

## PI ARTWORKS LONDON

### TREES DIE STAND: Plants and Humans

Curated by Freda Uziyel

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55 Eastcastle Street, W1W 8EG, London

Three years ago, while opening the front doors of the house, I found my old prunus tree laying down on the soil of the front garden. As the tree was full of buds, just before it's early spring flowering, I could not understand what happened. But at the same moment to my memory come a title of a play by Alejandro Casona, written in 1949: "Trees Die Stand". The play was a metaphor of human behaviour:

"Do not see me fall. Dead inside, but standing tall. Like a tree", says one of the protagonists- the grandmother.

My reaction of sadness mingled with thoughts about human nature and how much we are not only part of it, but also how much we are conditioned by it, formed the foundation of the idea for this exhibition.

- 'The artwork is candidate for contemplation and or, appreciation', Georgie Dickie

"Trees Die Stand: Plants and Humans" focus and captures intellectual and various ways in which artists relate to nature. The artists who take part in the exhibition, did not imitate nature, they look for creative ideas, often not unlike to that of processes of nature.

The roots, branches of trees, leaves and flowers are simplified in forms, sometime strongly exaggerated, or abstracted and united, going through metamorphosis to become a new form.

This exhibition places plants and natural world at its heart. We know, that humanity, could not live without them. "We are here by the grace of trees and forests" (Richard Powers-novelist). To be humble towards the nature, to see its beauty and its ordinariness, to observe it, to bow to trees and flowers it is sign of devotion and kind of religious act.

In 1883 Claude Monet settled in Giverny. The development of his garden in Giverny become a major focus of his life. He was a passionate gardener and subscriber to garden magazine; he owned a library with botanical literature. At this time he also developed his masterpieces, the Nymphs.

Van Gogh during last year of his life, when in mental asylum painted olive groves.

This works is his most passionate and expressive.

In our culture, culture very much influenced by Bible the very beginning of plants life happened on the third day of Creation. God said:

"Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seeds, and fruits, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them; and it was so".

- Genesis 1: 11

Trees and plants are mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible more than any living things, with the exception of humans. It is also notably evident how often human life is compared in the Bible with that of plants:

"He will be like a tree firmly planted by stream of water,  
Which yields its fruits in its season  
And its leaf does not winter,  
And in whatever he does, he prospers"

- Psalm 1:3.

Or: "But as for me, I am like a green olive tree

In the house of God;

- Psalm 52:8

"All theory is grey, my friend,  
But forever green is the tree of life"

-Faust, Goethe

The Tree of Life is described in Old Testament, in Chapter 2 of Genesis.

The tree was growing in the midst of Eden and it was the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Since the banishment from Garden of Eden, perhaps within our collective and unconscious memory, we have been striving to return there?

The tree of life, the tree of immortality appears in many mythologies and religions.

Trees are mentioned in every book and seen in many drawings of old civilisations.

Like in Judaism and later the Christianity, in Islam, in the Koran, the Tree of Life is located in the Garden of Eden.

In the Christian tradition one of the trees of life was the Jesse tree. It is showing the ancestors of Jesus Christ from

Nazareth. Jesse of Bethlehem was a father of King David. The idea of tree of Jesse originates in a passage in The Book of Isaiah, which describes metaphorically the descent of Messiah and was an omen for Christianity as the prophecy referring to Jesus. Tree of Jesse is a subject often seen in Christian art.

In Norse mythology it appears as Yggdrasil, a massive tree with extensive lore surrounding it. It is an eternal green tree. It stands in the middle of the world, with branches stretching out over the nine realms and it is tree of Good and Evil. According to Norse mythology the liquid of the roots of Yggdrasil are the source of life. The idea of the tree in a centre of the world was inherited from Norse culture by Germanic tribes.

The mystical tree of life is called by different names in different religions, and each has different mythology. In the epic story of „Gilgamesh and Aga“, the hero (Gilgamesh) is looking for eternal life. Gilgamesh has to bring and plant the magic plant, which will make one young again. Gilgamesh fails to bring the plant and with it fails to find the immortality.

One of the greatest poems of all medieval literature Dante's Alighieri's "The Divine Comedy", a poem that speaks about Christian vision in humankind and human destiny in the world starts in the forest. Dante at the age of thirty-five (as he describes himself), finds himself lost in the dark, dense forest ("selva oscura"), astray from straight way ("diritta via")- that can also mean: right way to salvation. The simple plot strating from forest leading him to nine circles of journey. He is assisted by Roman poet Virgil, who leads Dante through the Inferno and Purgatorio and showing him the "realm ... of those who have rejected spiritual values" ....

"The woods were gradually thinning. I was tormented by strange hallucinations.

I gazed at the weird tree trunks, around some of which were coiled thick, flesh-coloured snakes, suddenly I thought I saw, between the trunks, as though my fingers, the mirror of a half-open wardrobe..."

- Vladimir Nabokov, "Terra Incognita"

We - people feel so close to nature, that we throughout history and diverse civilisations are recognising in the patterns of nature, a real meaning. Many of us see suddenly that the bark resembles face. It is a cognitive process: by just looking, we imagine something of ours or us. Seeing faces in trees is a human condition.

'Trees Die Stand: Plants and Humans' investigates significance of our coexistence with things that grow in soil.

At the time of our lives shadowed by pandemic, fears of climate change and biological dark forces I am trying to show an antidote; something filled with love that we rarely realise it exist in us - the love of trees and all that's grows in soil.

Text by Freda Rozenbaum Uziyel