

Anthropomorphism and dreams about earth and plants

Thoughts on my artistic practice

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1. Secret Life of Houseplants, „Tripthi and the Favorite”, image from book, 2008-2009



2. Secret Life of Houseplants, „Penny and Perpetua”, image from book, 2008-2009

When I was a child, I wanted people not to kill or eat animals.

This was in contrast to what was happening before my eyes, in my grandparents' village near Bucharest. For Christmas we slaughtered a pig in the yard, and we children had to ride it symbolically after it was killed, and for Easter of course we slaughtered a lamb, which had previously received a name and became my sister's and my friend.

Although I now understand rationally that people often cannot avoid the consumption and exploitation of animals, and although I eat fish and seafood and sometimes even pork (!) it is a fact of life I can not "digest" very easily ... And as I make art about my fears, desires and beliefs, my first video, *Territory of Fear* (2003), documents the slaughter of more lambs for Easter by the shepherd in the same village of my grandparents. It is a theme that has been actively concerned me for almost three years, materializing in artist books, photos and actions with the public.¹

The extreme attachment to my grandparents' house and garden, where my father grew up, manifested itself both when I was studying in London, as well when, back in the country, in my grandparents' village, I composed a series of installations in the almost mythical space of childhood: in the garden, in the greenhouse, in the living room and in the grandparents sleeping room, recreating a time that can only be re-imagined and re-interpreted.²

Later on, after finishing my studies in Chicago, in a very strongly perceived isolation at the level of human contact, I became increasingly sensitive to the interactions with my studio plants, which showed extraordinary capacities, and which led me on the one hand, to read more about

1 "The Territory of Fear" (7 min., 2003) was first exhibited at UNA Gallery as part of a personal exhibition of the same title in the first year of the master's degree at the National University of Arts in Bucharest in 2003.

2 "Nice Day" (PAL video, 3 min. 45 sec. In English and Spanish, 2004-2005,) was first shown as a video and photo as part of Goldsmiths College's postgraduate exhibition, University of London in 2005. .

them and the biological origins of our planet, and on the other to start a project called "*Secret Life of Houseplants*" (2008-2009)³. It consisted of interviews with people, most of them known to me, but not all, about their plants, following the idea of a loving relationship between humans and plants, similar to that between humans and pets.

The anthropomorphism of animals, a practice that has always fascinated me, could be transformed, at a conceptual level, into an anthropomorphism of plants. I found it interesting to take over the idea of portraiture, human or animal, and adapt it to the plants that accompany us in everyday life. I also relied on studio or field portraits at the beginning of the 20th century. Before the start of this project, in the family's archive- that is to say, in the few photos in the village near Bucharest found in an acceptable condition- I had found some photographs, some of which represented my peasant grand grandparents with flower pots in their arms.

The project "I am Gustav von Aschenbach, or how to spend your eternity in Venice" (2010)⁴ at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Venice (IRCCU) was a synthesis of my previous activist experience as well as an attempt to redefine the magic city in personal terms. In short, I walked the streets of Venice during the Carnival, dressed in a bear costume borrowed from an animal welfare organization I worked with and distributed flyers for the cause of the various threatened species.

While in the gallery, dressed in a bear suit, I made interviews with the disguised tourists on their perception of the city. As Gustav strived to navigate between nature and culture, his endeavor continued in the artistic practice and everyday dilemmas of his alter ego, Delia Popa.

Each of my projects starts from a concrete situation, and above all from fears, conflicts, desires, obsessions, which I explore and exploit until I find a new way of looking at things, and can release that concern to the public space. In the same way, the passion for animals, plants and the land of grandparents is a perfectly personal matter.



Translation from Romanian by Delia Popa, 2018

Image 3 above: Delia as Gustav von Aschenbach as a bear in Piazza San Marco, Venice, February 2009

³ *Secret Life of Houseplants* project took three forms: the slide projection, exhibited at the Biennale of Young Artists from Europe and Mediterranean, Bari, Italy, 2008, the prints exhibited at Casa Teutsch in Sibiu, 2009 and the book, also exhibited on my artist page.

⁴ The title is inspired by the character with the same name in "*Death in Venice*" by Thomas Mann. The project was selected by Romanian Cultural Institute Venice following an open call and its only public viewing was as a live-video, by passers-by in front of the New Gallery during the 2010 Carnival.

