

In Germany, it is common to celebrate exhibition openings by giving long talks.

It would be easy also in this exhibition where the works are full of details waiting to be named. We could choose biological accuracy as our yard stick and then begin a conceptual landscape walk amidst Eggert Pétursson's paintings. Should we study all of them with German thoroughness, none of us would probably be at home before sunrise.

I will leave such studies and pleasures of observation to you. Not least because on such a botanical trip I would be quite useless. I know nothing about plants. Should I have to talk about Eggert's paintings in Germany, I'd better find something else in order to fulfill the expectations of all those who wait for a lengthy talk.

You don't look like Germans. Therefore I will venture to talk in brief.

Eggert Pétursson is an exceptional artist. In a time that favours quick reactions and fleeting self-centered moments, and expects art to be a social comment or even a support to public health, Eggert concentrates on a slow and reclusive work with a medium that has not been updated for hundreds of years.

What would be the social meaning of flowers made with oil colours? What sort of meaning there is to be found in oil colours? The answer is: everything or nothing. Our choice is everything, for it is right.

Be reminded that flowers are not only flowers. They are also language. The famous symbol of German Romanticism was the blue flower. The same Romanticism brought together the worlds of natural science and art in a way that we have sadly lost. It also brought together art and madness.

I learned to know Eggert Pétursson in the mid 1990s and watched, somewhat alarmed, as he spend a year covering a small square canvas with tiny flowers of oil colour. Luckily, he wasn't overly Romantic about his art. Neither did he have German looks.

Eggert Pétursson, the Icelandic artist who paints Icelandic flowers. As an artistic characterization this might be just about the least interesting I can imagine.

Yes, Eggert lives and works in Iceland. Yes, it is possible to spot images of plants in his artworks. But even if these are plants that happen to grow in his beautiful homeland, all ideas about depicting the Icelandic National Flora are far removed from his practice. Anyway, it would be a silly endeavour since similar flowers also grow elsewhere, many of them even here, in the Pori region in Finland.

Yet, leaving aside the national geographies and regional botanic emblems, it is nevertheless tempting to approach Eggert Pétursson's art by first marching in the abundant flora. We are able to call upon the plenitude of flowers first by uttering their common local names, which are of course age-old and often carry a Romantic scent, then by enlisting them by their scientific taxonomic titles using a dead language, like some magic spell that will set all wild things under a regulated order.

Perhaps I want to recall that there is an inbuilt verbal element in Eggert's subject matter—all the more interesting since all his paintings remain systematically untitled.

These are paintings of flowers and yet they are not named as such.

This is where we are reminded that we are not really looking at pictures of floral arrangement—or, if you like, seeing images of sexual organs of some low-growing Icelandic vegetation—but instead we are face to face with pieces of contemporary art. It is from this position that I would like you to approach Eggert's paintings: Eggert Pétursson, the avant-garde artist from Reykjavik, Iceland.

Who would have thought that flower paintings and avant-garde would come together and even become one and the same thing. For a long time flower paintings were almost synonymous to bad taste and kitsch. Or was it the other way round? What if the bad-taste-people had simply stolen all the beautiful flowery subjects and left little if nothing for the rest of us to enjoy?

The concept of avant-garde, as it was understood in the context of western contemporary art from the early 1900s till 1960s, usually preferred urban to rural, man-made to free-grown. It famously celebrated the victorious beauty of machines and speed that were to overtake the boringly pastoral standstill of the natural world.

Surely, many may still have considered Monet a great painter but his whole mindset, all that endless pondering about a pond of water lilies, was as if a bubble that belonged to a different era.

Underlining the constructive elements in art, the hardcore modernist avant-garde often found nature more likely disturbing than inspirational. The soft-hearted few, or those who openly voiced their debt to the natural world and its phenomena, such as Paul Klee, argued that art was an altered image of nature.

This seems to make sense also in Eggert's case but is there really such a thing as an unaltered image of nature? To whose eyes is it visible—birds and bees and fishes—or us? Eggert's art may not take Klee's dictum as its yard stick but it makes one ask if nature has a structure. Or is it but a reflection of our own attempts and deep grown needs to seek order?

Packed within rectangles and squares, Eggert's vision of nature is not simply systematic in a botanical context but also in an artistic one. After all, he has been educated to do these things. By making paintings that belong to a tradition of painting making—or, perhaps, even to the great Order of Painting—Eggert points towards a possibility that all that is actually depicted is at the end of the day of secondary meaning: flowers as an excuse for art.

Paintings are about painting, and Eggert, I believe, is no exception. Yet there is also another crucial aspect to his art, visible to all of us today in this stunning exhibition.

What we are confronted with is not so much images of flowers but an installation of multicoloured planes in space. Should we consider this also an altered image of nature? If yes, what is it that makes nature for us? The idea of art as a modified image gives, indeed, plenty to think about. It leads us to ask man's place in nature—or in relation to nature. Are we willing to be part of it or would we rather speed away? If the answer to the first question is affirmative, is it not then that our art also becomes part of nature. Is art then, but nature's modified image of itself?

Dear guests, dear flower people. It is my honour to open Eggert Pétursson's exhibition Flora.

- Dr. Jyrki Siukonen