

PETR NIKL: WILD FLOWERBEDS

1. 6. - 30. 7. 2022

Fait Gallery, Ve Vaňkovce 2, Brno, Czech Republic

Curators: Denisa Kujelová and Jiří Ptáček

In the exhibition Wild Flowerbeds of the versatile visual artist Petr Nikl, his creative approaches intertwine in a vast imaginative garden - a kind of ecosystem of moving and seemingly static organisms cultivated by the artist, but at the same time partially self-grown, much to his delight.

Petr Nikl is one of the few Czech artists who doesn't need introduction to the cultural public. Almost everyone will remember some of his exhibitions, a painting, drawing or print, an exhibition project he initiated, a music recording, a concert performance, a theatre play or a gallery performance or, for example, a book for adults and children he wrote and illustrated. However, it is not this multi-faceted and decades-long presence of Petr Nikl that makes him an unmistakable figure. Indeed, this presence would not be worth talking about and would be just mindless hyperactivity were it not characterized by the imaginative poetics with which the artist draws us into a fascinating space of fantasy and play.

If we were to sum up what Nikl communicates to his viewers and listeners, it would probably be a non-violently subversive impact on the consensus of dignified and pragmatic adulthood which creates a wall of restrictions and a hard-to-fulfil desire to break it, and Nikl's ability to indicate, through the outcomes of his work, a path towards the fuller experiencing of the multi-layered and mysterious nature of existence that spreads underneath the veneer of the mundane and the superficial absorption of reality.

Nikl co-founded his puppet theatre company Mehedaha as early as 1985. At that time, he was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague where intermedia fusions or performative forms in visual art were not discussed and taught. However, he soon found kindred spirits among the members of the *Tvrdohlaví* art group which made its first public appearance in 1987, with understanding not only for artistic activity but also for self-realization in music and theatre. Yet only in Nikl's case involving the wide spectrum of image, sound, language and body did it become the basis of all creative activities.

Like the performances of Nikl's plays where his visual sensitivity is strongly applied, many of his art projects are determined by the performative and procedural aspects of art. This is by no means limited to paintings which are executed by mechanical machines with the artist's assistance, often in the presence of the audience. This is also true, for example, of his recent works on paper in which he explores new possibilities by dipping rolls of paper in paint in anticipation of (again) only partially predictable results. Randomness and spontaneity help the artist to cross the horizon of his own imagination and provide him with the possibility of wonder at the resulting image. They are not far from Nikl's drawing method in which his skill taps

unconscious sources and the drawing is thus "let" grow out of contents which otherwise remain inaccessible.

The exhibition in the Fait Gallery is rooted in the metaphor of a flower bed. While a garden is associated with a branching cultural symbolism, the flower bed as its sub-component is only a kind of working subject. Under normal circumstances it is cultivated and maintained in a state where it serves well the greater whole or a given purpose which, depending on the intentions of the grower, is either ornamental or utilitarian. A flower bed that is not weeded and consequently wild is a sign of neglect, while care is characterized by a high degree of restriction and control over what can take place in this demarcated area. In contrast, Peter Nikl lets his imaginary flower beds overgrow in anticipation of the unsuspected and surprising. For him, they are not what he carefully prepares and then follows a plan but a combined activity of plants, soil, sunshine, rain, insects, earthworms, moles and other elements that enter into the process. The flower beds - not dissimilar to stretched canvases or sheets of paper because of their limits - are thus filled with actions that we can only partially observe. And anticipate even less.

Thanks to this, they can turn into fascinating revelations which, through their self-organization and somewhat "disorganized organization" take us beyond (or "under") an objective and clear understanding of reality, to its massive organicity and complexity that is never fully graspable. And yet, this "big" takes place in the encounter with something as "small", as a flower bed, a drawing or a painted image.

Text: Jiří Ptáček