



Edith Jeřábková: Monika Pascoe Mikyšková: Memories that aren't mine

Curatorial text for the exhibition at PLATO.

**Monika Pascoe Mikyšková:
Memories that aren't mine**

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Monika Pascoe Mikyšková's earliest memories of her grandmother motivated her to create this exhibition:

"A meadow on a hill, we are bending over together and gathering yellow flowers. I am at my grandmother's side, I am four or five years old. I ask what the herbs are used for, and my grandmother answers, for cleansing. This is the oldest memory I have of us together. A year after her son died, she is gathering St. John's wort at our cottage."

Perforate St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is known for its use as a nerve calmer, a sleep aid, and an antidepressant. The word *hypericum* comes from the Greek hyper (above) and eikon (icon), after a custom of hanging the herb above icons as a protection against evil. In ancient Greece and Rome, it was often burned to ward off evil spirits and diseases. When cows ate St. John's wort in their pastures, its red fluid turned their milk pink, which people in the Middle Ages incorrectly attributed to an evil spirit possessing the cows.

Monika Pascoe Mikyšková is interested in plants and their medicinal effects. Plant life has pervaded her work for many years. This does not mean that she merely depicts flowers, leaves, and seeds, although herbaria and various forms of observation and botanical research inspire Monika and are close relatives to her work. Rather, she relates vegetal existence to human emotions. She does not make direct use of anthropomorphization as we know it in our culture. Rather, she connects the human – and feminine – world with the vegetable world, as if plant tissue had direct connections and consistency with human organs and skins. As if her drawings and paintings mixed plant fluids with human bloods and bodily fluids. As if the stories and emotions of people and women could only possibly be fully told in conspiracy with the stories and emotions of plants.

Monika strives to record human–vegetable history, proximity, and corporeality. She fuses plant symbolism into an intermingling bionarration. She does not make portraits of plants, no matter how much the forms of her individual works may resemble them. She tenaciously strives to penetrate into the internal reality of organisms, the human psyche, the microscopic

landscapes of plant cells and tissues intended as a language for possible more-than-human communication and transfer of emotions.

The color of the exhibition is red, understood both symbolically and not. It is the color of the fluid of St. John's wort, which has sedative effects. It is a color laden with meanings, history, and power, a color both sophisticated and instinctive, the color of both royal symbols and women's emancipation. The drawings and paintings themselves lack the stylization present in the artist's earlier work – which finds more of an application in the objects of metal herb flowers which, hung from above, come near our heads, where they affect the neurotransmitters in our brains.

Yet another memory of the artist's grandmother's garden materialized in a photograph captures the artist, her brother, and her cousin in childhood. It comes from the same period – in the high grass, which her grandmother only cut after the daisies finished flowering, three small bodies stand together. Memories feed this exhibition. Remembrance with plants is a form of narration missing from great human history. The memories of St. John's wort thus become not just the artist's memories, but also those of her grandmother – and, at the same time, the memories of all those who have ever gathered it.

Edith Jeřábková

Monika Pascoe Mikyšková lives and works in Bratislava, where she also earned master's and doctoral degrees from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design. In 2004 she had a residency at Roxy Walsh's studio at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in Great Britain. She was a finalist for the 2022 Oskár Čepan Award. In 2019 and 2023, she received a grant from the NOVUM Foundation, and in 2015, she won the Collection Invitation Prize in the Essl Art Award CEE competition. Monika Pascoe Mikyšková has long been interested in the relationship between humans and plants, plant ritual, ethnobotany, ecology, and shared more-than-human emotionality.

