

Mathilde Papapietro

In the language of plants...

"Nature does not give long speeches"
Laozi, *Tao Te King*

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The art of Mathilde Papapietro from its beginnings has been connected with flora. Just as her life had been in a house in the *arrière pays* of the Drôme, Provence. An organic, symbiotic connection with Nature. A garden, a meadow ... Later, in Poland, the search for Nature’s energy continued. Taking photos of little gardens. Plants are Mathilde’s subject, her inspiration and motif. Usually the common, well-known species: reeds, grasses, brooms, sunflower petals as in the last cycle. And graphic. With visible drawing work: lines of stems, the minute connecting veins within petals and leaves ... All conveyed very realistically.

Plants also were the substance of her work in the cycle ‘Entraves du vide/ Embraces of void’ (1995). And although they are rarely seen directly, because she does not introduce living plants into the space of her art, they are always at there at its beginnings. Mathilde does smaller, delicate representations only. What is natural she subdues to the dictates of gesture, to define the artistic form and to obtain a legible record. The essence of elegance and calligraphic character. She twists the blades of broom, loops the stems of reeds, marks them with colour, bends and divides sunflower petals, joins them with pedicels ... Mathilde Papapietro creates a universal language of signs out of floral fragments.

She ‘writes’ the impermanent speech of Nature. She records it through artistic encounters: with traces of paint on reed stems, with drawings on lithographic stone, with scoring on fragile glass, through photography or graphics, or combining two techniques, as in the case of digigraphs in which the ‘Hélianthes’ are made. Or by making installations – from marble slabs with engraved grass shapes, or as now – from pieces of mirrored surfaces with sunflower petals forms applied to them.

Writing and signs have a floral genealogy. Many alphabets directly refer to the shapes of plants, such as the runic alphabet. This calligraphic trace has always been present for Mathilde Papapietro. Writing is a record of a language. Mathilde’s art is also active in this space, it tells of the ‘grammar of grasses’, the morphology of stems, and now – about the syntax of petals. Her art is also the forming of a language from Nature’s threads and writing it down.

Kali-graphy. Graphics. Photo-graphy. Signs. Elements. Circuits. Series. However, this is not just cool ‘combinatorics’. This floral language contains a feminine element – subtlety, fluidity, the ephemeral quality and mystery.

In her art Mathilde uses not only the language of pictures, but the art form is also realized in the sphere of words, drawing out relations, analogies and verbal

associations. The titles of Mathilde's cycles also contain a lingual trace. In one of Mathilde's cycles, "Ideograms" (1991), in French we may hear the echo of the word *graminées* – meaning grass plants. Similarly, the name of the recent cycle of graphics – 'Hélianthes' – is a lingual creation as well. 'Hélianthe' refers to the Latin name of the sunflower - *helianthus*, to the etymological root; it does not however end in the sphere of botany. It opens up an area of solar references. Work from Mathilde Papapietro's recent cycle depicts sunflower petals. This is the flower of the sun, its energy, and in a literal sense – sunflowers are an edible plant. This is a flower associated with the South of Europe, where Mathilde originates. The yellow colour of the petals is according to Chinese philosophy the colour of the earth's positive energy. This is the colour of joy, harmony and internal balance. 'Hélianthes' attract us, we are in awe at their realism, in the way they are depicted; the result of photographing them with a greater depth of field; enlarging the outcome to larger than natural size whilst removing redundant elements. There is an intensity and vividness of colour, sharpness of details such as the venation and bending of the lines or the fine moss covering pedicels and the impression of spaciousness and three-dimensionality of the image. However, and simultaneously, the realism of the work provokes in these sunny petals a visual reality 'of their own'. The more we look at them, the more the obviousness of what is depicted disappears. We forget about sunflowers and different associations appear: a similarity to flying birds, delicate fabrics, autumn leaves, writing and notes. 'Musicality' is also an essential quality of Mathilde Papapietro's work. Musicality understood as an order of all elements of the composition, as rhythm, syntony, as a harmonious understanding of instruments in an orchestra. Underlining the value of the composition has probably its source in the artist's musical education. Mathilde is a graduate of the Music Conservatory in Valence. The first 'Hélianthes' which were created in 2008, were calm, static, as if immobilised and more delicate. Subsequent graphics from the cycle are more dynamic, as if vibrating they emanate energy. This impression is evoked both by the way the petals are arranged, freely scattered, as is the composition in its evocation of internal tensions: the motif fills almost the entire space or to the contrary – 'lifts' in space. 'Hélianthes' have something of a dance to them, from tai chi's fluidity of movement to the flight of a flock of birds. They have the 'lightness of wind', as Michel Hardy sagaciously wrote about Mathilde Papapietro's earlier work. In the case of 'Hélianthes' this impression remains. They also have a certain Eastern restraint and elegance. Because they are close to Nature, the world of plants, which speak quietly, with moderation, and 'do not give long speeches' ...