Giulia Caneva, Arianna Monaco, Paola Virgili and Flavia Bartoli, “Re-flowering flowers: the hope of an eternal blooming since Roman times,” *Flora Mediterranea* 29 (2019): 27-44.
- <sup>7</sup> “Dr. Möller: die Botanik in den Fresken der Villa Livia.” [Sitzungsprotokolle]. *Mitt. Deutsch. Arch. Inst. Röm. Abteilung V* (1890): 78-80 [66-83]; Mabel McAfee Gabriel, *Livia’s Garden Room at Prima Porta* (New York: New York University Press, 1955); Carmelo Calci and Gaetano Messineo, *La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta* (Roma: De Luca, 1984), 7-20; Salvatore Settis, “Le pareti ingannevoli. Immaginazione e spazio nella pittura romana di giardino,” *Fondamenti XI* (1988): 3-39; Barbara A. Kellum, “The Construction of Landscape in Augustan Rome: The Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas,” *The Art Bulletin* 7 (1994): 211-224; Kaja J. Tally-Schumacher and Nils P. Niemeier, “Through the Picture Plane: Movement and Transformation in the Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas at Prima Porta,” *Chronika* 6 (2016): 58-71; Nava Sevilla-Sadeh, “Escapism and the Sublime: The Meanings of Illusionism in Livia’s Garden Paintings,” *Studies in Visual Arts and Communication* 6 (2) (2019): 3-14. [https://journalonarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SVACij-Vol6\\_No2-2019\\_Sevilla-Sadeh\\_Escapism-and-the-Sublime.pdf](https://journalonarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SVACij-Vol6_No2-2019_Sevilla-Sadeh_Escapism-and-the-Sublime.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> See: Reinhard Förtsch, “Ein Aurea-Aetas-Schema,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 96 (1989): 333-345; Gabriel, *Livia’s Garden Room at Prima Porta*; Barbara A. Kellum, “The Construction of Landscape in Augustan Rome: The Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas,” *The Art Bulletin* 7 (1994): 211-224.
- <sup>9</sup> See: Kaja J. Tally-Schumacher and Nils P. Niemeier, “Through the Picture Plane: Movement and Transformation in the Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas at Prima Porta,” *Chronika* 6 (2016): 58-71.
- <sup>10</sup> As mimesis that promises prosperity and abundance; realism that promises everlasting happiness; optical illusion that promises that nothing exists beyond this goodness; and a symmetrical composition that promises a world of equilibrium and harmony, see: Sevilla-Sadeh, “Escapism and the Sublime: The Meanings of Illusionism in Livia’s Garden Paintings.”
- <sup>11</sup> Kathryn L. Gleason, “The Lost Dimension: Pruned Plants in Roman Gardens,” *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 28 (3) (2019): 311-325.
- <sup>12</sup> Frederick M. A. Jones, “Drama, Boundaries, Imagination, and Columns in the Garden Room at Prima Porta,” *Latomus* 72 (4) (2013): 997-1021.
- <sup>13</sup> See the list of species: Giulia Caneva and Lorenza Bohuny, “Botanical Analysis on the Livia’s Villa Painted Flora (Prima Porta, Roma),” *Science and Technology in Cultural Heritage* 4 (2003): 149-155. *Picea excelsa*, *Acanthus mollis*, *Arbutus unedo*, *Buxus sempervirens*, *Chrysanthemum coronarium*, *Anthemis* sp., *Cornus mas*, *Cupressus sempervirens*, *Cydonia oblonga*, *Hedera helix*, *Iris* sp., *Laurus nobilis*, *Myrtus communis*, *Papaver somniferum*, *Phoenix dactylifera*, *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, *Pinus pinea*, *Punica granatum*, *Quercus robur* gr., *Quercus ilex*, *Rosa centifolia*, *Viola* cfr. *reichenbachiana*, *Nerium oleander*, *Viburnum tinus*.
- <sup>14</sup> For birds see: Antero Tammisto, “Birds in Mosaics: a Study on the Representation of Birds in Hellenistic and Romano-Campanian Tessellated Mosaics to the Early Augustan Age,” *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* 18 (1997); Antero Tammisto, “The Representations of the Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) and the Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) in Romano-Campanian Wall Paintings and Mosaics,” *Arctos-Acta Philologica Fennica* 23 (1989): 223-247; Antero Tammisto, “Gli uccelli nelle pitture di giardino della Casa della Venere in Conchiglia,” *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani* 23 (2012): 29-38.
- <sup>15</sup> Giulia Caneva, “Ipotesi sul significato simbolico del giardino dipinto della villa di Livia (Prima Porta, Roma),” *Bullettino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma C* (1999): 64-79.

<sup>16</sup> Giulia Caneva, *Il pino domestico. La Nazione delle Piante* (Bari: Laterza, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Reinhard Förtsch, „Ein Aurea-Aetas-Schema,“ *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 96 (1989): 333–345.

<sup>18</sup> As later misinterpreted (see the orange garden of Giacomo Boni on the Aventine hill in Rome) the famous *mala aurea* in the Hesperides' Garden clearly could not possibly be orange trees, which came from the East much later: first, the bitter orange tree with the Arabs, and then, the sweet orange tree with the Portuguese colonies.

<sup>19</sup> Giulia Caneva, *Il codice botanico di Augusto. Roma, Ara pacis: parlare al popolo attraverso le immagini della natura = The Augustus Botanical code. Roma: speaking to the People through the images of nature* (Roma: Gangemi, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Barbara A. Kellum. “The Construction of Landscape in Augustan Rome: The Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas.” *The Art Bulletin* 7 (1994): 211–224.

<sup>21</sup> Mabel McAfee Gabriel. *Livia's Garden Room at Prima Porta*. New York: New York University Press, 1955.

<sup>22</sup> See: Antero Tammisto, “Birds in Mosaics: a Study on the Representation of Birds in Hellenistic and Romano-Campanian Tessellated Mosaics to the Early Augustan Age,” *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* 18 (1997) René Guenon, *Simboli della scienza sacra = Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), translated by Francesco Zambon (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 1975); Ashleigh Green, “Lesbia's Controversial Bird: Testing the Cases for and against Passer as Sparrow,” *Antichthon* 55 (2021): 6–20.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick M. A. Jones, “The Caged Bird in Roman Life and Poetry: Metaphor, Cognition, and Value,” *Syllecta Classica* 24 (1) (2013): 105–123.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Eleusian and Mythraic rituals.

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## BIODIVERSITY IN THE ANCIENT ROMAN WORLD, THE VILLA OF LIVIA

The ancient Romans certainly had a concept of biodiversity, though it may not have been recognized or called by the same name. To the Romans, nature and its cultivation were tied to life and prosperity from the earliest of times. Later Romans often looked back to the early Republic, for example, as a time when hard-working and honorable men – Rome's richest and best, in fact – lived an honest and simple life tilling their own fields and harvesting their own crops. This sweet situation placed nature at the core of man's existence, and man was fully invested in the process of cultivating it.

Authors such as Cato the Elder, Varro, Columella and Vergil, wrote treatises and verse about farming, flora, and the natural world. Cato the Elder's treatise on agriculture, *De Agri Cultura* (ca. 160 BC), is in fact our oldest surviving work of Latin prose. A relatively informal manual of farming and animal husbandry, it was written from Cato's own experience. This work was so impressively full of essential and objectively true information, however, that it would be cited afterwards by authors on the same topic even centuries later.

Both Varro (ca. 37 BC) and Columella (mid-first century AD) for example refer to Cato's work in their own treatises of the same name, *De Re Rustica*. Varro's work is an incredibly precise guide, discussing every aspect of farming from land choice to necessary equipment. But the concept of biodiversity is vividly alive within the text, for much of it is dedicated to flowers and gardens, trees, and hedges, as Varro discusses in detail when, where, how, and for what reason to grow every species:

Certain trees, such as the fir and the pine, flourish best and are sturdiest in the mountains on account of the cold climate, while the poplar and the willow thrive here where the climate is warmer; the arbute and the oak do better in the upland, the almond and the Mariscan fig in the lowlands.

(*De Re Rustica*, I.6.4)

Indeed, the Romans well understood the precious concept that though man may change, the land stays the same. Therefore, it was vital – indeed it became a form of art – to know one's land, what it would best produce, and to subsequently plant and care

for it in the most efficient way so that it would yield the best results. In fact, the Augustan poet Vergil so advises in his *Georgics* (I.51-53):

Be it our care to learn betimes the winds and  
moods of heaven, To learn the tillage of our  
sires and nature of the place,  
What fruits each district does produce and  
what it does refuse.

Land cultivation was thus a traditional and respected science whose detail was studied and passed down for centuries.

As Rome expanded, it appropriated customs of the elite from the nations that it conquered, and it also amassed an incredible new wealth. By the second century BC, notions of what the rich should be doing with their time and money changed to reflect Rome's new status as wealthy world capital. At this time, the elite began to build *horti*, or expansive villa estates, where they could escape city life and the work associated with it, and retire to a place where they could enjoy their own leisure time and activities. *Horti* were filled with the beauty of gardens, art and the natural world.

It is these villa estates that we hear so much about from writers such as Pliny the Younger (late first century AD), who, in his letters to friends, took great pride in describing his villas in astounding detail. This was particularly true of his gardens, as he methodically described the shape of their shrubs, the design of their walkways, and the species of flora that filled the areas. These passages were provocative tours for the imagination.

One favorite instance is Pliny's description of his Tuscan villa in a letter to Domitius Apollinaris (*Ep.* 5.6). Pliny begins by describing the area's healthful aspects, as evidenced by the (unusual) fact that area residents survive to very old age. It is here, for example, that we witness Pliny's quite accomplished knowledge of plant species, though painted in broad strokes to outline the natural characteristics of the area as well as the benefits of biodiversity for the health of man:

The air in winter is sharp and frosty, so that myrtles, olives, and trees of that kind which delight in constant warmth, will not flourish here: but the laurel thrives, and is remarkably beautiful, though now and then the cold kills it.... The summers are extraordinarily mild, and there is always a refreshing breeze, seldom high winds. This accounts for the number of old men we have about, you would see grandfathers and great-grandfathers of those now grown up to be young men, hear old stories and the dialect of our ancestors, and fancy yourself born in some former age were you to come here. The character of the country is exceedingly beautiful. Picture yourself in an immense amphitheater, such as only nature could create.

But it is the following passages in particular that demonstrate the care with which domestic gardens were laid out and planted, within these estates. Here, Pliny recounts walkways and areas framed by greenery, or alternatively green areas planted as focal points; all of it very carefully curated. He furthermore reveals the purposeful selection of particular species for specific areas of the residence, each chosen for its individual virtues and the particular benefits it provides:

[The hippodrome] is set round with plane-trees covered with ivy, so that, while their tops flourish with their own green, towards the roots their verdure is borrowed from the ivy that twines 'round the trunk and branches, spreads from tree to tree, and connects them together. Between each plane tree are planted box-trees, and behind these stands a grove of laurels which blend their shade with that of the planes. This straight boundary to the hippodrome alters its shape at the farther end, bending into a semicircle, which is planted round, shut in with cypresses, and casts a deeper and gloomier shade, while the many inner

circular walks, enjoying an open exposure, are filled with plenty of roses, and correct, by a very pleasant contrast, the coolness of the shade with the warmth of the sun. Having passed through these several winding alleys, you enter a straight walk, which breaks out into a variety of others, partitioned off by box-row hedges. In one place you have a little meadow, in another the box is cut in a thousand different forms, sometimes into letters, expressing the master's name, ... while here and there rise little obelisks with fruit-trees alternately intermixed, and then on a sudden, in the midst of this elegant regularity, you are surprised with an imitation of the negligent beauties of rural nature. In the center of this lies a spot adorned with a knot of dwarf plane trees. Beyond these stands an acacia, smooth and bending in places, then again various other shapes and names.

Letters like these, written by learned men who were not strictly farmers, show how much a deep knowledge of plants and the natural world was still valued by the elite, even when the farming villas of old had been replaced by new luxury villas. As we learn from Pliny, an understanding of the unique gifts provided by different plant species and types was vital for creating for oneself the best and most coveted living situation, what he describes as the most “profound and undisturbed retirement;” a place where “all is calm and composed.”

Villas such as Pliny's have been discovered and excavated in modern times, with astounding results that corroborate ancient testimony as to these types of carefully planned garden areas. In the cluster of luxury estates perched on the cliffs of ancient Stabiae, for example, every villa was found to have a large external garden area. The recently excavated Great Peristyle Garden at the Villa Arianna (ca. 118 x 30 meters) in fact revealed to excavators the most marvelous and carefully fashioned area, laid out with man's physical and visual enjoyment in mind, and thrilling with an

encyclopedic list of plants. Here, excavators found that the rectangular garden space was planted on each side with two long flower beds or bushes that ran the entire length of the garden, which framed three long central rows of small trees. In between the rows of trees, there were grassy paths for strolling; thus the carefully planned layout encouraged a specific movement through the area. Quite interestingly, the rows of trees did not just feature one species type, as we see perhaps in the porticoes in Rome, such as that located at the back of the Theater of Pompey complex. There, Pompey dotted the interior space with the newly imported plane or sycamore tree, chosen for its aspect of providing shade. Instead, at the Villa Arianna, numerous different species of tree were found, which together must have created a visual symphony.

It is precisely this type of luxury estate – precisely this type of garden – that we see represented in the garden wall painting from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta, now housed in the Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo. It is evident in this wall painting that biodiversity is at work, for on the major expanse of every wall in the room, indeed in the rich background of this wondrous depiction, the natural world is shown growing wild and unsuppressed, representing nature unbounded, as far as the eye can see.

But there is much more to the wall painting, which provides a precious glimpse into the Roman world of the Augustan era. For the painting is not generic. It is precise. Scholars have identified over 23 species of plant and 69 species of bird within the room<sup>1</sup>. Many of these were specifically and powerfully symbolic in carrying Augustan ideology, highlighting the idea that the garden was carefully cultivated in this painting. More than just a scene of nature, then, the painting is therefore a study of species, and a testament to Roman knowledge of the natural world – particularly because the species shown do not usually appear together in the same season.

Indeed, the entire garden painting is cultivated, if we may use that word – and not just

in the farming sense, but in the curatorial sense. For if we look closely, the painting contains areas that represent different levels of cultivation and care. The area closest to the viewer is a carefully manicured lawn located between two man-made structures (fences) and highlighting particular species of trees that are delineated as focal points by the winding form of the white wall behind. There are even domesticated fowl walking on the lawn, and a bird cage rests on a fence on the far wall, its occupant inside. This is the curated zone, a zone touched by man. The area beyond the white wall, instead, shows little of man's touch, as again, the effect is one of unbounded nature continuing far into the distance. The painting thus represented a voyage for the viewer from the domestic sphere from which he peered, to the structured, orderly and curated nature of the first area, to the wilderness beyond.

The garden painting from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta was not the only example of its type, as paintings within the contemporary Auditorium of Maecenas, for example, share many of its aspects, including a blue sky, birds flying or sitting on fountains – even the wickerwork wooden fence. Pliny the Younger also describes such a painted space in this same Tuscan villa (*Ep.* 5.6):

There is, besides, another room, which, being situated close to the nearest plane-tree, enjoys a constant shade and green. Its sides are encrusted with carved marble up to the ceiling, while above the marble a foliage is painted with birds among the branches, which has an effect altogether as agreeable as that of the carving, at the foot of which a little fountain, playing through several small pipes into a vase it encloses, produces a most pleasing murmur.

The same types of paintings have been found in villa structures further afield, in situations that make it clear that these cultivated garden images consistently appeared on the interior walls of domestic structures located within manicured

garden spaces, purposely placed within truly planted areas. Scholars have thus understood that these painted examples of curated nature, then, actually served to physically and seamlessly blend the interior domestic spaces with what lay immediately beyond the walls, namely sophisticated spaces that included manmade gardens with short walls, fountains, shrubbery, and fruit trees, that would in turn attract beautiful birds and even insects.

Garden paintings such as that from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta therefore linked the Roman elite to their true, curated gardens, which, in some way, linked them back to what lay directly beyond: wild nature, growing without bounds, and highlighting life and biodiversity and all of their intertwining beauty. The paintings and their curated gardens thus also linked the Romans back to their traditional and respectable early beginnings as farmers, nurturers and benefactors of nature.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the article by Giulia Caneva, in this volume.

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### Ancient Authors

Cato the Elder, *De Agri Cultura*

Columella, *De Re Rustica*

Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*

Varro, *De Re Rustica*



# June di SCHINO

University of Roma Tre

## LIVIA'S GARDEN: A PARADISE FOR THE TABLE

Throughout time, the search for Paradise has materialized in the arts, oscillating between the memory of a 'Lost Eden' and the vision of a 'Heavenly Jerusalem' to be conquered. The *giardino felice* appears like a *paradeisos*, a citadel of Nature beyond time, like a timeless image of a paradise on earth.

The elements of Livia's garden appear to celebrate nature by offering a glimpse of the seasons, while the senses transform the garden into the grand theatre of the table. Livia's extraordinary *triclinium*, instead of looking out onto the real gardens of the villa, was an indoor garden of the imagination painted on its walls in ca. 30-20 BCE. The enclosure - an underground barrel-vaulted hall 40 feet long by 20 feet wide - was most impressive for the spatial play of the room itself, with its illusionistic quality, and the incredible accuracy and variety of plant species, which provided a unique landscape.

The superb painting conveyed a sense of luxury and a certain kind of prosperity, which held the strong political message that Augustus seems to have wanted to convey. With insight, Giulia Caneva describes the language of plants in the *Augustus botanical code*.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the human-plant relationship is critical to understanding culture. We seem to have lost touch with the immediacy of our

very lives' dependence on plants, but the ancients were extremely aware of this, and often expressed the idea by drawing similarities between humans and plants. While Caneva emphasizes the subtle significance of the images of nature, both our vision and understanding are richly rewarded. While various exotic birds play in the marvellous vegetation which springs from the regeneration of Mother Earth, she expertly describes 24 diverse species, bringing date palms, strawberry trees, and pomegranates to life.<sup>2</sup> Symbolic of abundance, fertility, virtue and knowledge the pomegranate was the only tree planted by Aphrodite, hence it represented love.<sup>3</sup>

This magical Eden appeared as an idyllic expression of a moving, sublime art whose beauty evoked a sense of the sacred. The outside garden entered the interior of the villa, and permeated into the soul. The walls themselves exulted all embellished and adorned to perfection and "so marvellously painted with Art that they put Nature to shame."<sup>4</sup>

Mythology tends to mark a sacred beginning. As narrated by Pliny the Elder in his *Naturalis Historia*, XV (136-137), one day a flying eagle dropped a white hen from its claws into Livia's lap, holding a branch of laurel with berries in its beak. As advised by the oracles, Livia took care to raise

the bird's offspring and planted the twig, creating a sacred grove that would provide laurel wreaths to crown emperors and for the triumphs of the generations to come. In time the vicinity became known as *Ad Gallinas Albas*.

The Empress Livia was a powerful historical figure - the first woman to be depicted on coins and portrayed in sculpture.<sup>5</sup> Able, intelligent, and astute, she was an outstanding influencer and counsellor during fifty years of marriage to Augustus. Her personal life, however, was fraught with suspicions of shady conniving and aberrant conduct to attain her goals and to assure the imperial crown for her son. A legend recounts that Rome's first emperor, Augustus, was poisoned with figs from his garden, reputedly smeared by Livia. But such a reputation might just as easily be the result of a smear campaign instigated by her son Tiberius, resentful of her persistent authoritarian attitude and meddling in his affairs. For this reason, or perhaps because of her horticultural expertise, a variety of fig known as the *Liviana* was cultivated in Roman gardens.

Although women were not permitted to drink alcoholic beverages,<sup>6</sup> it is not difficult to picture Livia transgressing in the garden at sunset, sipping her favourite wine. Pliny the Elder describes the vines which produced *Vinum Pucinum*, today well known as Prosecco. This special, rare wine came from the sunny slopes northeast of Barcola close to a place called Prosecco near the historic Castellum Pucinum. According to Pliny, Livia loved this wine for its particular medicinal properties and at 87, nearing the end of her long life, she attributed her healthy old age to the regular consumption of the only known psychotropic beverage, which she recommended as a true "elixir for a long life."

The empress was renowned for her beauty and resembled the modern woman of today, inasmuch as she took an active interest in her health and appearance. Not by chance was Livia associated with Venus and Cybele. She studied and grew many fruits, vegetables, herbs, and is still remembered for her potent 'Livia's Inula,' to which she attributed her good health and handsome appearance. For those interested in following suit, *Enula campana*<sup>7</sup> is a wild

plant with yellow flowers similar to daisies. The well-cleaned, ripened root is chopped into small pieces, boiled in vinegar, and left to dry for three days in the shade, then placed in a ceramic container with *sapa* (wine must) to marinate. Finally *mulsum* (honeyed wine) and *defrutum* were added, to preserve the liquor.<sup>8</sup>

The garden was a superb sanctuary, an idealized haven which captured the imagination and all the senses including taste. A theatre of memory was revived. In time, replicas of gardens and *natura architecta* for grand dinners have been documented from the fourteenth century and were present especially in the Renaissance and Baroque period.<sup>9</sup> Among the several historical treatises was a spectacular creation called "The Garden" in *Libro della cucina* (late fourteenth or early fifteenth century), written by an anonymous Tuscan. The table was animated with 'cavorting beasties,' fountains spurting white wine and a lake of jumping fish, eels, giant crabs, and baby turtles. For grand feasts a tree made of pastry, was erected in a beautiful garden on the table.<sup>10</sup> All studded with apples, pears, birds, grapes, and multi-coloured figs according to the season.

Luscious violet figs were exalted in the splendid frescos of Pompei, while black figs strutted among gorgeous peacocks at the *Casa degli Amanti*. They were depicted with other dried fruits, such as dates, on the walls of the *Casa dei Cervi* at Herculaneum. The blonde figs of Chio, considered a rare delicacy, were praised by Martial. The fig, and not the proverbial apple, was considered to be the original fruit of primordial sin.

Figs were a familiar source of food for the ancient Romans, and centuries later became a staple food for the poverty-stricken in the *Meridione* (the Italian South). Cato the Elder, in his *De Agri Cultura*, (ca. 160 BCE) lists several strains of figs grown at the time: Mariscan, African, Herculanean, Saguntine, and the black Tellanian. Figs were also used to fatten geese for the production of an evident precursor of *foie gras*. *Perna* shows up the sophisticated taste of the aristocratic Romans with whole hams covered with

figs and cooked. When ready, the skin was sliced into diamond shapes, covered with honey and baked in a pastry case, similar to the contemporary Virginia ham.

Athenaeus of Naucratis, in *Deipnosophistae* converses on the art and philosophy of dining in fifteen volumes, providing us with an inestimable wealth of knowledge on biodiversity, including the numerous species lost today. Here Magnus<sup>11</sup> declares, "(...) for on the subject of figs I will yield to no man, even if I am hanged on a fig-branch, I am so extraordinarily fond of them; I will tell what occurs to me - the fig tree, my friends, was made to be the guide of civilization. This is proven by the fact that Athenians call the place where it was discovered the Sacred Fig-tree, while they call its fruit the Leader because it was the first cultivated fruit to be discovered."<sup>12</sup>

Androtion, in *The Farmers' Handbook*, makes an impressive list of current figs: Laconian, phibalian, autumn queen, swallow-fig, regal-fig, yellow-belly, wild-fig, venison-fig, white-fig, cake-fig, bitter-fig, wake-robin, dusty-white, dusty-black, fountain-fig, mill-fig, scallion-fig, dwarf figs, phormynians, and double-bearing Megarian, to begin with.

Aristophanes joyfully exclaims in *The Olynthian*, "That god-given heritage of our mother country, the darling of my heart, is a dried fig, brought to light from a Phrygian fig-tree." That figs were more healthy to man than all other tree fruits is sufficiently proven by Herodotus of Lycia in his treatise on figs, and he clearly states that new-born children grow sturdy if nourished with fig-juice.

Livia was well aware that grand dining was a ritual of immense social and political significance and she cultivated the important pleasures associated with the final presentation of sweetmeats for the banquet. It is of interest to note how these confections have continued to please through the centuries. At this time, sugar was almost unknown although Theophrastus and Pliny mention a honey not produced by bees, but from a cane. According to Martial, the *pistore* (pastry chef) used *caroenum*, *defructum e sapa* obtained from boiling grape must in three different concentrations as a sweetener.

Many confections, amply described by Athenaeus were prepared with *tractae*, sheets of pastry made with wheat flour, filled with fresh cheese, honey, and pepper, not unlike the Greek baklava. Cato leaves us a good recipe for *spira*, redolent of the contemporary cheesecake and he also cites the *mustaceus*, a simple spicy biscuit made in anthropomorphic shapes still produced in Calabria today.<sup>13</sup> A very similar biscuit of a feminine figure with three breasts recalling the cult of the Great Mother can be found in the Roman hill towns even today, although she sometimes wears an anachronistic garter. Doubtless a precursor of the well-known *crème brûlée* is evident the *tiropatinam*, a sort of baked custard, made with milk, honey then sprinkled with pepper. The Romans also enjoyed *aliter dulcia*, a semolina cake cut into diamond shapes, fried and covered with honey which continued all through the Renaissance. A recent novelty in Italy are *crêpes* of all sorts. In imperial Rome, *ova sfongia ex lacte*, thin fried, *crêpes* were already popular, all covered with honey and pepper as described by Apicius in *De re coquinaria*.<sup>14</sup>

Marcus Gavius Apicius was a gourmet - gourmand who indulged in spending extravagant amounts of money on food, and when he became unable to continue squandering lavish sums on luxury fare, he committed suicide. The first cookery book has been attributed to him, but in point of fact there were three Romans with this very name and there is no proof whatever of his authorship. Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti,<sup>15</sup> a major authority on Ancient Roman dining, categorically excludes this possibility. Anecdotes of all kinds abound on Apicius from Athenaeus to Seneca, from Plinius the Elder to Martial.<sup>16</sup>

The art of staging the supernatural in interior gardens in the villas in Pompei was not an infrequent phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> Pompeian indoor gardens were multimedia environmental experiences often populated with insinuating satyrs, (sometimes dancing), deities, *situla* (silver vessels) and many male sex symbols. The renowned archaeologist Wilhelmina F. Jashemski discovered an orchard where masonry *triclinia*, shaded by wooden pergolas and the spreading branches of large trees, offered Pompeians an



opportunity to immerse themselves completely in a rich environment, essentially to live an experience through all the senses.<sup>18</sup> She pioneered the interdisciplinary study of ancient Roman gardens, utilizing ancient literary, documentary, archaeological, and archaeobotanical evidences.

A spell seemed to be cast on nature, creating an enchanted realm. Interior gardens allowed the Pompeian homeowner to enjoy his wealth and afforded a fleeting experience of the elite life of Roman citizens. The abundant, sometimes fantastic scenarios in Pompeian houses boast the fruits of conquest in ingenious installations and breathtaking illusions. These document contemporary style, while also creating visionary worlds in which wild animals rambled and heroes and gods sojourned.

Livia's garden of Paradise represents the quintessence of the elements vital in the mythical *Aetus Aurea*, the Golden Age governed by divine providence. This wondrous splendor recalls the timeless utopian *banquet of the gods*. Here Augustus and Livia acquire an arcane aura to become archetypes of the Great Mother and Father of the Gods, an emblem of supreme power. Miraculously this inimitable idealized paradise of classical antiquity has survived until today.<sup>19</sup> Enraptured with its unique magic, all will be transported into a new dimension of Ancient Rome. This superb botanical banquet represents a *summa* for the senses and the spirit.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Giulia Caneva, *Il codice botanico di Augusto. Roma, Ara pacis: parlare al popolo attraverso le immagini della natura = Speaking to the People Through the Images of Nature* (Rome: Gangemi, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Giulia Caneva, "Ipotesi sul significato simbolico del giardino dipinto della villa di Livia (Prima Porta, Rome)," *Bullettino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma C* (1999): 63-80; Giulia Caneva and Lorenza Bohuny, "Botanical Analysis on the Livia's Villa Painted Flora (Prima Porta, Rome)," *Science and Technology in Cultural Heritage* 4 (2003): 149-155.

<sup>3</sup> August Pauly and Georg Wissowa (Pauly-Wissowa) et al, eds. *Realenzyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft. Neue Bearbeitung*. (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1894-1980), Vol. XIV, pp.926-42.

<sup>4</sup> June di Schino, *Tre Banchetti in Onore di Cristina di Svezia 1668* (Rome: Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie, 2000). An interpretation of the Hebrew *pardes* (the orchard, generally citrus fruits) introduced the biblical concept of the "veiled to the unveiled."

<sup>5</sup> See: Livia's well-preserved bust in the Museo Oliveriano, Pesaro.

<sup>6</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (14, 89-90) It was not permitted to women at Rome to drink wine. Among the examples is the case of the wife of Egnatius Maetennius who was clubbed to death by her husband for drinking wine from the jar. He was acquitted of her manslaughter by Romulus. Fabius Pictor wrote in his *Annals* of a lady who broke the seal on the cupboard in which were the keys of the wine-cellar, and was compelled by her relatives to starve herself to death. Cato wrote that this was the reason why close relatives (to the fifth degree) gave women a kiss to perceive if they smelt of wine.

<sup>7</sup> *Inula campana*.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Stobart, *Il libro delle erbe, delle spezie e degli aromi* (Milano: Mondadori, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> Mirella Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Anonimo Toscano, *Libro della cucina*, Biblioteca dell'Università di Bologna, Ms 158, cc. 86r-91v.

<sup>11</sup> One of the 24 characters (or *sophists at dinner*) who take part in the banquet described by Athenaeus of Naucratis in the *Deipnosophistae*.

<sup>12</sup> Quote after: "The *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus published in Vol. I of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1927," Excerpts from Book III (Part 1 of 5), entry "Figs," LacusCurtius, [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Athenaeus/3A\\*.html](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Athenaeus/3A*.html). The LacusCurtius website project is based on The Loeb Classical Library. Quote from a publicly available source. However, the author is working on a text in Latin.

<sup>13</sup> Soriano Calabro is famous for its traditional specialized production of *mustazzoli*.

<sup>14</sup> *Pompeii and the Roman villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*. Edited by Carol Mattusch et al. Washington: National Gallery of Art and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2008. Exhib.cat. *Pompeii and the Roman villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*. Curator Carol Mattusch. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., October 19, 2008–March 22, 2009. Other Venues: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 19, 2008–October 4, 2009; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, February 24–May 18, 2008; February 24–May 18, 2008, November 8, 2008–January 25, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti, *L'Arte del convito nella Roma antica* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Annette Giesecke, "Outside In and Inside Out: Paradise in the Ancient Roman House," in *Earth Perfect: Nature Utopia and the Garden*, eds. Annette Giesecke and Naomi Jacobs (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012), 118-135.

<sup>17</sup> Bettina Bergmann, "The Gardens and Garden Paintings of Villa A," in Elaine K. Gazda and John R. Clarke, *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii. Kelsey Museum publication, 14* (Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 96-110; Bettina Bergmann, "Staging the Supernatural: Interior Gardens of Pompeian Houses," in Carol Mattusch et al., *Pompeii and the Roman villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples* (Washington: National Gallery of Art and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 53-70. Exhib. cat.

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelmina F Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Annette Giesecke, "The Afterlife of Paradise: Near Eastern Origins of the Ancient Roman Garden," *Dumbarton Oaks: Art – Nature – Scholarship*, accessed May 10, 2022, <https://www.doaks.org/research/garden-landscape/fellows/giesecke-2019-2020>; "From Paradise to Pompeii: Q&A with Annette Giesecke," <https://www.doaks.org/newsletter/from-paradise-to-pompeii>; Annette Giesecke, "Autopsy and Empire: Temporal Collapse in the Designed Landscapes of Ancient Rome," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 36 (4) (2016): 225-244.

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## OUTSIDE PRIMA PORTA, AND WITHIN - INSTANCES OF BIODIVERSITY

The Mediterranean basin is recognized as a biodiversity 'hotspot.' Hotspot, implies high numbers of endemic species and their unique, associated behaviors. The forces underlying this high biodiversity are climatic, geographic and geological (including volcanism) in general, with more specific ecological to physical factors operating on the local scale. Biodiversity is a contraction of 'biological diversity:' a concept that became accepted in the mid-1980s.<sup>1</sup> Thus, its study is recent - from the biodiversity standpoint, there is much to be described and understood.

Biodiversity is not static; two of the important dynamic forces of the last one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand years of earth history - are climate and human action. This longish time period encompasses major global changes in earth's climate: the relatively warm Interglacials from about one hundred and thirty thousand to seventy-four thousand ago, and from ten thousand to present; and the recent cold Glacial maximum at twenty one thousand years ago. The Italian peninsula was not covered by continental glaciers during this maximum (the closest ice boundary was in northern France) although alpine glaciers were significantly larger. The peninsula still experienced profoundly shifting climatic regimes over centuries

to millennia. Is biodiversity, found in ecological niches including those of the Italian peninsula today, a result of such major climate changes?

While present-day species, their associations, and their genomes may be mapped today, recreating past species types and distributions must be based upon fossils studies *in proprio*, including archeology-based research. At the end of the 1990s, the technology to analyze genomes, of fossils, commences. Most of this newer genomic analysis focuses on human remains, followed by important domesticates (dogs, bovines, cereal grasses, for example). With radionuclides used to date the fossils (<sup>14</sup>C, radiocarbon is very popular), and genomic analysis to provide species identification, a very partial but exciting picture of biodiversity, going back in time, may be recreated. How did humans, increasing in number and settlements over today's Western Europe, during the last 10.000 years, influence the region's biodiversity?

Research, to understand species types and their distributions back into time, is driven by these two major questions. The questions are posed for a Western European region, Prima Porta, but the endeavor is global.

Is a species occurrence natural? In other words, is human influence absent or negligible?

The *potential natural* vegetation around Rome today is mixed evergreen and deciduous oak species, very generally.<sup>2</sup> The managed agricultural lands are now at 57 percent, and 25 percent remains forest (much managed).<sup>3</sup> These natural tree species replaced the steppe and *Picea* vegetation, representative of glacial climate. Further from Rome, some mesophilous and thermophilous trees did grow during the glacial period.<sup>4</sup> The vegetation changes driven by climate forcings, were most rapid from about fourteen thousand to nine thousand years ago during the transition into the warmer, moister Holocene epoch (demarcated ten thousand years ago). Likely the meso- and thermophilous tree types expanded their ranges from glacial refugia (imagine topographic niches with relative warm, moist microclimates) mysteriously located throughout the whole Mediterranean basin. Plant migration (their seeds) came even from outside the peninsula. The physical mode of this migration - wind, birds, other mammals, water - can be imagined. The evidence of natural vegetation, prior to historical records, derives primarily from plant pollen and macroremains - seeds, leaves, and charcoal, in sediments. Identification of these fossils is not as precise as actual visual identification - the taxa are identified to genus (not species) level usually.

Studies of particular interest to biodiversity affected by human action, are based on genomes from actual plants and their macroremains. Domesticated olive and grape were not part of the natural vegetation of this region in the past; their expansion into the Italian peninsula indicates cultural support from modern humans, evidence that humans began altering the region's biodiversity. These plants do not leave abundant traces. Relatively more fossils have been found of wheat's early domesticates (*Triticum* and *Aegilops* species). All these taxa are the focus of many recent paleoecological studies, for the Southern Europe Mediterranean region, due to their importance as food crops.

The term, expansion, is deliberately vague: olive and grape can be wild, or domesticated; the

wild and domesticated types may be assigned the same species name, or not; the domesticate can derive from selective breeding of a local wild taxa or an introduced taxon, or some combination thereof. In summary, the breeding of new plant species was deliberate and/or casual, and participants (both plants and humans) were both wild/local and invasive/foreign. Assigning an origin, and known 'breeder's pedigree,' to these important plants, is difficult. Here is one summary of the likely origins of domesticated olive, *Olea europaea* ssp. *europaea*, based on DNA analyses of both wild and domesticated olive trees:

Regional hotspots of plastid diversity, species distribution modelling and macrofossils support the existence of three long-term refugia; namely the Near East (including Cyprus), the Aegean area and the Strait of Gibraltar. These ancestral wild gene pools have provided the essential foundations for cultivated olive breeding. [Our analysis] indicates the cradle of first domestication in the northern Levant followed by dispersals across the Mediterranean basin in parallel with the expansion of civilizations and human exchanges in this part of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Phylogeographical analyses exists also for *Laurus nobilis*,<sup>6</sup> and then there are numerous volumes and papers devoted to the wheat and barley cereal grasses.

Such botanical-based research, addressing plant species distributions during Roman times and earlier, rarely addresses the plants in the frescos of Livia's villa at Prima Porta, Rome.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to put a biodiversity framework onto the 24 species shown - is to imagine a mosaic, with very few pieces available. In order to puzzle-out the dynamic forces (e.g., climate, human interference including domestication and migrations) which may have influenced the plant assemblages (or associations) on the frescos, each species could be assigned to a category: potential natural



vegetation of Rome ca 40-30 BCE; taxa not local but still endemic to the peninsula; taxa relevant to domesticated or cultivated crops, and; taxa derived from ancestors with no known local examples (call them allochthonous or foreign). Applying these categories raises one's curiosity. Three fruit trees are represented, all allochthonous in origin: *Cydonia oblonga* (quince); *Punica granatum* (pomegranate), and *Phoenix dactylifera* (date palm). *Arbutus unedo* (*corbezzolo*) and *Myrtus communis* (*mirto*) produce edible fruits, although not in high volumes, and they are autochthonous to the peninsula. Can we hypothesize any meaning for these associations - that is the research puzzle!

Myers (p. 40) writes, "Livia's commission in this new Second Style of painting (ca 40-30 BCE) visually celebrates garden and plant knowledge and seems to confirm her participation in contemporary elite (male) competition for fame in plant breeding and collecting." Were the painted fruit trees the subjects of plant breeding efforts? This is fun speculation.

Earth's biodiversity, now, is experiencing erosion of genomic diversity and species extinction; and humans are greatly responsible for these losses. However, a few taxa that are adaptable to domestication, have actually shown the opposite trend.<sup>8</sup> Crop domestication and breeding of new taxa (cultivars, landraces, varieties, etc.), has actually created new species.<sup>9</sup> *Vitis vinifera* L. subsp. *sativa* (domesticated grapevine) is related to, but still a different sub-species from *Vitis vinifera* subsp. *sylvestris* (syn. *Vitis sylvestris* C.C. Gmel, wild grapevine).<sup>10</sup> Common bread wheat, *Triticum aestivum*, grown over much of western Europe today (and other continents), is a different species from its mix of ancestors located in the Karacadağ region (Turkey), and the upper Jordan valley.<sup>11</sup> The domestication process is linked to the selection of traits, as humans decide whose seed to save and carry, and whose to ignore - it is a global phenomenon of the last ten thousand plus years.

Modern commodity-based agriculture, whose metrics are production and yield for the global markets, favors monocultures with short

life spans. The result, widely acknowledged, is reduction in biodiversity. This biodiversity loss is evident in wildlife, pollinators, insect pests, their natural enemies, soil invertebrates, and microorganisms.<sup>12</sup> However, some of the first studies addressing biodiversity concepts, also did recognize the importance of so-called traditional agroecosystems, in supporting high biodiversity. Traditional agroecosystems, pre-industrial age forms, are fast disappearing globally. Innovative research methods are applied to identify the remaining systems, and even to parse out traces of past systems. For Italy and the Lazio region, examples are in Porfiri et al. (2008)<sup>13</sup> and Frattaroli et al. (2014).<sup>14</sup> Very far away, on the Pacific Ocean coast of North America, comes one of the most exciting discoveries about past-high biodiversity agroecosystems: the deliberate cultivation of 'forest gardens' by indigenous gardeners. These managed agroecosystems were so strange to our standard models of domestication and cultivation, that their traces were overlooked. Actual plant surveys reveal that "isolated patches of fruit trees and berry bushes in the region's hemlock and cedar forests were *deliberately* planted by Indigenous peoples in and around their settlements more than 150 years ago" of now British Columbia.<sup>15</sup> These studies are for the past few centuries at best, so we can speculate for earlier times.

The frescos of Prima Porta also show fruit trees (quince, pomegranate) with berry bushes (*corbezzolo* and *mirto*) amidst conifers, other local trees, and flowers. With these very few puzzle pieces, one can optimistically imagine Livia and her gardeners, experimenting with associations of exotics along with local wild plants, to create forest gardens. Doing her part, to support biodiversity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See: Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Carlo Blasi et al., *The Ecoregions of Italy. A thematic contribution to the National Biodiversity Strategy* (Rome: Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea Protection - CIRBFEP - University of Salerno, 2010), 11-12, Retrieved from [www.mite.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio/biblioteca/protezione\\_natura/ecoregioni\\_italia\\_eng.pdf](http://www.mite.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio/biblioteca/protezione_natura/ecoregioni_italia_eng.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, "Factsheet on 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme for Lazio" ([Ec.europa.eu](http://ec.europa.eu), 11/2021), 2, Accessed August 7, 2021 from [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key\\_policies/documents/rdp-factsheet-italy-lazio\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/rdp-factsheet-italy-lazio_en.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Maria Follieri et al., "Palynostratigraphy of the Last Glacial Period in the Volcanic Region of Central Italy," *Quaternary International* 47-48 (March 1998), 3-20, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1040-6182\(97\)00065-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1040-6182(97)00065-7).

<sup>5</sup> Guillaume Besnard et al., "The complex history of the olive tree: from Late Quaternary diversification of Mediterranean lineages to primary domestication in the northern Levant," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 7 April 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2012.2833>.

<sup>6</sup> Francisco Rodríguez-Sánchez, et al., "Late Neogene history of the laurel tree (*Laurus* L., Lauraceae) based on phylogeographical analyses of Mediterranean and Macaronesian populations," *Journal of Biogeography* 36, no. 7 (July 2009): 1270-1281, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2699.2009.02091.x>.

<sup>7</sup> Giulia Caneva and Lorenza Bohuny, "Botanical Analysis on the Livia's Villa Painted Flora (Prima Porta, Rome)," *Science and Technology in Cultural Heritage* 4, no. 2 (2003): 149-155.

<sup>8</sup> Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> The definition of Species, varies, and should be evaluated as one writes of 'new species.' But for this paper, the common definition is used - sexual reproduction results in fertile offspring. Animal domestication has also created new species.

<sup>10</sup> Claudio D'Onofrio, "Introgression Among Cultivated and Wild Grapevine in Tuscany," *Frontiers in Plant Science* 11, no. 2 (February 2020): Article 202, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpls.2020.00202>.

<sup>11</sup> Hatice Bilgic et al., "Ancient DNA from 8400 Year-Old Çatalhöyük Wheat: Implications for the Origin of Neolithic Agriculture," *PLoS ONE* 11, no. 3 (2016): e0151974, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0151974>.

<sup>12</sup> Biodiversity loss: 1. Power and Flecker give a late twentieth century perspective, written for general science readers; 2. while Johnson et al., (2017) publish a complete research-level review; 3. then the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the major intergovernmental instrument, while; 4. the 2021 UK report "The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review" marked the overall acceptance of Biodiversity's critical importance to human welfare. Full reference citations are in the Bibliography.

<sup>13</sup> Oriana Porfiri, Maria Teresa Costanza and Valeria Negri, "10. Landrace Inventories in Italy and the Lazio Region Case Study," in *European landraces: on farm conservation, management and use*, edited by Veteläinen, Merja, Valeria Negri and Nigel Maxted, *Biodiversity Technical Bulletin* no. 15 (Rome: Biodiversity International, 2009), 117-123.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Rita Frattaroli et al., "The disappearance of traditional agricultural landscapes in the Mediterranean basin. The case of almond orchards in Central Italy," *Plant Sociology* 51, no. 2 (December 2014): 3-15, <https://doi.org/10.7338/pls2014512/01>.

<sup>15</sup> C. G. Armstrong et al., "Historical indigenous land-use explains plant functional trait diversity," *Ecology and Society* 26, no. 2 (2021):6, <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12322-260206> is the research article. Andrew Curry writes a summary, "Pacific Northwest's 'forest gardens' were deliberately planted by Indigenous people," *Science*, published online April 22, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abj1396>.

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## BOTANICAL IMPERIALISM AND METAMORPHIC BIODIVERSITY: LIVIA AND OVID

Since the garden and gardening practices define humanity's relation to the natural environment, it is of utmost importance to retrace and re-examine the garden's symbolism, history, and life-sustaining potency

Annette Giesecke and Naomi Jacobs <sup>1</sup>

At the Empress Livia's suburban Roman estate at Prima Porta, there was a venerated laurel tree. According to the ancient sources, in 39/38 BCE, a white hen, which had in its beak a laurel branch, was dropped by an eagle into Livia's lap when she was at her suburban property. From this sprig was planted a laurel grove from which the Julio-Claudians took their victory crowns<sup>2</sup> and the property took its name from the white chickens: *Ad Gallinas Albas*. The story instantly and consciously legitimated both Augustus' marriage to Livia and his extraordinary rise to power through the creation of a 'mythological landscape' in the real Italian countryside.<sup>3</sup> Augustus liked to appropriate trees. Two laurel trees were planted by his doors on the Palatine (depicted frequently on coins) and he claimed a palm tree sprang up in the pavement in front of his house and he had it transplanted to Apollo's Temple next-door.<sup>4</sup> The vegetal imagery on public monuments such as the Altar of Peace proclaimed a new 'Golden Age' of prosperity and fecundity under Augustus' protection. A common iconographic representation of Livia was as the

grain goddess Ceres. In Rome, Livia dedicated the *Porticus Liviae*, a public portico and garden; the *Villa ad Gallinas Albas*, however, was evidently private.<sup>5</sup>

Livia had probably inherited the estate from her father. Recent excavations<sup>6</sup> have revealed that there were once four gardens at the villa, one of which occupied a huge terrace with a double-aisled portico (ca 68 m long and 74 m wide) that would have contained some 100-150 columns.<sup>7</sup> Livia's most famous garden, however, is the painted one now recreated at the Palazzo Massimo. This painted room was originally in a subterranean chamber some four meters below ground, accessible by a steep staircase. Recent analysis of the paintings reveals 24 species of plants, flowers and fruits all blooming simultaneously, some out of season, all young plants.<sup>8</sup> The laurel appears throughout the background, but is not framed in the niches. Scholars hotly debate the symbolism in the choice of plant species, and see connections with the shared vegetal imagery of the Altar of Peace.<sup>9</sup> The exceptional plant variegation, unparalleled



in its detail, of Livia's commission in this new Second Style of painting (ca 40-30 BCE), visually celebrates garden and plant knowledge and seems to confirm her participation in contemporary elite (male) competition for fame in plant breeding and collecting.<sup>10</sup> The late first century BCE saw a flowering of interest in horticulture and botany. Exotic trees (such as ebony and balsam) were displayed as booty or prisoners in triumphal processions, and agricultural and botanical treatises seized during Carthaginian and Mithridatic wars were brought to Rome and translated. Some two hundred types of plants have been identified in Roman iconography (list 202 taxa, 78 families, 159 genera and 168 species<sup>11</sup>). The trees and plants depicted in the Garden Room are both domestic and foreign, included are the northern pine and the palm, perhaps expressions of botanical imperialism. Perhaps similar plantings were to be found outside at the villa in the real gardens. The search for a religious, mythological, political, or philosophical key to the interpretation of the paintings will no doubt continue, but perhaps in the original private space the point was merely to imbibe the paradoxical pleasure of a cool underground garden when it was too hot to be outside.

The poet Ovid, born in 43 BCE, was witness to the rise of Augustus and his appropriation of Roman myth, architecture and iconography, religion, and even time, in the service of the dissemination of his new values and the legitimization of his power. Through his poetry Ovid probed and challenged these authoritative and authoritarian maneuvers in subtle and often provocative ways. When Augustus was claiming Venus as his ancestress, putting a Cupid at the foot of the Prima Porta statue, Ovid in his poetry insistently depicted Venus and Cupid as promoters of erotic affairs, heterosexual, homosexual, incestuous, adulterous. At the very time Augustus was passing Rome's first moral legislation against adultery, Ovid's *Art of Love* professed to teach adultery. He reminds the reader that the prominent pairing of Venus and Mars in Augustus' Mars Ultor Temple in Rome could evoke their famous

adulterous affair. Ovid frees the iconography and narratives of poetry, art, and nature from the interpretive grip of imperial power.

In the *Metamorphoses*, the origin of the Augustan laurel is told in the story of the transformation of Daphne (the Greek name for laurel). Daphne begged to be transformed because Apollo was attempting to rape her; even as a tree she shuddered at his touch. Apollo's arboreal appropriation mirrors Augustus'. Biodiversity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* is created from human suffering; trees and flowers represent the sufferings of humans, male and female, caused by the powerful gods. In the *Fasti*, Ovid tells the origin story of the Roman flower-goddess Flora and the first flower garden, given to her after she was raped by the wind-god Zephyr. Her garden is filled with metamorphosed boys, all of whom became flowers after tragedy ("through me beauty springs from their wounds"<sup>12</sup>). In a remarkable act of originality, Ovid says that Mars, god of war and father of Romulus, sprang from a unique flower in Flora's garden. Juno had wanted to conceive without a male and Flora touched her with a magic flower. Are we to recall that Livia was never able to conceive a child with Augustus? In Ovid's version, Rome thus originates in a flower produced by Flora, the goddess at whose festival, the Floralia, prostitutes famously danced naked. Ovid never finished his calendar poem (*Fasti*) - it ends before he gets to the moths named after Caesar and Augustus. He was banished by Augustus in 8 CE because of a poem and an 'error,' as he tells us. From the cold shores of the Black Sea at the edge of the Empire (modern Romania) where he died, Ovid never stopped asking Augustus, Livia, and later Tiberius, for a pardon and return. He never received one. In a late poetic letter *Ex Ponto*,<sup>13</sup> he recalls his own Italian garden on the same Via Flaminia as Livia's gardens and dreams about weeding and watering his plants.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Annette Giesecke (editor) and Naomi Jacobs (editor), *Earth Perfect?: Nature, Utopia and the Garden* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012), 14.
- <sup>2</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 15.136–137; Suetonius, *Galba* 1.1; Dio Cassius 48.52.3–4
- <sup>3</sup> Allan Klynne, “The Laurel Grove of the Caesars: Looking in and Looking Out,” in Barbro Santillo Frizell and Allan Klynne, eds. *Roman Villas Around the Urbs: Interaction with Landscape and Environment. Proceedings of a Conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome, September 17–18, 2004. Projects and Seminars 2* (Rome: Swedish Institute in Rome, 2005), 167–175.
- <sup>4</sup> Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 92.1–2.
- <sup>5</sup> This is disputed by Allan Klynne, “The Laurel Grove of the Caesars: Looking in and Looking Out,” who suggests the Villa would have invited visitors. The famous statue of Augustus Prima Porta, which was discovered at the villa in 1863, might support this.
- <sup>6</sup> Allan Klynne and Peter Liljenstolpe, “Investigating the Gardens of the Villa of Livia,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 13 (2000): 220–233; Peter Liljenstolpe and Allan Klynne, “The Imperial Gardens of the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta: A Preliminary Report on the 1997 Campaign,” *Opuscula Romana* 22–23 (1997–1998): 127–148.
- <sup>7</sup> Klynne, “The Laurel Grove of the Caesars: Looking in and Looking Out.”
- <sup>8</sup> Caneva, Giulia and Lorenza Bohuny. “Botanical Analysis on the Livia’s Villa Painted Flora (Prima Porta, Rome).” *Science and Technology in Cultural Heritage* 4 (2003): 149–155.
- <sup>9</sup> Barbara A. Kellum, “The Construction of Landscape in Augustan Rome: The Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas,” *The Art Bulletin* 76 (2) (June 1994): 211–224; Reinhard Förtsch, “Ein Aurea-Aetas-Schema.” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 96 (1989): 333–345; Bernard Andreae, *Am Birnbaum: Gärten und Parks im antiken Rom, in den Vesuvstädten und in Ostia* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1996).
- <sup>10</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 15.70, figs named for Livia and Pompey the Great; Ann Kuttner, “Looking Outside Inside: Ancient Roman Garden Rooms,” *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 19 (1) (1999): 7–35. Published online: May 31, 2012.
- <sup>11</sup> Alma Kumbaric and Giulia Caneva, “Updated Outline of Floristic Richness in Roman Iconography,” *Rendiconti Lincei* 25 (2) (2014): 181–193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12210-013-0279-4>.
- <sup>12</sup> Ovid, *Fasti* 5.228.
- <sup>13</sup> Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 1.8.

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## BIODIVERSITY IN BYZANTIUM: BETWEEN PATRONS, MANUSCRIPTS, AND BOTANICAL TRAVELS

### I. Preliminary remarks on Byzantine biodiversity and its study

Not much has been written so far about biodiversity in Byzantium *per se*. There is, however, a very interesting essay on botany recently written by Alain Touwaide and included in the *Companion to Byzantine Science*.<sup>1</sup> The essay addresses the concept of biodiversity related to the variety of plants recorded in Byzantine (scientific) written sources and opens by mentioning the illustrated manuscripts of Dioscorides' *De materia medica* (especially the well-known Viennese version)<sup>2</sup> as

an initial reference point for research. The main sources for the study of botanical biodiversity in Byzantium are, in addition to Dioscorides, obviously also the *Hippocratic Corpus*, Aristotle and Theophrastus, Galen and Greek translations of Arabic treatises.

Since the studies carried out so far have been purely based on Dioscorides and on a concept of botanical biodiversity based on a division of plants according to geographical area and phyto-physiological properties, Touwaide proposes to extend the manuscript research from the catalogue of medical codices compiled by Diels at the beginning of the twentieth century (*Die*

*Handschriften der antiken Ärzte*) to the entire deposit of Byzantine manuscripts, which are now made more traceable and accessible by the paleographic databases and digital resources like the online TLG.<sup>3</sup> This would make it possible to examine both hitherto unknown sources and sources not yet considered from a botanical point of view. According to Touwaide, and rightly so, recent developments in archaeobotany and palaeoclimatology are decisive. Adam Izdebski, an expert in environmental history at the Max Planck Institute and co-editor together with Johannes Preiser-Kapeller (Vienna) of *the Companion to the Environmental History of Byzantium*, has for years been studying pollen deposited on lake bottoms in former Byzantine territories as evidence of changes in biodiversity, climate change, and from them even migrations and changes in the socio-economic structure of those regions.<sup>4</sup> Touwaide also stresses the need not to underestimate the possible contribution that texts such as monastic *typika* and legal documents can make to the issue of botanical biodiversity.<sup>5</sup> The scholar, however, argues that it does not appear that “Byzantine scholars developed a scientific concept of Mediterranean botanical unity or regional diversity.”<sup>6</sup> It is clear, nonetheless, that the Mediterranean is a rich biodiversity hotspot and Touwaide’s essay provides us with some bibliography on this, though not yet specifically on the Byzantine millennium.<sup>7</sup>

Touwaide also notes the coincidence of the recurrent provenance of several medical specialists from Tarsus in Cilicia, not far from Anazarbo, the birthplace of Dioscorides,<sup>8</sup> arguing that it cannot be a coincidence that Cilicia is also the region of the Mediterranean basin with the highest presence of botanical biodiversity. Even though in ancient and Byzantine authors, there is no clear trace of any explicit awareness of this richness, it seems that climate change (and this is where Izdebski’s work could come in) and deforestation in the Byzantine era probably affected biodiversity.<sup>9</sup> Another rather interesting aspect is that the presence in the Byzantine area of exotic botanical varieties from Persian and Arab territories as early as the

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries could serve as a further key to understanding how Byzantium’s role as a cultural melting pot and bridge between East and West also contributed to the growth and development of its botanical biodiversity. The type of knowledge produced by the Byzantines’ botanical observations is perhaps also worth noting. Their approach shows three different tendencies: speculative (focusing on the genesis and ontology of plants), analytical (taxonomy and classification), and utilitarian (plants in relation to agriculture, food, medicine, body hygiene, etc.).<sup>10</sup> While the first two trends are more scientific and theoretical, the third rather relates to the practice of everyday life.

Since the topic of biodiversity constitutes a *Knotenpunkt* of philology, codicology, literature, history of science, environmental studies, palaeoclimatology and archaeobotany, the interdisciplinary aspect is fundamental. It is exactly this aspect that encourages the versatility and multitasking attitude which is typical of Byzantine civilization scholars, fascinated by a subject that is in some ways very topical and, in some cases, closely dependent on modern scientific research technologies.

If we then consider biodiversity as it appears in literary texts, observing both the cognitive perception of the different (botanical) species and their literary rendering opens up truly stimulating analytical horizons. On the one hand, literary biodiversity can result into fascinating encyclopaedic works such as the eleventh book of the *Geoponika*. Here, the mythological origin of different flowers and trees harmoniously entangles with technical advice about the best season for their planting and harvest, deriving from deep-rooted rural practices.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the widespread presence of floral and arboreal elements in fictional and poetic texts reveals a complex and fascinating metaphorical apparatus, consisting in the shimmering entanglement of the natural world and human perception. In the Byzantine hymnographical production, for example, plants or fruits often represent the female appearance of Mary, Mother of God, and convey the imagery of the garden, which in turn



identifies with the terrestrial paradise.<sup>12</sup> As we can see, botany, religion, and human virtues, such as purity and innocence, blend here into a multifaceted conceptual structure. In this case, the application of literary theories is accompanied by philosophical and theological analysis of the text, but also by the use of cognitive science, e.g. with Lakoff and Johnson's fundamental theory of conceptual metaphor.<sup>13</sup> An 'ecocritical' approach could also be adopted in the literary analysis of biodiversity, i.e. focusing on the active role of different plant species in the textual context.<sup>14</sup> This is possible on the assumption that literary agency can be ascribed to all elements, both human and non-human, present in a narrative or ecphrases, and that the faculty of action (in a text) is not exclusive to humankind, as argued by the more traditional approach.<sup>15</sup>

Biodiversity in Byzantium is therefore a theme that lends itself to a scientific, historical and literary analysis that is, to say the least, multifaceted, even with the possibility of potentially very fruitful contemporary references, such as the encounter between East and West, a particularly hot topic in recent times, and the focus on nature, environment and climate change in relation to human intervention, as well as on the concept of diversity, all key words that are particularly appealing these days - unfortunately or fortunately - when it comes to applying for funds of any nature and entity.

(L. B.)

## II. Byzantine biodiversity and botanical knowledge: the example of the Viennese Dioscorides

### Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq

Just as a mosaic, history is made by the entirety of all the pebbles put together, and like a domino every tiny piece could set off a process hardly mutable and rather unpredictable. It might be argued, with a pinch of salt, that some personalities may have played a larger role in some dynamics. The Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq should be considered one of them. He, whom Emperor Ferdinand had named ambassador to the Ottoman court in the years 1554-1562, went to Constantinople in two separate occasions: the first journey lasted less than a year, while the second one almost seven, during which he defines himself as "a virtual prisoner in his own mansion."<sup>16</sup>

His personality has not attracted much attention from scholars, and his value in making history is on the one hand broadly acknowledged,<sup>17</sup> yet, on the other hand, some information has not been properly explored nor uncovered.<sup>18</sup> This is, however, not the place to discuss such elements, and we shall instead focus our attention on how he contributed to our understanding of not only Medieval but also Renaissance biodiversity, in particular of the flora of what once was the Ottoman Empire, and before the Byzantine Empire, and of all the bordering countries he had to pass through on his way to Constantinople. To do this, we gather information from his collection of four letters, the so-called Turkish letters, in which he discusses Turkish costumes, in terms of dress-codes, rituals, relationship with their allies and enemies, but also about the structure and architecture of the city, and the flora and fauna.<sup>19</sup>

Plants and flowers seem to have had various uses, such as medical or ritual, already in the ancient Greek world, though "tentacles of Byzantine medicine extended into areas that we would now consider nonmedical."<sup>20</sup> According to

Busbecq, “Turks were fond of flowers” and used them also in ceremonial rituals.<sup>21</sup> Such a fondness of flowers came unexpected to Busbecq, who, as a fan and sort of expert himself, did not think that the Turks, who were “otherwise anything but extravagant,” would have joined him in such an obvious simple pleasure.<sup>22</sup>

In the first letter, Busbecq describes his meeting with the Janissaries, who, as customary, greeted him “with a bunch of hyacinths or narcissi.”<sup>23</sup> The origin and meaning of this tradition is not explained by Busbecq, who later mentions that he found hyacinths and narcissus “pretty much everywhere” in Adrianople: an abundant flowering which caught him by surprise as “winter is not a favorable season” for flowering.<sup>24</sup> About the hyacinth and narcissus he also adds that a large quantity of them “causes a headache in those who are not accustomed to them.”<sup>25</sup> This apparently does not hold true for tulips, also found in Adrianople, which though praised for their “beauty and the variety of colors,” have little or no scent.<sup>26</sup> We may find a sense of surprise in these lines, which might indicate that these species were not common in the West. Lavender is also mentioned in the following pages as a ‘fragrant’ plant found through some fields after leaving the city of Scutari.<sup>27</sup> He also talks about medicinal plants, such as, for example, the *scordium*, an hoppiaceous used against plagues or insomnia, which emanates “an odour of garlic” and that was previously “unfamiliar” to him.<sup>28</sup>

In the concluding pages of the letters, he describes what he found worthy of being brought back to the emperor, and among such things, he said he “hardly brought back any plants or herbs but some botanical drawings which he was ‘keeping for Mattioli.’”<sup>29</sup> Mattioli was a famous Italian physician, who worked for Archduke Ferdinand and Emperor Maximilian II, and generally remembered for his herbal, firstly published in 1554, which seems to have been inspired by the writings of Pedanius Dioscorides.<sup>30</sup> This botanical interest of Busbecq, coupled with a strong passion for manuscripts, results evident in his desire of buying and

bringing back the oldest copy known to us of the Dioscorides’ *Materia Medica*, a fundamental treatise to Byzantine pharmacology written in the first century AC, now to be found in the Austrian National Library as Cod. Med. gr. 1. This manuscript preserves and bears 383 botanical pictures of plants, accompanied by descriptions and analysis. The manuscript is unique in its own, and has attracted scholarly attention for centuries, with its relevance testified by the copious reproductions even in the twentieth century<sup>31</sup> and by its nomination as part of the UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register. He describes the codex as follows:

The only one I left at Constantinople was a copy of Dioscorides, evidently a very ancient manuscript, written throughout in uncial characters and containing drawings of the plants, in which, if I am not mistaken, there are also some fragments of Cratevas and a treatise on birds. It belongs to a Jew, the son of Hamon who was Solyman’s physician, and I wanted to buy it, but was deterred by the price. For he demanded 100 ducats, a sum suiting the imperial purse, but not mine. I shall not leave off pressing the Emperor till I induce him to ransom so famous an author from such foul slavery. The manuscript is in very bad condition from the injuries of age, being so worm-eaten on the outside that hardly anyone, if he found it on the road, would take the trouble of picking it up.<sup>32</sup>

Due to the high price of the manuscript, Busbecq was at the beginning unable to buy it. However, as promised in the letter (“I shall not leave off pressing the Emperor till I induce him to ransom so famous an author from such foul slavery”), he managed at the very end - many years later, when the son of that stingy enough emperor raised to the throne, whom Busbecq himself was tutor to - to acquire the precious manuscript, together with another copy of it of much less value nonetheless.<sup>33</sup>

To conclude, it would not be surprising if, once home, Busbecq confirmed his perceptions of such plants by looking at the Dioscorides' descriptions.

### The manuscript and its dedicatee

It would now be interesting to look at the origin of this manuscript. We shall present the dedicatee of the book and give some information on her personality. The exemplar is clearly rather prestigious, as it can be seen by its size - 38 × 33 cm, it weighs 14 pounds - structure and internal content. Brubacker points out that it was possibly made for imperial use<sup>34</sup> and describes it as "a self-consciously deluxe reference book presented as a learned text with encyclopedic pretensions."<sup>35</sup> This assumption of hers is justified by the dedicatee of the book: the aristocrat Anicia Juliana (ca 462–ca 528). Born to one of the wealthiest family in Byzantium, she is known for her endless commitment to artistic and architectural patronage. She is mostly remembered for the foundation of the Constantinopolitan churches of Saint Polyeuktos and of Hagia Euphemia.<sup>36</sup> What is rather striking about this personality is not just the dedication and commitment to art sponsorship, but rather the fact that, unlike other more famous Byzantine patronesses, she was not directly related nor tied to the somewhat *parvenue* family of future emperor Justinian I. She was the great-granddaughter of the celebrated Byzantine emperor Theodosius II, and her other forbears were all of the highest rank, such as, for example, her grandfather Emperor Theodosius II and the sainted empress Aelia Eudocia. Although her father Olybrius was one of the last Western emperors, and her husband Areobindus briefly occupied the throne, to shortly later flee it, and although her son Olybrius jr was almost crowned, Anicia Juliana's economic, artistic, and political power mostly relied on her own familiar lineage, which seems to go back to through seven centuries of roman statesmen.

The importance of her ancestry is well-stressed also by an epigram of the Greek Anthology,

in which Anicia Juliana is implicitly compared to her great-grandmother, the Empress Eudocia. Such a poem is relatively surprising, as one would expect that in the comparison, the empress would always come out as the best out of the two:

Eudokia *the empress*, eager to honour  
God, first built here a temple of  
Polyeuctus the servant of God. But she  
did not make it as great and as beautiful  
as it is, not *from any economy or lack of  
possessions* — what doth a  
Queen lack? — but because her prophetic  
soul told her that she should leave  
a family *well knowing how better to*  
adorn it. Whence Juliana, *the glory of  
her blessed parents*, inheriting *their royal  
blood in the fourth generation*, did  
not defeat the hopes of the *Queen, the  
mother of a noble race*, but raised  
this from a small temple to its present  
size and beauty, increasing *the glory  
of her many-sceptered ancestors* ....

This poem is beautifully constructed, thoroughly permeated by a slight irony nor difficult to grasp, neither alien to Byzantine's literature, and does the opposite of what commissioning and praising texts are supposed to do. If one looks closely at it, something stands out: Eudocia's imperial title is there mentioned not to praise her, but it is instead used to make the other shine, adopting the well-known *escamotage* of *synkrisis*, proper of classical and biblical literature. Eudocia is an empress, does not lack economical means, but she is implicitly considered not worthy enough to deal with "God's possessions" so that she needs to leave it to "a family *well knowing how better to* adorn it." A female succession of course, culminated in her grand-grandaughter Anicia Juliana.

## Conclusions

To conclude we could argue that in a sort of ring composition the manuscript traveled from one empire to another, first from the Greeks to the Turks, and then back from the East to the West, that is, from the Ottoman empire, successor of the perished empire of the Second Rome, to the Sacrum Romanum Imperium of the Habsburg emperors. It survived the cruel and inescapable flux of time, the fall of a city, a likely daily use by physicians, to finally end up in the Austrian National Library. This manuscript and all the people revolving around it, that is to say the patroness Anicia Juliana, the ambassador Busbecq, the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, are all pawns in the broader world's chessboard, and it is their actions and interactions that to some extent contributed to the development of global history.

(G. M. P.)

### III. *Hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa* (A garden enclosed my sister, spouse)<sup>37</sup>

Julia Augusta and Julia Anicia. Two women very much alike in every aspect, even in the name they went by in past scholarship and by which they were widely known; although the former was born as Livia Drusilla, and gained the name Julia Augusta from her marriage with Octavianus, and the latter's name was actually Anicia Juliana.

Both of them were linked to imperial figures. Livia first married a member of the Gens Claudia, and then the very founder of the *principatus*. Anicia Juliana was not just a wife but also a daughter, niece, and grand-daughter of emperors. Both of them were connected to the ruling class and the roman *intelligencija* through a privileged network of family ties.

By marrying her cousin Tiberius Claudius Nero, the sixteen-year-old Livia not only entered the highest Roman patrician class, but also the fervid

environment of the anti-cesarean conspirators, led by Brutus and Cassius, and it was for this valuable pedigree that Augustus, the ambitious nephew and self-proclaimed heir of Caesar, married her. As for Anicia, countless 'Proustian kinships' linked her to the empire of the First Rome and the new aristocracy of the Second Rome, Byzantium. We may mention here, beside the many figures of statesmen, that of the philosopher Boethius.

Both of them were the heirs of a *lignée* of women, which had made women power a family tradition. Livia's mother, Alphidia, coming from a dynasty of high-ranking magistrates, was a powerful figure, widely known as such even to our contemporary literature and mass culture. Political activism and artistic patronage were already a prerogative of the long line of matrons and patronesses which Anicia Juliana came from.

It is to this feminine tradition that we cannot not pinpoint the most evident feature the two had in common: their botanical interests and their commission of a *hortus*. A botanical garden mirrored in a stone garden, in the case of Livia: the first century frescos of her Villa at Prima Porta, that can still be admired today, in their original form, at the National Roman Museum, re-enact with a sublime pictorial technique the scenes of real plant life. A parchment garden, in the case of the codex of Anicia, a book-garden: almost 500 sheets and 435 (today 383) full-page plates compose that equally illusionistic herbarium that is the Dioscorides of Vienna, illuminated at the beginning of the sixth century.

These powerful women's relationship with nature, or rather the making of nature the very source of their power, is clearly stressed by the primary sources. Plinius, in his *Naturalis Historia*, recounts the famous tale according to which, once the wedding with Augustus was arranged, an eagle dropped on Livia's lap a perfectly intact (*inlaesam*) white hen, which was carrying in her beak a laurel branch. Livia bred the offspring of that *gallina alba*, and from that *lauerum ramum*, that Livia planted, was born a sacred wood (*mira sylva*), from which the future emperors would have picked out the laurel

of their crowns and the one they held in their hands in their triumphs.

Even the emperors' male power, therefore, drew its legitimacy from the female contiguity with the animal and vegetable world, with its ancestral strength, with its mysterious messages. It is no coincidence that among the multiple iconographies of Livia Julia Augusta, the most famous statue, now in the Louvre, depicts her in the guise of Ceres, goddess of fertility, her veiled head surmounted by a laurel wreath, the *cornucopia* supported by the left hand, the ears of corn clutched in the right.

Among the representations of Anicia, the most significant one is found in one of the initial *folios* of the Dioscorides of Vienna, in which she appears at the center of a miniature, enclosed among the rope knots of an esoteric mandala formed by an eight-pointed star bounded by a circle. On the outer edges of the star, a little people of *puttos* in the guise of masons and carpenters climb up, painted in grisaille. The matron/ patron is in the middle of the star, seated on a throne in a sacred and ceremonial posture, in the act of giving alms. She is flanked by two equally hieratic female figures, personifications of Magnanimity (*megalopsychia*, as can be read in the inscription above the figure seated to the left) and Prudence (*phronesis*, again written above the personification seated to the right). At the feet of Anicia kneels the 'Gratitude of the arts,' personified in a *putto*, who hands the manuscript to the benefactress. Above the latter's figure stands out the attribute of *sophia*, 'wisdom.' Anicia is thus presented as the personification of that same sacred Sophia from which the grandiose Constantinopolitan basilica of Hagia Sophia takes its name, which would shortly thereafter be re-erected by Justinian on the remains of the Theodosian basilica, due to Anicia's great-grandfather, Theodosius II, and destroyed during the Nika revolt of 532, almost twenty years after the creation of Dioscorides' manuscript. A Wisdom, in the case of Anicia, explicitly and eminently feminine.

According to a theory that has been famously put forward by Robert Graves in his book, *The White Goddess*, which in turn was based on that

masterpiece of the history of religions that is Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, all religions of Indo-European peoples have originated from the common cult of a female deity, known under different names, inspired and represented by the phases of the moon and linked to the cultivation of the earth, lady of the harvest and the underworld, and therefore of love, death, and rebirth.

Regardless of the theories on matriarchy put forward by the historians of the nineteenth century and refuted by the anthropologists of the twentieth, in that archaic world the supremacy of women was based on the channeling of voices and vibrations of an *anima mundi*: of that 'soul of the world' that includes everyone and everything and thus first of all the language of non-human life, the speech of animals and plants: a feminine capacity for perception and inclusion that marked the muse, the Pythia, the Sibyl, the Platonic priestess, as well as the medieval witch, which were considered psychic mediators between the natural and human worlds.

The changing face of this ancestral *Mater nostra* is hidden behind the various female personifications of pagan myth, but also behind the Christian cult, if we think of the divine mother-son couple that remains and that reworks beliefs and rites of a pre-existing religious corpus. The earthly queens, already according to Graves, are hypostases of the Goddess in each of their kingdoms. It is to this ancient and never forgotten matriarchy that the imaginary that surrounds those women and *dominae* refers, in whose figures and in whose political, artistic and cultural eminence a power survives that is given by the connection with the natural world and the intimacy with the whole living nature.

(S. R.)



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Allan Touwaide, "Botany." In Stavros Lazaris ed., *A Companion to Byzantine Science* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 312.

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript is listed as Vindobonensis med. gr. and kept at the Austrian National Library. It is a sixth century deluxe manuscript of a rather large size (38x33 cm, weight 14 pounds), which preserves the earliest illustrations of Dioscorides' *Materia Medica*, accompanied by the pharmaceutical properties of each plant. See: Leslie Brubaker, "The Vienna Dioscorides and Anicia Juliana," in *Byzantine Garden Culture*, ed. Antony Robert Littlewood, Henry Maguire, and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002), 189; Ch Christian Gastgeber, 'Der Wiener Dioskurides-Codex med. gr. 1. Beobachtungen zu den Widmungsblättern', *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie* 20 (2014), 9-35. doi 10.1553/micha20.

<sup>3</sup> Touwaide, "Botany," 310. Digital resources are the *Thesauri linguae graecae* and *Pinakes, Textes et manuscrits grecs*.

<sup>4</sup> Johannes Preiser-Kapeller and Adam Izdebski ed., *A Companion to the Environmental History of Byzantium* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 2021). [forthcoming]. For an overview about potentialities and perspectives of the environmental topic in the Late Antique and Early Middle Ages, see: Adam Izdebski, "Setting the Scene for an Environmental History of Late Antiquity," in Adam Izdebski and Michael Mulryan ed., *Environment and Society in the Long Late Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 3-13.

<sup>5</sup> Touwaide, "Botany," 302-352.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, 319.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, 320.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, 321.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, 322.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, 328.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Dalby, *Geoponika: Farm Work. A Modern Translation of the Roman and Byzantine Farming Handbook* (Totnes, Devon, UK: Prospect Books, 2011), 235-245.

<sup>12</sup> Helena Bodin and Ragnar Hedlund eds., *Byzantine Gardens and Beyond. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia*, 13 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2013), 128-147.

<sup>13</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> A pioneering work for the ecocritical approach to the Byzantine literature is: Adam J. Goldwyn, *Byzantine Ecocriticism: Women, Nature, and Power in the Medieval Greek Romance* (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2018). A more recent publication by Thomas Arentzen, Virginia Burrus and Glenn Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life. Christianity and the Arboreal Imagination* (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2021), explores representations of trees in Byzantium, by drawing on broader scholarship on Plant Humanities and eco-criticism.

<sup>15</sup> For a thorough investigation of the relation between agency and plants, see: Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, *Tree Cultures: The Place of Trees and Trees in Their Place* (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> George Sarton, "Third Preface to Volume XXXIII: Brave Busbecq (1522-1592)," *Isis* 33 (5) (1941/42): 558.

<sup>17</sup> On Busbecq see: Ignace Dalle, *Un Européen chez le Turc: Augier Ghiselin de Busbecq: 1521-1591* (Paris: Fayard, impr., 2008); Dominique Arrighi, "Le récit de voyage dans l'empire ottoman: traditions et variations dans les *Lettres turques* de Busbecq," *Camenae* no.1 (janvier 2007): 1-11; Dominique Arrighi, *Ecritures de l'ambassade: les "Lettres turques" d'Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq* (Paris: Honoré Champion éditeur, 2011); Hubert Le Bourdelles, "Busbecq: 1521-1591. Un humaniste et un homme d'action européen," *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 2 (1991): 204-209; Christian Gastgeber, "Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq und seine griechischen Handschriften," in André Binggeli, Matthieu Cassin, Marina Detoraki and Anna Lampadaridi eds., *Bibliothèques grecques dans l'Empire ottoman* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2020), 145-181; Silvia Ronchey, "Libri quos mari transmissi Venetias. Busbecq, Prodromos Petra e i giacimenti librari costantinopolitani al tempo di Solimano il Magnifico," *Engramma* 174 (2020): 199-229; André Rousseau ed., *Sur les traces de Busbecq et du gothique* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1991); Zweder von Martels, "On his Majesty's Service. Augerius Busbequius, Courtier and Diplomat of Maximilian II," in Friedrich Edelmayr and Alfred Kohler eds., *Kaiser Maximilian II. Kultur und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert* (Wien and München: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik and R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1992), 169-181; Zweder von Martels, "A Stoic Interpretation of the Past: Augerius Busbequius's Description of his Experiences at the Court of Süleyman the Magnificent (1554-1562)," *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies* 2 (1993): 165-179.

<sup>18</sup> It is undeniable that the position of Busbecq as ambassador at the Turkish court might have had various implications that may have gone beyond the apparent scope of the diplomatic mission. As his figure is still partially shrouded in mystery, one might for the moment only speculate on what other aims he might have wanted to accomplish during his two journeys. His position as an insider in the Greek Constantinopolitan world and his ties with the patriarchal entourage should be further investigated as well as his role in bringing such a copious number of manuscripts to the West, probably acquired from the monastery of Prodromos Petra, which is also a rather understudied topic. Busbecq's acquisition of Greek manuscripts in the sixteenth century, more than a century after the fall of Constantinople, sheds light and speaks for the status of monastic libraries in the post-fall world, and how they managed to survive and remain active after the Turkish conquest, a fact that should not be underestimated, considering what on the other hand happened in the aftermath of the 4<sup>th</sup> crusade. The vicissitudes surrounding

his shipment of manuscripts to Venice should also deserve further studies. About this last point, see: Silvia Ronchey, "Introduzione storico-filologica," in Paolo Cesaretti and Silvia Ronchey edd., *Eustathii Thessalonicensis exegesis in canonem iambicum pentecostalem. Recensuerunt indicibusque instruxerunt. Supplementa Byzantina, Bd 10* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 187\*-313\*.

<sup>19</sup> Ogier de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, translated by Edward Seymour Forster, introduced by Philip Mansel (London: Eland Books, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Brubacker, "The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana," 213.

<sup>21</sup> Ogier de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters* (Eland 2001), 16.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ivi, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, 163.

<sup>30</sup> John Bidwell et al., *Mattioli's Herbal: A Short Account of Its Illustrations, with a Print from an Original Woodblock* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Touwaide, "Botany," 302.

<sup>32</sup> Ogier de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, 163.

<sup>33</sup> Sartori, "Third Preface to Volume XXXIII: Brave Busbecq (1522-1592)," 566.

<sup>34</sup> Brubacker, "The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana," 206.

<sup>35</sup> Ivi, 209.

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, 212.

<sup>37</sup> *Canticum Canticorum*, 4,12.

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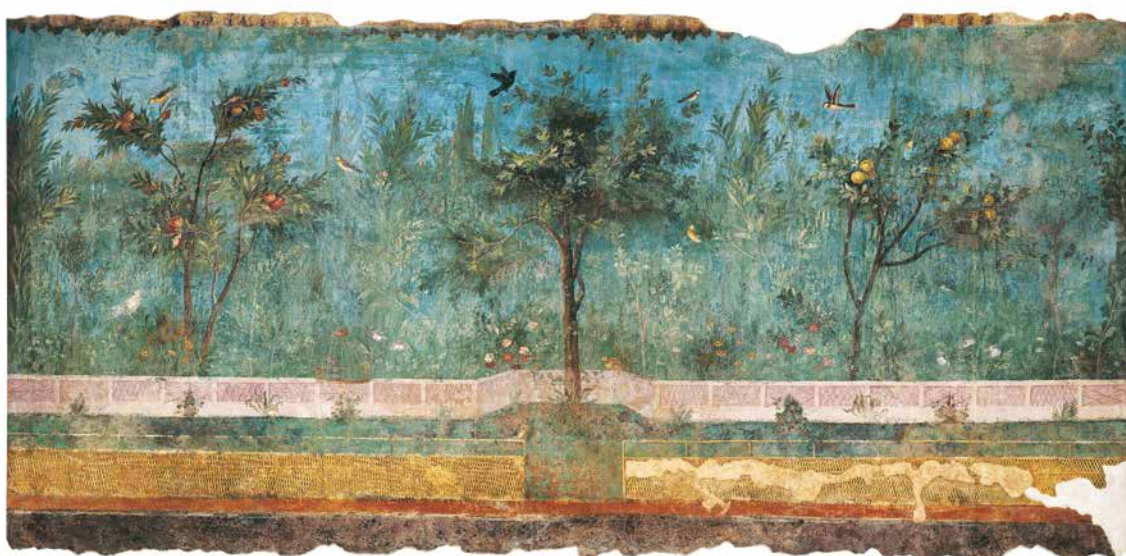
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## BIODIVERSE POEMS, POSTHUMAN POETS: GARDENS IN/AS ROMAN POETRY



Images courtesy Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, Ministry of Culture, Italy

Let us begin with an image. It comes from the cycle of frescos found in the famous subterranean room - probably the triclinium - of the Villa of Livia ad Gallinas Albas at Prima Porta, now housed in the Palazzo Massimo, and which provides the focus for the collection of essays in this volume.

If we look closely, it is clear that the scene is an *adynaton*, a natural impossibility. Pomegranates and quinces jostle with iris, daisies and chamomile, flowering and bearing fruit with no regard for seasonal propriety. Roses, poppies, and chrysanthemums spool out against a backdrop of





Rene Magritte, *La Condition Humaine / The Human Condition*, 1933, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA. © Peter Barritt / Alamy Stock Photo

oak, pine, cypress, palm, and oleander. Partridges and goldfinches feast on the fruit trees and rest on their branches. At first viewing, we are looking at a scene of hyper-fertility and abundance, at the idealized and unbridled play of nature (*natura*), free from human intervention. When we lower our gaze, however, the perimeter wall with a solitary birdcage perched suggestively upon it, and the garden path, the *ambulatio*, tell us otherwise. We are looking, in fact, at the imposition of culture (*cultus*) upon nature, at nature contained, an enclosed space, ‘paradise’ in the most literal sense of the word (*paradeisos*, from the Persian *pairidaeza*, *pairi* [around] + *daeza/diz* [brick]). Of course, what we are looking at is a garden. At their most basic level,

gardens always imply an interplay between nature, art and artifice, suggesting a level of cultural control over the natural, whilst also presenting nature itself as a work of art. The garden is where nature and culture come together.

It is also important to understand the fresco itself as another layer of artifice and technology, a cultural lens through which nature is mediated. This is further complicated when we consider where the fresco stood in relation to Livia’s villa: one of its functions was to give the viewer the appearance that she was looking out into the gardens that surrounded the villa complex, including the central courtyard and the grand terrace garden that lay beyond the triclinium’s



walls. The fictive garden is placed in front of the real garden, not so much replacing it as merging with it. We might be reminded, at this point, of René Magritte's *La Condition Humaine* (1933).

Magritte gave a concise account of his own work: "In front of a window seen from inside a room, I placed a painting representing exactly that portion of the landscape covered by the painting. Thus, the tree in the picture hid the tree behind it, outside the room. For the spectator, it was both inside the room within the painting and outside in the real landscape."<sup>1</sup> Magritte's last sentence quietly deconstructs the conventional divide between nature and cultural artifice, between reality and representation: as much as Livia's fresco or Magritte's painting occlude nature, they also collapse any distinction, inviting the viewer to identify the boundary of the fresco or the painting directly with the boundaries of the gardens and landscapes themselves. Nature is not something 'out there,' brought into domestic space through copy and reproduction, but a presence which can exert direct control over culture, can even display its own technologies of art and artifice, a point that writers in Antiquity often extol (epitomized by Ovid's description of the grove of Diana in the *Metamorphoses*, in which "nature had imitated art in its design"). The afterlife of Livia's frescos tells a wonderful story. After the subterranean room was discovered in the 1800s, the report of the Pontifical Ministry of Public Works recorded that, "the ceiling had entirely collapsed and the stucco decoration which once decorated the vault was found among the rubble which filled the room."<sup>2</sup> Over time, nature had imposed itself upon its own representation. Horace predicted something similar of Roman luxury villas in *Epistle* 1.10:

A forest nursed among colorful columns, and a house which looks out on distant fields is praised.  
You will drive out nature with a pitchfork, but she will always hurry back,  
and, stealthily, she will burst through your foolish disdain, triumphant.

In the garden of Livia, we arrive at something not far from Donna Haraway's notion

of 'natureculture,'<sup>3</sup> which eschews the traditional structuralist 'nature/culture' binary in favor of a more entangled and ontologically flat model, in which nature and culture are co-dependent, and who and what counts as an actor is constantly up for grabs, making it very hard to determine where the human and non-human (i.e. culture and nature) definitively begin and end. This is a posthuman perspective that is gaining traction in the classics,<sup>4</sup> and equally so in the art world, as the recent *Natureculture* exhibition at Fondation Beyeler, Basel (June 13 to September 21, 2021) shows.

In this article, I turn to the poetic correlative of Livia's naturalcultural world, and explore the interactions between nature and culture in the literary gardens found in (some) Greek and (mainly) Roman poetry. I attempt to map out the networks of solidarity that emerge between poets, poems and gardens, and the literary procedures whereby the human and non-human, nature and culture, impact each other and become entangled with each other. Although plants in literature might often seem mere background details, they constantly evoke and intersect with the central themes of classical literature. Latin poetry and its Greek predecessors canvas vast biospheres in their descriptions of plantlife, gardens and natural landscapes; plants and flowers also constitute a rich metaphorical field through which poets can define their poetry, their poetical subject matter, and their own poetic identity. But if we push beyond the figurative implications of this imagery, we find numerous points of contact and influence between the realms of nature and culture. When, for example, a poet describes her poetry as a flower or a garden, what happens when we think about the processes by which Roman poetry books were manufactured from a richly biodiverse plant-world, and how this can impact the meaning of the text? Or, when a poet compares humans (the poet, the lover, the young hero) to flowers or gardens, how does this reflect the ways in which categories of 'human' and 'non-human' were defined and interrogated? And finally, it is important to

consider the political contexts of these poetic blossomings, and their relationship to empire and imperial forces. Uprooting, transplanting, grafting, bordering: these are all terms that apply equally to humans as well as plants, and can point to an affinity between the two. For Roman poets in the Imperial period, the garden represented a tool to reflect on the nature of imperial power, on relationships between ruler and ruled, and the poet's complicity in, or resistance to, the imperial project, both in terms of the autocratic power of an emperor, and in terms of the practices of colonial expansion.

## Biodiverse Poems

Poets in antiquity like to think of their poems as flowers. It is a metaphor that never grows old, constantly reseeds, forms new roots (you get the idea). In rhetorical texts, variations on the word *flos* (flower) are often used to denote an embellished, 'florid' style. This could be a pejorative term: Quintilian mocks the self-indulgences of the contemporary style of composition with its 'flowerets' (*Inst.* 2.5.22: *recentis huius lasciviae flosculis*). But, as often as not, it was deployed as a point of praise. Columella says of Virgil's *Georgics* fourth that "he illuminated (*illuminavit*) the subject of bees with poetic flowers (*poeticis floribus*)," and Sidonius Apollinaris, writing in the fourth century CE, describes Horace's *Odes* as "blossoming with many-coloured flowers of words" (*Ep.* 9.13.2: *vernans... verborum violis multicoloribus*). The weaving and arrangement of flowers as a common metaphor for poetic composition is present in Greek poetry from the early lyric poets onwards (Sappho 55.2-3, for example, or Pindar *Olympian* 6.86-7 and 9.48-9), and extends right through to the Roman authors of Late Antiquity. An entire garden could symbolize a poem: the imperial author composes his *numerosus hortus* to discuss gardening in Book 10 of his prose work *De Re Rustica*, slipping into verse to pick up where Virgil left off in the *Georgics*.

Michael Roberts observes that one purpose of this floral imagery was to promote the desired virtue of literary variety (*varietas* in Latin, *poikilia* in Greek), both in the composition of the poem itself from a wide choice of words, but also in the arrangement of a collection of poems.<sup>5</sup> In other words, a book of poetry was expected to display rich verbal and literary biodiversity. Writers titled collections of shorter poems with words that suggested such a variety of different flowers: Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights*, pref. 5-6) writes how authors, "since they had laboriously gathered varied, manifold and indiscriminate learning, therefore invented ingenious titles to correspond with that idea:" Cicero's *Limon* ('meadow'), is a case in point, as is Statius *Silvae* ('woods'), which Sidonius Apollinaris later described as a 'jewelled field' (*Carm.* 22.9: *gemmea prata Silvularum*). Words for joining, blending, weaving, and combining (*miscere*, *iungere*, *serere*) often point to the arrangement and combination of these flower-poems. In Greek literature, such collections of various poems were called *anthologia*, which comes from the word *anthos* (flower), or *stephanoi* (garlands); in Roman poetry, Martial describes his eighth book of epigrams as a *serta*, the Latin word for garland. In his monumental *Natural Histories*, Pliny, referencing Cato, describes the process of creating a real garland, emphasising the importance of variety, and noting that the plants used should come directly from the garden.

Cato bade us include among our garden plants flowers for garlands, especially because of the indescribable delicacy of their blossoms, for nobody can find it easier to tell of them than Nature does to give them colours, as here she is in her most sportive mood, playful in her great joy at her varied fertility... not even the painter's art, however, suffices to copy their colours and the variety of their combinations.

(NH 21.1)

For Pliny, the flowers of the garland create an artform of nature that exceeds the artifice and technologies of human culture, to which the poets and painters themselves strived to assimilate

their own creative labour. The poetic *anthologos* or *stephanos* stressed the identification of poems as flowers, and highlighted the poetic diversity the collection worked to display. Take the famous *Garland* of Meleager, published in the first century BC, a collection of choice epigrams by forty-six different Greek poets from every lyric period up to the editor Meleager's own time. In the elegiac poem that introduces the anthology, Meleager describes each poem as the flower, fruit or plant of its respective poet, all woven into a garland of verse by the editor himself. Here is a small cutting:

Many lilies of Anyte he wove, and many of Moero,  
only a few flowers of Sappho, but they are roses ;  
narcissus, too, heavy with the clear song of Melanippides  
and a young branch of the vine of Simonides ;  
and there he wove in the sweet-scented lovely iris of Nossis,  
the wax for whose writing-tablets Love himself melted;  
and with it marjoram from fragrant Rhianus,  
and Erinna's sweet crocus, maiden-hued, the hyacinth of Alcaeus,  
the vocal poets' flower, and a dark-leaved branch of Samius' laurel.

(5-14)

The rest of the poem proceeds in a similar way, matching poet with flower and linking them together with verbs that denote gathering or weaving. Included is "the young branch of Simonides' vine" (νέον οἰνάνθης κλήμα Σιμωνίδεω) and "the first flowers of Menecrates' pomegranate" (ῥοιῆς ἄνθη πρῶτα Μενεκράτεος); the invective poetry of Archilochus is represented by the cardoon, or thistle. Meleager goes on to describe the more recent poems as, "newly-written shoots" (ἄλλων τ' ἔρνεα πολλὰ νεόγραφα), and his own offerings, humbly, as little snowdrops (λευκοῖα). It is an extraordinary poem that describes both poems and poets in botanical terms, whilst also attributing creative agency to the flowers themselves, blurring the line between nature and culture. Importantly, it also represents the variety of poets included in the garland as an extremely rich biodiversity canvassing the entire Mediterranean, which matches the geographical diversity of the Greek poets themselves, from 'Sicilian anemones' to the 'Syrian nard of Hermodorus' in the east. The garland embodies a vast ecosystem of plant-life, and there

are obvious *political* consequences of the control of and imposition of order upon such an expanse in imperial terms, in which the poetic text participates (on which more below). But fundamentally, there is a compelling sense of exchange and affiliation at play between humans and plant-life: nature is imbued with the creative cultural drive of poetry, and poetic creation can be parsed as a natural phenomenon, aimed at creating and sustaining diversity. The anthologist plays the role of the gardener, pruning, taming, editing "living extracts from global nature," as Diana Spencer puts it.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of the imperial Roman villa garden, the production of poetry was synonymous with the production of fruit and vegetables, and by the time of the emperors, *otium studiosum*, had in fact replaced agriculture as the main priority of the villa. An anonymous poet praises the Augustan patron Maecenas for "cultivating Apollo and the Muses in his luxurious gardens" (*Elegiae in Maecenatem* 35: *Pieridas Phoebumque colens in mollibus hortis*). The Flavian poet Statius constantly praises his patrons' creation of poetry in their villa gardens. For Pliny, the villa garden was synonymous with literary production, a text to be read in combination with his own literature: his box hedges were arranged to spell out his name, inscribing his authorial identity upon the garden (*Ep.* 5.6.35).

Catalogues of plants with similar metapoetic implications are a staple feature of Greek and Roman poetry.<sup>7</sup> Virgil employs numerous lists of plants in both his *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. At *Georgics* 4.116-48, he describes the flowers and produce of the old Corycian's allotment in Tarentum, a garden we shall revisit shortly, and which is often interpreted metapoetically; the gardener may well represent the Alexandrian poet Nicander, who influenced Virgil's writings.<sup>8</sup> In *Eclogue* 2, the shepherd Corydon attempts to attract Alexis with a garland, adding to the gifts of the nymphs his own contribution of apples, plums, and myrtle:

Come here, O lovely boy: for you the Nymphs bring lilies,  
look, in baskets full; for you the Naiad fair,  
plucking pale violets and poppy heads, combines them  
with narcissus and flower of fragrant dill;

then, weaving marjoram in, and other pleasant herbs,  
colours soft bilberries with yellow marigolds.  
Myself, I shall pick the grey-white apples with tender down  
and chestnuts, which my Amaryllis loved;  
I shall add the waxy plum (this fruit too shall be honoured).  
I shall pluck you, O laurels, and you, neighbour myrtle,  
for so arranged you mingle attractive fragrances.

(45-55)

Like Meleager's garland, words that denote weaving, combining, and arranging dominate the passage, as Corydon creates an arrangement from a wide botanical selection, emphasizing the diversity of his gift. But we are also meant to read Corydon's gift metapoetically,<sup>9</sup> and particularly in reference to Meleager's garland, and to understand the selection and arrangement of the variety of flowers in terms of the various poetic sources that Virgil is drawing on to create his own pastoral poetry (Theocritus, Nicander, Moschus). For Virgil, as for Meleager, the creation of poetry is assimilated to nature. Elsewhere, in *Eclogue 4* - the famous poem in which Virgil celebrates the birth of a child who will bring a new Golden Age to the World - it is the Earth itself (*tellus*), which creates an arrangement of flowers, formed with no cultural artifice (*nullo cultu*):

But first, child, as small gifts for you, Earth with no artifice  
will pour the straying ivy rife and baccaris  
and colocasia mingling them with the smile of the acanthus.

In the passages above, it is the poem which is depicted as a natural occurrence. But the trope is reversed here: it is not the act of poetic creation that is likened to the botanical world, rather it is nature that is presented as a creative force, capable of transcending the artifice and cultures of human creativity and producing art *sua sponte*. The idea is encapsulated in Ovid's description of the Grove of Diana in the *Metamorphoses*: we are told that the site has been created "with no artifice" (3.158: *arte laboratum nulla*), but that nonetheless, "nature has imitated art through its talent" (3.158-9: *simulaverat artem | ingenio natura suo*). We also find, in descriptions of gardens, a concentration on nature's own 'creative drive' rather than the

imposition of artifice by any human cultivator. Pliny's *Letters* often make this case. In his description of a natural amphitheater in his Tuscan villa, for example, he writes that "you will take great pleasure if you should look down on the countryside from the mountain, for you will seem to see not the lands but some form painted for its exceeding beauty," praising nature's artistic talent (5.6.13).

This notion of nature as the supreme artist was familiar from several philosophical schools of thought in Antiquity, including the Platonist tradition, which imagined nature as a designing, demiurgic force, and the Stoics, who viewed nature as identifiable as the universe itself, a living, designed, and rational thing, "in which no randomness but rather order is displayed and a certain resemblance to art" (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.81-2). And if nature could be understood as the ultimate force of creativity, then aligning poetry with nature allowed the poet to identify as something tantalisingly more-than-human, as a divine force in their own right. When, in the first lines of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid talks of the creator of the world as either 'god' (*deus*), or 'better nature' (*melior natura*), we recognise the poet himself standing behind this divine creator, the manufacturer of the expansive, totalising universe of the *Metamorphoses*. At its roots, the representation of poems as flowers always hints at this identification of the poet with divine nature.

We can clearly see how poetic biodiversity is a metaphorical trope that runs through Greek and Latin poetry, using the plant-world to describe the creative actions of humans, but also attributing creative agency to the natural world. But this metaphorical language of literary creativity and variation also hints at the material contexts of the production of poetic texts in antiquity, a process that was deeply reliant on botanical and other natural resources, drawn from a vast geographic expanse across the Roman empire. The poetry book, as a physical artifact, could itself constitute a form of natural diversity, a point to which the poets were highly sensitive. A number of words for writing implements that frequent Roman poetry attest



to this. *C(h)arta*, the word often used by poets to signify a sheet of paper, also refers to the leaf of the papyrus plant itself, which came predominantly from Egypt (Pliny *NH* 13.21); similarly, the original meaning of *liber*, the word for book in Latin (= 'library', 'livre', 'libro') is 'bark', the thin rind of tree from which the papyrus leaf was taken. The Egyptian name for the plant, *Byblos*, said to derive from the Phoenician city of Byblos, provides the Greek noun for book, *biblos* (= 'bibliography'). Roman poets were especially aware of the material properties of the poetry books, and - as with flowers - often identify their literary creations directly with the plant-based *charta* themselves (the *longa carta* of Horace, *Satire* 1.5), for example, or the *cacata carta* of Volusius that Catullus denounces in Poem 22). Pliny suggestively describes *charta* as the "commodity by which immortality is ensured to mankind," stressing the underlying connection between the natural resources that link the poetry book, poetry, and the poet, and the enduring legacy, beyond the limits of mortality, that such a connection ensures.

Wax tablets, another common symbol of poetic creativity and production in Latin poetry, are often described in relation to their origins in nature. The wooden board over which the wax was stretched was procured from the boxtree, the *buxum*, similar to the root of our word 'book' (= Old English *bōc* (beech), related to Germanic 'Buche'). Propertius describes his well-worn tablets as 'cheap wax on common boxwood' (3.23.8: *vulgari buxo sordida cera fuit*). Metaphors for writing on wax tablets were often agricultural, aligning literary composition with working the land: one might 'plough' (*arare*, *exarare*, *sulcare*) through the wax, and the stylus used to write might also be referred to as a 'plough' (*vomer*).<sup>10</sup> The wax itself was identified with the flowers from which bees collected the pollen needed to produce it. In *Amores* 1.12, Ovid, discussing his writing tablets which now bear a rejection letter from his mistress, curses them on strictly botanical terms. The wax is denounced as being made from hemlock, and pollinated by Corsican bees, infamous for the bitterness of their honey:

quam, puto, de longae collectam flore cicutae  
Melle sub infami Corsica misit apis.  
Extracted, I bet, from honey of long hemlock,  
Flowers delivered by the famous Corsican bees.

The metaphorical biodiversity explored above is thus never far from the actual diversity of natural materials that the poetry book in antiquity demanded. The description of flowers that fill the poems of Greek and Latin literature were physically inscribed on the pulped and pressed flowers, plants and trees from across the Mediterranean. The poetic artifact can constitute a miniature ecosystem. But we can go further than this, and recognise this diversity on an even smaller, microbial scale. As the poetry book moves through the time, passing from readership to readership, from geographical location to location, it accrues and develops new forms of microbial and bacterial life. If we pay attention to this thrumming diversity of biological life that fills the pages of classical poetry, we are able to engage with it on a wholly new hermeneutic level. Such an interpretative practice exists, and is referred to as 'biological hermeneutics,' already extant in the seventeenth century with Robert Hooke, who placed his books beneath a microscope (a recent invention at the time) to study their microbiome. On the sheepskin cover of one book, he discovered:

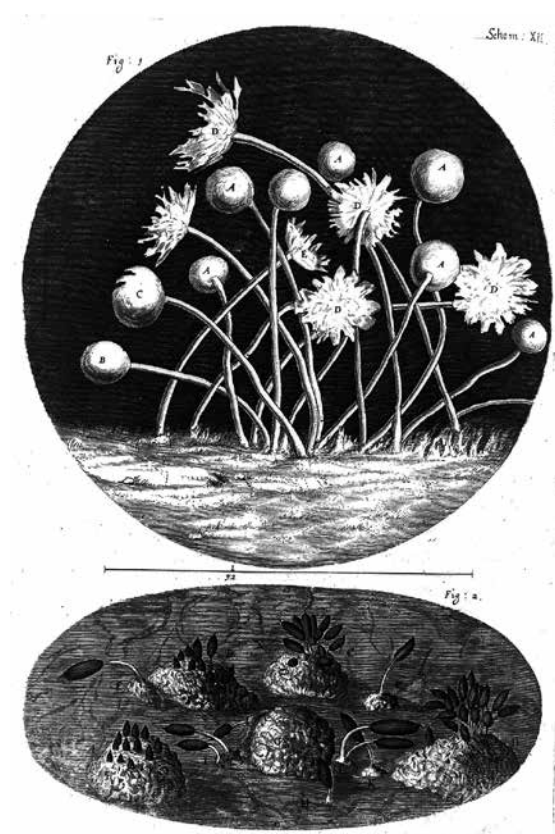
... a small white spot of hairy mould, multitudes of which  
I found to bespeck & whiten  
[the book]. These spots appear'd, through a good  
Microscope, to be a very pretty shap'd  
Vegetative body, which, from almost the same part of the  
Leather, shot out multitudes of  
small long cylindrical and transparent stalks.

(*Micrographia*, Schema 12)

Hooke provided illustrations for his observations, drawing small white flowers blooming against an ink-dark background, an image that unwittingly looks back to the floral metaphors the poets of antiquity use to describe their own poetry-books, now presented as a reality.

More recently, the artist Sarah Craske has explored the possibilities that biological hermeneutics presents. Arguing against an





Robert Hooke, *Micrographia*, London : Printed by J. Martyn and J. Allestry, 1665. Schem. 12, fig. 1. Of blue mould, and of the first principles of vegetation arising from putrefaction; Figure 2: Of a plant growing in the blighted or yellow specks of Damask-rose leaves, bramble leaves and some other kinds of leaves. Source: Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert\\_Hooke,\\_Micrographia,\\_Wellcome\\_L0010931.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Hooke,_Micrographia,_Wellcome_L0010931.jpg).

overreliance on the digitalisation of literary archives, Craske “develops the concept of books as centres of microbial life and data transfer”<sup>11</sup> by mapping out the biological information gathered in books over decades and centuries. The book she chose to investigate was a 1735 edition of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid’s epic riot of mutation, transformation and human/non-human connections. By submerging pages from the book in a blood agar mix and incubating the pages, Craske revealed “the incredible diversity of microbial life that had been coughed onto the book’s pages by generations of readers,”<sup>12</sup> with hundreds of colonies blooming in the plates. Craske’s images present the poem, poetry book, and readership in a rich, entangled web of microbial biodiversity. Over time, the poetry book develops a life of its own, and poetry is preserved by nature in its most infinitesimal and microscopic form, providing an exhilarating dimension to the

concept of ‘literary immortality’ pursued by poets even as it decentres human agency.

## Posthuman Poets

We can thus construct a formula that looks something like this: poem = flower = poet. Meleager’s garland shows how both poet and poem can be identified as flowers within a diverse system of language. The poem can be understood as a natural creation, but we are also prompted to view nature through an anthropocentric lens, and to see nature as an act of poetic creation and artifice. The poem - and, by extension, the poet - becomes something more than human, metaphorically and materially entangled with the natural resources that it both describes and utilizes, and assimilated to the divine creative impulse of nature, the ultimate



Sarah Craske,  
*etamorphoses* chapter p73.

fabricator. This identification with flowers provides a means of transcending human limitations, and also to reflect on what it means to be human. We turn now to look at some of the ways in which the identities of plants and humans intersect, the ways in which nature can assume human qualities, and the ways in which humans are embodied as flowers in poetry.

The attribution of human qualities to nature is a theme that runs right through classical thought. This often belies an anthropocentric approach that views the purpose of nature as to benefit mankind.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle attributes a basic form of soul to plants (*De anima* 413a-b), and the Neoplatonist philosopher, Plotinus, maintained that plants have some share in reason and soul (*Enn.* 3.2.7.36-7). On the other hand, Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle who wrote some of the earliest extant botanical works (*Historia Plantarum, de Causis*

*Plantarum*), argued rather that plants were not intended to benefit humans, but were endowed with the ability to pursue their own happiness and flourishing - namely the propagation of their own species: if humans eat the flesh of a fruit and throw away the seed, for example, it ultimately benefits the fruit rather than the human. If this asks us to understand plants in strict terms of human embodiment and agency, it also subtly decentres an anthropocentric view which, when taken to the extreme, reveals nature's complete disregard for humans, reminding us of our insignificance and undermining any sense of human exceptionalism. As Lucretius likes to insist throughout the *De Rerum Natura*, "in no way is the nature of things divinely arranged for us" (*DRN* 5.198-9).

The literary device in which nature is made to react to a human situation, or to express human emotion, was defined by Ruskin as the 'pathetic

fallacy,' pejoratively meant to indicate a weakness in poets unable to see the reality of nature as it really is. The poet might see in nature instead a perfect reflection of their own disposition. Ennius can talk of 'happy meadows' (*laeta prata*, *Ann.* 537 Sk.), and Cicero of the 'happiest flowers' (*laetissimi flores*, *Ver.* 4.107). Virgil describes 'a tree with fortunate branches' (*ramis felicibus arbos*, *Georg.* 2.81). Such happiness and fortune indicate the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, where the plants, fruits and trees willingly and happily serve humans. The description of the natural world in human terms is a particular trait of pastoral poetry, which imagines an ideal rural existence in nature, free from urban constraints. Like Theocritus and the Hellenistic pastoral poets before him, Virgil constantly describes the emotional capacity of the landscape, and particularly its ability to articulate and to respond to poetry. When Tityrus leaves his homeland in *Eclogue* 1, the pines and the orchards call for him (1.37-8). In *Eclogue* 5, the mountains and woods and groves "joyously fling their voices to stars" and "ring out with song" (59, 64). *Eclogue eighth* praises the "ever-tuneful groves and speaking pines" of Maenalus (22).

This quasi-poetic ability of nature is often employed in pastoral laments for the dead. In *Eclogue tenth*, "the laurels and the tamarisks, and the pines on Mount Maenalus weep" for the dying poet Gallus. Here, Virgil is looking back to the pastoral laments of Hellenistic poetry, and particularly that of Bion, who wrote a *Lament for Adonis*, in which nature effusively mourns the hero's death:

The rivers lament Aphrodite's suffering,  
the springs in the hills are weeping for Adonis,  
from grief the flowers turn red.

In turn, as Aphrodite weeps and Adonis bleeds, "the tears and blood become flowers on the ground" - roses and anemones, respectively (64-66) - enacting a reciprocal exchange: flowers exhibit human emotions, and the emotions of humans lead to the creation of flowers. To a degree, the

connection between human and nature that the pathetic fallacy presents points to the doctrine of universal sympathy extant in classical thought, and particularly in Stoic philosophy, which assumed that a natural bond connected all elements of the well-ordered and inter-connected universe (Cicero *de Div.* 2.34). But the ability for the landscape to respond empathetically and articulately also re-emphasises the idea of nature as the ultimate poetic creator, capable of generating meaning and emotional value.

Equally common in ancient poetry is the presentation of humans as flowers. In the *Timaeus*, Plato makes a curious connection between plants and men, describing humans as a form of 'heavenly plant' (φυτόν οὐράνιον), whose head is a 'root' which tends upwards (*Tim.* 90a). The comparison of humans to flowers is present in classical literature from Homer onwards. In the military world of the *Iliad*, young heroes are described as "the new shoots of olive trees" (17.52); when they are killed in battle, they are compared to wilted poppies in gardens, like Priam's son Gorgythion: "and he bowed his head to one side, like a poppy that in a garden is laden with its fruit and the rains of spring" (8.306-8). Virgil imitates this simile in his account of the fateful young heroes Nisus and Euryalus in the *Aeneid*: when Euryalus is slain, his head falls limp, "just as when a crimson flower, cut down by the plough, droops as it dies, or poppies with weary neck lower their heads" (*Aen.* 9.436-7). Before Virgil, Catullus had repurposed the image as a metaphor for his unrequited love:

Nor may she look back upon my love as before,  
which by her lapse has fallen, just as on the meadow's edge  
a flower has been touched by the passing plough.  
(11.21-24)

The blossoming of Catullus' love is felled by the apathetic agricultural technologies of his mistress, oblivious to nature. The flower could stand as a symbol of both youth and beauty, as well as a reminder of the transience of life and love. It was also a means of embodying the lover as an object of desire and sexuality. The use of

plant imagery for human beauty and sexuality was long-standing in the ancient world: in the *Odyssey*, the nubile Nausicaa is a young palm tree (6.162-3); Sappho compares a bride to an apple and hyacinth (105a and b). This trope could be extended to indicate an entire garden: the lyric poet, Archilochus, regards his intended lover as a garden (*P.Colon. inv.* 7511), and in Catullus 62, the bride is a “flower in a secluded garden,” anticipating the Christian *hortus conclusus* of the Vulgate *Song of Songs* (*hortus conclusus soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus*: “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up.”). For Ibycus, the entire expanse of youth is a fertile garden, the appropriate time to love. In this amatory context, diversity could indicate a degree of promiscuity: boy-mad Meleager returns with another garland, this time composed not of poets, but of his young lovers:

For you, Cypris, Eros plucked with his hand at harvest the fruitful flower of boys as a soul-bewitching crown. For he wove the sweet lily Diodorus into it, and Asclepiades the pretty wallflower. Yes, he wove Heraclitus in, like setting a rose from its thorn, and Dio bloomed like a vine. He bound in Theron, a golden crocus from his hair, and he added Uliades, the twig of thyme. He harvested Myiscus with his beautiful locks, an evergreen branch of olive, the lovely branches of courage. Holy Tyre is the most blessed of islands! It contains the myrrh-breathed grove of the boys who bear the flowers of Cyprus.

Like the poets included in the earlier garland, each beautiful boy here constitutes an individual flower or plant, which come together to represent the proverbial ‘flower of youth.’ Meleager again slips between comparison and identification, allowing a number of different images to stand at the same time: plants arranged in a garland, boys embodied as flowers, boys arranged in a pageant, *eros* as a garland-weaver, and the poet-lover himself as Eros-the-garland-weaver, and poems about boy-flowers gathered together within a poetic ‘garland.’

Behind these different configurations of human-as-flower stands the poet, who often self-presents as a form of flower. At the end of the

*Georgics*, Virgil says that he ‘flowered’ in Naples (*Georg.* 4 563–4: *illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat | Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oti*); we still refer to the productive period of a creative’s life as their *floruit*. Lucretius calls Homer ‘always-blossoming’ (*semper florentis Homeri...speciem*), the evergreen (ἀειθαλής) poet. The poetic identification with a flower can allow the poet to advertise his poetic capacities, but also to dwell on the fleeting nature of life experienced by all; the transience of flowers reflects our own brief lives. As Ovid grows old in exile, he describes his skin as “the colour of autumn leaves, struck by the first frost when winter spoils them” (*Tristia* 3.8). Seneca identifies with the superannuated plane trees that he planted as a child, “now parched, knotted and without foliage,” synonymous with his own aging body (*Epistle* 12). The Greek lyric poet, Mimnermus, laments the human condition, “as leaves born in the teeming spring” before the “fruit of youth, like one day’s worth of sun, dies fast” (Poem 2). But on the other hand, flower-imagery can be employed to make a *distinction* between the terminal fate of humans and the regenerative capacity of nature. In his *Lament for Bion*, the Hellenistic poet Moschus looks to the garden:

Alas! When the mallow and fresh parsley  
and the springing crumpled anise perish in the garden  
they live yet again and grow another year,  
but we men, so tall and strong and wise,  
as soon as we die, in a hole in the earth we sleep  
Without end or waking.

(3.99-104)

The flower can symbolise the ephemerality of life; but, like ‘evergreen Homer,’ it can also suggest a form of immortality achieved through regrowth and renewal, to which the poet might compare their own poetic immortality through the process of being reread and reread. In the last poem of the *Odes*, the ‘monument-poem’ which predicts the poet’s eternal fame, Horace talks of “growing fresh with praise in posterity,” an image of renewal that evokes associations with flowers. Similarly, the presence of flowers in epigrams on the tombs of poets symbolizes a desire for immortality beyond



the grave, playing up the nourishing power of plants, flowers and vines and their metaphorical association with poetry. One sepulchral epigram explains how the acerbic poet, Hipponax, “even now dead, does not cause cultivated vine to grow (ἐπιτέτροφε) on his tomb, but brambles and acerbic fruits” (AP 7.536); another epigram exhorts ivy to “flourish green on top of the tombstone of Anacreon” (AP 7.24). Poems, poets, and tombs are grouped together in various floral combinations, associating the immortal power of poetry with the regeneration of flowers, through which the poet will live on. Human bodies directly give way to the (poetic) bodies of flowers, such as in one particularly one particularly touching funerary epigram from Sardinia:

May your bones, Pomptilla, grow into violets and lilies:  
May you flower in the petals of roses, sweet crocus and  
ageless amaranth,  
and of the beautiful flowers of the white pansy,  
like the narcissus and the sad amaranth,  
also the time that will always will have your flower.

There is an acknowledgment here of the deep connectivity and symbiosis between humans and nature, and that the death of one yields new forms of life, in which the deceased may also take part. But we are also asked to imagine the works of the poets in similar terms, as the blossoms through which they will survive. Walt Whitman poignantly expresses this combination of poems, flowers and bodies in the exequy *Scented Herbage of my Breast*, where the poet’s body seems to quite literally yield flower-poems for posterity:

Leaves from you I glean, I write, to be perused best  
afterwards, Tomb-leaves, body-leaves growing up above  
me above death,  
Perennial roots, tall leaves, O the winter shall not freeze  
you delicate leaves,  
Every year shall you bloom again, out from where you  
retired you  
shall emerge again...

Both Whitman and the ancient poets push us gently towards a posthuman perspective, recognising not only that humans don’t just inhabit the world but *are* inhabited by the world as one

object among many others, but also that we are organisms that, like poems, display a staggering diversity of human and non-human life. The beginning of Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet*<sup>14</sup> encapsulates this sentiment perfectly:

I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with* many.

Perhaps the poets of antiquity who spend their time with flowers were more aware of this fact than we like to give them credit for. Nature and culture are constantly destabilised in the poetic flowers and gardens of ancient texts, forcing the reader to constantly question the relationship between the natural world and the production of poetry, and the relationship between humans and non-humans.

## Containing Diversity

There is, however, a further layer to this story. The flowers of Greek and Latin poetry can gesture towards a posthuman imaginary, and facilitate the collapse of traditional structuralist binaries or progressive solidarities. But we should not forget that the reduction of certain types of humans (women, slaves) to the status of non-human was a standard practice of power and exploitation in antiquity.<sup>15</sup> The poetic celebration of botanical diversity and geographical variety can also slip easily into a celebration of the imperial powers that govern such expanses; this is particularly true of the Imperial Roman period, in a period in which Rome enjoyed a global market and facilitated the free-flowing movement of produce and people. Walls and borders defined the garden in the ancient world. In Rome, the word *hortus* signified an enclosure before it meant garden.<sup>16</sup> Much like imperial



borders, garden borders impose order, harmony and structure upon a natural space whilst keeping out hostile and undesirable aspects. The English poet-gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay might have the last word on this matter when he claims that “the dull necessity of weeding arises because every healthy plant is a racist and an imperialist; every daisy wishes to establish for itself an Empire on which the sun never sets.”<sup>17</sup> The poetic gardens of Latin poetry can thus shed light on the processes of control and order of empire, on the creations of borders, and on competing notions of local self-sufficiency and globalised markets, as well as reveal the poet’s complicity in, or resistance to, the imperial project.

The vast expanses of private pleasure parks (the *Horti Agrippae*, *Horti Luculliani*, *Horti Sallustiani*, *inter alia*) in imperial Rome could represent miniature empires in their own right, creating the illusion of whole worlds and realms, teeming with foreign plants from foreign conquest, symbols of botanic imperialism. For imperial gourmands, the borders of the dinner-table were also interchangeable with the borders of the world, where plates heaved with produce from across the empire. Gowers puts it well: “imperium had turned Rome into the world’s emporium: its alimentary choices are presented as almost infinite, from the turnips of Romulus to the larks ‘tongues of Elagabalus.’”<sup>18</sup> In literature, Trimalchio’s feast in Petronius’ *Satyricon* is an obvious example, and Seneca offers numerous cases of exotic banquets of which he vehemently disapproves. Juvenal, a satirist deeply wary of external pressures and globalising tendencies of empire, constantly pushes back against import culture in his *Satires*. The small garden (*hortulus*) is to be preferred to any pleasure garden, and when he gives us a glimpse of his dinner table in *Satire* 11, it’s loaded with local, organic produce: asparagus, eggs, grapes, apples, pears. We get a similar portrait of the self-sufficient garden in the fourth book of Virgil’s *Georgics*, where the poet recalls an old Corycian gardener:

For I remember once, beneath the walls of hill-top  
Tarentum, where black Galaesus waters golden crops,

I saw an old Corycian, who had a little plot of unwanted  
land, not rich enough for cattle, no use for sheep,  
unsuitable for vines. Yet here he dotted cabbage-plants  
among the brambles, with white lilies and verberna and  
slender poppies in between. To his mind, such wealth was  
equal to a king’s; and when he came home late at night,  
he piled his table high with unbought feasts. He was the  
first in spring to pick the roses, and in autumn fruit, and,  
when bitter winter still made rocks explode with cold and  
rivers’ flow was frozen up with ice, there he was already  
trimming dainty hyacinths’ locks, and cursing summer and  
its zephyrs for being late in coming. Yes, he was first to  
overflow with families of bees and bounteous swarms and  
force the spurting liquid from squeezed honey-combs. His  
lime-trees and his pines were all abundant, and all the fruit  
these fertile trees gave promise of from early blossom came  
to ripeness in the autumn. Elms he planted out, full-grown,  
in lines, along with hardy pear, thorn-trees full of plums,  
and planes already serving shade to drinking-parties.

(*Georgics* 4.123-48).

The self-sufficient garden of the Corycian, occupying a tiny corner of the empire and in the final margins of Virgil’s *Georgics*, nonetheless carves out its own imperial expanses (“such wealth was equal to a king’s”). Virgil’s praise of the gardener’s ability to respond to the constraints of local times and seasons contrasts with the global *imperium sine fine*, upon which the sun never sets and where everything is available. We do not know who the Corycian gardener is supposed to represent. Ancient traditions associated him with a pirate settled on land by Pompey the Great; others have interpreted him as a figure of Epicureanism, or utopian thought. He is also synonymous with the poet himself, laying out trees in lines much like Virgil lays out lines of poetry. But he might also be a symbol of resistance to empire, the separateness of his garden a symbol of poetic and political self-reliance and autonomy, a garden from which Virgil is also excluded, “shut out by space and time’s unfair constraints,” placing the poet ambiguously on the garden fence, both part of the mechanisms of empire and tacitly critical of them. The small size of the garden stands in contrast to the vast swathe of imperial space. Similarly, in the pseudo-Virgilian, *Moretum*, the peasant’s garden is “tiny in size, but lush with different plants,” and Martial’s epigram on his modest garden villa similarly teem with homegrown produce, straight from farm to

table - even though he complains that his estate is so small a cucumber can't lie straight. (11.18).

Imperial control of natural expanses and produce can also double as the imperial control of nature itself. In Statius' *Silvae*, the poet praises the emperor Domitian as "better and even more powerful than nature itself" (*Silvae* 4.3.135 *natura melior potentiorque*), a divine being capable of bringing climatic stability to the world. For a ruler, control over exotic plants could signify authority over far-flung regions, and a well-ordered garden could signify a well-ordered state. Xenophon tells us about the Persian king Cyrus' gardening abilities (*Oeconomicus* 4.21-22). As Totelin points out "a king like Cyrus, with a love of such order, can be trusted with the administration of a kingdom." In Rome, exotic plants and trees were led in triumphal processions, as Pliny observes ("...it is a remarkable fact that since the time of Pompey the Great we have led even trees in triumph" 12.112). Pompey led the ebony tree in the triumph over Mithridates VI Eupator (Plin. 37.12-14). The Flavian emperors Vespasian and Titus led the balsam tree, native only to Judaea, in their triumph over the Jews; Pliny recounts that the tree "was now a slave, and paid tribute together with its race," a bold move that combines the human and non-human in one act of subjugation, the botanising rulers, ruling over their plant-like subjects.<sup>19</sup> Vespasian's Temple of Peace, built in 71 CE, contained garden beds eighty meters long,<sup>20</sup> populated with exotic flora unknown to Italy. In the *Natural History* Pliny praises the 'peace' Vespasian has bestowed upon the world, which has allowed plants brought to Rome from across the empire, a passage which Elizabeth Pollard<sup>21</sup> suggests must be read in close relation to the temple:

other [plants] moreover are brought from elsewhere hither and thither throughout the whole world for the welfare of humanity, because the immense majesty of the *pax Romana* presents in turn not only humans with different lands and races among them, but also mountains and peaks rising up into the clouds, and their offspring and even plants.

(HN 27.3)

Just as imperial gardens aimed to contain the world within its borders, so too does Pliny's text, compressing the flowers and plants of the world within the confines of the manuscript, which in turn burgeons with the miracles of nature. Emperor and poet coalesce in the same project of domination, structure and order.

When we look at frescos of Livia, the wife of the first emperor of Rome, it is important to acknowledge the implications of power and imperial control these images could connote; the vegetative iconography of the frescos is mirrored by the Ara Pacis, Augustus' monumental altar aimed at communicating abundance and prosperity under his rule upon his return to Rome in 13 BC. The abundant diversities and various arrangements of flowers and plant-life that we find in poetry are never far from questions of imperial control, the relationship between the natural world and cultural domination, and the poets' role in producing cultural and political meaning. Diversity could be parsed in opposite ways, both as symbolic of self-sufficiency and autonomy in the face of an imperial, globalising culture, but also as a celebration of the expansive reach of Roman power. In Imperial Roman poetry, biodiversity can be parsed as an imperial practice, and gardens can represent microcosms of empire, but it is important to note the flipside of this observation: that nature is more than capable of displaying its own imperial tendencies, and the non-human always stands to conquer, contain and colonise the human. But more than this, the rich diversity of plantlife in literature prompts fundamental questions on the poetic and real relationships between humans and nature, and the endless configurations of and connections between both, stretching far beyond the limitations of a lifespan.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Quoted in Harry Torczyner, *Magritte: Ideas and Images* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1977). Wikipedia article, "The Human Condition (Magritte)," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Human\\_Condition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Human_Condition).
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Understanding Rome*, "Paradise regained: the painted garden of Livia at Palazzo Massimo," <http://www.understandingrome.com/2014/01/08/paradise-regained-the-painted-garden-of-livia-at-palazzo-massimo-3/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Vol. 1 (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).
- <sup>4</sup> See: Emanuela Bianchi, Sara Brill and Brooke Holmes, *Antiquities beyond humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Giulia Maria Chesi and Francesca Spiegel eds., *Classical literature and posthumanism* (London: Bloomsbury Publications, 2019); Francesca K. A. Martelli, *Ovid* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020).
- <sup>5</sup> Michael Roberts, *The Jewelled Style: Poetry and poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, NY: University Press, 2010).
- <sup>6</sup> Diana Spencer, [Review of *Hortus: The Roman Book of Gardening; Morals and Villas in Seneca's Letters: Places to Dwell*, by John Henderson], *The Journal of Roman Studies* 95 (2005): 275-278.
- <sup>7</sup> Eleni Peraki-Kyriakidou, "The Ovidian Leuconoe: Vision, Speech and Narration," in Stratis Kyriakidis ed., *Libera Fama. An endless journey* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 71-93; K. Sara Myers, "The *Culex*'s metapoetic funerary garden," *Classical Quarterly* 70 (2020): 749-755.
- <sup>8</sup> Stephen J. Harrison, "Virgil's *Corycius senex* and Nicander's *Georgica: Georgics* 4.116-48," in Monica Gale ed., *Latin epic and didactic poetry: Genre, Tradition and Individuality* (Swansea UK: The Classical Press of Wales, 2004), 109-124.
- <sup>9</sup> See: Wendell Clausen, *A commentary on Virgil, Eclogues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- <sup>10</sup> Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, "The vocabulary of wax tablets," *Harvard Library Bulletin* n.s. 1 no.3 (1990): 12-19.
- <sup>11</sup> Sarah Craske and Charlotte Sleigh, "The art of biological hermeneutics," in Arthur Clay and Timothy J Senior eds., *On media, on technology, on life: interviews with innovators* (Gistrup, Denmark: River Publishers, 2021), 82-99.
- <sup>12</sup> See: David Farrier, *Footprints: in search of future fossils* (London: 4th Estate, 2021).
- <sup>13</sup> Rebecca Armstrong, *Virgil's green thoughts: Plants, humans, and the divine* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2019).
- <sup>14</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *When species meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- <sup>15</sup> See: Tom Geue, "The Imperial Animal: Virgil's *Georgics* and The Anthro-po-/Theriomorphic Enterprise" in Giulia Maria Chesi and Francesca Spiegel eds. *Classical literature and posthumanism* (London: Bloomsbury Publications, 2020), 103-110.
- <sup>16</sup> Emily Gowers, "Vegetable Love: Virgil, Columella, and garden poetry," *Ramus* 29 (2) (January 2000): 127-148.
- <sup>17</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Selections* (Berkeley, Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 2012).
- <sup>18</sup> Emily Gowers, *The loaded table: Representations of food in Roman literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- <sup>19</sup> Laurence Totelin, "Botanizing rulers and their herbal subjects: plants and political power in Greek and Roman literature," *Phoenix* 66 (2012): 122-144.
- <sup>20</sup> R. B. Lloyd, "Three monumental gardens on the Marble Plan," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86 (1982): 91-100.
- <sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Ann Pollard, "Pliny's *Natural History* and the Flavian *Templum Pacis*: botanical imperialism in first-century CE Rome," *Journal of World History* 20 (2009): 309-338.

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- Lloyd, R. B. "Three monumental gardens on the Marble Plan." *American Journal of Archaeology* 86 (1982): 91-100.
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## Ancient Authors

Archilochus, *P.Colon*  
 Aristotle *De anima*; *Historia Plantarum*; *de Causis Plantarum*  
 Aulus Gellius, *Attic nights*  
 Bion of Smyrna, *Lament for Adonis*  
 Catullus  
 Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*; *Verrine*; *de Divinatione*  
 Columella, *De Re Rustica*  
 Ennius, *Annales*  
 Hipponax  
 Homer, *Iliad*; *Odyssey*  
 Horace, *Epistle*; *Satire*  
 Ibycus  
 Juvenal  
 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*  
 Meleager, *Garland*  
 Moschus  
 Nicander of Colophon  
 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*; *Tristia*  
 Petronius, *Satyricon*  
 Pindar, *Olympian Odes*  
 Plato, *Timaeus*  
 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*; *Letters*  
 Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*  
 Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae*  
 Sappho  
 Statius, *Silvae*  
 Virgil, *Eclogues*; *Georgics*; *Aeneid*  
 Vulgate, *Song of Songs*





**PLANTS  
DEPICTED  
IN THE  
FRESCOS OF  
VILLA OF LIVIA,  
PRIMA PORTA,  
ROME.  
LOCATED  
AT MUSEO  
NAZIONALE  
ROMANO,  
PALAZZO  
MASSIMO,  
ROME.**

Reference: original article by  
Giulia Caneva and Lorenza  
Bohuny, "Botanic analysis  
of Livia's villa painted flora  
(Prima Porta, Roma)",  
published in *Journal of  
Cultural Heritage*, 4 (April  
2003): 149-155.



# 1.

*Acanthus mollis* L. Brankursine (Bear's breech). H scap. Spontaneous element in the Western Mediterranean basin, cultivated as ornamental since ancient times.

# 2.

*Anthemis* cfr. *cotula* L. Foul chamomile (dog-fennel). T scap. Euro-Mediterranean species found in ruins and uncultivated environments.

# 3.

*Arbutus unedo* L. Strawberry tree (*Arbutus*). P caesp. Typical Mediterranean element occurring in maquis and acidophilic *ilex* woods.

# 4.

*Buxus sempervirens* L. Ordinary box. P caesp. This sub-Mediterranean– Atlantic element is present in broad-leaved thermophile woods and is cultivated as an ornamental plant.

# 5.

*Chrysanthemum* cfr. *coronarum* L. Yellow chrysanthemum. T scap. It is a typical Mediterranean element, spontaneously growing in wastelands and cultivated fields.

# 6.

*Cornus mas* L. (Male) cornel. P caesp. A species of South-European-Pontine origin, it is a typical element of sub-Mediterranean broadleaved woods. Due to its very hard wood, it was used widely in ancient times e.g., to make tools and javelins.

# 7.

*Cupressus sempervirens* L. Common cypress. 3.1.3. Angiospermae–dicotyledons.

8.

*Cydonia oblonga* Miller (= *C. vulgaris* Pers; *Pyrus cydonia* L.) Quince-tree. P scap. This plant originates from the Middle East and is largely cultivated for its edible fruit.

9.

*Hedera helix* L. Ivy. P lian. This sub-Mediterranean and sub-Atlantic element is found in thick woods and shady sites characterized by a certain degree of moisture. Since ancient times, it has been cultivated as a climber (creeper) to cover walls and as a decorative element.

10.

*Iris* cfr. (flower de luce). G rhiz.

11.

*Laurus nobilis* L. Bay laurel. P caesp. Typically Mediterranean element, it is found in sunny stations (sites), although preferably with edaphic moisture. It is largely cultivated as an ornamental element.

12.

*Myrtus communis* L. Myrtle. P caesp. This is a strictly Mediterranean element and an integral part of the species typical of the maquis.

13.

*Nerium oleander* L. Oleander. P caesp. It is a typical element of the Mediterranean area where it is found to grow spontaneously along the gravelly streambeds. Likely to have been cultivated since ancient times for the ornamental effect of its flowers.

14.

*Papaver somniferum* L. (incl. *P. album* Miller; *P. hortense* Husenot; *P. officinale* Gmelin). Opium poppy. T scap. Euro-Mediterranean element, [widely cultivated for official, aromatic, and decorative purposes.

## 15.

*Phoenix dactylifera* L. Date palm. P scap. This plant is typical of the sub-tropical regions of the Old World and has been cultivated since ancient times, mainly in the Southern Mediterranean areas, for ornamental and fruit-bearing purposes.

## 16.

*Phyllitis scolopendrium* (L.) Newman (= *Scolopendrium officinale* Swartz; *Sc. vulgare* Sm.). Common scolopendria.

## 17.

*Picea excelsa* (Lam.) Link (= *Picea abies* (L.) Karsten; *P. vulgaris* Link). Spruce. P scap. Northern Europe and Siberia. Alpine species that is found in cool stations.

## 18.

*Pinus pinea* L. Stone-pine, Pine-kernel pine, P scap. This species is spread from the Mediterranean Sea to Southern Europe.

## 19.

*Punica granatum* L. Pomegranate. P scap. It is an element of Middle East origin cultivated both as an ornament and for its fruits. Here, it is playing a highly relevant role among the elements of the garden, where it is displayed alternating with quinces.

## 20.

*Quercus ilex* L. Green oak. P scap. A typical plant of the Mediterranean area representing the dominant arboreal element.



## 21.

*Quercus robur* (group) (among the species here included, the characteristics similar most are those of *Q. robur* and *Q. petraea*). Oak s.l., P scap. It is commonly found in Southern Europe, however, in different species.

## 22.

*Rosa centifolia* L. Cabbage rose. P caesp. It is a derivation of the Gallic Rose.

## 23.

*Viburnum tinus* L. Guelder rose. P caesp. Strictly Mediterranean element, it grows spontaneously in thermophilous evergreen woods.

## 24.

*Viola* cfr. *reichenbachiana* Jordan ex Bureau (*Viola sylvestris* Lam.) Sylvan viola. H ros. This species is present from the Siberian regions to Europe, including the Mediterranean area.

## 25.

There is the last species, the identification of which is very uncertain.

Based on a series of morphological characters, mainly concerning the shape of petals, the identification of this species belonging to the family of Liliaceae would seem reasonable. However, the atypical and varying number of flowery pieces makes this proposal rather doubtful. The taxonomy of Liliaceae has had a complex history since the first description of this flowering plant family in the mid-eighteenth century. Originally, the Liliaceae or Lily family were defined as having a „calix” (perianth) of six equal-coloured parts, six stamens, a single style, and a superior, three-chambered (trilocular) ovary turning into a capsule fruit at maturity.





# *Contemporary Artists' Herbarium*

**Cornelia LAUF  
Flavia PRESTININZI**

# GABRIEL ALONSO

---

(b. 1986, Madrid, Spain)

Works in Madrid, Berlin, and New York. In his installations, sculptures, photography and video, he investigates contemporary relationships between aesthetics, science and post-nature. His latest projects explore post-romantic assemblages of nature, activating a change of perspective regarding the relationships between archeology, geology, and human culture. In 2020 he founded the Institute of Postnatural Studies, a platform for research and creation from which to discuss new approaches to artistic practice through political ecology, post-natural aesthetics, and new ethics of creation that contribute to the definitive dissolution of the nature-culture binomial. His work has been exhibited in different galleries and international exhibitions, such as Pradiauto 2022 (Madrid), Matadero 2019 (Madrid), John Doe Gallery 2018 (New York), IIFA 2018 (New York), Poor Media Leuven 2016 (Belgium), Espacio Las Aguas 2015 (Madrid), Mila Gallery 2014 (Berlin) among others.

## *Sempervivum*

dried flowers, infused flower, silicone,  
silicone glue, white glue  
original size  
2022







# SUSANNAH BOSANQUET

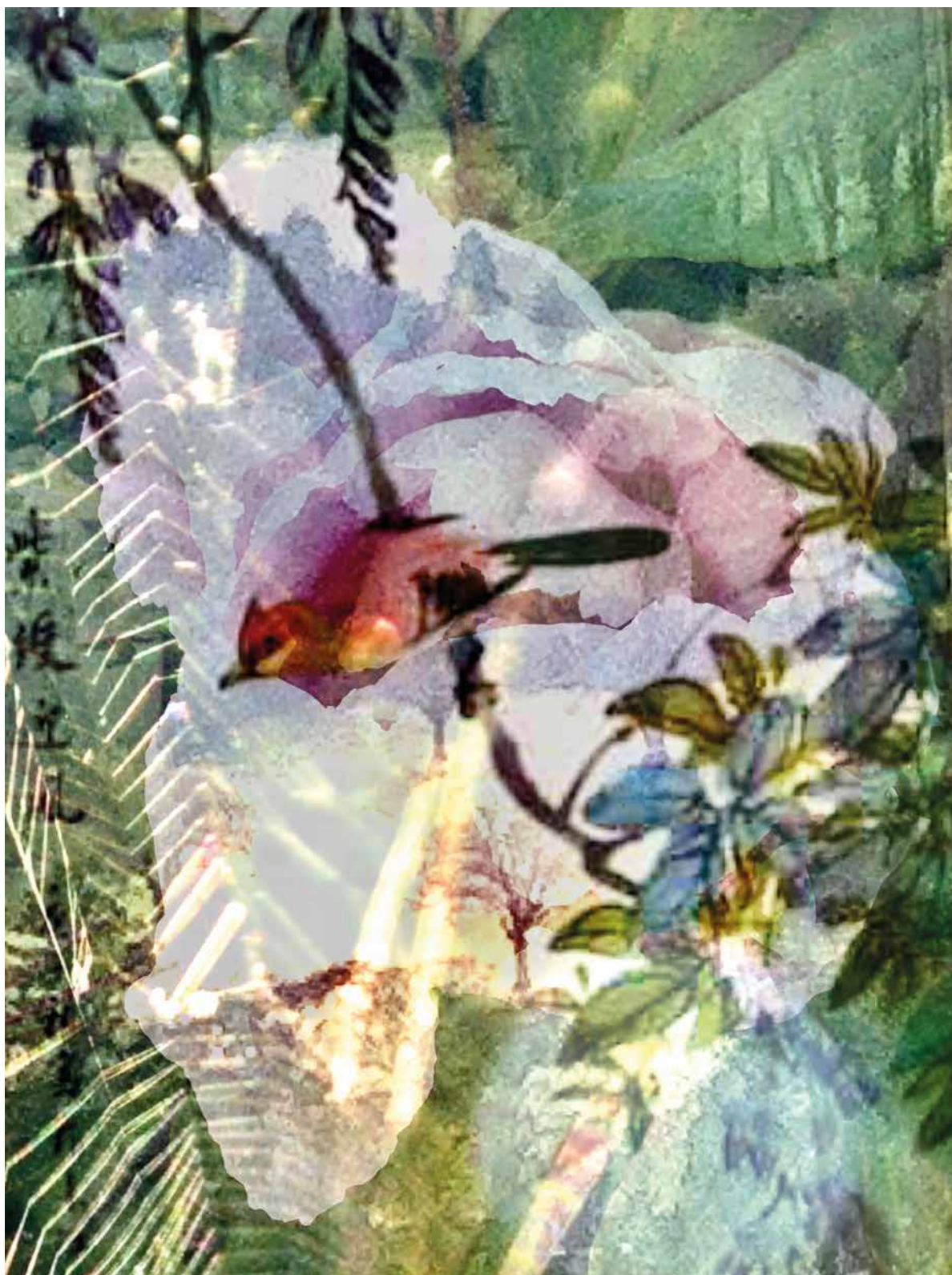
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(b. 1963, London)

She is an artist and cultural producer, based in Dorset, UK.

*Kew Gardens Bird*  
photograph  
original size  
2016





# MARTHA BOYDEN

---

(b. 1951, Worcester, Massachusetts)

She has lived and worked in Rome since 1988. Her first one-person exhibition, *Mutability*, was held in 1977 at MOMA PS1 Special Project, NYC. Since her arrival to Italy. In 1982, she has continued painting and exhibiting; as well as curating international exhibitions, restoring houses, and projecting gardens. She describes herself as yet another artist gardener abiding in the inseparability of toxicity and heavenly perfumes.

"Trumpeting Moon Angels Offering Their Heavenly Perfumes As Our Garden Of Delight, Brugmansia ( Angel Trumpet ) of the Solanaceae ( Night Shade ) family,"

*Angel Trumpet*  
photograph  
original size  
2022





Angels Trumpeting Heavenly Perfumes  
As A Moonlite Garden Of Delight  
Brugamsia ( Angel Trumpet )

# BILL BURNS

---

(b. 1956, Regina, Canada)

He is a Canadian artist. His works are about advanced industrialism, donkeys, goat's milk, salt, safety gear, and honey bees, and the artist is known for artists' books published by Verlag Mark Pezinger, Vienna, YYZ BOOKS, Black Dog Publishing, London, and others.

*Broad Bean*

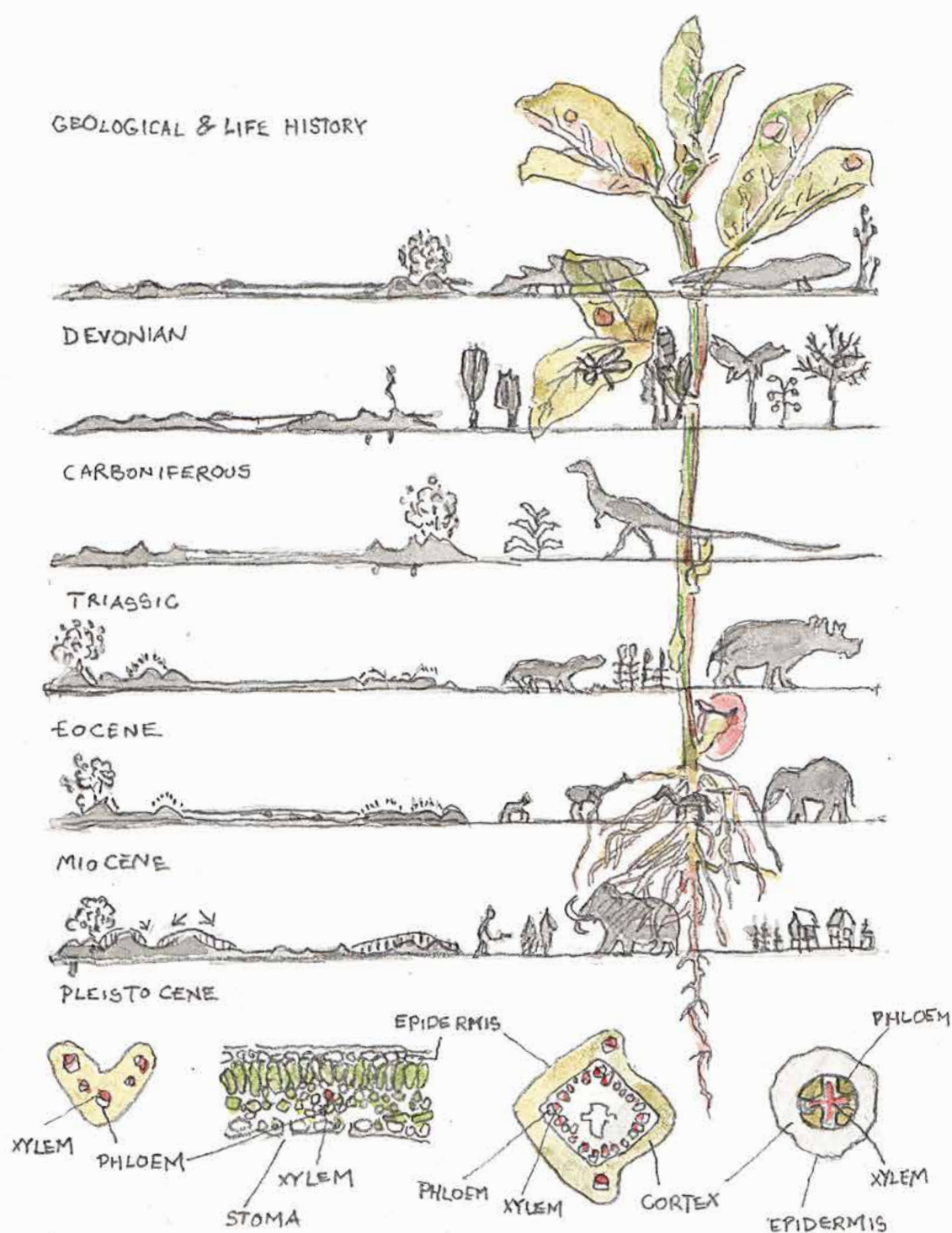
watercolour and pencil on paper

14 x 20.5 cm

2021







CROSS SECTIONS OF BROAD BEAN: PETIOLE, LEAF, STEM AND ROOT.

ABOVE RIGHT: A YOUNG BROAD BEAN PLANT (*VICIA FABA*)

# FRANCESCO CIAVAGLIOLI

---

(b. 1983, Avezzano, Italy)

First studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Perugia, and then moved to Rome. After numerous exhibitions and residencies, he transferred to Milan, where he is currently based. His primary interest is in deepening the relationship between images and their reproduction, through painting and various media. He won the Novicelli Prize in 2020, and is the subject of a recent museum retrospective in northern Italy.

*Lilium\_1*

digitally modified drawing  
original size  
2022





# MARCELLO CRESCENZI

---

(b. 1979, Rome, Italy)

Illustrator, art director, and visual designer who develops illustration-based projects both in the commercial and non-commercial realm. After several years working as a graphic designer, in 2006, he fully dedicated himself to illustration with the *Rise Above Project* in which he often explores popular culture, history and – more generally – territories of folklore, symbols, fantasy, and the legendary. His work has been published in Italy and abroad, in publications including *Dazed*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vice* and *Wired*. He has received awards from *Creative Quarterly* and by the Art Directors Club Italy.

*Cotogna*

digital coloring on pen  
and ink drawing  
original size  
2022







# RAFFAELLA CRISPINO

---

(b. 1979, Naples, Italy)

Lives and works in Brussels. She conducts artistic research on ethnography and anthropology to understand contemporary discourses about political history and aesthetics; she works in different media, from gouache to installation, sculpture, and video. In Israel, she created a permanent land art installation in 2010 and she is the subject of a recent solo museum exhibition in Belgium.

## *Senecio Inaequidens*

At the end of the nineteenth century, wool was imported from South Africa to be washed in the river in the town of Vervier in Belgium. No one knew that inside the wool was hidden the seed of this yellow flower, the *Senecio Inaequidens*, which, thanks to trains and railways, hybridised with local species and spread throughout Europe. This botanical print on silk of *Senecio Inaequidens*, is part of a series of botanic prints where I use only invasive plants, inspired by the botanical idea that plants that were once described as invasive are today considered indigenous.

## *Senecio Inaequidens*

botanic print on silk  
27 x 25 cm  
2021





# SABINE DELAFON

---

(b. 1975, Grenoble, France)

Lives and works in Milan. Her artwork spans from photography to glass installation, from writing, painting, to performance, passing through to street art. Her main areas of research are identity, love, and spirituality, revolving around the idea of quantity. The intersection of these central themes, their repetition and the course of time is where her work takes shape.

*Orange Blossom*

*Wasp*

hand-engraved glass plate

25 x 25 cm (both images)

2020





# MARK DION

---

(b. 1961, New Bedford, Massachusetts)

He is an American conceptual artist. His work examines the manner in which prevalent ideologies and institutions influence our understanding of history, knowledge and the natural world; he is best known for his use of scientific presentations in his installations.



## *Herbarium*

hand painted acrylic wash,  
spitbite aquatint, à la poupée  
photogravure, with hand applied  
letterpress labels and stamps  
7 images in bleach stained folio  
16,5 x 11,5 in (ca 42 x 30 cm)  
Edition: 20 Courtesy the artist,  
Graphicstudio, Will Lytch  
2010

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# LISE DUCLAUX

---

(b. 1970, Bron, France)

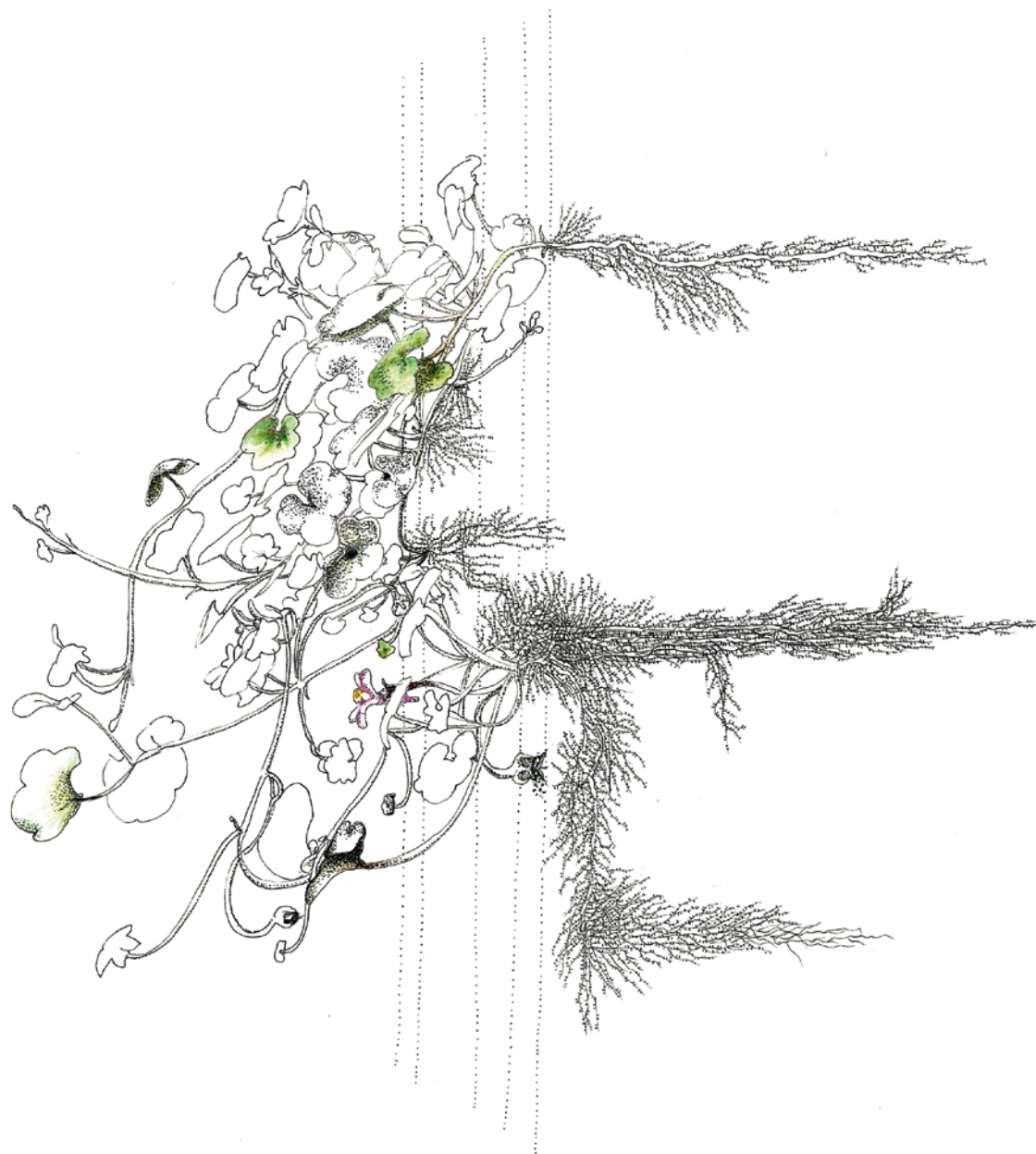
She is based in Brussels. Her work is structured by an investigation into the forms and processes of nature and ecosystems, similar to the methods of biology or cartography. Refuting any systematisation of thought, the artist explores the complexity of the living through different disciplines, including drawing, writing, photography, performance, and installation. Her publishing house, à lire à la loupe, publishes posters and books, including *L'observatoire des simples et des fous*.

"Harmless cosmopolitan that appreciates the old stones. It can be found along and on walls throughout Europe. Introduced 500 years ago from Italy, it has been cherished for centuries in the gardens of castles."

*Ruine de Rome - Colosseum Ivy*  
(*Cymbalaria muralis*)

pigment, ink drawing, coloured  
pencil, and painting on paper  
original size  
2020





# GRAHAM DURWARD

---

(b. 1957, Aberdeen, Scotland)

Lives in New York City and upstate New York. Studied the fine art of painting at Edinburgh College of Art; attended the Whitney Museum Study Program, and the British School at Rome.

He is fascinated by the way paint can materialize presence in its physical and psychological realms. How its qualities can engage us with the word as we see it. Be it figuration, abstraction, or cultivation. His artistic heritage is one of modernist painting filtered through a traditional art school training and post conceptualism. This often involves a love-hate relationship with creativity bordering on melancholia as befits a Northern European sensibility. Fixating on the natural world, more recently he feels free of the necessity of ideas in painting. Nevertheless he is always questioning how wide the quotation marks are.

He has exhibited his paintings regularly in the US and abroad, including solo shows at AC Projects NY, Boesky NY and Paley UK, as well as in a blueberry farm in Italy.

*Milkweed*

oil on linen

28 x 22 in (ca 56 x 71 cm)

August 2022







# KAROLINA DWORSKA

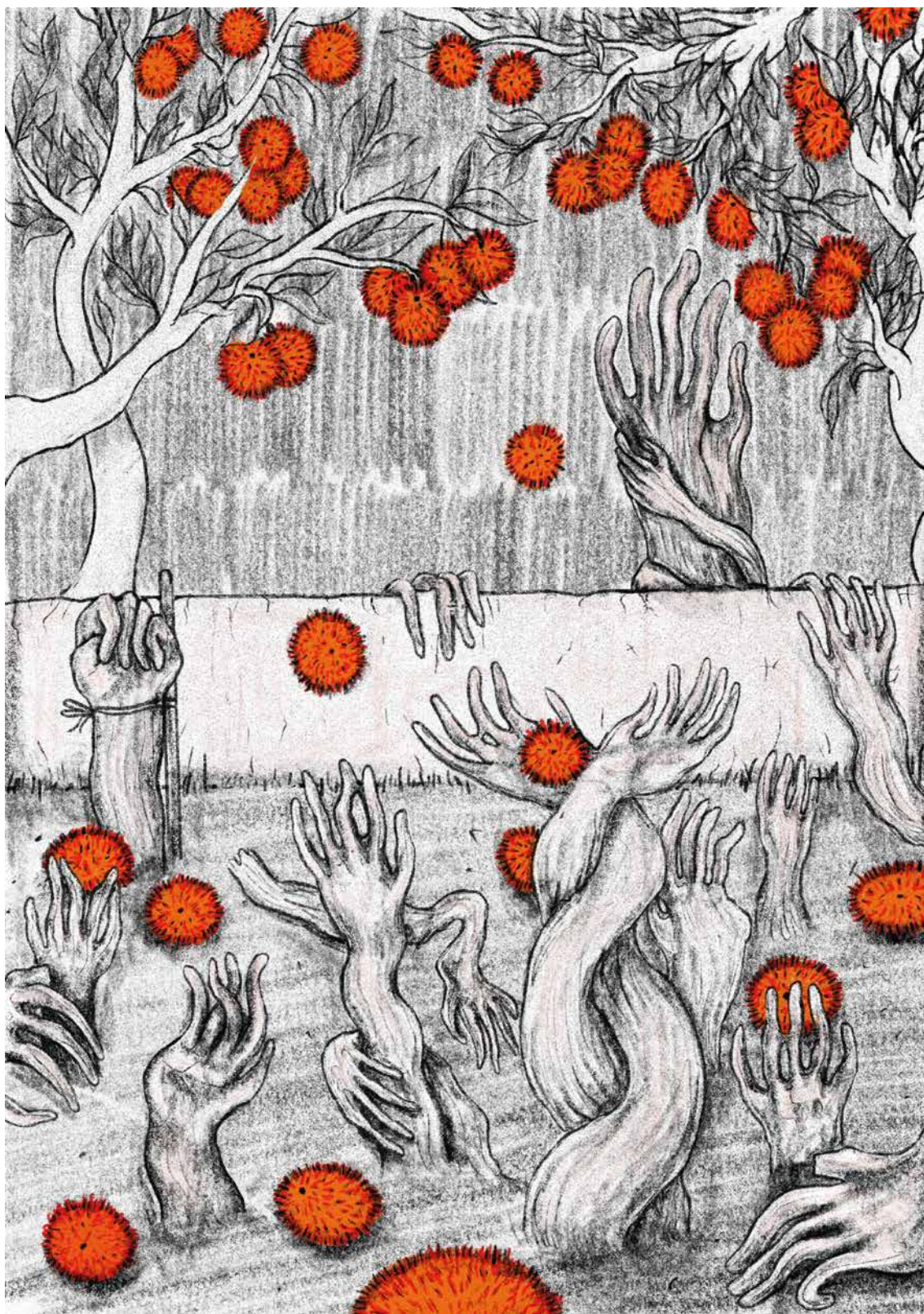
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(b. 1997, Rzeszów, Poland)

She is based in London. In her textiles and sculptures, she uses the meditative state of dreaming as a lens to examine the strangeness of inhabiting a body and its fragility. Among the most recent exhibitions and participations: *Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2021*, South London Gallery, London (2021) and *Deep Dive*, Pradialto, Madrid (2021). She has been awarded a 2020–2021 Goldsmiths BA Fine Art Junior Fellowship.

*Arbutus Unedo*  
(*Strawberry tree*)  
drawing on paper  
original size  
2022





# NINA EATON

---

(b. 1964, Racine, Wisconsin)

She is an American visual artist and teacher who has lived in Rome and Tuscany for over thirty years. The frescos of Livia's dining room have informed and inspired her artwork, subterranean dreams, and the rehabilitation of oak and cork forests in the Tuscan Maremma.

*Split Oak/Double Oak*  
watercolor on Arches paper  
23 x 31 cm  
2021







# SASKIA FISCHER

---

(b. 1986, Stuttgart, Germany)

Fischer lives between Germany, the UK, and Lithuania. An interdisciplinary artist, working with images, objects, texts, and environments, her research is concerned with the paradigms that form and inform landscape as a reflection of cultural and social values. Her most recent exhibitions and publication include: *The City is a Forest*, essay, *Desired Landscapes* no 5, edited by Natassa Pappa, Athens, Greece; *Kosice Seed Library*, curated by Borbála Soós, Šopa Gallery, Kosice, Slovakia; *Bangkok Biennial*, stricte intimité, curated by Lee Anantawat, Tristan Deschamps, and Sathit Sattarasart, Bangkok, Thailand; 2021; *A Garden for Autarkia*, initiated in collaboration with Lukas Strolia, Autarkia, Vilnius, Lithuania; *Violets (Retour de Paris)*, commission for a public art work, Institut français and Current Festival, Berliner Platz, Stuttgart.

*Pomegranate (Vilnius)*

UV-print on aludibond

20 x 30 cm

2021







# VALENTINA FURIAN

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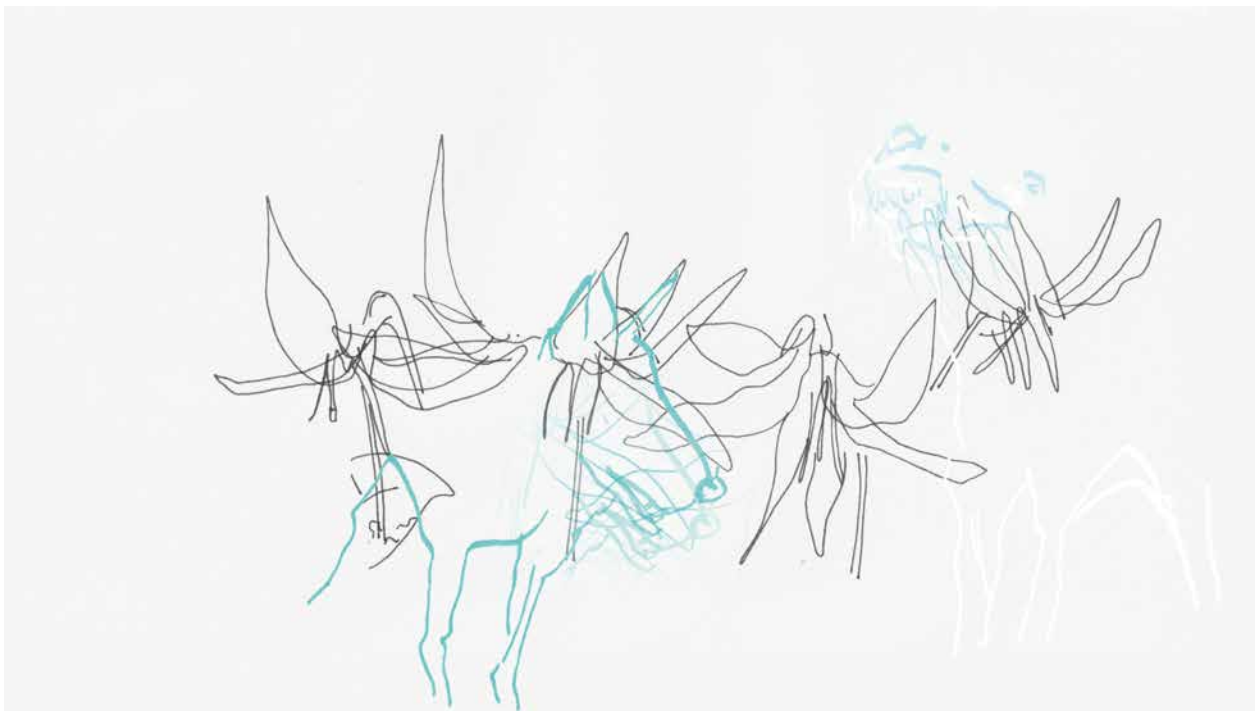
(b. 1989, Venice, Italy)

Italian artist, working mainly with moving images. Her research investigates the relationship between humans and nature; with particular interest in the exploration of animal domestication as a form of human domination as well as human domestication in relation to social rules.

*Dogtooth violet\_01*

drawing  
original size  
2022





# IULIA GHIȚĂ

---

(b. 1986, Oltenița, Romania)

She lives and works in Italy. She graduated from National University of Arts in Bucharest in 2008 and from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome in 2011. Solo exhibitions include: AlbumArte, 2021, Studio Giudecca 860, 2019, AlvianiArt Space, 2019. Group exhibitions: Bilotti Museum, 2021, Martinengo Cesaresco Palace, 2021; BEDS.Athens, 2021, Centrul de Interes, 2020, AlbumArte, 2019, Ex Elettrofonica, 2019; Acquario Romano, 2019, La Nube di Oort, 2019, National Gallery of Cosenza, 2019.

*Cydonia oblonga 8*

drawing  
original size  
2022







# TOMMASO GORLA

---

(b. 1981, Verona, Veneto, Italy)

Italian artist and researcher with a strong interest in an interdisciplinary approach to the visual arts. His interests revolve around the topics of image agency, visual ambiguity, and perceptual indeterminacy. These topics are explored through a great variety of means, from sound art to painting and drawing especially. He accompanies his practice with theoretical research and curatorial activities that include talks, publications and exhibitions.

*Untitled*  
drawing  
original size  
2017





# ALEXANDER HAMILTON

---

(b. 1950, Chapel Brampton, England)

Raised in Caithness, Scotland and studied drawing and painting at Edinburgh College of Art. After qualifying in 1972, he spent six months recording plants on the uninhabited Island of Stroma, creating unique photogram images. Thus began a fifty-year journey exploring his relationship with plants. In 2022 a major book will be published on his work: *In Search of the Blue Flower: Alexander Hamilton and the Art of Cyanotype*.

*Brantwood Plant*  
cyanotype  
original size  
2021





# HANNA HILDEBRAND

---

(b. 1978, Como, Italy)

Studied at the Städelschule, with Tobias Rehberger, Wolfgang Tillmans and Thomas Bayrle, among others. She is a photographer, film maker and passionate note-taker. Skeptic of social media and a discreet attitude towards distribution are her methodologies towards a focus on a human scale. Her studio is the site to develop external film projects as well as work on drawings, paintings and sculpture. Her work has been shown internationally in galleries, museums, and festivals.

*Lotus*

photograph  
original size  
2022







# DEBORA HIRSCH

---

(b. 1967, São Paulo, Brazil).

She is a visual artist. MSc in Industrial Engineering (USP) and MBA (SDA Bocconi). Nominated for the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation's (CIFO) Award. She has exhibited her work in many institutions and her work is included in public and private collections. Artist-in-residence at RU Residency Unlimited, NY and Annex B, NY.

*With building and palms*

drawing  
original size  
2022





# TAYLOR HOPPES

---

(b. 1999, Cleveland, Ohio)

She is an American artist. Her paintings, mixed-media art, and video works are influenced by travel, nature, and abstract sensation; or the combination of digital technology and painting. Landscape and plants never fail to inspire her creative process. She graduated with a BFA in Painting from Temple University's Tyler School of Art (2021), and studied in both Rome and Tokyo. She is currently based in Yokohama, Japan.

*Laurus nobilis*

drawing  
original size  
2021







*Laurus nobilis*

# MARIJA MAŠA JOVANOVIĆ

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(b. 1983, Belgrade, Serbia)

She is an artist of American and Serbian origin. Works in the field of painting, drawing and illustrations. From 2007 she has been a Member of the Association of Fine Arts (ULUS) and the Association of Fine and Applied Arts, from 2013. In 2007 she received an award from the Foundation of Rista and Beta Vukanović, Belgrade, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Arts, Belgrade. Solo exhibitions: Botanical Inspirations, Halka art gallery, Istanbul, Turkey 2017; Arcadia, Gallery Pro3or, Belgrade, 2015; Svet koji nestaje [Vanishing World], Gallery SULU, Belgrade; Subordinated Nature, Centar za kulturu Grocka [Center of Culture Grocka] Belgrade, 2012; Love & Desire, Studentski kulturni centar [Student cultural centre], Belgrade, 2011; A Cup of Tea, Magacin 8, Dom Omladine [The Dome of the Youth], Belgrade, 2008; *Mapping the Past*, Gallery of ULUPUDS [Association of Applied Arts Artists and Designers of Serbia], Belgrade.

*View in Eden*

pencil on paper

70 x 84 cm

2020







# IVARS (WILLIAM H. SULLIVAN)

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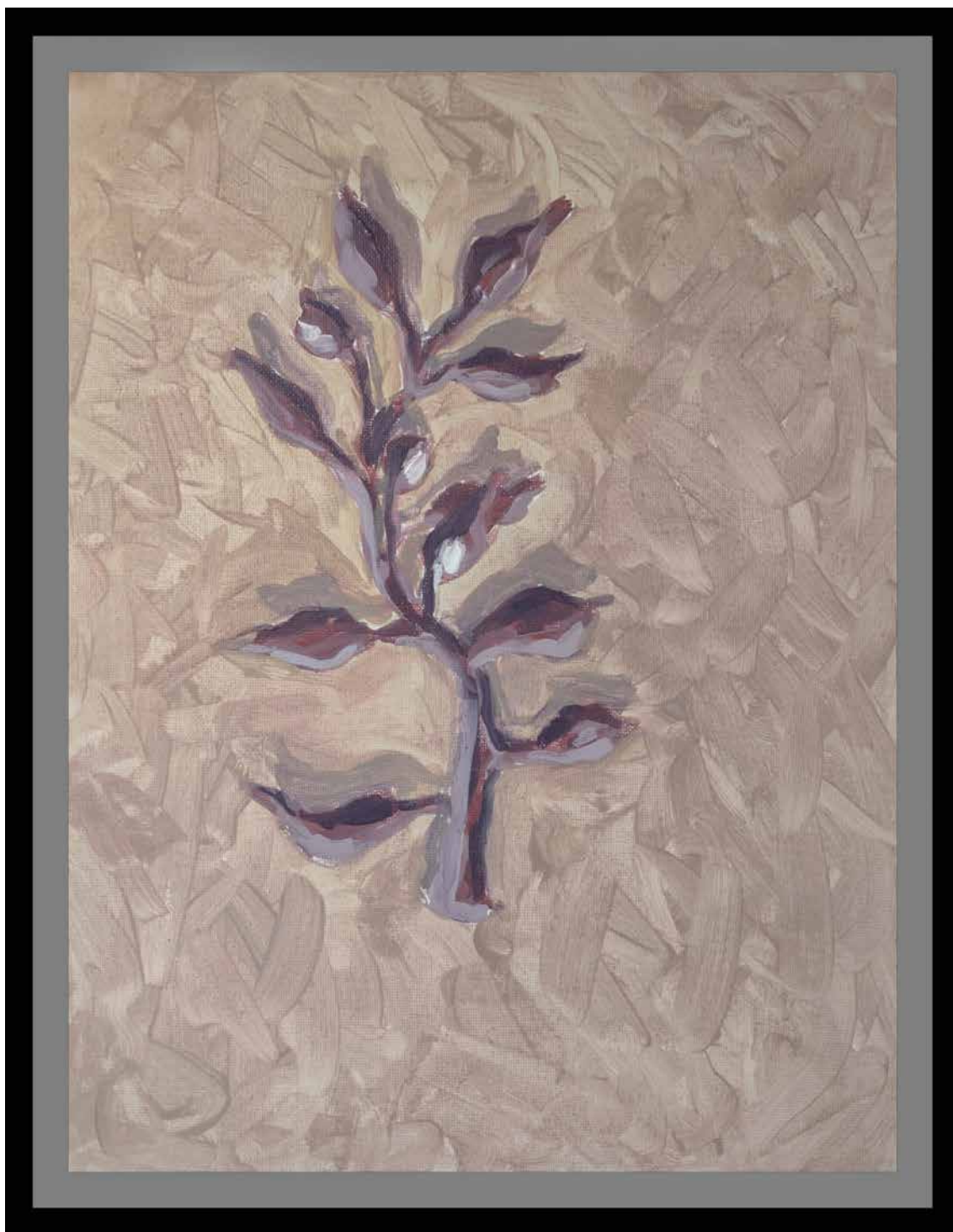
(b. 1994, Riga, Latvia)

He is a Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning Master's student at The University of Maryland. With a background in architecture, he works in Washington D.C. consulting on gardens as well as working with investors in creating supportive networks for good design and development. Recently, he has collaborated with the Embassy of Spain and artist Lucia Loren to introduce seventy two new species into their gardens to support native pollinators and engage the public with beauty.

*The Olive Branch*

acrylic on canvas board  
9 x 12 in (ca 23 x 30,5 cm)  
2022





# ANKA LEŚNIAK

(b. 1978, Bielsko-Biała, Poland)

She is an artist, researcher, academic teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk, and co-organizer of the Feminist Seminar, Lokal\_30 Gallery, Warsaw. She is also a member of the Frakcja Group of women artists. She was awarded a Scholarship of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland (2011) grants from the Mayor of the city of Lodz (2015) and from the city of Gdansk (2016).

Active in genres such as installation, video-installation, video-art, performance art, photo-collages and site-specific artworks, her practice is mainly focused on the history of women, feminism and gender-related topics; the body; ethnic identity; language and memory. Her works have been presented in Poland; South Korea at Asia Performance Art Festival (2012), Changwon Sculpture Biennale, (2020); Gangwon Biennale (2021), Austria, Slovakia at Transart Communication Performance Art Festival, (2012); Germany at Ostrale Biennale (2017); Italy; Scotland; Ukraine; Malta within the exhibition *Found a Mentalism II* (2018); Uzbekistan at Tashkent Biennale (2018).

*Cydonia oblonga*

watercolor, gouache, ink, digital collage  
original size  
2022

## Research Bibliography

Kessler, Rob. *Cydonia oblonga, Quince pollen*, hand coloured SEM, 2009.

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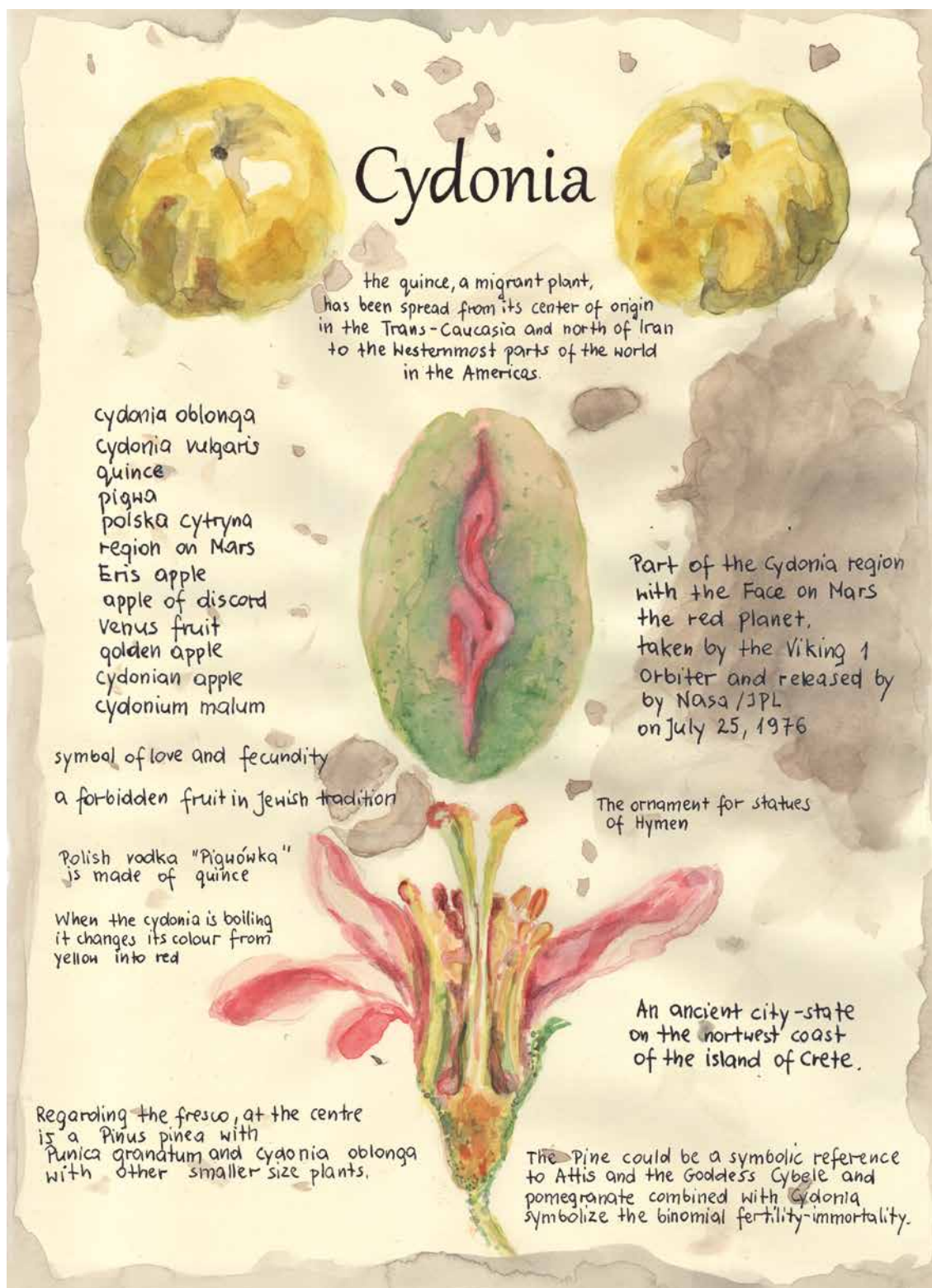
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Sissi. "Quince Vodka." *With a glass - blog*. <http://www.withaglass.com/?p=7276>.

"Testing Pigwówka (Quince Liqueur)." *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-Cp8g5d-U>.





# KAROLINA LIUSIKOVA

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(b. 1987, Minsk, Belarus)

Artist and cultural producer of Tatar origin, living in Rome. Her works are based on visual citations of modern and ancient science literature, executed in watercolour, etching, or sculpture.

*Pinus pinea*  
mixed media on paper  
39,4 x 23,1 cm  
2021







# KEN LUM

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(b. 1956, Vancouver, Canada)

Artist, and a longtime professor, currently the Chair of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design in Philadelphia. He is co-founder and founding editor of the *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. A book of his writings titled *Everything is Relevant: Writings on Art and Life 1991 – 2018* was published in 2020 by Concordia University Press. As an artist he participated in exhibitions such as Documenta, Venice Biennale, Sao Paulo Bienal and Whitney Biennial. Since the mid 1990s, he has worked on numerous major permanent public art commissions including for the cities of Vienna, Rotterdam, St. Louis, Leiden, Utrecht, Toronto and Vancouver. Currently he is working as a co-founder and Chief Curatorial Advisor to Monument Lab, a public art and history collective founded in Philadelphia.

*Opuntia (prickly pear flower)*

plant from the personal garden of Linus Lum

photograph by Linus Lum

original size

2022





# ADELLE LUTZ

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(b. 1948, Lakewood, Ohio)

Lives and works in Los Angeles and New York. Her works have ranged from costume design to performative actions and installations with, often, a focus on human rights and our common place on this blue planet. The beauty and uses of bamboo have been particularly important in Adelle's family with over 1000 pieces now included in the permanent collection of the Denver Art Museum. A dedicated bamboo gallery is named for her parents, Walter + Mona Lutz.

*Bamboo Lift-Off*  
watercolor and ink  
18 x 25 cm  
2021









# ALEKSANDRA MIR

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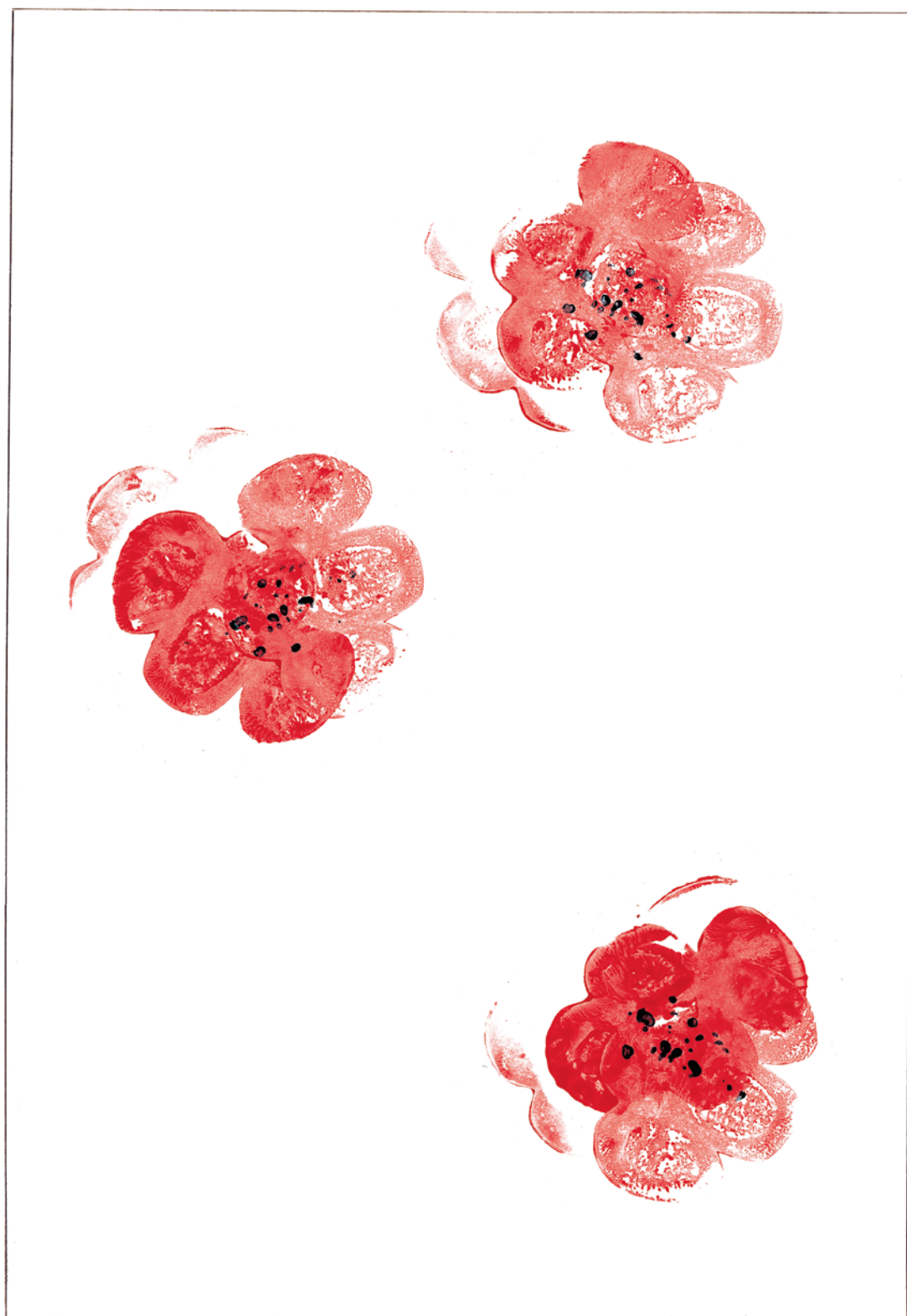
(b. 1967, Lubin, Poland)

Swedish-American artist living in London who has been active on the international art scene for the past 30 years. *The Meaning of Flowers* was produced during her residency in Palermo, Sicily, 2005–2010.

*The Meaning of Flowers (Poppy / Asshole)*

letterpress, fruit and vegetable acrylic  
monoprint on hand torn paper, from a series  
of forty motifs in an edition of fifteen,  
35 x 50 cm  
2006





*Poppy*  
Asshole

# CATERINA MORIGI

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(b. 1991, Ravenna, Italy)

Lives and works in Bologna. Caterina Morigi studied University, Venice and at 'Université Paris8-Saint Denis. In her practice she often collaborates with scientific centers such as LAMA - Laboratory of Ancient Materials of the IUAV University, or the Rizzoli Orthopedic Institute and the University of Bologna. Caterina Morigi's research investigates the variations of the material, paying attention to its less obvious aspects, sometimes hidden inside. This is also focused on crossing thresholds: on what leaves a mark and on what leaves emptiness.

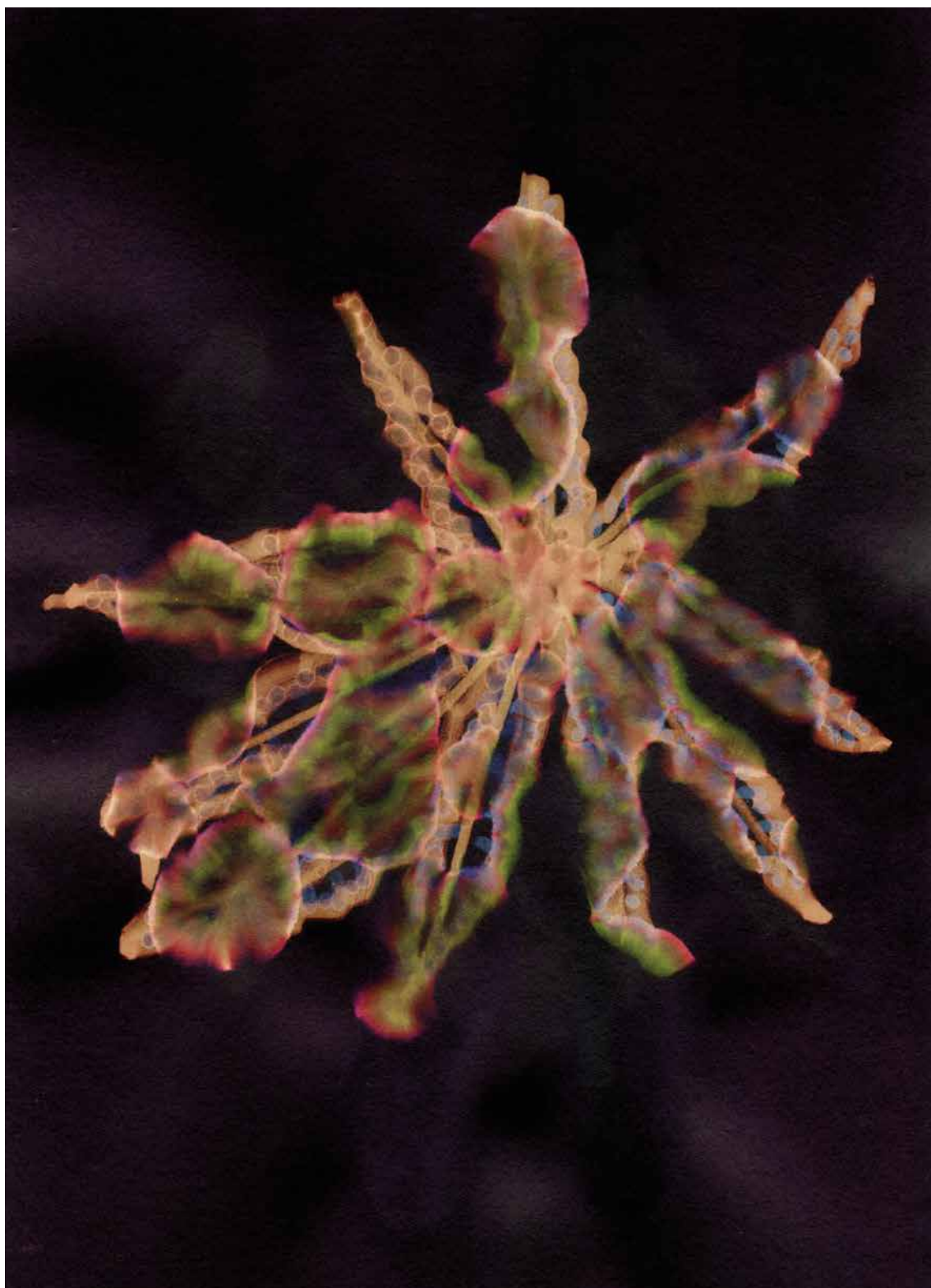
*Phyllitis Scolopendrium*

digital drawing

original size

2022





# CHRISTIAN PHILIPP MÜLLER

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(b. 1957, Biel/Bienne, Switzerland)

Artist, organizer, and curator. His installations are based on artistic research that engages with existing social, economic, and cultural relationships. He questions the art context, the specificities of a site, and the exhibition as the medium of art.

*Untitled*  
photograph  
original size  
2022







# TXUSPO POYO

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(b. 1963 Alsasua, Navarra)

He holds a BA in Fine Arts from the University of the Basque Country (UPV). In 2001, he completed an ISCP residency sponsored by Fundación Marcelino Botín and also studied at the CADA Center of New York University. In 2006, he received funding from Fundación Arte y Derecho and Fundación de las Artes de Valencia for his Delay Glass project, and the same year won the Premio Gure Artea of the Basque Government. In 2008, he was awarded first prize at the 10th Unión Fenosa International Exhibition. In 2015, he received funding from The Fundación BBVA for La Engaña tunnel Project and in 2018, from Huarte Centro de arte contemporáneo and the Gobierno de Navarra for the Izaro project. In 2021, he was artist-in-residence at the Academy of Spain in Rome.

*Untitled*

photograph  
original size  
2022





# ANDREA POLICHETTI

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(b. 1989, Rome)

His research draws on archaeological and natural imagery; through experimentation with contemporary materials, he uses different languages, including drawing, printing, cyanotype and sculpture.

He has been actively involved in the creation of independent exhibitions, such as 89/2012, the management of the temporary space Da Franco (inside a barber shop in the centre of Rome) and a publishing project of fanzines. In 2020, he founded Spaziomensa, furthering his activity as a promoter and art organiser, in addition to art.

*Untitled*

neon sculpture

2021

photography: Natalie Russo

courtesy: the artist and

Agricola Due Leoni







# RUBY PERKINS

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(b. 2000, Berkeley, California)

Lives and works in Philadelphia. She studied at Tyler School of Art where she won the Painting Intensive Award 2022. She has recently participated April 2022; *Portraits in Two Three Time*, BFA Thesis Exhibition, Stella Elkins Tyler Gallery Philadelphia, PA

Group Exhibitions:

May 2021; Group Show on a Blueberry Farm Nepi, Italy

May 2021; Temple University Rome, Italy

2019; HERspace Group Show Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Publications:

2021; *Breaking Boundaries*, Artists of Color Collective

Awards:

2022; Laurie Wagman Internship Award Fund

2022; Painting Intensive Award, Tyler School of Art

*Untitled*

ink on paper, drawing

original size

2021







# RACHEL PIMM

(b. 1984, Harare, Zimbabwe)

A research-based artist whose work studies the narratives of transforming surfaces, environments, ecologies and ecosystems and their politics and materialities. These often closely observe industrial, geological, mineral or vegetal processes. Her work was presented at the Serpentine Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery, and Royal Academy in London, and art centres in the US and around Europe. She is Associate Lecturer at Camberwell College, UAL.



*Weeds by the moon*

material: ongoing graphic  
digital archive of seasonal  
plants  
original size  
2020–2022

*Fried fennel blossom*

documentation of cooked  
wild food  
2020



# BARBARA PRENKA

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(b. 1990, Gjakova, Kosovo)

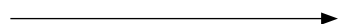
Born in Kosovo, lives and works between Venice, Bolzano, and Berlin. Her production includes abstract paintings, objects and installations of painted fabrics based on spontaneous gestures. Her works are featured in various collective exhibitions and galleries such as Venice Time Case (2022) at Galerie Italienne, Paris; MAKE ME A COFFEE MAKE ME A SANDWICH (2021) at Galeria17, Prishtina; and Sans Titre gallery (2016) Paris. In 2021, she exhibited at Palazzo Monti, Brescia and she is currently working on a site-specific installation for the Villa of Livia, Prima Porta.

*Pullant fragmenta*

tempera on watercolor paper

29 x 42 cm

2021









# EGLÉ DE RICHEMONT

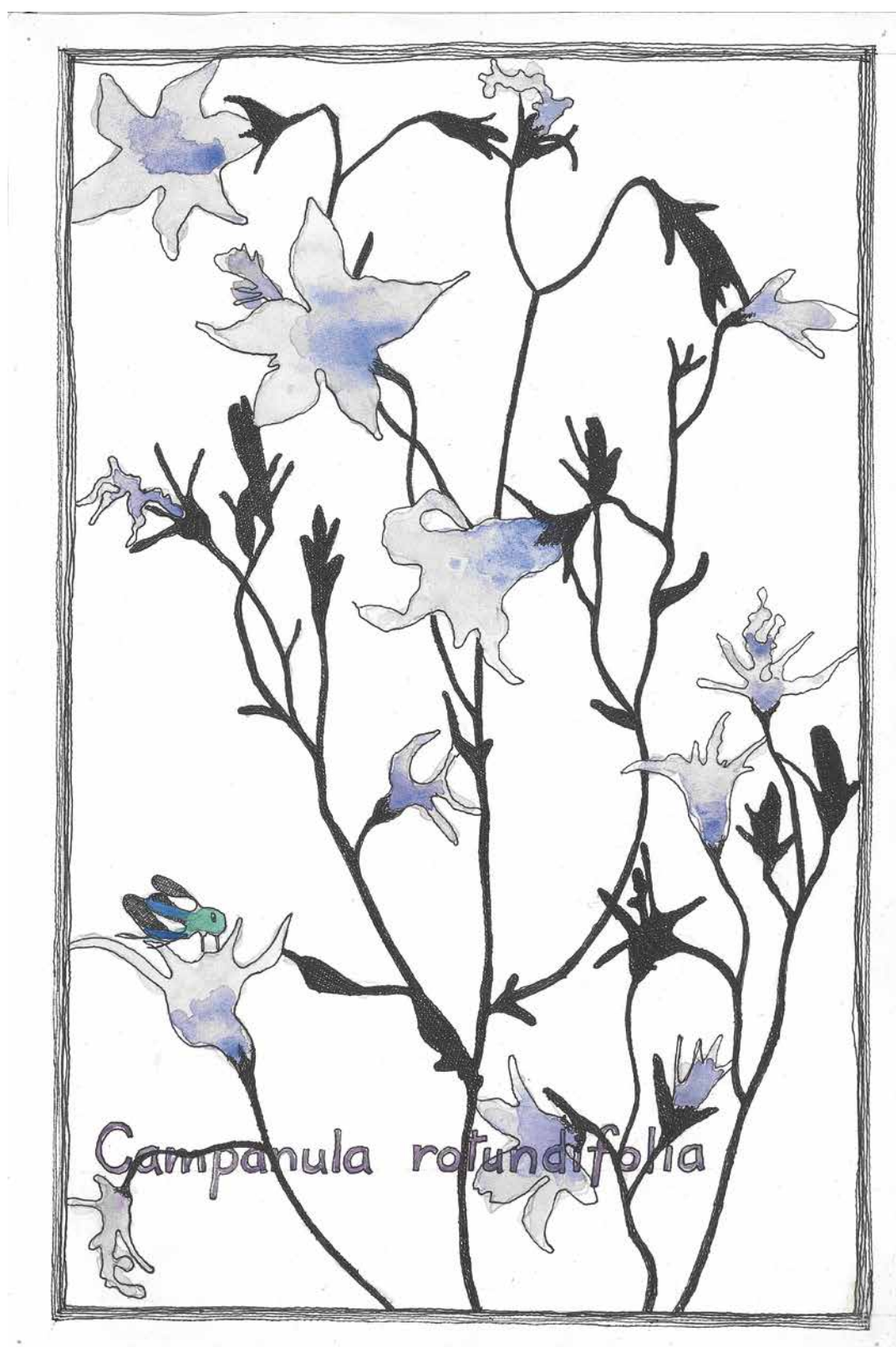
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(b. 1957, Johannesburg)

Decorative artist based in Rome. Coleoptera has been her main field of interest for more than 20 years; recently she has dedicated more of her time to making ceramics.

*Campanula rotundifolia*  
watercolour on paper  
original size  
2022





# CHRYSANNE STATHACOS

---

(b. 1951, USA)

Multidisciplinary artist of Greek, American, and Canadian heritage. Her work is heavily influenced by feminism, Greek mythology, the natural environment, Eastern spirituality, and Tibetan Buddhism. She has exhibited for over 40 years in museums, galleries and public spaces internationally.

Solo exhibitions include: Gold Rush at Cooper Cole, Toronto (2018–19) and Pythia, The Breeder, Athens, Greece (2017).

Recent installations: AA Bronson's Garten der Lüste, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2018); The Sculpture Park, Madhavendra Palace, Jaipur, India, (2018–2020); 13th Gwangju Biennale, Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning, South Korea (2021); MAO Museo di Arte Orientale, (Turin) and Henie Onstad Art Centre (Oslo), (2022).

She was also featured as a contributor to AA Bronson's House of Shame, published by Edition Patrick Frey (Zürich).

*Rose*

direct print on paper (unique)

9 x 12 in (ca 23 x 30,5 cm)

2022





# SARAH DE TELIGA

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(b. 1954, Melbourne, Australia)

French-Australian artist, currently living and working in Paris. She has enjoyed a career of forty years as a painter; textile artist; fashion designer; and curator.

*Untitled*

painting

original size

2022

photo: Victor Matussi re







# AKI TURUNEN

(b. 1983, Helsinki, Finland)

Graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in 2011. In addition, he studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. His paintings are based on choices of materials and the imagery he deals with is a combination of intuition, subconsciousness and traditions.

The starting point for creating this painting was first going through of the intriguing list of the plants depicted in the fresco of Villa Livia. At first, I focused entirely on which plants spoke to me visually. After having raked through the entity there was a selection of plants left and I focused on the meanings that one can derive from them. Finally I decided to choose the opium poppy respectively *papaver somniferum* in Latin.

The opium poppy, or just a poppy, seemed to embody both personal and more universal meanings: Here, in Finland, it is a plant that survives in the nature only in July. I instantly reminisced about some of the poppies in my grandmother's garden and especially about their hairy stems. I remember how the stems felt when I touched them. The blossoms themselves, I recollect, lose their petals rather easily so there exists a certain fragility to the plant.

In a wider perspective, the poppy is self-evidently a symbol of the opium trade, it is also the symbol of the 1st World War: I remember the vast installation I saw in the Tower of London in 2014 designed by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper – a myriad of red ceramic poppies were installed to symbolize a pond of blood. Interestingly, in Finland, the most well-known printed fabric depicts a poppy and it is called 'unikko'. It is a pattern designed by Maija Isola and nowadays produced by Marimekko. The Finnish word 'Unikko' comes from the word 'uni' which means sleep or dream. In Italy however, as I have understood, the (opium) poppy is a very common flower that grows in the wild.

For my painting I wanted to choose a medium that would have the material sensuousness similar to the fresco of Villa Livia itself. I chose to paint in egg tempera on wood. I could have also chosen to paint in encaustic using molten pigmented wax which seems to be one of the most used media in the Roman times. As for the pigments I wanted to use colors that could have been used in the Roman times. The blue in the background is of genuine azurite, an early blue pigment used by the Romans. The molecule consists

mainly of copper and carbon. The yellow rim referring also to the Roman use of color combinations is of genuine Naples yellow, a lead antimonate compound. I chose a small size for the picture because I think it is very intelligible for the reading format – since the book now is the predominant vehicle for this work. The small sized picture comes close to the reader. The content in the painting revolves a lot around scale:

The small plant becomes huge before the tiny poppy leaves. Shall there also be the physical venue later on, I will be happy to create another piece for it for the experience of the spectator will be then different. The composition of the painting is inspired by the compositions of Piero della Francesca, a Renaissance painter also a mathematician. He is an artist I have studied quite a bit lately.

The big poppy is placed within two triangles, there is an oval guiding the lines of the small poppy leaves. The clouds in the background land on the lines of the golden ratio. For the photos I collaborated with photographer Filippo Zambon, originally from Tuscany now working in Finland. The photos show a studio reproduction of the painting. With photos taken outdoors I wanted to simulate the connection to the fresco for a fresco is always about how a picture is related to the surrounding space. I wish to express my warm gratitude for taking part in this very fascinating venture.

Helsinki, November 2021

*Papaver somniferum*  
– a highly secretive opium poppy  
tempera on wood  
28 x 22 cm  
2021  
photo: Filippo Zambon





# MEYER VAISMAN

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(b. 1960, Santiago de Leon de Caracas, Venezuela)  
Lives in Israel and works globally.

*He Loveth Me - They Loveth Me Not*  
installation view  
2015







# MARIA VOROBYEVA

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(b. 1993, Moscow)

Russian artist from Moscow, working in digital art, painting, and set design. She graduated with a degree in architecture from Central Saint Martins in London. Her work has been exhibited in the UK, Germany and Russia and her clients include Fendi, *Wonderland* magazine, *Elle* magazine, Russian Jewish Congress, among others.

*Floral Study*  
2021





# DANIELE ZOICO

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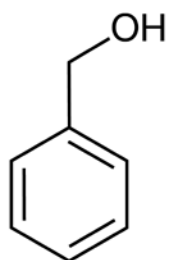
(b. 1985, Venice, Italy)

Italian artist, designer, and performer. In 2007, he co-founded the Blauer Hase collective which creates experimental forms of artistic production and fruition. In 2015, he founded his production house, DANTO Production, formed by a group of video-makers with whom he creates video production for visual artists, documentation for museum installations, documentaries and communication. His works have been exhibited in events and institutions such as MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts (Rome), MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art (Rome), Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation (Turin), Castello Sforzesco (Milan), Turin Film Festival (Turin) and Viafarini DOCVA (Milan).

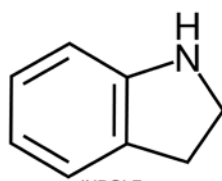
*Jasmine (Jasminum sambac)*

2022

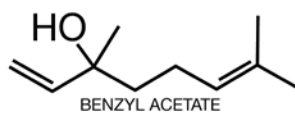




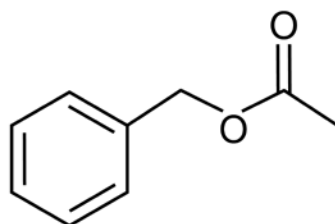
BENZYL ALCOHOL



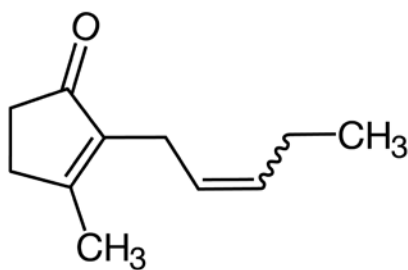
INDOLE



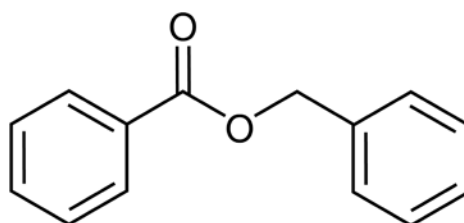
BENZYL ACETATE



LINALOOL



JASMONE



BENZYL BENZOATE

# pro- ject sta- tus re- port



Gardens and Villa of Livia, Prima Porta, Rome  
 External Project Status Report  
 March 2022

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 Display solutions for the *natatio* mosaics  
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 Digital Triclinium frescos  
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 Phase IV: Global Awareness Campaign
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### 1. Premise, Mission, and Objectives

#### Premise

This proposal aims to revitalize an ancient area of Rome through a multidisciplinary research project considering biodiversity in all its implications. The project functions in a contemporary key, manifested by a fusion of public and private forces, and expressed through art, horticultural activism, digital platforms, preservation, and archaeology. Seeking to rephrase ancient methods for future generations, the project is inspired by an extraordinary, in many places still verdant, suburb once considered Rome's "first door." Prima Porta, Rome, is also known as the property of Livia Drusilla, wife of Augustus, mother of Tiberius, and eminent Roman matron. This research project is inspired by a culture of sustainability ongoing over millennia, a metaphor for a vibrant, multicultural Rome, with archaeological and horticultural patrimony of national and global relevance.

The present-day area once constituting the farm, gardens, and villa of Livia still offers an untouched landscape, in some corners, through which to sense the ancient pulse of the Mediterranean. By celebrating this venue through study, art, and attention to its plants, the project aims to suggest how biodiversity has always figured in the corridors of spiritual and political power. The natural yet also artificial landscape at hand includes many now endangered species. The project hopes to show the symbiosis possible between plants and humans.

A world-renowned fresco cycle celebrating Mediterranean horticulture adorned the cool subterranean summer pavilion in Livia's country seat. These frescoes, today conserved at Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, are among the most charming examples of landscape painting in the entire history of art. They offer a unique opportunity to gaze at ancient flora and fauna, in metaphorical and allegorical form. The plants are a subtle reminder of ancient female nature deities, once considered to be the very embodiment of prosperity.

The archaeological site of the villa of Livia *ad Gallinas Albas* in its original location at Prima Porta offers a fertile ground to revitalize values of stewardship, sustainability, and harmony with nature.

The medicinal and culinary garden of the Villa of Livia, as well as its formal gardens, demonstrate sustainability and innovation, the interplay between science and society, and the relationship of art and nature. All these are positioned around the figure of Livia as Mother of Rome, a vision that Augustus sought to underscore. To rethink what was once the most important garden in the Roman Empire, a multidisciplinary team of artists, classicists, biologists, archaeologists, food historians, private enterprise, botanists, bio-engineers, art historians, architects and philosophers have been assembled to facilitate a dialogue among varied disciplines and promote biological and cultural diversity.

## Mission

Our mission is to bring biocultural diversity to everyday dialogue. This task requires two things: a deep understanding of our situation and effective communication.

All substantial change, a paradigm shift, needs a visual language that can capture the public's attention and reshape people's perceptions. Our goal, therefore, is to bring together leading researchers and visual thinkers, and then to present their findings, theories and ideas, synthesizing the ancient and contemporary, going beyond the dichotomy of scientific and humanistic. This dialogue is possible through art, the ultimate universal language.

## Objectives

- Communicate **biodiversity, sustainability, continuous cultural practices including agriculture**
- Raise public awareness of **heritage and ecological conservation**
- Envisage biodiversity as cultural diversity
- Promote biodiversity as environmental and **economic sustainability**
- Emphasize **collective responsibility and global impact**

## Methods

- **Curatorial, Editorial and Publication**, with podcasts and contributions from experts, artists, scholars (commissioned May 2021, sponsor Suzanne Deal Booth).
- **Research** published in *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, Scholarly Journal, Fine Arts Academy, Gdańsk (2022)

- **International Network** of local projects working in the same direction as *Universal Gardens* (April to June 2021, letters of outreach to UK, France, Switzerland, Germany, USA, et al.)
- **Website and Database** (September/October 2022, proposed to ENEL Foundation)
- Series of focused **exhibitions, performances, and happenings**
- Series of **public** talks, conferences, and symposia (2022 -2023)
- Interaction of **contemporary art, science, and archaeology (ongoing)**

## 2. Phase I: Valorization of Villa of Livia, Rome

### Project Proposal

#### Valorization of Site of Villa of Livia, Rome through:

##### **Temporary contemporary art installation**

**Restoration** and display of the *natatio* mosaics

**Reconstruction** of Livia's private garden

- Research on plants in both domestic and formal garden
- Reconstruction of the garden
- Sponsorship for long term maintenance

##### **Digital reconstructions of the Villa and the triclinium fresco**

#### Suggested Institutional Interventions (MiC - Ministry of Culture)

- **Permanent didactic materials** at Villa of Livia
- **Ticket** paired with Palazzo Massimo and House of Livia on the Palatine Hill

#### Interventions coordinated by Municipality Roma XV

- **Signage** (outside the Villa, in Piazzale Flaminio train station to Villa of Livia, from Prima Porta train station to Villa di Livia)
- Parking and **accessibility**
- Museum Gift Shop and Café

#### **COMMUNICATION**

- Exhibition catalogue
- **Public** performances, round tables, concerts
- Sponsor **recognition** events
- **Conferences** with partner universities and UN agencies
- **Workshops** with schools and universities at Villa of Livia
- **Collaboration** with Municipio Roma XV for awareness and communication in Prima Porta

## Phase II: Online Presence

### Database (next step)

- To feature a selection of scholarly and scientific **research**
- Collection of **artworks, artists, and curators**
- List of **researchers, activists, professionals, public figures**; their biographical and contact information

### Editorial (commissioned)

- **Written contributions**, essays, interviews, opinion pieces
- **Artistic contributions**, including but not limited to, poetry, visual art, photography music, video and cinematographic art, design, short fiction
- **Podcasts - Video interviews**
- Online **lectures**

### Network (established)

- Biodiversity **projects** on a global scale (links and contacts)
- Biodiverse **farms, gardens, villas, parks and sites**; A Preliminary Network (links and contacts)

### Social Media (commissioned)

- Instagram, Twitter and Facebook
- **Amplifying editorial** content and producing **exclusive curated content**
- **Promoting the archeological site(s) on international level**
- **Mailing list** and monthly **newsletter**

## Phase III: Current Research and Publications

- **Editorial concept established**
- Scholarly publication in **book** format: collected volume of **interdisciplinary** papers from specialised historians, classicists, microbiologists, botanists from partner institutions, with works by **contemporary artists**
- **Publisher**
- **Research published in scholarly journal**, *Sztuka i Dokumentacja / Art and Documentation*, Fine Arts Academy, Gdańsk, Poland
- Printed using **unburnished, recycled, biodegradable** materials

### **Interdisciplinary papers:**

Laura Borghetti, Ph.D.; Giulia Maria Paoletti, Ph.D.; Silvia Ronchey, Ph.D.,  
“Biodiversity in Byzantium, between patrons, manuscripts and botanical travels”

Giulia Caneva, Ph.D., “Summary of Augustan Botanical Message”

Crispin Corrado, Ph.D., “Biodiversity in the Ancient Roman World”

June di Schino, Ph.D., “Livia’s Garden: A Paradise for the Table”

Margaret Kneller, Ph.D., “On Biodiversity in the Ice Age at Prima Porta” [TK title]

Cornelia Lauf, Ph.D., “The Livian Paradigm: Agricultural and Environmental Politics with Art”

Nicolas Liney, Ph.D.; “Biodiverse poems, posthuman poets: gardens in/as imperial Roman poetry”

K. Sara Myers, Ph.D., “Botanical Imperialism and Metamorphic Biodiversity: Livia and Ovid”

#### Phase IV: Global Awareness Campaign

- The sum of previous phases repeated in other locations, with the aim to create a **global awareness** campaign of the villa of Livia and its implications
- Creation of **site-specific** projects in partnership with **local institutions**, museums, universities and partners
- **Contemporary art** exhibitions with artists and curators, **local** and **international**
- Local **archaeology**, historic **works** of art, and cultural **traditions**
- **Conferences, lectures and workshops**, held locally and streamed online





# Installation in the ancient *natatio* of Livia

Estimated completion date: Summer, 2023

Mosaic 940 x 560 x 110 cm; border mosaics: 100 cm

Courtesy the artist, Barbara Prenka

Proposed partner: Bisazza SPA



# con- trib- utors

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Bernard Anson Silj**

Bernard Anson Silj is the founder of and proprietor of Villa Anson Silj in Prima Porta, Rome. Anson has used the storied past of the grounds to promote the importance of new modes of story-telling. A descendant of a famed explorer, as well as the founder of the Dilettanti Society – which counts members today such as Prince Charles – Anson is an eclectic custodian of Italy's unique relation with the United Kingdom, which he furthers through his Rome-based nonprofit, Associazione Anson Silj and the Edinburgh-based StoryGardens Ltd..

**Giulia Caneva, Ph.D.**

Giulia Caneva is full-time professor of Environmental and Applied Botany in the Dept. of Science at Roma Tre Univ. Her research activity is mainly focused on the Mediterranean vegetation and plant biology applied to the conservation and enhancement of works of art. She has been involved in many national and international projects of cultural heritage conservation: Moenjodaro, Pakistan; Chengdè, China; Copàn, Honduras; Joya De Cerèn, El Salvador; Martvili, Georgia; Ta Nei Temple- Angkor Cambodia; Cappadocia Churches, Turkey; Bali Aga villages, Indonesia; Mrauk U, Myanmar; Ancient Tombs of South Korea. She received several awards for her scientific activity: XI Edition of the award Giacomo Lumbroso (2011, Roma), the Gran Prix for Cultural Heritage of the European Union - Europa Nostra, (Lisboa, 2012); Art and Science of the Società Nazionale Scienze Lettere ed Arti (2019, Napoli). She is the author of more than 300 publications and twenty three books.

**Alessandra Capodiferro, Ph.D.**

Alessandra Capodiferro, archaeologist for MiBAC/MiC (Rome), has been responsible for the Museums of Palazzo Altemps and Terme di Diocleziano (National Roman Museum). She was also director of the archaeological sites of the Aventine hill. She has carried out research activity on excavations, heritage preservation, museum management, and historical archives (archaeological records and photography). Curator of exhibitions, and editor, she has collaborated with Encyclopedia Treccani and The American Academy in Rome. Since 2019 to date, Capodiferro has been President of the International Association for Classical Archaeology, based in Rome (AIAC).

**Crispin Corrado, Ph.D.**

Crispin Corrado is a classical archaeologist specializing in Roman art; she has fieldwork experience at Pompeii, and has worked in a curatorial capacity at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design, and the Vatican Museums. She currently teaches at various institutions in Rome, and is the founder of the Rome Society of the Archaeological Institute of America.



**Isabella Dalla Ragione**

President of the Archeologia Arborea Foundation, Isabella Dalla Ragione is an agronomist who deals with the concrete safeguarding of biodiversity. Her orchard, in San Lorenzo di Lerchi, in the upper valley of the Tiber, preserves, protects and grows over 500 specimens of ancient fruit trees in 150 different varieties.

**Ihsan Barış Gedizlioğlu, M.A.**

Ihsan Barış Gedizlioğlu is an independent researcher. His research focuses on ancient philosophy and language, and on material culture as exhibited in visual arts. He holds a Master's in Art History from John Cabot University and currently lives in Venice.

**Valeria Grilli**

Valeria Grilli is an architect with a professional degree from the Sapienza University Rome. She has post-graduate experiences in London, and ample experience in the field of urban and territorial planning, with early forays into the field of exhibition practice. She has worked extensively in the area of safeguarding of Italian artistic and cultural patrimony. She lives and works in Rome.

**Margaret Kneller, Ph.D.**

Margaret Kneller is a professor at John Cabot University Rome, where she teaches courses in climate change and natural sciences. Her scientific research pursues topics of biodiversity, agrodiversity, and archeo-botany.

**Cornelia Lauf, Ph.D.**

Cornelia Lauf is an art historian and curator living in Rome. She holds a doctorate from Columbia University and began her career at the Guggenheim Museum. Her exhibition projects include *Artist/Author, Contemporary Artist's Books*, (traveling, American Federation of Arts, New York City), *Konstantin Gricic*, (Casa di Goethe, Rome; Harvard University, Cambridge; Klassik Stiftung, Weimar) *Wall to Wall: Carpets by Artists*, (Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland), among many others. She worked as editor-in-chief of Imschoot, Uitgevers, Belgium; co-founded Three Star Books in Paris (2005-2017), and has produced many books and editions with contemporary artists. She lectures widely at universities and art schools, and has held teaching positions at the New School; Duke University; IUAV, and currently, John Cabot University Rome. She has completed a consultancy for Samantha Leslie of the Leslie Foundation, Ireland, has begun writing artist profiles for the *Financial Times*, and is organizing her personal archive.

**Nicolas Liney, Ph.D.**

Nicolas Liney recently graduated from Oxford University, where he has focused on ekphrasis and intermediality in imperial Latin literature. Lives between Australia, Denmark, and London.



**Karolina Liusikova**

Karolina Liusikova is an art director, artist, and a cultural producer based in Rome, Italy, who focuses on contemporary art as a platform for interdisciplinary dialogue. She is a consultant for private galleries and public institutions, including directing External Relations for No Man's Land Foundation, Rome. As editor and collaborator for various contemporary art publications, she has worked with artists such as Emilio Prini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Yona Friedman, Jimmie Durham, Alvin Curran, Bruna Esposito, Fabrice Hyber, Jannis Kounellis, and others.

**Giuseppe Morganti**

Giuseppe Morganti, architect for MiBAC (Siena and Rome), has overseen the restorations of S. Maria Antiqua, Temple of Saturn, Horti Farnesiani (Farnese Gardens), Basilica of Maxentius, and Domus Tiberiana. He has carried out research activity in conservation-restoration theory, construction techniques, garden art history, ruins in aesthetics, participating in conventions and courses in Italian and international universities. Since 2003, he has collaborated with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kurdistan, Egypt, Iran, Israel and Jordan, on cultural patrimony preservation.

**Karen S. Myers, Ph.D.**

Karen Sara Myers is a professor and Chair of the Classics Department at the University of Virginia. Her personal research focuses on classical Latin literature, as well as ancient gardens and their literary representation.

**Giulia Maria Paoletti, Ph.D.**

Giulia Maria Paoletti holds a doctorate in Byzantine Philology at the University of Oxford. She works on the poetry of Middle and Late Byzantium, providing new critical editions of monastic and paraenetic texts. Her Ph.D. project was funded by the Nicholas Frangiscatos Scholarship in Byzantine and post-Byzantine Studies (Exeter college). Her research interests include Greek palaeography and codicology, book circulation in Byzantium, and the interaction between secular and monastic poetry in Byzantine cultural milieux. She lives in Oxford, England.

**Flavia Prestininzi, M.A.**

Flavia Prestininzi is an independent curator based in Rome and a PhD candidate in "Medium and Mediality" at eCampus University. She took an MA in Philosophy at University of Roma Tre, and in Curating and Collections at Chelsea College of Art UAL, London. In 2017 she started organizing collective exhibitions in Italy, Spain, UK and Iran working with her international curatorial collective, active until 2020. She has worked with national and international foundations and galleries, where she developed a strong interest in the relation between art, science and nature. Mostly focused on supporting emergent and international artists, she believes that the curatorial process is strongly linked to a collective and shared knowledge, where different subjects and fields can be readdressed and redefined through the lens of art. She is currently researching about this horizontal and multidisciplinary approach, that can be said as Rhizomatic, within her PhD practice based research.

**Silvia Ronchey, Ph.D.**

Silvia Ronchey is a historian and philologist in Byzantine studies. Between 1996 and 2012, she taught at the University of Siena, from 2012 to present, she is a professor of Byzantine civilization in the department of Humanities at the University of Rome. She is also a collaborator with the newspaper *La Repubblica*.

**June di Schino, Ph.D.**

June di Schino is a cultural historian specialized in food studies. Docent at the University of Bologna and RomaTre, President of Diomeda Study Research Centre, she has researched unpublished manuscripts, winning national and international awards and has curated twenty six exhibitions in Italy and abroad. Visiting lecturer in many countries. She has participated in international conferences, often evoking gala banquets with period music. Honorary Member of the Institute of Historical Research School of Advanced Study, *Accademia Italiana della Cucina*, and *Chaine des Rôtisseurs*. She lives in Rome.

**Aaron Skarzenski, B.A.**

Aaron Skarzenski is a recent graduate with a Bachelor's in Anthropology and Art History from Temple University, with a focus in multimodal cross-cultural communication between linguistics and the arts. He is currently a Collections Assistant at the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia.

**William Hearst Sullivan**

William Hearst Sullivan is a dual Master's candidate of Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture at the University of Maryland.

**Carlo Virili, Ph.D**

Carlo Virili is a professor and archaeologist from La Sapienza University, Rome. More recently his research and archaeological activities have focused in the Italian region, Rieti, where he has excavated sites related to Bronze Age Italian peoples.

**Maria Giovanna Virga, M.A.**

Maria Giovanna Virga is an independent researcher and curator based in Rome. She holds a Master's degree from IUAV University in Venice. Her projects with private and public institutions, as well as international curators and artists include coordination, editorial, and research assistance. She currently collaborates with Massimo Piersanti Photo Archive and MATTATOIO, Rome.

The project *Universal Gardens* has been made possible thanks to the support and generous collaboration of individuals, cultural institutions, and university research centers.

We would like to acknowledge the following:

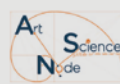
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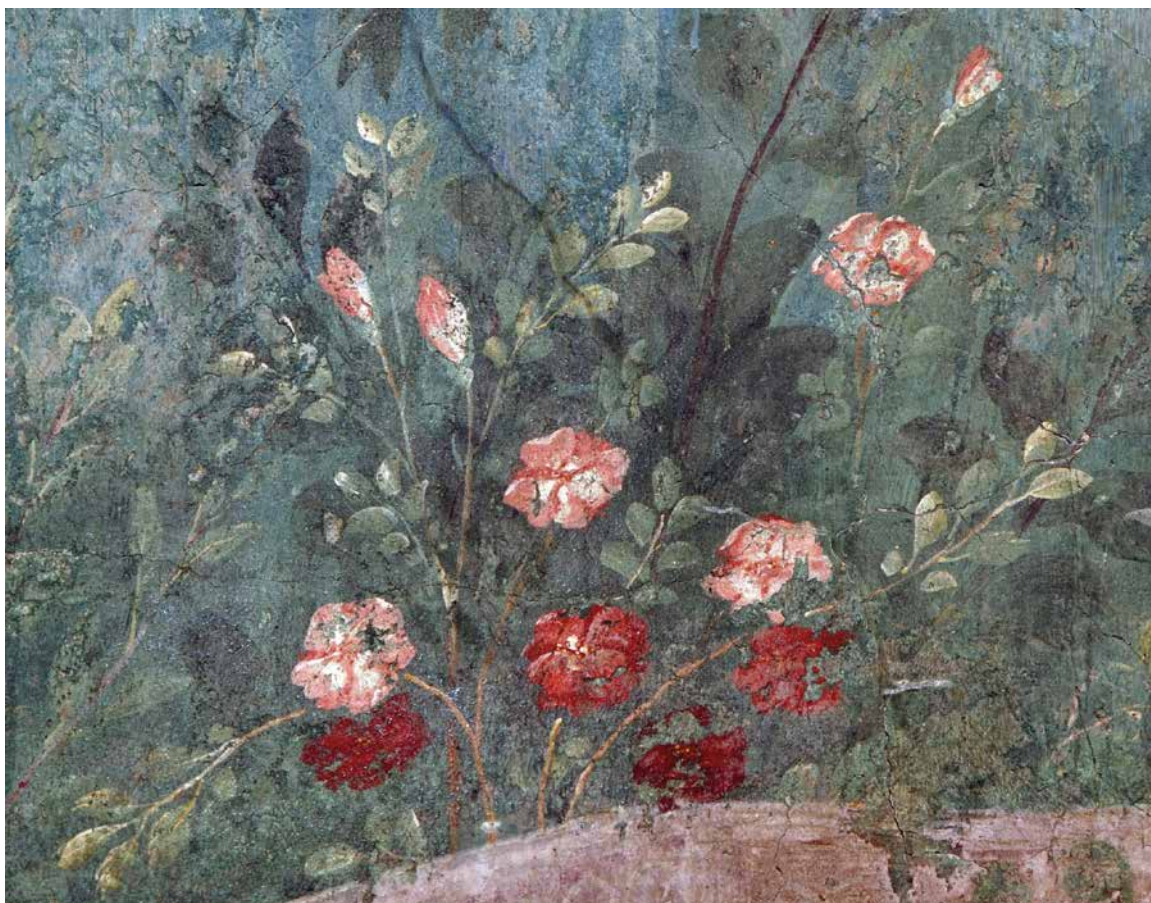
doi:10.32020/ArtandDoc/26/2022/22

# dc- knowl- edge- ments

Sincere thanks to Gloria Arditì, Fabio Attorre, Bernard and Eleonora Anson Silj, Paola Barbaglia, Maria Bonmassar, Suzanne Deal Booth, Giulia Caneva, Alberta Campitelli, Alessandra Capodiferro, Pieranna Cavalchini, Joseph Connors, Crispin Corrado, Alessio De Cristofaro, Alan Crivellaro, Barbara Egan, Alessandra Fassio, Andrea Fogli, Ihsan Baris Gedizlioglu, Valeria Grilli, Lukasz Guzek, Inge Hansen, Malcolm Kendall, Margaret Kneller, Alma Kumbaric, Angelina De Laurenzi, Nicolas Liney, Karolina Liusikova, Aleksandra Mir, Giuseppe Morganti, K. Sara Myers, Giulia Maria Paoletti, Carlo Papa, Gabriella Pescucci, Alma Piermattei, Flavia Prestininzi, Daniela Porro, Elisabetta Povoledo, Silvia Pulino, Isabella Dalla Ragione, Ruth Raymond, Tracy Roberts, Sylvia Ronchey, Ingrid Schaffner, June di Schino, Aaron Skarszenski, Salvatore Settis, Carolyn Smyth, Henry Thomas Sodt, Shannon Di Stefano, Ivars Steines, William Hearst Sullivan (Ivars), Eleonora Tempesta, Andrea Valcalda, Lila Viehweg, Carlo Virili, Maria Giovanna Virga, Shara Wasserman, Lila Yawn, and the MA Program in Art History, John Cabot University, and the many artists, institutions, and individuals who have shared images and ideas for this project.



# VILLA OF LIVIA FRES- COS



Courtesy Ministry of Culture, Museo Nazionale Romano  
photos: Simona Sansonetti and Valeria Intini









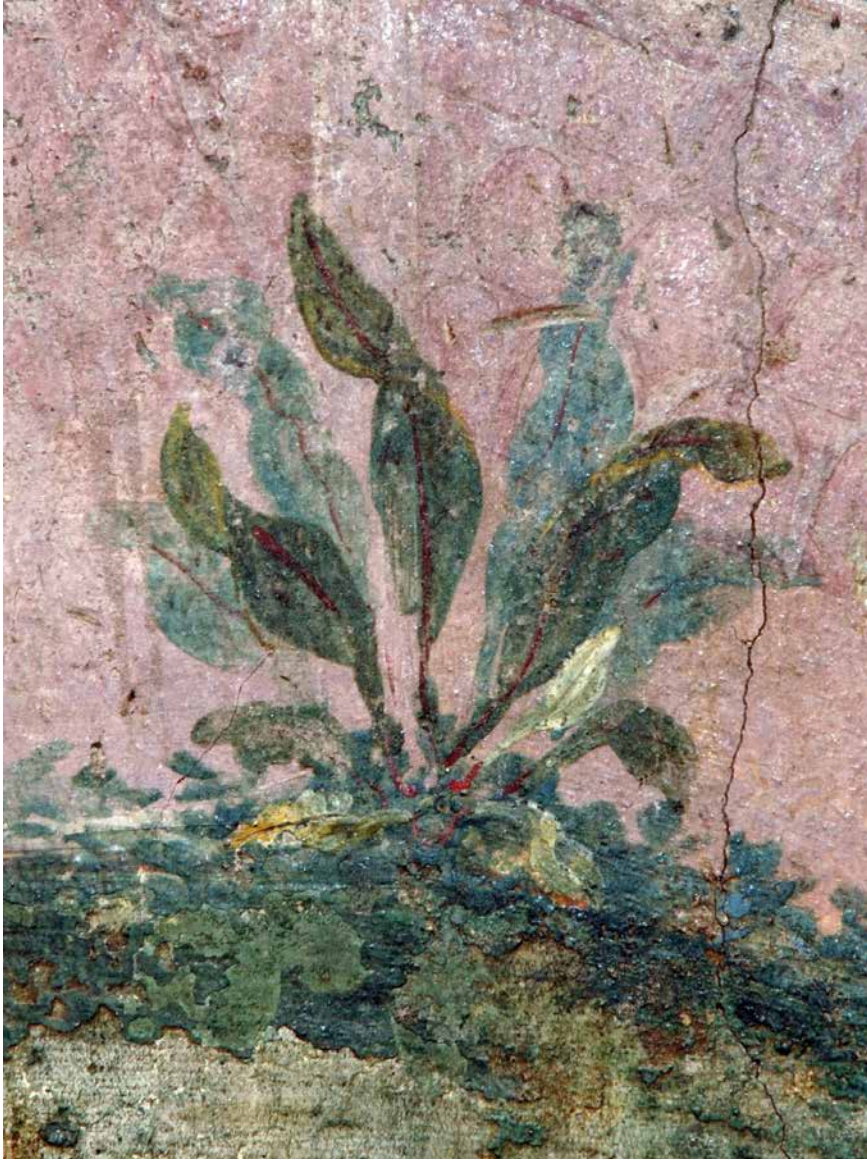




















V A I

RIA





TERESA  
FEODOROWNA  
RIES  
STUDIES



A...kademie der bildenden Künste Wien  
Exhibit Studio  
*Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*  
9 Oct–16 Nov 2021

"How beautiful it would be if the fragrance  
of flowers had killed me in my sleep."  
Teresa Feodorowna Ries, March 2, 1951, Lugano-Paradiso

How can an exhibition show that forgetting is fabricated? Forgetting is history of injustice that does not pass. *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* is dedicated to the life and work by the Jewish sculptor Teresa Feodorowna Ries (1866–1956). She was one of the few artists of her time whose works were shown in the Vienna Secession, the Venice Biennale and the Glass Palace in Munich. Ries would have liked her work to be appreciated at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna,

where she studied. This recognition was never granted to her during her lifetime.

Artist Valerie Habsburg developed the concept of *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* based on her and Anka Leśniak's extensive research on Ries, which began with the rediscovery of her estate in 2018. With contributions by Anna Bochkova, Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Mika Aya Azagi, Judith Augustinovič, and Sami Nagasaki, the exhibition raises awareness that forgetting has its effects and that responsibility must be taken for the consequences of forgetting.

Curator: Valerie Habsburg  
Curatorial support: Elke Krasny  
Artists: Judith Augustinovič, Mika Aya Azagi, Anna Bochkova,  
Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Sami Nagasaki  
Film: Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Karl Martin Pold  
Exhibition design: Judith Augustinovič

Opening  
Fri, 8 Oct 2021, 7 pm

Exhibit Studio  
Schillerplatz 3, 1010 Vienna

Opening Times  
Daily except Monday 10 am–6 pm  
· *Free entry*

Program for the exhibition and further  
information at [www.akbild.ac.at](http://www.akbild.ac.at)

Mediapartner **DERSTANDARD**  
© Valerie Habsburg, 2020

**CURATORIAL  
REFLECTIONS  
ABOUT  
*UN PARADISO  
AMARO / BITTER  
PARADISE*  
by Valerie  
HABSBURG**



■ The exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* took place on the occasion of the reopening of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna at Schillerplatz after more than four years of renovation. 2021 was also the year in which women were officially admitted to study at the Academy for hundred years. The ceremonial opening of the old building and the re-entry of the students was also the occasion for further celebrations and exhibitions. In total, there were 4 exhibitions that took place in parallel, whereby I would like to mention the exhibition *Hungry of Time* here, as it had a link to the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*. In this exhibition, the historical art collection of the Academy was

contrasted and presented with contemporary art in the rooms of the Picture Gallery by the Indian curator trio Raqs Media Collective. From the very extensive collection, a photograph of *The Witch* by Teresa Feodorowna Ries was chosen from the archive, along with many other works. Until this date, however, this one photograph of *The Witch* in the Academy's Archive was not really known. This photograph was taken with a large format camera and is of exceptional quality. It shows the sculpture of *The Witch* before all the suffering and destruction she experienced. On the basis of this photograph, insights into the lost hand and other damages can be gained for the first time. (This photo will be discussed in detail later on).

## Curatorial Statement of Valerie

### Habsburg (from the booklet

### accompanying the exhibition

### Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter

### Paradise)

*Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* confronts life in paradise with the pain of the forever present past. Teresa Feodorowna Ries spent the last years of her life in the beautiful Paradiso of Lugano. This place was her exile where she could try to find peace after all her terrible experiences. The entry in the guest book of the Casa S. Birgitta on August 25, 1942, gives only a dark inkling: "After my heavy loss, I found peace and consolation here. Heartfelt thanks. F. Ries."

The artist spent the last years of her life in a place where the world had seemingly not come apart at the seams, where a lake, nestled in a peaceful landscape, gently laps against its shores, and nature breathed life into her. And yet: she could not forget. Her memories almost petrified her; her hands were sealed. Countless letters abound with hints at her struggle to ascertain the whereabouts

of her works, which she considered her children. Words, captured on paper, are what remains. They reveal the ghosts of the past. Memory also resides in paradise; it is the shadow of the golden shine. Mercilessly, the golden mirror of the present shows the past.

The grave of a whole life reveals itself. A jumble of stones, broken forever. The shards of a sunken world are the foundation on which this paradise is built.

"*Death* and *Lucifer* are smashed, that's for sure. I feel particularly sorry for *Lucifer*. I received the Golden Medal for it in the Künstlerhaus after all - as the only lady in Austria."

June 22, 1949

Stories haunt you until you embark on a quest. Found stones are picked up. What emerges is a building, a sculpture, the spirit captured therein. The spirit of an artist, of a time that is no more and yet teaches us so much that is important for the present.

"... and yet I am doing well compared to five million people."

February 4, 1956

The title of the exhibition, *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*, stands for bitterness and pain, beauty and suffering, life and death. Gold as a color and material refers to the supposed splendor of the past. Gold as jewelry, as a symbol of beauty - yet toxic nevertheless. The toxicity of capitalism and the toxicity of the past. Living on the damaged Earth, toxic yesterday held in memory, makes one wonder about the possibility of preserving the past of a generation in the present generation. Is it possible to retrieve the memory's store and continue writing? Can history be shown at all without looking through the glass of the present? The true price of gold is doubtful and relentless. Its value is determined not only by the past but also by the daily influences of the present. Gold represents the torment (of the workers in the mines) and merciless capitalism. "I have great difficulties breathing. Whenever I cough, my chest feels very dry. Like there is dust in my lungs. I want to get rid of it. But it doesn't come out." (Miner in South Africa, deutschlandfunk.de)

You can never get rid of this dust, nor of that of the past. It covers the gold that shines in the present. Not everything can be weighed in gold - not even in art. In the exhibition, gold as a symbol of success, achievement, and triumph refers to all that is past, to forgotten successes, and to the highest of all virtues, love. Gold is one of the treasures in paradise, it cannot be assigned to any specific place. The Garden of Eden is a fenced terrain, and yet it is not clear where it is. However, the bitter paradise can be explored on foot, the fragrance of the past inhaled.

The works, building blocks of an existence, can speak when they are questioned. Silent stone becomes a narrator about time. Is paradise a palace, and is its foundation made of gold? Are the gates covered with dust and reveal themselves only to the seeker? And is not bitterness also of gold, born of suffering and pain? Is it not agony that makes gold shine? Memories blur in the ocean, the spirits drowned long ago.

## Description of the exhibition

When you entered the exhibition, you were immediately greeted by the original sculpture of *The Witch* to the toilet at Walpurgis Night by Teresa Feodorowna Ries (TFR). The fact that we were allowed to show this monumental marble sculpture at and in the Academy was unique. Thanks to a loan from the Wien Museum, it was possible for this central work by TFR to remain in the rooms of the Academy. It seemed almost like coming home, as this was the starting point for TFR's idea for this sculpture at Schillerplatz.<sup>1</sup>

In this building, over these stairs, TFR walked and describes very impressively in her autobiography how the thoughts about *The Witch* revealed themselves. It was one of her leading encounters with the Academy, the building and the architecture, the students and the ancient works of art in the building. This impression was overwhelming for her and equally overwhelming was becoming famous overnight with her work, *The Witch*. But this work was also torn apart in the newspapers - after all, only a woman could create such a grimace out of noble marble.<sup>2</sup>

On the free-standing wall directly behind the witch was the inscription "Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise" and a quotation from a letter written by the artist TFR on March 2, 1951. Written here in golden letters was: "How beautiful it would be if the scent of flowers had killed me in my sleep."<sup>3</sup>

Later, when it became known that a direct thread of *The Witch* led to the neighbouring rooms of the Gemäldegalerie to the exhibition *Hungry of Time* and the research on this photograph hanging on the wall there was immediately started, an almost mystical circumstance emerged. There was a comprehensive series of images of TFR's works in the photo collection of the Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings) at the Academy, and how these photographs came to the Academy could be proven precisely by this letter from 1951.

It can now be assumed that Teresa Feodorowna Ries would have liked to become an honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and for this reason and as proof of her



artistic work she sent these photographs to the Academy. Of course, women were very rare in the list of honorary members and a corresponding letter has unfortunately not been found to date.<sup>4</sup>

Opposite *The Witch* looking out of the Academy window was the work *Little Witch* by Anna Bochkova on a golden plinth made especially for this exhibition. These plinths were also located in the room behind the free-standing wall and the exhibition was presented on them.

The juxtaposition of *The Witch* and *The Little Witch* opened up a possibility of time, the time in between and a space. In this space, questions arise as to how the sculpture is dealt with today? What is the history of the witch in art and what does it tell us? How do contemporary artists interpret the witch and her story?

The text on the base of the marble sculpture was also intended to point to the way we deal with this witch, which has been severely damaged by the suffering of history and has now been restored. It was a text written by Felix Salten and a statement at the time about the artist's work. The curatorial decision to delete individual letters from this text as a reference to forgetting (being made), disappearance and erasure from history supported the possibilities of interpretation and contemplation by the visitors. The fact that this work, *The Witch*, has received the inscription with the reference to the questions of restitution for the first time in the entire history is also essential and of great significance here.<sup>5</sup> In the exhibition where it was shown before, such an inscription was not yet present and it was thus another historical moment of the sculpture of *The Witch*.

On the back of the wall, the work *Kittel* by Judith Augustinovič was displayed and projected onto it with a slide projector, the original handwritten testament of TFR could be seen, felt and read for the first time. The smock, an artistic interpretation of the sculptor's working smock, the garment in which TFR depicted herself as an artist and sculptor in her portraits and was an important garment for her, became the presentation and projection surface of its wearer and her legacy.

Next to it in a column-like display case lay the original will bedded on a fabric with a floral print. The will presented itself here not legibly, but as an object. Likewise, in the booklet that accompanied the exhibition, the first page of the handwritten will was also right in the middle. The exhibition as a place for an opening of the will and space for possible readability was an important basic idea for the curatorial questions and the conception.

When you walked through the exhibition, you found the works of all the participating artists. They stood there like little islands. The *Witch's Spaces / Teresa Spaces* by Anna Bochkova spread out at the feet of the work *Kittel* and the showcase with the original will. Like little sentinels, they stood there and told about the history of TFR. Be it a house that dealt with life in exile, flight and loss or the witch's tower where being locked up was legible. But also non-existent things and dried flowers showed themselves to the viewer.

Directly against the wall, yet seemingly around the corner, was the work *Declaration* by Sami Nagasaki. A work, an object, that contains a line of an original handwritten letter from TFR, in which she gives advice to a student as a teacher. It is a document of TFR's concern to introduce other women to the possibility of sculpture. But Sami Nagasaki also deals here with questions of visibility, legibility and presentation. Framework conditions are deliberately deconstructed and place themselves in the way of the viewer, in the space and invite reflection.

One step further, on the right-hand side of the floor, was an installation with the video work *Skin / Stone* by Mika Aya Azagi, which deals with the material stone, being an artist, forgetting and transience, and also burial. Directly afterwards, but at a distance, the works *Three Faced Goddess* and *Unburied* by Mika Aya Azagi were projected onto the wall as an installation with two slide projectors and sound. The sound here, the dull rumbling or rolling of the stones, seemed almost meditative. This work also deals with the artist's personal connections to TFR and its history. But

it also recalls the fact that TFR has not received a gravestone to this day and that her grave in the Jewish cemetery in Lugano does not have a stone. But a stone that is of such great importance here.

The connection between body, earth and stone and the decay, the natural cycle and the doubts speak to the viewer.

Again one step further, almost around the corner, stood a white block of marble. Unhewn, not shaped and yet. It is a stone that was dedicated by the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in collaboration with Roland Kollnitz as a possible gravestone. This stone, which at first glance does not appear to have been worked, was nevertheless already shaped. The first sculptural traces came from the sculptor Ulrike Truger and the stone came from her studio stock, some of which she donated to the Academy's sculpture workshop. In the exhibition and as a first step towards the creation of a gravestone for TFR, TFR's poem "The Marble Block" was projected with a slide projector.<sup>6</sup>

It is also important to mention the fact that it was a conscious curatorial and artistic decision that was chosen for showing the photographed original materials from the archive - a photograph as image and document, as proof of existence and witness to the original.

A few steps further on, visitors could see the large-scale installation *The spell with scissors* by Anka Leśniak. Here, old scissors moved almost magically when the visitor moved, in front of the video work *The March for The Witch* projected onto the wall. The hands of the female sculptors, the students in the sculpture studios in the Prater from the Academy today, could be seen in this video. The sound is the rhythmic sounds of carving the stones, composed to a piece of music, the sound of the sculptors working while they carve the stone with the sculpting tools. Also as an island in the room are two old Hantarex screens, arranged into a column. On them are two video works *The Witch* and *The Reconstruction of The Witch* by Anka Leśniak, where she deals with questions around the sculpture of *The Witch* of TFR, the restoration, the Disappeared Hand and

a possibility of reconstructing this hand. Interviews with restorers, pictures of the red spray-painted and demolished witch, create a queasy feeling. What was done to *The Witch*?

At the end of this retrospective mental tour through this room of the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*, there is now a tall fragile narrow golden pedestal with the work *Book of Sculptures* by Valerie Habsburg. A book can be seen and touched, and can thus be felt, leafed through and palpated. An old wine-red velvet photo album with brass ornaments reveals a skeleton inside. The skeleton on which a hundred years ago there were other photos. Now they have disappeared, leaving holes and scars. On the individual skeletal sheets of the old photo album are black and white photographs of TFR's works that can be found and still exist today. These black and white photographs appear colorless, as a reference to yesterday and disappearance. But the gold and velvet point to a splendor that remains and a treasure, even if it seems almost bony and empty.<sup>7</sup>

Next to this work hangs on the wall the work *The Measurement of Time* by Valerie Habsburg. An acrylic glass box, its contents a black and white photo of a self-portrait of TFR with countless torn old analogue colour photographs. This self-portrait of Teresa is a historically important photograph, as it represents one of the first artistic self-portrayals and representations through photography - far ahead of many artists known today. The posture of TFR's hands opens up many possibilities of meaning and interpretation. The torn colour photographs - called snippets by Valerie Habsburg - stand for the pain of passing, forgetting and erasing, but also for working with memories, temporality and working with an archive in itself. Discarded memories manifest themselves in torn fragments to a new meaning and generate an image that is changeable.

\*\*\*

A second location and showcase for the *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* exhibition was also the Director's Room in the Academy's library. This historic room was already the library director's room in TFR's time. It was here that the later director of the library, Hans Ankiewicz-Kleehofen, sat and copied TFR's letter of application - the first letter of application by a woman as professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 1931.<sup>8</sup> Of course, it was not acted upon at the time and it disappeared into the archives until it was unearthed through research by Valerie Habsburg.

The library of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna is in possession of one of the world's last copies of TFR's autobiography *The Language of Stone*, published in 1928.

Texts, a video work on computer with the correspondence between TFR and Mark Twain, excerpts from other works by the participating artists in paper form and with code to scan and invite into the virtual space showed up as an installation on an old desk of the Academy. It is the workplace of artistic research, where the visitor could also take a seat and linger - whether to read, think or work. The original book *The Language of Stone* was also on the table on the occasion of this special event and could be looked at with one's own hands. Other working materials that gave insight into the research project and the TFR Archive were also on display.<sup>9</sup> Like paperweights, but not suitable as such, were small models of the participating artists' works in the exhibition.

On the wall on the occasion of the exhibition was a large-format photograph of TFR's handwritten list of works from 1938, which she made shortly before her escape and the preservation, protection and donation of her works.<sup>10</sup>

This list of works, the writing of TFR and the traces that can be found here opened up many good conversations during the duration of the exhibition, and this workplace and space were also an important place for courses, lectures or even interviews about the project. The students

were thus able to be very close to all this and to feel the often invisible archive work. A beautiful aspect is that this large-format photo is still there today in this place on this wall and in this room. Traces inscribe themselves - in the building and stand for a possible tomorrow.

The exhibition was accompanied by the launch of the homepage <https://teresafeodorownaries.com/> and the Instagram presence [tfr\\_archive](#). Information, readings, archival material and interviews were also shown on the Academy's online platforms in the run-up to and during the exhibition. The participating artists, curators and curatorial support gave readings Gartenpalais Liechtenstein from TFR's autobiography *The Language of Stone* in the summer of 2021 and these *Lectures in the Garden* were recorded on film and shown online. The non-resident artists recorded their readings in Israel, Poland, Brazil and Italy. These small pieces can still be found online today and stand on their own and as a trace for the history that is now also inscribed in the virtual space.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See in the autobiography *Die Sprache des Steines*, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Teresa Feodorowna Ries, 2. März 1951, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ÖNB Sammlung von 4 Handschriften und alten Drucken, Autogr. 1121/14-2.

<sup>4</sup> Bettina Henkel initiated the application for honorary membership of TFR at the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna. The application was presented to the Senate and Valerie Habsburg gave a presentation. The Senate unanimously approved the application and forwarded it to the Rectorate.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.wienmuseum.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDFs/Restitutionsbericht\\_2019.pdf](https://www.wienmuseum.at/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/Restitutionsbericht_2019.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> "Poem Marble Block" by Teresa Feodorowna Ries, TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg.

<sup>7</sup> See also in the autobiography *Die Sprache des Steines*, p.11, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library.

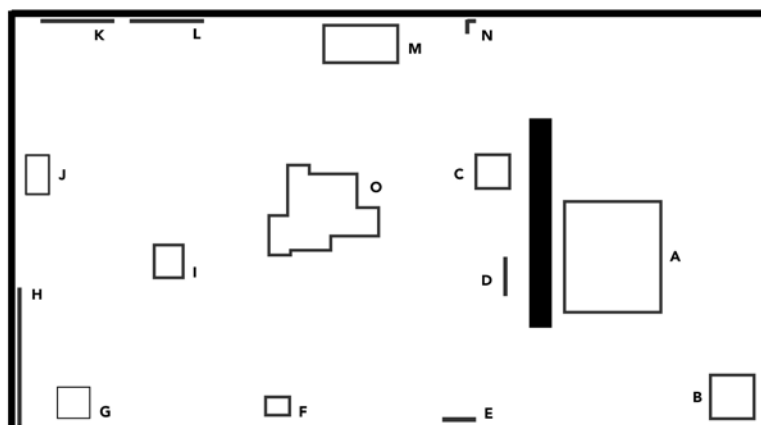
<sup>8</sup> Verwaltungsakt 1931, GZ 963, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Archive.

<sup>9</sup> Working materials on the desk were: documents of TFR Archive; poems by TFR; research documents and 10 writings by participating artists; sketches by Anna Bochkova; Ries\_Twain by Sami Nagasaki; original book *Die Sprache des Steines* by TFR from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library; *Spezialschule - Zur Geschichte des Bildhauereigebäudes der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien*, Hrsg. Simone Bader, Katharina Hölzl, Jakob Krameritsch, Fabian Leitgeb, Emanuel Mauthé, Florian Mayr, Bianca Phos, Oktober 2019 by Schleebrügge Editor; exhibit models, prints of further related art works by Anka Leśniak; article published by Mika Aya Azagi in Israel, photographs with works from TFR.

<sup>10</sup> Original Testament of Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Pro Memoria (certified donation to the Israeli National Museum in Jerusalem), TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg.

## Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise

Werke



- A Teresa Feodorowna Ries - *Hexe bei der Toilette für die Walpurgisnacht*, 1895, Courtesy Wien Museum

Das Podest ist von der Ausstellung *Im Schatten von Bambi. Felix Salten entdeckt die Wiener Moderne*, 15.10.2020 bis 19.09.2021, Wien Museum MUSA, übernommen.

*Diese Skulptur ist zur Zeit Gegenstand der Provenienzforschung des Wien Museums. Recherchen zur Klärung der Besitzverhältnisse sind im Auftrag der Wiener Restitutionskommission in Gange.*

- B Anna Bochkova - *Hexe*, 2020

- C Teresa Feodorowna Ries - *Handschriftliches Testament*, 1941, Courtesy TFR-Archive

- D Judith Augustinovič - *Kittel*, & Valerie Habsburg - *Projektion Testament TFR*, 2021

- E Valerie Habsburg - *Die Messung der Zeit*, 2019

- F - *Book of Sculptures*, 2020

- G Anka Leśniak - *The spell with scissors*, 2021

- H - *March for the Witch*, 2019

- I - *The Witch*, 2016

- *The Reconstruction of the Witch*, 2019

- J Valerie Habsburg - *Marmorblock*, 2021. Projektion des Gedichtes *Der Marmorblock* von TFR

- K Mika Aya Azagi - *unburied*, 2019

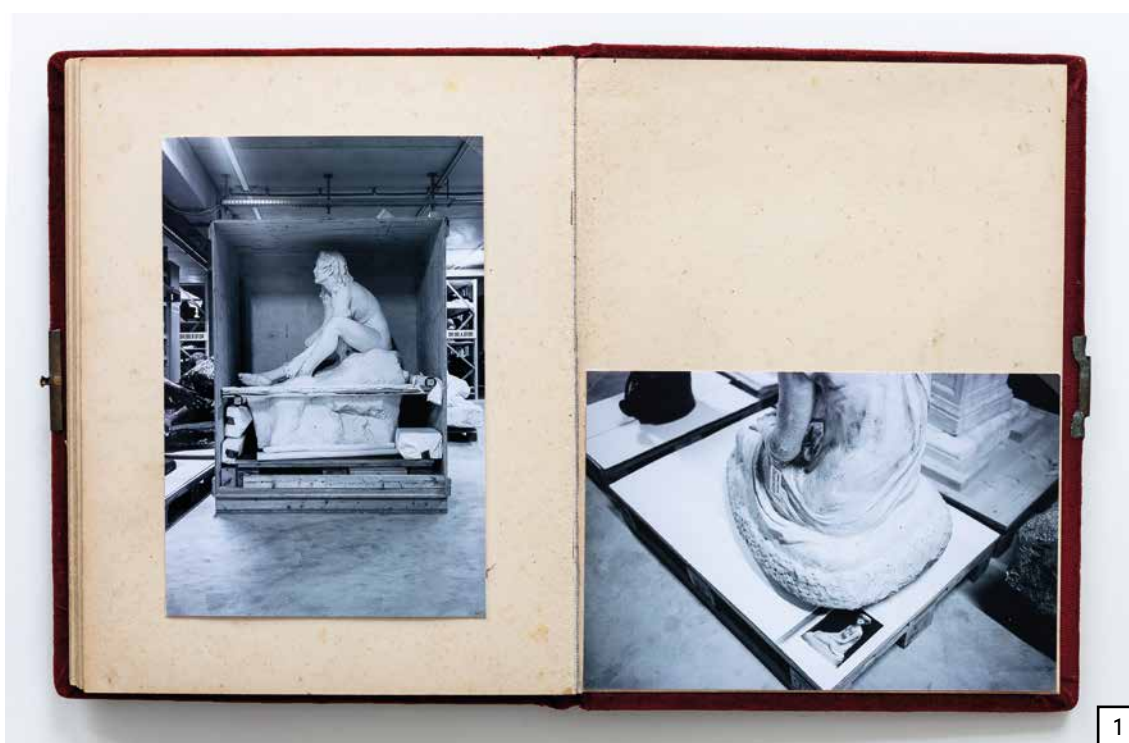
- L - *three-faced goddess*, 2019

- M - *skin/stone*, 2019

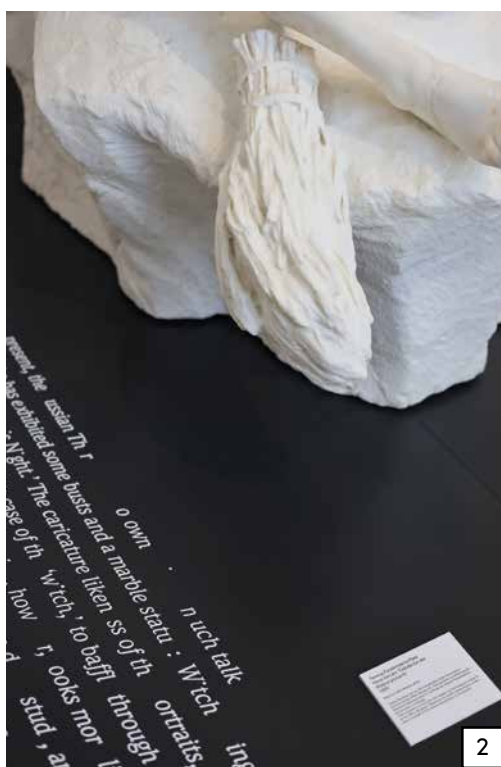
- N Sami Nagasaki - *Declaration*, 2021. Originalbrief von TFR

- O Anna Bochkova - *Witch's Spaces/Teresa Spaces*, 2021





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1. Valerie Habsburg, *Book of Sculptures*, 2020. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

2. Exhibition View. Base of *The Hexe* with erased inscription and information on restitution. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

3. Exhibition View. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, *Hexe bei der Toilette für die Walpurgisnacht*. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



4. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel with Last Will*, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

5. Valerie Habsburg, *The Measurement of Time*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



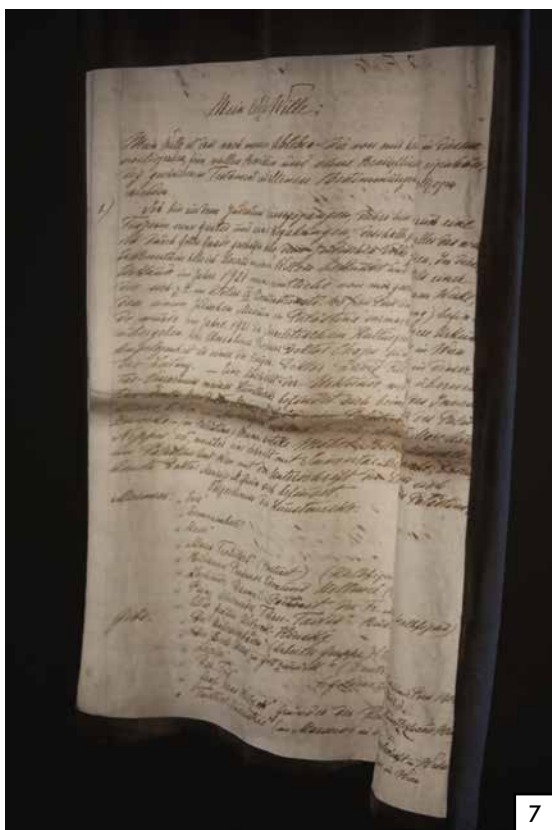


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6. Teresa Feodorowna Ries in Arbeitskittel. TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021

7. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel* with Last Will (detail), 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

8. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel* with Last Will, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



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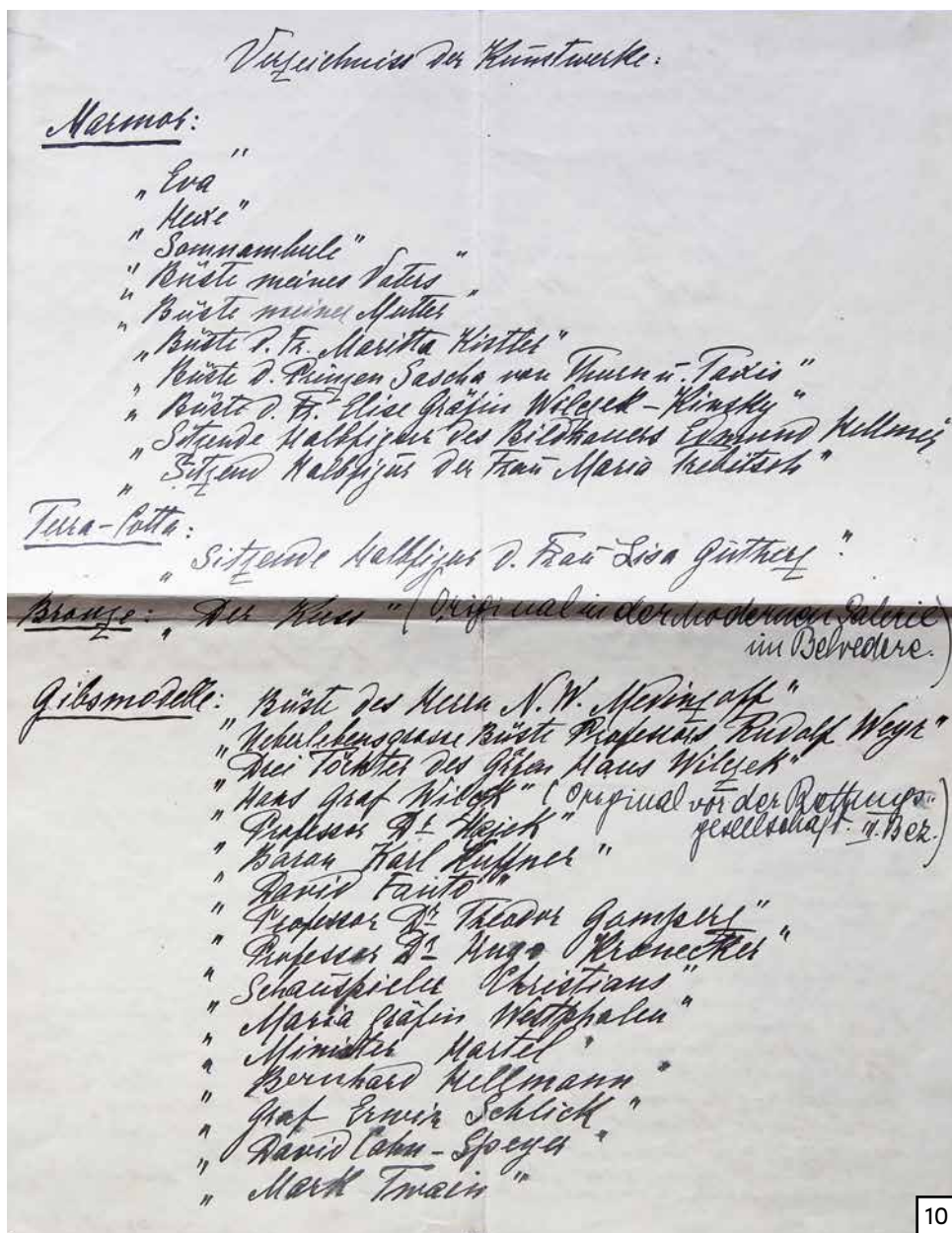
## Mein letztes Will:

Mein Will ist, das nach meinem Ableben Sie von mir keine, in einem  
verlängerten, rein vollen Herzustein und ohne Beeinflussung eigenhän-  
gig geschriebenen Testament enthaltenen Bestimmungen, entgegen-  
nehmen.

- 1.) Ich bin aus dem Judentum hervorgegangen, daher bin ich auch eine  
Trägerin seiner geistes und seiner Begabungen. Deshalb soll alles das was  
ich durch Gottes Gnade geschaffen habe, dem jüdischen Volk gehören. In diese  
Erfahrung habe ich jetzt meinen Willen dokumentiert und mittels einer  
Urkunde im Jahre 1921 meine sämtliche von mir geschaffenen Werke,  
die sich z. Z. im Hotel R. (Lichtensteinstr. 48 im Park-Untergang) befin-  
den einem jüdischen Museum in Palästina vermacht. Diese Urkunde  
wurde im Jahre 1921 in Israelitischen Kulturgemeinde in Wien  
abgegeben. Herr Abraham Pichler-Guttes hat in dieser  
Angelegenheit als einer der Zeugen. Folkes David Rothblum übernahm  
die Leitung. — Eine Abschrift der Urkunde, wie auch das Inven-  
tar-Verzeichnis meines Kunstwerks befindet sich beim Leiter des Palä-  
stina-Archivs Herrn Guttes, der sich in Palästina befindet. F. M. K. K. K.  
Strauss, S. Wien. — Nachtrag: Ich habe auch eine Urkunde  
Zwecke (in Palästina) meine antike Möbel, Bilder, Teppiche, etc.,  
Kippur etc., worüber eine Schrift mit Invenar-Verzeichnis sich  
im Palästina-Archiv Wien mit der Unterschrift des Leiters des Palästina-  
Archivs Herrn Guttes befindet.

### Verzeichnis des Kunstwerks:

- Marmor: "Eva"  
"Sonnambule"  
"Hexe"  
"Maria Tschirke" (Portrait) (Kaltstein)  
"Bildhauer Professor Edmund Hellmer" (Portrait, Kaltstein)  
"Lächende Dame" (Portrait in F. M. K.)  
"Prinz Alexander Thier-Taxi" (Küste)  
"Elise Gräfin Wilczek-Pleschke"  
Gips: "Die Wunderschönen" (Arbeitsgruppe) (Gips in Lichtensteinstr. 48)  
"Die Seele steht zu Gott zurück" (Zentralplastik)  
"Lucifer" (Gips in Lichtensteinstr. 48)  
"Der Tod"  
"Herr Hans Wilczek" (Gips in Lichtensteinstr. 48)  
"Textil-Industrie" (im Marmor in der Reise in Wien)



9. Testament (original, page 1). TFR Archive

10. Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise (short film, ticket), 2021. TFR Archive



448077  
 Brief  
 25  
 Baron A. Burger "Studienkopf nach H. Paul Felsen" (für den "Mosaik")  
 "Lachendes Mädchen"  
 "Meine Grossmutter" (i. Z. in der Wohnung: V. Hausberg)  
 "Lucifer"  
 "Der Tod"  
 "Die Anheimgabe" (Original in Bronze in Wien am Kongress)  
 "Modell für das Grab: Frau Strauss"  
 "Vier gleichzeitig lebenden Generationen d. grossen Wälder"  
 "Moses"  
Architektur: "Ein Entwurf für ein Museum"  
Portraits: "Meine Mutter"  
 "Selbstporträt" (im Arbeitskittel)  
 "Selbstporträt" (im grünen Kleid)  
 "Russischer Bauer"  
Quaschi: "Mein Mutter mit einer Handarbeit"  
 "Kleid"  
 (Im Wandkasten des Ateliers befindet sich ein Natur-  
 abguss meines rechten Hand.)  
Adressiert!  
 Rechtsanwältin  
 Dr. Anna Feodorowna  
 Wien  
 Elisabethgasse 6  
 Telefon 0.24-4.35  
 Wally Frau  
 Prof. Theresie Ries  
 Wien, I.  
 Hausengasse, 3,  
 Wien, am 19 Juli 1938.  
 Sehr verehrte Freundin!  
 Ich war leider in der letzten Woche ein wenig rückfällig in meiner  
 Gesundheit und konnte daher die gewünschte Erklärung bis heute  
 nicht beantworten. Ich habe leider nur Zeit, um nach kleine Nach-  
 richt darüber erhalten, dass Sie sich in der Stadt befinden und Sie  
 dort zu Hause. Ich habe zu Antwort meist eine Abschrift  
 der Erklärung konnte ich Ihnen bis heute nicht senden.  
 Die Erklärung befindet sich gerichtet bei mir und ich müsste  
 daher die Erklärungsmittel, um eine Abschrift bitten.  
 Ich will hoffen, dass alles in Ordnung gehen wird und nachher  
 mit besten Empfehlungen von mir Frau und mich  
 Ich erlaube  
 Unterschrift

11. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Werkliste (page 2). TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021
12. Sami Nagasaki, Declaration, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg
13. Exhibition View with Kittel and Witch's Spaces. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg
14. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Werkliste (page 1). TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021
15. Anna Bochkova, Witch's Spaces, 2020. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



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16. Mika Aya Azagí, *Skin Stone*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

17. Anka Leśniak, *The Reconstruction of the Witch*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

18. Anka Leśniak, *The Spell with Scissors*, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



Anna Bochkova  
Valerie Habsburg  
Violetta Leitner  
Anka Leśniak  
Curated by Anka Leśniak

# Lost Element. Re-construction of the Witch

## Exhibition

**14 January  
– 13 February 2022**

**Opening hours**  
**Opening**  
**Finissage**

**Fri/ Sat 14:00–18:00 and by appointment**  
**13 January 2022, 15:00–21:00**  
**13 February 2022, 14:00–18:00**



**VBKÖ**  
Austrian Association of Women Artists  
Maysedergasse 2/28, 1010 Vienna, Austria  
[www.vbkoe.org](http://www.vbkoe.org)

 **Bundesministerium**  
Kunst, Kultur,  
öffentlicher Dienst und Sport



**THE EXHIBITION**  
***LOST ELEMENT /***  
***RE-CONSTRUCTION***  
***OF THE WITCH***

**CURATORIAL**  
**REFLECTIONS**

by Anka  
LESNIAK

that are ready to fight for a better world —  
past/present/future.<sup>1</sup>

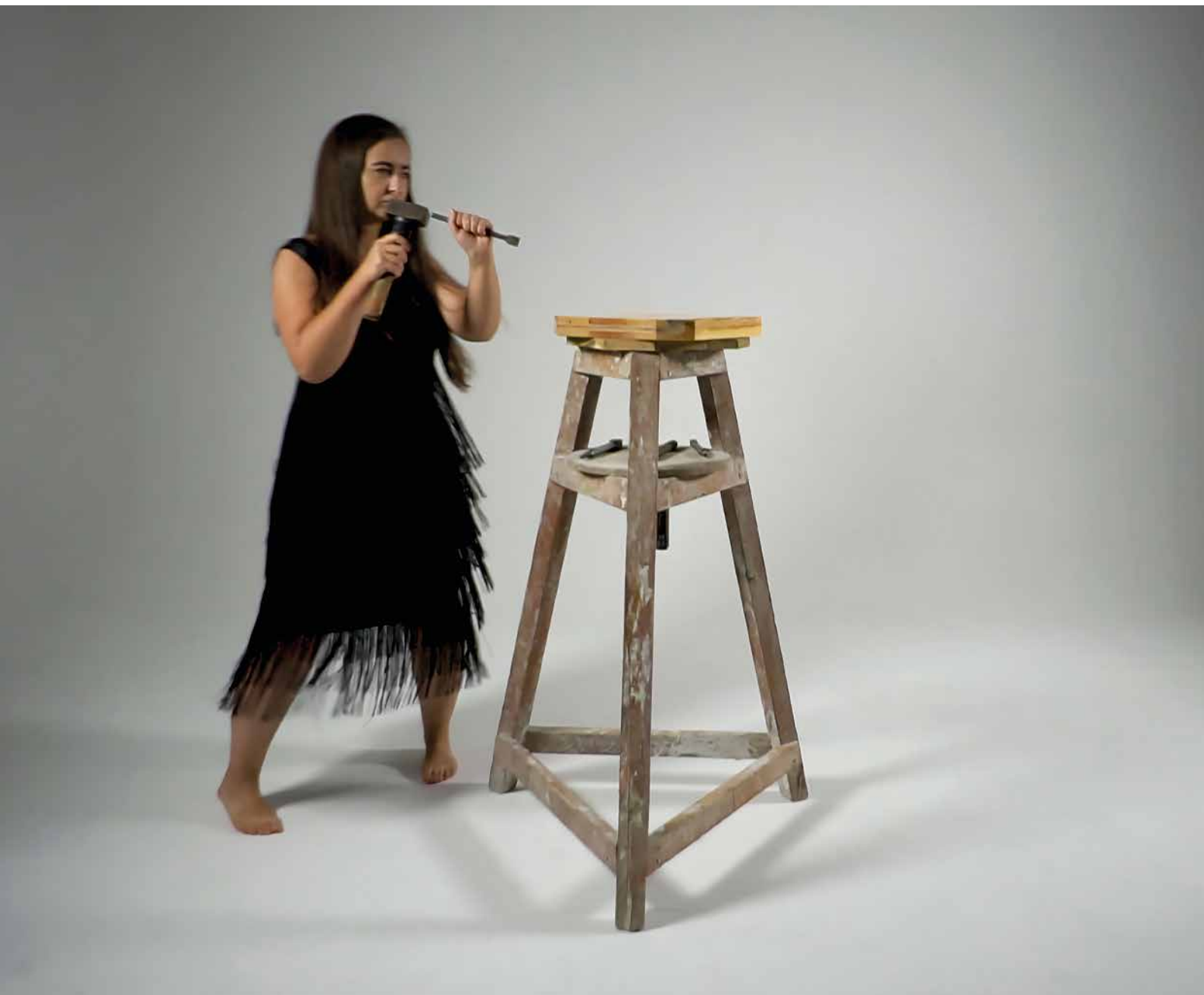
It wouldn't get any better opportunity to present the life and artistic output of Teresa Feodorowna Ries and an artistic investigation of the TFR Archive. The TFR Archive is a group of feminist artists who work with the forgotten legacy of Teresa F. Ries, an Austrian artist of multi-ethnic origin: Jewish-Russian-Hungarian, who had to flee from Vienna after 1938. A biography of the artist and her works, mostly lost, or destroyed have become a starting point for the research and works of a collective of contemporary artists who work with different aspects of Teresa F. Ries's life and art in contemporary contexts and discourses.

■ The exhibition *Lost Element / Re-construction of the Witch* was the next chapter of a collective artistic investigation on the life and damaged or lost artworks by Teresa Feodorowna Ries (1866-1956). It took place at the VBKÖ – The Association of Austrian Women\* Artists – gallery. The show was one of the series of selected presentations in the open called "The Portal." The title referred symbolically to the iconic portal at the Maysedergasse, which, as the authors of the open call wrote in their statement, has been the sole remaining eyewitness of the VBKÖ's history since 1910 and has thus experienced a myriad of challenging, celebratory, historic, empowering, and entertaining moments.

We define these golden doors as a portal, a starting point, a threshold, a wormhole, or a gateway. It stands for new beginnings, time and space travel, change, access, virtual realities, gatekeeping, role play, transformation, a means of passage, progress, transition, or ultimately the ending. The VBKÖ gallery welcomes exhibitions that critically investigate the concept of the portal in its diverse meanings, and ponder why gates might be open for some and closed for others; projects that imagine beyond the physical framework of reality, or those that highlight characters

The collective had its roots in the encounter between Valerie Habsburg and me in 2019. We worked earlier on the story of Teresa F. Ries separately. The word "archive" refers to the private archive of Teresa F. Ries, which Valerie Habsburg came across in an auction house and managed to acquire.<sup>2</sup> The informal structure of the TFR Archive allows other artists to join the subsequent chapters of this research-based project. We explore historical, sociopolitical, and artistic facts and contexts concerning the fate of Teresa F. Ries and her artworks as a Jewish and woman artist, also the victims of the Nazi regime. This forgotten artist was only recently rediscovered. However, the policy of presentation of her works, and access to them, remains problematic. Thus, we as artists decided to work together and reinterpret the case of Teresa F. Ries through artistic research in/with her archive and with a critical approach towards (art) institutions and the distribution of power in the past and nowadays.

The first spectacular event of the TFR Archive, presenting the artworks based on Teresa F. Ries's biography, was the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*, curated by Valerie Habsburg at the Exhibit Studio of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in October/November 2021. This show was one of the four exhibitions accompanying the reopening of the historical building of the Academy at the Schillerplatz after



Anka Lesniak, *Sculpture Rituals*, video-still



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1. Entrance to the exhibition. Photo: Anka Lesniak
2. Anka Lesniak, *Lost Element*, video, installation. Photo: Anka Lesniak
3. Lena Violetta Leitner, *Tremate*. Photo: Lena Violetta Leitner
4. Lena Violetta Leitner, *Tremate*, installation, detail. Photo: Lena Violetta Leitner
5. Anka Lesniak, *The March for the Witch*, video. Photo: Anka Lesniak

a few years of its restoration. This exhibition was immensely significant since Teresa Ries couldn't officially study at the Academy, however, she worked there on her sculptures, taking private courses from Professor Edmund Hellmer. Thus, the exhibition was her symbolic and authorised comeback, both through her original sculpture *The Witch* (1895) presented at the exhibition and through the contemporary and new media artworks inspired by her story.<sup>3</sup>

Teresa F. Ries was one of the prominent artists of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and a few times also exhibited at the VBKÖ's exhibitions. In 1938, her studio was "Aryanized" so to speak, and taken over by Gustinus Ambrosi, while she had to flee to Switzerland, forced to leave all her professional life and artworks behind. Among the numerous works left in her studio was a marble figure of *The Witch at her toilette before the Witches' Sabbath*. The sculpture depicts a vigorous naked woman looking straight into the viewer's eyes and smiling maliciously while cutting her toenails with big scissors.

Although witches were not a rare inspiration for artists at the turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, Ries's sculpture was an extraordinary example of an artwork challenging the old patriarchal order. Her *Witch* was a symbol of feminine power. The figure seems to be full of vigour and eroticism and at the same time a rebel who challenges the clichés of representations of women in art and goes beyond stereotypes. Perhaps this was the reason for several acts of vandalism on this sculpture during the next decades, especially when it was left unattended on the outskirts of Vienna until the 1990s. Although the hand with the scissors is still missing, *The Witch* has been restored by the Vienna Museum and is exhibited more and more frequently. *The Witch* by Teresa Ries is a witness to the history, of political and social changes. The damaged sculpture feels like an accusation against H1Story, institutions, politics towards women (artists), anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. However, it has an inspiring potential for political and social changes and the

emancipation of minorities. As a part of a research-based art project, the exhibition *Lost Element / Reconstruction of the Witch* also poses the question of how it is possible to symbolically reconstruct the lost element of *The Witch* through contemporary cultural discourses and interpretations.<sup>4</sup>

The exhibition explored different threads related to the history of the damaged sculpture, as well as the role of the witch as a rebel against the oppressive and constraining patriarchal order. Through the presentation of our works, based on historical research and archives, the exhibition opened "the portal" between the past and contemporary women's art practices.

The exhibition *Lost Element / Reconstruction of the Witch* at the VBKÖ shared the space of the VBKÖ gallery with the exhibition *Craving supernatural creatures*. The *Lost Element...* occupied two smaller rooms, where previously was the VBKÖ's archive. My installation presented in the first room consisted of the fence stretched between two opposite walls and the video projected behind it. This work introduced the viewer to an artistic investigation of *The Witch* and the possible causes of damage to this sculpture. The fence in the gallery referred to the fences appearing in the video, which were filmed in the places connected with Teresa F. Ries. It was the fence around the hotel Lido on the island Lido in Venice, where the artist used to spend her holidays at the peak of her career. It was also the fence in Lugano, close to a former location of the Villa Emilia – the pension house, where Teresa F. Ries under the name Loevitowa, spent her last years in exile. The fence stretched in the gallery was similar to the garden fence behind which the *Witch* and other sculptures by Teresa F. Ries were kept, and where they were found in the 1990s by art historian Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber. The video is a sort of patchwork consisting of excerpts from my previous video works on the *Witch*, among others, the interviews on the damaged sculpture with art conservators Marija Milchin and Johann Nimmrichter. The video also includes the documentation of the installation *Spell with*



*Scissors*, presented at the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*. The accumulation of scissors and shears projected onto the fence evoked ambiguous associations – vandalism or removing the barrier alike. The fence itself is to protect, but also to deny access. In the room with the installation, there was also a barred window overlooking the staircase, which fit the character of the work.

In the same room, there was also a monitor with the video *The March for the Witch*. This work was shot during my OeAD scholarship in Vienna in 2019 when I continued my artistic investigation on the lost hand of the sculpture *The Witch*. Then, I came up with the idea of filming the hands of women sculpture students during the classes on carving in stone. It was a year before the centenary of the official admission of the first women students to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Thus, I've realised that the lost hand of *The Witch* keeping the shears, the hand with a tool, the one that is with the ability to act, reappears in many hands of young women sculptors. I filmed them during chiselling in stone and intertwined this action with sentences telling the story of Teresa F. Ries and her sculpture. The video characterises the dynamic montage in the rhythm of the soundtrack with the use of the sounds of chiselling, composed by Justyna Stopnicka June.

The video refers to constraints that Teresa F. Ries faced as a woman in her times. She was not allowed to study at the Academy in Vienna, even though that was a place where she found inspiration for creating a rebellious figure of a witch, and where probably she worked on this sculpture, for which posed an academy model - Anna Faust. Additionally, the sculpture was considered a domain of male artists, where women were the most unwelcome, compared to other art disciplines. On the other hand, the video shows the contemporary academy, where most of the sculpture students are women. Their repetitive, rhythmic chiselling refers to the incessant and growing women striving for equal rights and agency in society. This struggle doesn't bring the expected results quickly, and

we still face gender discrimination. Nevertheless, from the perspective of one hundred years, we can see that full women's emancipation is inevitable, especially thanks to education where men and women have equal access to knowledge.

The aforementioned garden fence wrapped around the corner led the viewers through a small passage to the other room. In this passage, on the wall behind the fence, was placed an enlarged photo of the damaged *The Witch*, taken by Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber in the rural suburbs of Vienna, where she found the neglected and vandalised sculptures by Teresa F. Ries.

*The Witch* and other marble sculptures, as Valerie Habsburg managed to establish the facts, were left close to the compost stack in the park in Oberlaa. This contrast of the marble sculptures as something designed, solid and valuable, and the compost as raw, dirty, worthless material, and the fact that these two entities of opposite features had been somehow equalized, seemed very surprising to us, also fascinating and... "bewitching." From the perspective of preserving artworks as a cultural heritage and regarding the biography of the artist persecuted by the Nazi regime, such a disregard towards her artworks by the institution which should have to protect them, says a lot about the policy towards the artworks made by women, categorized also as the Other. However, if we apply the post-human and ecological perspective, we may assume that the compost is valuable and useful. The decaying, rotting leaves, branches, hay, etc. fertilize the soil and contribute to the rebirth of nature. So, the compost is not that worthless and unpleasant. We are all compost... as says Donna Haraway.<sup>5</sup> And from this point of view, what's the difference between stones and rocks that emerged and were shaped by organic processes and the stone (marble) elaborated by the human hand? The marble sculptures, besides being vandalised by "unknown" perpetrators, began to be "reappropriated" by nature. They started to cover with the biofilm - a dark coating that consists of bacteria, algae, and fungi.<sup>6</sup>

Valerie Habsburg took pictures of today's look of the place where *The Witch* and other sculptures were left for years. In the large-scale photographs entitled *Composted Stone*, one can see a pile of dry leaves, grass, soil, and stones. These works are the analogy to the picture of neglected and damaged stone sculptures by Teresa F. Ries documented by Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber. These photographs of composted nature were placed above an installation by Anna Bochkova.

In Anna Bochkova's work, small ceramic sculptures were put on the soil. Her ceramics objects were expressive and organic. The artist called them *Witch Houses*, like the *Defending House*, *Lost House*, and *House With a Secret*. One may associate them with the houses of Baba Yaga (Baba Jaga), a Slavic witch. In patriarchal versions of the fairy tales, Baba Yaga is a cruel, old woman, harmful to people, especially harsh to children, and is even able to devour them.<sup>7</sup> She gives them very demanding tasks and if they fail, they will not survive. However, the psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés, in her inspiring book *Woman Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, proves that this character may be interpreted in a more ambiguous and even positive way. Baba Yaga as a witch (the woman of wisdom) teaches children that the ability to cope with hard experiences is necessary to survive and to protect our physical and mental health. She starts the process of initiation into adult life.

The tiny ceramic sculptures made by Anna Bochkova while placed on the soil, evoke ambiguous meanings. On the one hand, they look like precious, fragile artistic objects, on the other, in the context of soil and the photographs of composted stones by Valerie Habsburg, they can be also interpreted as remains, trash. The Baba Yaga houses, according to the fairy tales were hidden in forests. Here, they were shown on dry soil. The soil used in the works presented in the exhibition had been taken from Oberlää, close to the place where Teresa F. Ries's sculptures were left, and then found. Thus, it refers directly to the story of *The Witch*. In the context of global warming (due

to, among other things, the human harmful activity resulting in the gradual destruction of forests), the dried soil touches the ecological issues and reminds us that the patriarchal order, based on disregard, violence, and exploitation of nature, finally will lead the humankind to self-destruction.

The soil was also used in Lena Violetta Leitner's work *Tremate*. Lena Violetta Leitner is an artist working with plants and technology. Her installation consisted of four elements: a living plant and a pile of soil, on which she placed a vessel, where water was turning into steam. On the steam, there was appearing a sentence: "Tremate, tremate, le streghe son tornate," which means "Tremble, tremble, the witches are coming back."<sup>8</sup> The sentence refers to the feminist demonstrations in Italy in the 1970s when women started to protest against the law based on so-called traditional values, that limited their right to divorce and control their reproduction.<sup>9</sup> Women re-appropriated the figure of the witch as a representation of female power and also the expression of women's anger and rage.

This return of witches means for women the regaining the right to express the reactions considered as "inappropriate" for them in the patriarchal world, such as resistance, anger, and even fury, which women use in the fight for, and to defend, their rights. The witches become also heralds of the rebirth of women's knowledge and healers of bonds that have been destroyed for ages in a patriarchal culture. This process of enslaving women reached its peak in the witch-hunt in the Early Modern period in Europe and Colonial America. It was large-scale femicide resulting in depriving women of the rest of their relative independency that they had had since medieval times while helping people using herbal medicine, as midwives, or living together in secular communities such as Beguines.<sup>10</sup>

The work by Lena Violetta Leitner refers to ecological issues, but it's also somehow "uncanny." In her way of connecting the natural elements (plant, soil, water) and technology (steam, clay), one can also see a subtle sense of humour. The



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6. The damaged *Witch* from the Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber's archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

7. Lena Violetta Leitner, *Tremate*, installation, in the background, Anka Lesniak, *Sculpture Rituals*, video. Photo: Lena Violetta Leitner

8. Valerie Habsburg, *Hüterin der Erinnerung*, Object N°1; Valerie Habsburg, *Composted Stone #3*, C-Print. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

9. Anna Bochkova, *Defending house*, from the series *Witch Houses*, glazed ceramics, installation. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

10. Anna Bochkova, *Expanding house*, from the series *Witch Houses*, glazed ceramics, installation. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

11. Valerie Habsburg, *Hüterin der Erinnerung*, Object N°2 and N°3. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

12. Valerie Habsburg, *Hüterin der Erinnerung*, Object N°2 and N°3, details. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

13. Exhibition view with works by Anna Bochkova and Valerie Habsburg. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



second part of the work – the plant – "spoke" to us in Morse code. The plant was shaking from time to time unnaturally and in its subsequent movements (longer or shorter) the message "I will survive" was encoded. These two messages – projected on the steam and encrypted in Morse code, could be interpreted in the context of the need to return to so-called female values, such as care, and respect for the environment and other entities, but also with the belief that witches (wise women) can overturn the harmful patriarchal order. Additionally, the plant chosen by the artist was a fern, which is one of the oldest plants on Earth. The soil used in Lena Violetta Leitner's work, contrary to the soil in Anna Bochkova's installation, was constantly irrigated by steam. Thus, it was wet and after a few days, even the sprouts of vegetation appeared.

Morse Code appeared also in my video-performance *Sculpture Rituals*. The video is another work from the series inspired by an unexplained loss of a meaningful part of *The Witch* – A Hand Holding Shears. In this video, I am 'sculpting' an invisible sculpture, with the use of chisels, hammers, etc. I am chiselling it in the air as if I was doing a kind of mysterious ritual around the sculptor's stand. However, the sounds made by knocking a hammer and chisel refer to the letters of the Morse code and contain an encrypted message – spelling out "a witch." The hand equipped with a tool, of *The Witch* by Teresa F. Ries, symbolized agency. That is why hands and sculptural tools are significant elements in my performance. However, their function has changed – they become a kind of sound communicator. The work also refers to the shift observed in the field of art that more and more moves from making an object – an artefact – towards performativity, a gesture, and a process. I also ask about the relationship between what is visible and what is encoded in a work of art.

This video was installed next to Valerie Habsburg's photograph of the blossoming bushes of roses and other plants in the park/garden in Oberlaa, where *The Witch* had been left. This photograph was placed opposite the already

mentioned photographs with the composted stones. One of the possible interpretations of the meaning of the hand of *The Witch* with shears leads us to gardening and knowledge of plants as one of the witches' occupations. The shears/scissors can be also associated with Atropos, one of the Three Fates (Moirai) – she who cuts the thread of life.

Besides the photographs, Valerie Habsburg prepared a series of ready-made objects. One of them *Hüterin der Erinnerung, Object N°1*, (Guardian of Memories) was a head cover made of random objects such as fur, ribbons, and pieces of photos. These torn photos were arranged in a kind of ornament adorning "a hat." While looking closer at the tiny scraps of the photographs, one could recognise that they are photos – looking like old ones – taken in a garden. This gesture of tearing the photographs (frequently taken by the author herself) and using their scraps in a new context, is characteristic in Valerie Habsburg's works. She also plays with photography as a re-presentation of reality and its existence as a physical object, which is particularly visible in tearing and through this the destruction/deconstruction of the consistency of the image.

An intriguing balancing act between the palpability of the objects themselves and the symbolic notions hidden in them was to be seen in the *Hüterin der Erinnerung, Object N°2 und N°3* – a composition consisting of an old candlestick, archival black and white photo, dried flowers, black gloves, and a book. The photo, where the main motif was the dreamlike light of the sun shining through the trees, was punched and put, instead of a candle, on a spike of the candlestick. The dried plants were taken from Oberlaa rural area, where *The Witch* had been left. The book – opened on the page with the picture of the damaged *The Witch*, was a copy of the *Spezialschule*, where one of the chapters referred to the story of Teresa Ries.<sup>11</sup> And the long gloves – black and elegant ones, with the embroidered words: "Dame" (Lady) and "Hexe" (Witch), referred to the ambiguous and often contradictory descriptions of "woman nature" and the social expectations towards



femininity. However, these mutually exclusive notions of "expected" and "condemned" ways of being a woman and represented here as "the lady" and "the witch", don't need to be such opposite as in patriarchal understanding, where if a gentle "lady" reveals her rebellious "witchy" character is considered as false and two-faced. In this context, the gloves by Valerie Habsburg can be interpreted as a symbol of accepting and adopting the whole spectrum of behaviours that empower a woman.

The gloves as well as the torn photos belong to Valerie Habsburg's visual repertoire. She explores this motif through compositions made of found gloves, which also belonged once to women from her family, and through photographs of them. The gloves, in the past the emblematic element of the suit of a higher class woman, are currently being used in a more utilitarian way, not only to protect our hands from freezing but also in a range of jobs where hands may be injured or have to be protected for hygienic reasons. Teresa F. Ries as a prominent artist belonged to the higher society, but being a sculptor, she also did hard physical labour such as carving in stone. We may assume, that, like some contemporary (women) sculptors filmed in the video *The March For The Witch*, she probably protected her hands from cuts and blisters with gloves, while chiselling in stone. The gloves can be also used to protect valuable objects such as artworks and archival documents from our touch that can damage them. Valerie Habsburg as an artist, a caretaker of Teresa F. Ries's private archive, and also a memory keeper of her legacy, used women's gloves as a symbolic representation of different aspects of Teresa F. Ries's personality and biography.

To conclude, the exhibition *Lost Element/ Re-construction of the Witch* asked the question of how we can work with loss, which here is represented by the lost hand of *The Witch*. *The Witch* deprived of the hand with shears refers to the woman deprived of her agency. The sculpture also represents the fate of the artist herself who was persecuted by the Nazis because of her Jewish origin and had to flee to Switzerland, leaving all

her life and artworks in the country governed by her oppressors. She survived and spent the rest of her life in a safe place, however, was deprived of everything that brought meaning to her life and died forgotten in Lugano. She was buried there at the Jewish cemetery. The striking fact is that the artist who carved masterpieces in stone doesn't even have a memorial stone on her grave. Only dust... and some weeds...

The word "re-construction" used in the title of the exhibition refers to the symbolical restoration of the "lost element" through contemporary art means such as video, installation, ready-made, etc. The complexity of the story of Teresa F. Ries and the fate of her artworks, allow us to treat her as a case study for posing and analysing the questions related to refugees, women's rights, the attitude of art history towards the heritage of women artists, protection of artworks and archives and access to them as well as questions about restitution. The Nazis looted a huge amount of artwork during the World War. A lot of them were sold and/or disappeared. Some were placed in Austrian museums, and for decades the rightful owners unsuccessfully demanded their return. This problem was described in a complex way in the book by Sophie Lillie *Was einmal war*. One of the most spectacular cases of restitution became the return of Gustav Klimt's painting including the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I (The Lady in Gold or The Woman in Gold)* from the Belvedere Collection in Vienna to Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer's niece Maria Altman.<sup>12</sup> Teresa F. Ries's artworks were also considered the property of the Vienna Museum. However, according to her last will, found among other documents in her private archive, she wished to give her works to the museum in Israel. The fact that her studio was taken by Nazis and the works were looted, and probably cheaply sold and dispersed, and only after the war they were taken under the protection of the City Collections (later in the Wien Museum) makes the ownership even more complicated. The works are currently under the restitution process.

Contemporary (women) artists from the TFR archive, with the range of "tools" remind, re-work and re-tell the story of Teresa F. Ries in today's contexts and discourses. The research that results not only in scholarly articles but in artworks, opens "the case" of Teresa F. Ries and develops it as a rhizomatic structure, that can grow/expand in different directions. While comparing the methods of working with damaged artwork in the field of art to the methods of treating it in art conservation, like in the case of the lost hand of *The Witch* by Teresa F. Ries, art conservators can only decide if to reconstruct or not reconstruct the missing part, and for each option, we could point out the pros and cons. Art historians can describe their research in publications. Without the pioneering studies and the book on women artists by art historian Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber and also the knowledge and experience of the art conservators Marija Milchin and Johann Nimmrichter, we couldn't have the base for our artistic research and artworks. However, as artists, we are not obliged to "tell the truth" understood as proven facts, and we can adopt the tools of art historians, archivists, and investigative journalists and publish the results of our research as our artworks that also become our manifestos.

Although each of the artists taking part in the exhibition presented her works, there were the shared elements, such as the fence, soil, gloves, plants, and stones, that led the viewer through the visual narrative. These visual signs refer to the story of *The Witch*, but they are also open to other interpretations. While working on the exhibition, I realised that I am somehow obsessed with fences. It was a time when thousands of refugees from the far East started to try to cross the Polish border with Belarus. Used by Lukashenko's regime as a living weapon and by the Polish government as a tool for boosting the popularity of anti-refugee politics, these people were freezing and even died in the forest, treated violently by both countries' border guards. Instead of humanitarian ways of dealing with this crisis, the government decided to invest in a wired fence to stop the refugees.

This fence is also a trap for wild animals, which frequently die in agony entangled in it.

Thus, the motif of the fence present in photos taken when the damaged *Witch* was found, was replicated in the gallery space as an ambiguous symbol of protection and oppression alike. Teresa F. Ries was also an immigrant and then a refugee. The lost hand of the damaged sculpture of *The Witch* has been replicated in many hands of today's young women artists making their sculptures. However, the gesture of hitting and breaking the stone can also be interpreted as the symbolic destruction of the patriarchal order. But, on the other hand, a question is: why do we have the right to excavate the stone for industry and art with such invasive methods for nature as they are used in quarries now in the first place? Thus the title *Reconstruction of the Witch* means to restore the disregarded values such as sensitivity, empathy, and care, but also the passion to stand against the violence towards human and non-human persons.

The exhibition in the gallery of the Association of Austrian Women Artists was also a great opportunity to reinterpret and give a new spirit to the works of Teresa F. Ries as an artist of multi-ethnic roots, by contemporary women artists of different origins, who were connected through her story. It's also a tribute to the woman artist, who was brave enough to live the life she wanted to live, even though she had to face constant prejudices towards her gender and origin. She was one of the women who paved the path for the next generations of women artists.

### **The Patriarchal Concrete!**

We hammer iron into your cold heart.  
 We are striking it with chisels,  
 passionate and willing to destroy.  
 Disappear you must!

We are penetrating your concrete heart  
 ever deeper.  
 Until you break into a billion pieces.  
 And let your heaven consume you!

Let's reconstruct the Witch!  
 A rebel against the prevailing order.  
 Let's reclaim her power!  
 the power to stir the "divine" order.  
 Let's find the lost element.

Let's enjoy our  
 imperfection,  
 diversity,  
 incompatibility...  
 Let's play  
 The March for the Witch!

Anka Lesniak, 2020

(the manifesto inspired by the poem by Teresa F. Ries, *Der Marmorblock*)

*Lost Element / Re-construction of the Witch*, 14 January – 13 February 2022, VBKÖ, Vienna.

Arists: Anna Bochkova, Valerie Habsburg, Lena Violetta Leitner, Anka Lesniak.

Curated by: Anka Lesniak / TFR Archive.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "The Portal," VBKÖ, <https://www.vbkoe.org/2020/09/09/opencall-theportal/>.

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Habsburg, "The Sculptor Teresa Feodorowna Ries and her private archive," *Art and Documentation*, [https://www.journal.doc.art.pl/pdf21/art\\_and\\_documentation\\_21\\_teresa\\_ries\\_studies\\_habsburg.pdf](https://www.journal.doc.art.pl/pdf21/art_and_documentation_21_teresa_ries_studies_habsburg.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Liudmila Kirsanova, "Un Paradiso Amaro/ Bitter Paradise," *Les Nouveaux Riches*, <https://www.les-nouveaux-riches.com/un-paradiso-amaro-bitter-paradise/>.

<sup>4</sup> Anka Leśniak, "Teresa Ries and the Witch," *Art and Documentation*, [https://www.journal.doc.art.pl/pdf21/art\\_and\\_documentation\\_21\\_teresa\\_ries\\_studies\\_lesniak.pdf](https://www.journal.doc.art.pl/pdf21/art_and_documentation_21_teresa_ries_studies_lesniak.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 107.

<sup>6</sup> Eric May, Sophia Papida, Hesham Abdulla, "Consequences of microbe -biofilm-salt interactions for stone integrity in monuments," New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003, 452-471. <https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/en/publications/consequences-of-microbe-biofilm-salt-interactions-for-stone-integ-2>.

<sup>7</sup> Mike Dixon-Kennedy, "Baba-Yaga," *Encyclopedia of Russian & Slavic Myth and Legend* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 23-28.

<sup>8</sup> Irish artist, Jessi Jones, referred to this sentence, see: Aidan Dunne, "The persistence of the feminine, embodied in the witch, demonised, and hounded," *Irishtimes*, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/the-persistence-of-the-feminine-embodied-in-the-witch-demonised-and-hounded-1.3543103>.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Bassnett, *Feminist Experiences, The Women's Movement in Four Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge / Boston and Sidney: Allen & Unwin, 1986/2013), 95.

<sup>10</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn NY: Autonomedia, 2004), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Valerie Habsburg, Jakob Krameritsch, Anka Leśniak, *Spezialschule*, edited by Simone Bader, Katharina Hölzl, Jakob Krameritsch et al. (Vienna: Schlebrügge.Editor, 2019), 110-127.

<sup>12</sup> Eli Anapur, "How Maria Altmann Fought To Recover Nazi Looted Klimt Paintings," *Widewalls*, <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/maria-altmann-klimt-paintings>.







BOOKS

# ***Tomáš Ruller. Perform- -made***

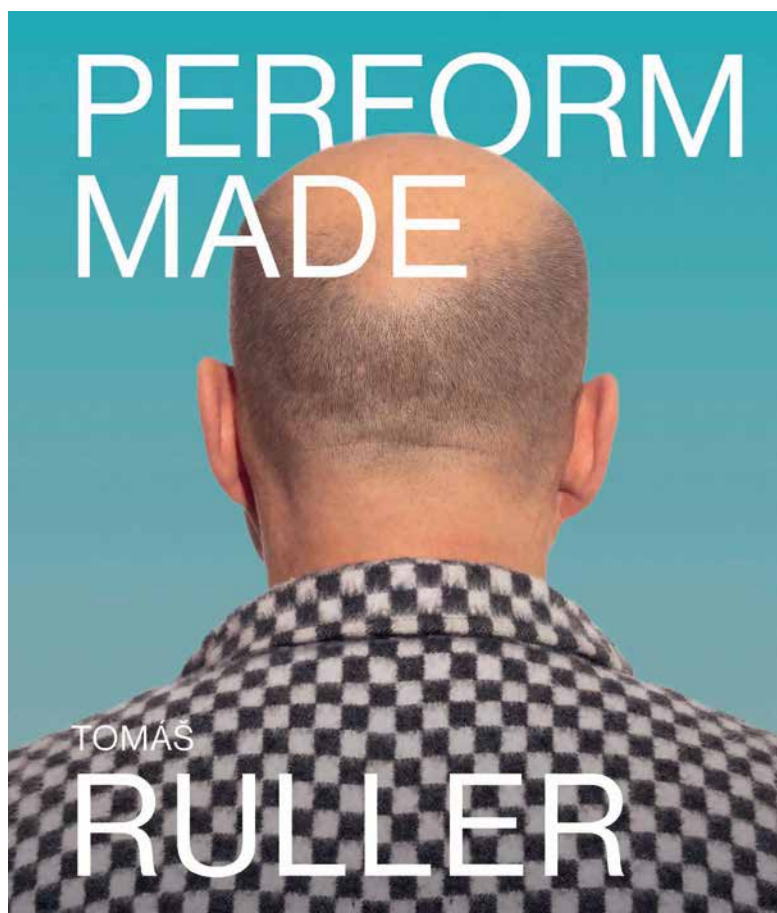
Ukazał się długo oczekiwany *catalogue raisonné* dzieł Tomáša Rullera, sporządzony przy jego udziale i obejmujący twórczość do roku 2020. Artysta nadal bardzo intensywnie pracuje, więc katalog będzie wymagał aneksów. Zasadnicza wartość krytyczna tej publikacji polega na wyczerpującym przedstawieniu wczesnej twórczości Rullera. Ten okres jest szczególnie ważny z dwóch powodów. Pierwszy jest taki, że w Czechosłowacji, w okresie poprzedzającym przełom polityczny w Europie Centralnej i upadek Żelaznej Kurtyny, niemal niemożliwe było swobodne uprawianie sztuki o charakterze konceptualnym i akcjonistycznym. Zachowana dokumentacja takich działań jest szczątkowa i bez komentarza twórcy trudna do zrozumienia dla współczesnych badaczy. Dlatego udział autora w jej opracowaniu czyni z tej publikacji tak istotne źródło wiedzy o tym okresie. Drugi wynika z licznych i bardzo żywych kontaktów Rullera z artystami i środowiskami pracującymi nad pokrewnymi zagadnieniami artystycznymi w Polsce. Ich początek sięga lat osiemdziesiątych, okresu Stanu Wojennego, a więc czasu wyjątkowo trudnego dla polskich twórców. Rezultatem tych kontaktów było powstanie formacji Black Market, której twórczość jest kluczowa dla historii sztuki performance, zarówno polskiej jak i światowej.

Ruller prezentował swoją twórczość w Polsce ponad 15 razy (!). Uczestniczył w ważnych festiwalach sztuki performance, takich jak Zamek Wyobraźni (Bytów/Ustka) czy InterAkcje (Piotrków Trybunalski), organizowanych w latach dziewięćdziesiątych i początkowych dwutysięcznych, a więc w okresie wielkiego boomu na tą sztukę w Polsce. Ale może najważniejsze były pobyty w latach osiemdziesiątych, na zaproszenie Grzegorza Dziamskiego, teoretyka sztuki konceptualnej i organizatora takich inicjatyw, jak spotkania pod hasłem Expanded Theater w Międzyzdrojach w 1983 roku, kontynuowane w jego galerii Maximal Art i sympozjum w Jabłonce (rozmowa z Dziamskim jest opublikowana w tym katalogu, datowana na rok 1985). Zaowocowały one najpierw współpracą z Zygmuntem Piotrowskim, w konsekwencji prowadzącą do założenia Black Market. Wszystkie te fakty arty-

styczne zostały zebrane i bardzo detalicznie opisane w omawianym katalogu. Ruller był w Polsce w 2010 roku z okazji dwudziestej piątej rocznicy powstania Black Market (Lublin, Warszawa). W 2022 roku pojawił się znowu w ASP w Gdańsku na festiwalu FNAF (FNAF – Festival of Naked Forms zainicjowała Lenka Kłodová w Pradze w 2015 roku, a od dwóch edycji ma on odsłonę w gdańskiej ASP).

Performance nie jest jedynym rodzajem sztuki uprawianej przez Rullera. Należy on także do pionierów sztuki mediów w Czeskiej Republice. Jest założycielem Wydziału Video-Multimedia-Performance w Brno University of Technology, od 1992 roku. Równie ważne miejsce w jego twórczości odgrywa rzeźba, obiekt, instalacja. Cała jego różnorodna twórczość została zaprezentowana na wystawie w Brnie w galerii Dům umění města Brna, pod takim samym tytułem jak omawiany katalog, wydany w związku z tą wystawą. W katalogu znajdziemy także informacje o kulisach pozyskania ze Stanów Zjednoczonych - z inicjatywy Rullera - prac wideo i dokumentacji Woody'ego i Steiny Vasulków i ustanowienia w Dům umění města Brna instytucji pod nazwą Vašulka Kitchen będącej centrum studiów nad ich twórczością, która jest kluczowa dla historii sztuki obrazu medialnego.

Katalog otwiera pierwsza zrealizowana praca Rullera. Rzadko zdarza się, aby już na samym początku kariery artysta stworzył pracę tak dojrzałą, która pozostaje dla niego punktem odniesienia na późniejszych etapach kariery, a co więcej stanowi wsparcie dla rozumienia i interpretacji jego aktualnej twórczości. *By the Way* to performance do fotografii wykonany w jaskini Pekarna, w górach Moravian Karst, w 1974 roku. Ruller miał wtedy niespełna 18 lat. Na fotografii widzimy niewyraźne postaci stojące w jaskini. Praca jest – świadomym – odniesieniem do platońskiej przypowieści o jaskini. Artysta wyznaczył tu pole gry jaką prowadzi między reprezentacją a światem otaczającym w swoich performance, a od 1983 roku w pracach wideo. Przy czym, materiał zawarty w katalogu, jak i sposób jego strukturalizacji w ramach tej publikacji, jednoznacznie wskazują na live art jako prąródło i fundament całej jego różnorodnej twórczości.



*Tomáš Ruller: Perform-made: Resistant Moments.* Edited by Pavel Liška, Dušan Brozman, and Tomáš Ruller. Praha and Brno: Karel Kerlický - KANT and Brno University of Technology - VUTUM Press, 2021. Wszystkie teksty zostały opublikowane także w języku angielskim.

W świetle kategorii współczesnej performatyki jest całkowicie zrozumiałe zarówno szerokie rozumienie kategorii performance, jak i używanie tej praktyki w rozmaity sposób, także dokamero-wo. Jednak należy zauważyć, że Ruller stosował rozszerzoną (expanded) performatykę w swoich realizacjach od początku, od owej akcji w jaskini platońskiej. Performance jest dla niego także sposobem budowania relacji między mediami i łączenia mediów sztuki, zgodnie ze źródłową zasadą dialektyki mediów Dicka Higginsa, twórcy teorii i praktyki sztuki intermedialnej.

W późniejszych latach Ruller wielokrotnie powraca do działań w jaskini. Często też pracuje w przestrzeniach w rozmaity sposób zamkniętych czy izolowanych, bądź inaczej wydzielonych. Pra-

ca w ukryciu wynika ze sposobu rozumienia sztuki jako doświadczenia wewnętrznego, ale ściśle po-wiązanego z kondycją fizyczną, somatyczną artysty. Częstym miejscem realizacji jest też pejzaż, natu-ralne otoczenie. Ten sposób działania jest charak-terystyczny dla artystów w Czechach, jak i innych krajach za Żelazną Kurtyną, gdzie wyjście poza galerie i poza miasto było koniecznością wobec systemu kontroli i cenzury państwa, a zarazem stanowiło poszukiwanie enklaw wolności artystycz-nej i świadczyło o determinacji artystów chcących tworzyć sztukę mimo wszystkich przeciwności. Te decyzje, zdawałoby się - wtedy - będące aktami desperacji, dziś są ważnymi dokumentami sztuki współczesnej. Pokazują jak dzięki uporowi artystów mogła ona istnieć i się rozwijać, mimo wszystko.



Stąd w tym obszarze geograficznym ukształtowała się specyficzna odmiana land art. Inaczej niż jej amerykański odpowiednik, nie operowała gigantyczną skalą, a wręcz przeciwnie – była personalna; to interwencja w pejzaż, którą można wykonać własnymi rękami *in situ*. Akcje i instalacje tego typu mają charakter site specific, co jest kluczową praktyką lat dziewięćdziesiątych. Jednak ze względu na wspomniane warunki tworzenia w Czechach, ta praktyka była rozwijana przez Rullera już od początku lat osiemdziesiątych. Jego liczne realizacje outdoor bazują, tak lub inaczej, na elemencie performatywnym, który był kluczowy zarówno dla tej sztuki jako lokalnego zjawiska, jak i praktyki własnej Rullera. Zarazem, była ona w punkcie wyjścia powiązana z konceptualizmem, operowała znakiem i logiką tautologii. Ale inaczej niż realizacje w white cube była kontekstualna *par excellence*. Odnosiła się zarówno do miejsca realizacji, jak i – szerzej rozumiana - stanowiła manifestację polityczną wolności w totalitaryzmie. Innym zagadnieniem rozwijanym przy tej okazji, a należącym do metodologii konceptualizmu, była dokumentacja i późniejsze prezentacje śladów działania. Jest to istotne dziś, w sytuacji gdy każda najdrobniejsza nawet pozostałość ma wartość muzealną. Katalog prac Rullera dowodzi jak ważne są strategie pracy z dokumentami sztuki i tworzenie dokumentów przez artystów. Katalog *Perform-made* stanowi wzorcowy przykład opracowania dokumentacji sztuki żywej.

Osobny rozdział w tym katalogu, jak i w życiu artystycznym Rullera, stanowi 'art of meeting' – tworzenie sztuki z innymi, wspólnie, które jednocześnie jest tworzeniem sztuki własnej, w zgodzie ze sobą, bez utraty ani odrobiny indywidualności. Oparcie sztuki na podmiotowych relacjach międzyludzkich wymaga wypracowania specjalnej metodologii. Ta z kolei wynika z praktyk warsztatowych, edukacyjnych, w których ma miejsce zwrotny przekaz informacji między nadawcą a odbiorcą. A więc znów natrafiamy na sytuację dynamiczną, czyli performatywną, gdyż w takiej dwustronnej relacji żadna ze stron nie może pozostać bierna. Przykłady wspólnej pracy znajdziemy już w najwcześniejszej praktyce Rullera. Należy

do nich także inicjalna dla niego akcja w jaskini. Współpraca z Zygmuntem Piotrowskim stanowiła rodzaj ukoronowania procesu rozwijania tej praktyki. Była ona tak udana także z tego powodu, że również Piotrowski uznawał współpracę warsztatową z innymi za jeden z fundamentów swojej praktyki twórczej. W katalogu znajduje się zdjęcie zorganizowanej przez Rullera 'sytuacji' podczas spotkania Expanded Theatre. Sytuacja to słowo-klucz jego praktyki tego typu. Zbiorowe performance są organizowane przez niego do dziś pod nazwą *Open Situation*. Zdjęcie przedstawia osoby stojące na tle morza (*Stand-up*). Kadr jest podobny do ujęć sytuacji w jaskini. I to podobieństwo wynika z charakteru formy akcyjnej opartej na 'czystej' obecności – artyści, innych, a w rezultacie wspólnej. Wspólna praca z Piotrowskim doprowadziła do powstania międzynarodowej grupy Black Market (pierwsze kolektywne performance pod tą nazwą odbyły się w 1985, ostatnie w 2010 w rocznicę powstania). Katalog Rullera stanowi podstawowe źródło do studiowania historii grupy poprzez opublikowane w nim dokumenty, teksty źródłowe, korespondencję. Informacje na ten temat znajdujemy także w szczegółowym kalendarium twórczości artysty. Współpraca międzynarodowa przełamywała ograniczenia polityczne tego czasu wynikające z funkcjonowania Żelaznej Kurtyny. Zarazem zaistnienie takiej wymiany zapowiada schyłek post-jałtańskiego podziału Europy na wschód i zachód.

Katalog dowodzi, że cała sztuka Rullera opierała się, i opiera do dziś, na dialektycznym uzgodnieniu sprzeczności między wzorcami kulturowymi, praktykami i mediami sztuki, indywidualnymi i kolektywnymi postawami. Zgromadzona dokumentacja pokazuje, że Ruller wypracował metodę twórczą opartą o performance, która tym niemniej zawsze może zostać otwarta i zintegrowana z praktykami innych twórców. Indywidualne jest społeczne – to konkluzja z długiej drogi artystycznej Rullera.

Łukasz GUZEK



# OBITUARY



Marek ze swoją pracą w mieszkaniu, 2016

# THINK CRAZY

4 marca 2022 roku zmarł, przeżywszy 86 lat, Marek Konieczny. W nekrologu rodzina napisała: *Niegdyś Inżynier – Architekt, Narciarz, Twórca idei Think Crazy*. Marek Konieczny, który pochodził ze śląska Cieszyńskiego, przywędrował do polskiej sztuki z dość nietypowego kierunku. Studiował na Politechnice Śląskiej w Gliwicach, która w tym czasie była spadkobierczynią Politechniki Lwowskiej. Na wydział Architektury Wnętrz warszawskiej Akademii Sztuk Pięknych przyszedł jako doświadczony konstruktor i już w trakcie studiów współpracował z jej profesorami. Trzeba wspomnieć, że w okresie jego studiów na warszawskiej akademii znalazła przystań czołówka polskiej awangardy architektonicznej. Wspominał, że projektował „ptaki,” czyli pawilony handlowe w lubelskim osiedlu Słowackiego, głównym dziełem małżeństwa Zofii Garlińskiej-Hansen i Oskara Hansena. Doświadczenia z tego okresu mocno odcisnęły się na twórczości Marka powodując, że była ona unikalna, nie tyl-

ko na polskim podwórku. Jakie cechy wyniósł ze swojego architektonicznego doświadczenia? Przede wszystkim precyzję myślenia, poczucie misji i wiarę w nowoczesność, wszystko, co składało się na pojęcie awangardy z połowy ubiegłego wieku. Także specyficzne umiejętności warsztatowe, które były obce polskim artystom z tego okresu. W tych latach droga artysty była tradycyjna – ognisko plastyczne, liceum plastyczne i wyższa szkoła plastyczna, w których ćwiczono rysunek z gipsu i modelu. Na studiach wyższych za nowoczesne uważano rysowanie, malowanie, czy rzeźbienie niedokładne, to znaczy z zamazanymi rysami twarzy. Wyjścia poza bryłę, czy płaszczyznę, jako nośnik dzieła przy tym trybie kształcenia nie brano pod uwagę. Podobnie było z miejscem zaistnienia dzieła. Nie wychodzono ze sztuką poza galerię, ponieważ ówczesna polityka kulturalna kontrolowała poczynania artystów. Istotnym doświadczeniem Marka był wyjazd do Stanów Zjednoczonych w ramach





Marek z żoną Moniką Szwejewską w ich mieszkaniu, 2016

Stypendium Kościuszkowskiego i kontakt z grupą Fluxus. W tym czasie amerykańscy artyści z tej grupy zamieniali swoją egzystencję w formę dzieła sztuki, ze wszystkimi wynikającymi z tego konsekwencjami. Marek wspominał współpracę z Georgem Maciunasem, który w tym czasie ukrywał się przed wierzycielami. Później chętnie zamiast notki biograficznej zamieszczał krótki tekst o sobie, który był podstawą do notki w nekrologu: *Urodzony pod znakiem Raka. Syn Księżycy. Kocha orchidee. A szczęście zapewni mu szmaragd. Artysta. Niegdyś inżynier. Narciarz, wizjoner, kusiciel. Dezenter konceptualizmu. Twórca idei Think Crazy. Żyje w Europie.* W tych słowach widać wyraźne zamknięcie jednego etapu życia i rozpoczęcie innego. Od czasu tego wyjazdu Marek przestał działać jako inżynier i oddał się w pełni sztuce, traktując to jako działanie totalne. Zarówno jego pracownia, jak i mieszkanie, były traktowane jak dzieła sztuki. Podobnie traktował swoje ubranie i ciało. Czasem występował jako jednorożec z rogiem na

czole, lubił też podobny w kształcie sierp. Procesualne prace Marka opierały się na zestawieniu ludzkiego ciała z artefaktem. Początkowo dokumentował takie działania na taśmie filmowej, często zapętlonej, co dawało efekty medytacyjne. Jego warsztat artystyczny znacznie odbiegał w tym czasie od konwencjonalnego warsztatu plastyka. Właściwie jedynymi jego pracami na płaszczyźnie były wielkoskalowe pastele na fizelinie, które też chętniej niż na ścianie eksponował w przestrzeni. Pozostałe prace mocno wkraczały w trzeci wymiar, przynajmniej ramami, często jako elementy prac wykorzystywał *objet trouvé* – wypchane zwierzęta i dekoracyjne przedmioty połączone z formami abstrakcyjnymi. W obrazach wykorzystywał efekty znamion luksusu, przede wszystkim złoto, w tym celu używał szlagmetal, ale też futra, szlachetne drewno i tkaniny. Jego prace rzeźbiarskie były najczęściej oparte na gotowych, polichromowanych i złożonych znalezionych przedmiotach, a właściwie przedmiotach wybranych, które inspirowały go do



Marek ze swoimi pracami w pracowni, 2014



Rzeźby Marka w jego pracowni, 2010

kolejnych przekształceń. Ten proces porównywał do robienia kanapki, na której kładzie się kolejne warstwy jedzenia, żeby była pożywna i smaczna. Performance Marka były krótkie, agresywne, działały jak koany w Zen, chociaż nie odwoływał się do inspiracji buddyzmem. Na wystawie organizowanej przez Janusza Boguckiego w kościele na Żytniej w Warszawie zbudował własną, artystyczną kaplicę. Marka poznałem bliżej w latach osiemdziesiątych, kiedy organizowałem wystawy w pracowni. Bardzo pasowała mu otwarta formuła tych wystaw, w których obok sztuk wizualnych odbywały się koncerty, teatr, poezja, sztuki walki i performance. Obok uznanych artystów występowała też młodzież. Dla młodzieży zorganizowaliśmy w tych latach Akademię Komplet Sztuki. W ramach tej akademii poznałem podejście Marka do tworzenia dzieła, bowiem wypracował on specyficzny warsztat artystyczny. Podstawą był temat, czyli sens dzieła. Mogło to być hasło, typu: *ogon konia mongolskiego*, ale zawsze była konkretna przyczyna, dla której powstawał

dany obiekt. Istniał w tym pozytywny program nauczania architektonicznego, w którym forma powstawała w odpowiedzi na postawiony problem i powinna być skonstruowana w sposób logiczny. Forma, w której temat miał zaistnieć, nie mogła być konwencjonalna, ale jak najlepiej skorelowana z tematem, odpowiadająca charakterowi artysty. Miała być przy tym kompletna, czyli zamknięta, a więc nie wymagająca poprawek. Uczestniczący w naszej akademii studenci oficjalnej akademii zaproponowali Marka jako profesora wizytującego w warszawskiej ASP. Marek był profesorem wizytującym krótko, ale wychował kilku artystów, którzy wyrosli ponad standardowe umiejętności absolwentów akademii. Ten niezwykle istotny powód, sens tworzonego dzieła powodował, że jego prace, chociaż formalnie abstrakcyjne, niosły w sobie niezwykle istotny przekaz zarówno intelektualny, jak i emocjonalny. Sens tworzonych dzieł spowodował, że nie są one, jak współcześnie często widzimy, obiektami dekoracyjnymi, ale pomimo złocen i bogatej formy są





Rzeźba i gwasz Marka  
w pracowni, 2010



Marek wykonuje działanie w swoim mieszkaniu, 2016



Prace Marka w jego pracowni, 2010

esejami dotyczącymi sensu naszej egzystencji. Tu trzeba powiedzieć o innej cesze Marka, jego non-konformizmie. Bardzo chętnie uczestniczył w niezależnych wystawach, nie tylko w latach osiemdziesiątych. Pamiętam demonstrację, jaką zorganizował z nami w 1989 roku przeciwko powołaniu w Zamku Ujazdowskim Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, który miał być ośrodkiem prowadzącym artystów zgodnie ze standardem konwencjonalnej sztuki zachodnioeuropejskiej. Już w XXI wieku, po działaniach w kierunku ograniczenia swobody twórczej przez system kuratorski, uczestniczył w wystawach organizowanych przez stałych uczestników wystaw pracownianych z lat osiemdziesiątych pod hasłem: *Kultura niezależna 25 lat później*. Te wystawy, mimo że opierały się na czołowych polskich artystach, nie mogły zaistnieć w oficjalnym obiegu, co

także świadczy o kondycji organizacji polskiego życia artystycznego. Był jednym z tych twórców modernistycznej awangardy, którzy mocno weszli w nurt postmodernizmu, chociaż jego wiara w sens sztuki nie pozwoliła mu na afirmację nurtów post sztuki. W 2021 roku namalowałem poczet władców Polski. Władcom do Zygmunta Augusta z nieznanymi obliczami nadałem twarze polskich współczesnych artystów. Pierwszemu władcy – Lechowi nadałem twarz Marka Koniecznego, uznając jego rolę we współczesnej polskiej sztuce. Będąc niewątpliwie jedną z najciekawszych postaci w sztuce przełomu XX i XXI wieku przeminął wraz z nią. Na cmentarzu żegnało go niewielu. Kilka osób z rodziny i kilku artystów.

**Jan RYLKE**

