

*stalo – nestalo se / it happened – it didn't happen*

In the post-factual era in which inconvenient truths are countered with alternative facts, science suddenly finds itself in a crisis of justification. In the echo chambers and lie factories of the digital space, facts become fiction and vice versa.

## Richard Nikl: Factspawn

13/04–30/05/22

In Richard Nikl's "soft diagrams", digitally rendered paintings from printed layers and painterly touch ups of which four are on display in his first presentation at Stone Projects, the artist gives a certain softness to seemingly hard facts. In the form of graphs and mind maps, it is an attempt to grasp the outlines of flapping ideas without shapes.

Referencing Parametricism, an architectural style based on algorithms and flowing forms, Nikl's paintings are composed of curves, sticks, grids, holes, cells, roots, fibers, and bubbles. Along the brain like structures text is horizontally and vertically spread, connecting loose fragments and words like synopsis. This psychological layer is resolved by one or the other cartoonish Shrek moments: warts and pimples from monster stories and fairytale frogs sit on the surface and look at you.


The text snippets are quoted from Czech literature, opera, and theatre, among them the writers Ludvík Vaculík and Václav Havel, both civil rights activists against the communist regime of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and 1970s. Nikl works with original language, mostly his mother tongue. Through the variety of typefaces (including the handwriting of the artist) the text turns into an image, all the more for an international audience.

As a counterpart, Nikl partly makes use of a visual language translatable to anyone: Since the rise of emoticons ("smileys") in the 1980s and 1990s, the design and range of pictorial representations have significantly changed over time: Whereas back then typographic approximations were reduced to a minimum by using characters like :- ) or :( in order to express humor, a mood, or simply to save time, today's emojis have become hyperrealistic symbols of various genres. Unnecessary details like shadow, reflection, depth, and perspective make up pictograms which are as complex as approachable. Their cuteness and playfulness give them a certain lightness and easiness and turns a fire or a cloud into an object that is truer than true. A similar effect applies to the colors of the paintings: following the color scheme of diagrams and charts, they consist of gray or nude tones combined with accent colors that make it a joyful experience – somewhere between scientific logic and childlike play.

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 *Open the door, my princess dear,  
Open the door to thy true love here!  
And mind the words that thou and I said  
By the fountain cool, in the greenwood shade.*

It is the beginning of a process at the end of which there is not  
always a frog waiting.

*nádech – výdech – opakování / inhale – exhale – repeat*

Miriam Bettin, 2022