

VIKTOR ŠEFČÍK & ESTER:

*Florebit Sicut Liliūm*

(Ozeáš / Hosea 14:5)

dvojice  
couples

# *Florebit Sicut Lilium*

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*(he shall grow as the lily)*

The title of our exhibition has been borrowed from the Biblical verse “Florebit sicut lilium”, part of the Old Testament message on hope and renewal. Within its original context, the line is a symbolic reference to the *rebirth of nature and the Earth*, a parallel which resonates with the more contemporary need for the renewal of the planet. The lily is a flower which creates its own context for the image of transformation; it grows from the unclean earth<sup>1</sup> and is transformed into a pristine flower. Metaphorically, it represents the awakening or resurrection of something that was once dead or impure, the beginning of new life. Like the Biblical lily, the people of today and the planet as a whole are in sore need of *pure water and fresh air*. The ecological crisis, the loss of humanity and communication breakdown form our own *Biblical impurity* which we must amend. If we are to begin acting responsibly, we must hope that our Planet Earth will itself blossom like the lily. The verse cited above suggests a spiritual and physical flowering and the return of values.

We find ourselves in the midst of plants and flowers. Viktor Šeřčík, one-time underground artist and later painter of urban nooks and crannies has exchanged the chaos of big city life for a quiet place in the country; on a rolling plain with an endless expanse of sunflowers to the right and cornfields to the left, all of which lies beneath a deep blue sky and a sun that seems to have come straight from Provence. Simply lie down on the ground, change your point of view<sup>2</sup> and everything can appear different. Suddenly you become aware of the beauty of contrasting pure colours, the mysteries of light and shadow, the infinite line leading from the Renaissance to the Baroque. Or take the artist’s untamed garden; ancient plum trees and apple trees seemingly unmarked

- 1 In many cultures and texts, including the scriptures, the earth is understood as an unclean material, and the use of earth as a metaphor for impurity forms a context for imagery referring to transformation and purification in which the unclean and fragile can undergo a process of rebirth and reemerge with a new beauty and purity.
- 2 The artist is reminded of an incident when he was painting *en plein air*; the chair on which he was sitting sank into the soft earth, and he found himself face-to-face with the open sky.

by the passing seasons, medlars, the grapes and wild roses creeping across the veranda, the flowers and herbs growing wild, the labyrinth of well-trodden paths threading through the bushes and verdant greenery.

The artist secluded himself from the art world for fifteen years, and it is always curious to meet someone again after such a period of time, to observe how they have changed. A sense of calm radiates from him, a respect for the world of plants. He lives among them, observes their growth, admires their pure and honest lives, finding within them an order, a natural rhythm, an innate purity. He watches their existence as it plays out in real time, from seedling to the aftermath of their death. It is said that you should find the themes from life that can bring you artistic fulfilment; he has done so, but not, as we might expect, in the form of the still life<sup>3</sup>, even though he long ago painted bouquets of flowers for his mother. In recent years, flowers have become the main focus of his interest, more specifically their details which serve as an object of observation and inner contemplation.

In the history of art, we can see a similar approach to flowers in the work of, for example, Georgia O'Keeffe<sup>4</sup>, an artist who is known for her expansive and detailed depictions of flowers. She too was entranced by nature which she perceived as being part of her own inner-world. Under the influence of Arthur Wesley Dow<sup>5</sup> and his focus on capturing the emotional essence within an object, she began experimenting with abstracted and refined floral forms. She was also influenced by Modernist photography, in particular the technique of close-ups. In the 21st century, similar concerns have been addressed by artists

3 The still life emerged as a distinct genre in the 17th century in three types: 1. vanitas, which drew attention to the transience of life and the terrifying prospect of death lurking around the corner, 2. a symbolic type which dwelled on the five senses: sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste, 3. a type which serves to display painterly skill; the perfect mastery of technique which was capable of deceiving the eye. Trompe l'oeil is the French expression for visual illusion. Although the still life was typically seen as less serious than other genres, it soon became the most commercially successful form of fine art.

4 Georgia O'Keeffe (1887 – 1986), an iconic figure in American Modernism and “the mother of flower paintings”. Her art is not only a visual representation of reality but also an expression of internal emotions and impressions. <https://www.artdependence.com/articles/the-symbolism-of-flowers-in-the-art-of-georgia-o-keeffe/>

5 Arthur Wesley Dow (1857 – 1922), American painter, photographer and renowned educator who argued for the importance of the feelings and impressions that art evokes in viewers in addition to how it appears.

such as Marc Quinn<sup>6</sup>, an artist known for his hyper-realistic paintings which feature combinations of flowers which could never have co-existed in the real world, thereby questioning the present-day manipulation of nature. Also worthy of mention in this context is the remarkable illustrator of atlases of plants and flowers Marianne North<sup>7</sup> (1830 – 1890); she fearlessly travelled around the world and documented plants in their natural environments.

Viktor Šefčík is not primarily concerned with ecological issues; he states that he trusts in a *process of self-development* in nature, believing that nature possesses a strength which is greater than that of humankind. He tries to observe the construction and form of plants to such a degree that he can draw generalizations from them, seeing the observation of their slow birth and development, even after their physical death, as the gateway to the microprocesses of life. There is a unique beauty in every stage of their lives, from each of which new qualities emerge. This latest creative project is unique in the context of Slovak contemporary fine art, not only in terms of subject matter but also in the consistent calm of his depictive technique. It is not a case of active observation; these are not botanical records. We are often unable to identify his flowers, nor do we need to. What draws the attention is his unorthodox cross-sections, details and shapes. It is, at the same time, an account of the artist's immersion in himself, the connections between his mental and visual perceptions. He hopes that the feelings he experiences in the creative act are also reflected in the final work and that these can be perceived by their viewers. He sometimes conceals small details within his compositions: for example, mirrored dialogues or cloaked hints. Among the most significant of

6 Marc Quinn (\*1964), contemporary British artist who work "Garden, 2000" represents the desire to bring together all of the world's plants into a single location in order to create an "idealised paradise". <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/garden2>

7 Marianne North (1830 – 1890), English botanist and illustrator of the Victorian era who is renowned for her remarkable listing and observation of plants in their natural environments. She was known for her extensive travels and her discovery and description of previously unknown plant species. Her work approaches the artistic quality of the old masters. <https://thecabinetofcuriosity.net/2016/04/18/the-extraordinary-life-of-marianne-norththe-victorian-gentlewoman-who-travelled-the-world/>

8 Drolleries are small images found in the margins of illuminated manuscripts. Often depicting fantastical or hybrid creatures and plants in unusual or unlikely poses, they can be conceived as expressions of free thinking.

his inspirations are depictions of sunflowers and corn, not only for their vibrant colours but above all for the constantly changing structure of their foliage, from vibrant green to their dry, Baroque-esque twisting and shrivelled, fragile forms. He is similarly fascinated by the dried luminance of roses in full bloom. Seeking out a full scale of shades, he forms interesting geometric colour schemes, observing how their mutual interplay changes the expression in different contexts. The tonal shifts in the colours of his paintings oscillate between sharply realistic contrasts in full sunlight to subtle, graduated shades, seemingly captured through a haze or mist.

The artist's large format drawings in pencil, charcoal and pastels are smaller than his paintings, yet they display an equivalent power of expression. The drawings aim at a specific whole, the final result of which often has an abstract effect. While his paintings feature depictions on smooth, calm surfaces of the media, he often energetically crumples or layers the canvases of his drawings to form starker contrasts. In some places, he uses tones or undertones which grant the works an air of historicism. He is both a painter and a restorer, a profession which is closely connected with the history of art. His studies, his restoration projects and the work he has carried out in depositories have allowed him an intimate familiarity with historical paintings; from this experience he has drawn an expert knowledge of colour, light, shadow and technique, all of which appear constantly in his work.

An equally important but hitherto unexhibited part of Viktor's presentation is his photography, a selection of work which is surprising and refreshing, serving as stimuli for the subsequent artistic development. His work is a process of action photography, a selection of moments, far from typical preconceptions about the search for subjects. On occasions, his photography becomes a source of his inspiration, but they are essentially unfinished products into which he involves himself manually, seeking within them new shapes, other forms as yet unknown. He extracts some sections of the photos, placing them into collages, concealing them beneath acrylics or accenting them with watercolours. He used this approach in his fascinating cycle which documents corn plants. He likes to suggest hints of a coloured frame in his works, drawing inspiration from Romanesque frescos or the drolleries<sup>8</sup> found in Gothic book illustrations and illuminated manuscripts.

Viktor Šefčík has fallen in love with nature. He is grateful that he lives in an environment which supports free creativity, a space in which he strives to understand the universe and express this in his own unique fashion. His work is “a testimony of the artist’s rebelliousness and conciliations”<sup>9</sup>, a process which runs its course seemingly outside the context of contemporary society. His work as a whole can perhaps be viewed as a *fourth wall* which serves as a personal barrier against the aggressivity of the modern day. Time and humility.

**Who is Ester?** Viktor Šefčík describes Ester as his finest work, a statement which stands as a beautiful declaration of emotion from father to daughter. We can perhaps see a visual metaphor for their lives in the small watercolour titled *Magnolia* from 2005, a work which depicts a fragile shoot blossoming from a sturdy root. Ester has spent much of her life in close proximity to her father. Life in his studio brought her a wide range of stimuli for her artistic education, allowing her to pick up visual impulses and dialogues in the creative process in an informal fashion. Overcoming the potential risk of epigonism, Ester has developed and established herself as an interesting and distinct personality. Her work shares a similar way of thinking with that of her father, but she has chosen her own path in the form of sensitive organic sculptures.

At first glance, these abstract structures, which were created between 2017 and 2023, are the antithesis of her father’s paintings, but they in fact complement his work perfectly. While Viktor offers the viewer insights into the internal structure of flowers and emphasises detail, Ester refines her forms, enclosing and concealing them within an embrace which seems intended to protect their inner core. Upon closer examination we can discern the morphology of the sculptures, formed as they are from curious shapes germinating seeds, buds, stems, stones and natural cavities, at times indicating a figural hint. To some extent they are sketches, lacking unnecessary detail, solid and thoughtful. An appealing aspect of the artist’s work is her decision to work with a mix of kaolin clay sourced from her local area and firesand. The sculptures are not fired, only dried, and the use of kaolin allows her to form thin, fragile layers. Also of interest are the models which have

been purposefully created to provide watering places for insects and small birds, working with cascade-like plant forms, a process which can be observed in nature. In a roundabout way, we have come back to the imagery of transformation suggested by the title of the exhibition; her works too are a metamorphosis of *Biblical clay*. They represent an image of the *transformation and purification* of that which was not living, and which has become a beautiful, vibrant form.

Renewal is a process which affects not only nature and humankind but also art. The exhibition of work by Viktor Šefčík and his daughter Ester invites us to embark upon a journey into introspection, to perceive the detailed documentation of living processes. We share the belief of the artists that their works can enable us too to become part of this transformation.

PhDr. Edita Vološčuková, PhD.,  
exhibition curator

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