

FINE ART EXHIBITION

by **Silvia Karamfilova**

“Stories”

2021

“We, humans, do not want to conquer the cosmos at all. We want to expand the boundaries of the Earth endlessly. We don’t want other worlds; we want a mirror.

We are in the foolish position of a man striving towards a goal he fears and does not want...

...because... we are only seeking Man!”

***From the movie “Solaris”
by Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972,
based on Stanislaw Lem’s
novel “Solaris”***



"Good News", 2020,
wooden panel, acrylic
paint, golden and
beige metallic gilding
paste, 50 x 50 cm

"GOOD NEWS" is an image in the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle of paintings. It contains the element of **the window** through which we, as the viewer, look out. The painting is an allusion to the story about Noah's Ark. According to the legend, Noah's Ark is large ship (vessel) described in the Bible in chapters 6-9 of Genesis through the construction of which God saves from extinction Noah and his family, as well as couples of numerous species of animals from a global flood. It is presumed that it occurred approximately 4350 years ago. After the flood waters receded, Noah released a white dove with the hope of finding land where the vessel could moor. The dove returned carrying **an olive tree branch** in its beak. That became known as the **symbol of salvation** and firm ground where life would continue. The olive is associated with the **hope of peace, renewed life and deliberate work** towards a new aim. It is often depicted by painters in times of war, cataclysms, and epidemics. Simultaneously, the olive branch is also a **sign of rebirth**.

The painting done in 2020 gives the feeling that humanity is passing through a new global cataclysm characterized by the acute **change taking place** in our lives, filled with fear and uncertainty. Thus, we find ourselves sailing in a new Noah's Ark, slowly moving towards a new, soon to be reinvented, world. No one knows what it would look like or what exactly it will offer us. Light streams inwards and all we have is **our hope and the determination to survive**. **The white bird** is the symbol of this **hope and desire for a better life**. It brings good news of a **new beginning**.

Resting on the window pane are 8 **books** symbolizing **the knowledge** collected throughout time. It is through the gathering of knowledge and our willingness for adaptation, coupled with our prior experience, that we would enter this new world. However, knowledge alone will not be sufficient unless we attain wisdom in the process of change.

There are also **pomegranates** depicted in the painting. In Greek and Persian mythology, they symbolize **death, but also fertility, beauty and eternal life**. This shows the dualistic nature of life encompassing birth and death, ends and **new beginnings**. We are at the **threshold** of... a **New Beginning**. Perhaps it is time to leave the ship and discover a new reality with an open mind and good intentions.

If you pay close attention, you will notice that there are two olive tree branches. On the window pane lies the branch reminding us of the first world wide flood, while the one brought by the white bird represents the Good News coming now. I leave it to you, the viewer, to decide how to approach the new time that is coming.



"The Road to Change is Beckoning", 2020, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden, beige, silver and copper metallic gilding paste, 50 x 50 cm

"THE ROAD TO CHANGE IS BECKONING" is part of the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle of paintings. It is an invitation to decide to figuratively "pack our bags" and start **on the road** leading us to unknown realms and ultimately **to change**.

Looking out through the window, we find ourselves in a cozy home where we have comfort, sustenance and a feeling of security – water in a pitcher and fruits to keep us content. Pears symbolize immortality and prosperity because pear trees have a long life. In China, **the pear** is regarded as a symbol of **comfort**, however, it is also seen as a symbol of **separation**.

Hence, this painting calls to the one who has opened the window to the outside world to think about giving up their zone of comfort and **setting out on a journey** through green fields and pastures, colorful forests, crossing bridges and sailing through distant seas to look for the **new in their life**. **The window** is an architectural element with a symbolic meaning in art usually associated with **intermediation between interior and exterior**. It is a means of observation, inadvertent voyeurism, communication, liberation, hope, new opportunities or escapism. Even though life indoors is limited by walls, it is enough to open a window and look outside. Thus, we **observe and discover** the outside world, nature and unknown horizons. We strengthen our sense of belonging and community. The air and light passing through bring us hope and lift our spirit.

There is another important symbol in the painting – that of **the bridge**. It is an element **connecting** two sides or shores or two realms. They can be actual or abstract. By crossing over a bridge one **overcomes an obstacle**, be it concrete as a river or a gorge, or a more abstract one. Thus, it represents also **transition or a voyage**. It can, however, also be a **place for meetings**.

So...dare to leave your real or figurative lockdown and **venture into the unknown.**
The road to change is beckoning... Perhaps the most courageous voyagers are those who have already passed beyond the road and bridge and are already sailing in the little red boat towards the horizon...Bon voyage!



"Roots", 2018,
wooden panel, acrylic
paint, golden, silver
and copper metallic
gilding paste, crystal
elements, 81 x 72 cm

"ROOTS" is part of a cycle of paintings named **"Words"** to which I return to from time to time.

It fits organically into the overall theme of the exhibition as it tells the story of **our beginning**, the place where we were born and from which we started our development. It is also a figurative place which represents the concept of "anchoring" which grounds us and keeps us stable and centered no matter what we decide to do with our lives and where they take us. If the previous two paintings call for us to turn our gazes towards the outside world of the unknown, this one incites us to think about what it is that we consider as **our roots**. We know quite well, that no venturing into the unknown can take place without a stable notion of the place we started from and the awareness of **who we are**.

The roots of the **Tree of Life** lie deep and spread into the earth's soil which is our eternal home, our anchoring point. Its branches reach high into the sky and soak in the nurturance of the sunrays allowing us to grow, develop, blossom, burn, wither and ultimately rebirth with the coming of spring. Trees have provided us with shelter, protection, sustenance, resource of medications, fire, energy, weaponry, tool building and construction materials. Trees can withstand the toughest of storms which is why plenty has been written about their strength and endurance.

According to Manuel Lima in his "The Book of Trees. Visualizing Branches of Knowledge", *"trees also provide us with an important metaphor for creating knowledge classification systems. Throughout human history, **the tree** structure has been used to explain almost every facet of life. It pragmatically **expresses the materialization of multiplicity** (represented by the succession of boughs, branches, twigs and leaves) **out of unity** (its central foundational trunk, which is in turn connected to a common root, source, or origin)."*

In my painting, the city nestled at the bottom of the tree (the roots and the trunk) represents the unity which gives rise to **the multiplicity of stories** (the branches with their leaves) **which each one of us carries throughout life** from birth. These stories branch out, interconnect, clash, overshadow each other or stimulate each other to grow. Some of them never close the cycle by never returning back to the starting point. In all cases, however, there are grains of that unity that live on and **define our character**.



"Lockdown", 2021, canvas, acrylic paint, golden metallic gilding paste, 40 x 120 cm

"LOCKDOWN", albeit different, is part of the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle of paintings. It came as a spontaneous reaction to the ongoing events we are all experiencing over the past one year.

The painting shows a **caged city** hanging over dried up, cracked and desolate land. Dark clouds slowly descent over it and encompass it. A **raging storm** has begun to slowly unfold symbolizing the **change** which is taking place. To the left there is the globally recognized biohazard symbol, coined by Dow Chemical in the 1960s, conveying "danger" in every language. **The normal flow of our life has been strongly disrupted.** We are urged to practice universal precautions against exposure to an unknown infectious agent posing risk to our wellbeing and lives.

The message is clear - **life has been caged, constrained and crippled.** It reflects well how most of us feel – threatened, restricted, afraid for our lives, unable to trust those around us, retreating into our own shells, not being able to make clear plans about the future, angry and humiliated, let alone being able to have dreams. **The light streaming through the windows of the buildings in the city is overshadowed by the prison bars** encompassing it. They hold us in **lockdown** physically **also affecting our spirit.**

However, **our souls are still free** unless we have decided to cage them ourselves through our thinking. The souls are the white birds flying through the bars and wondering out into the horizon. Somewhere there in the far distance, we also see **blue seas** where there are no dark clouds. Boats roam freely. *Panta Rhei...* **Everything flows, everything in life passes and times are subject to change. Before this change occurs, however, a road is to be walked by each and everyone of us. It can take many forms and expressions.**

Thus, before the city lies a dusty and cracked **road** on which **a human** stands gazing in the direction of the caged city. **It could be anyone of us.** He knows that he has to pass through the city to continue down the road which leads to the sea and nature where he would meet and be reunited with his freedom. **It is a choice each one of us has to make....to either remain in the caged city or continue walking on the road to freedom.**



"Illusion of Serenity", 2020, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden and beige metallic gilding paste, 53 x 47 cm

I painted **"ILLUSION OF SERENITY"** during the first lockdown in France. Not surprisingly, this is the period in which I started depicting windows open to the outside world. Hence it is a part of the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle.

The painting presents a window pane on which a bowl of pears has been placed. Around it are scattered cherries and pomegranate fruits. The image invokes a **state of serenity, stillness and quietness**. Each one of objects in it is **symbolic** in its own way. It was believed that **pears** represented **immortality and prosperity** because pear trees live for a long time. In China, the pear is regarded as a symbol of comfort, however, it is also seen as a symbol of **separation**. The symbol of **the cherry** exists in numerous countries and is usually connected to **human happiness**. On the other hand, the slightly **wavy sea** in front of the window suggests a different state – that of the **premonition of anxiety**. The serenity and quiet are opposed to the anticipation of the upcoming change, to the feeling that something will happen. This is an illusory state with the sentiment that whatever it is, it will pass quickly and things will return to their normal, familiar and comfortable motion. We should not forget that we live in a **dualistic world** and it is natural for us to experience day and night, good and bad, light and darkness, peace and war, calm weather and storms, etc. The illusion of the slightly wavering sea suggests that this state is liable to **suddenly transform** into a raging storm and instantly at that. The **floating clouds** attest to this process too.

This was at the beginning of the lockdown when information about what was ensuing was scarce. Perhaps that is why the meaning of the objects I have portrayed in the painting is so **subtle** and hard to grasp at first glance. Our lives seemed fairly well organized and orderly (apparently not for everyone), for some to the point of boredom, until we came at a head collision with the approaching new reality. We criticized a number of things ...the lack of novel ideas that would facilitate change in our lives, as well as the absence of leaders to lead people towards new ideas. **Were we prepared for what was coming?!...Hardly.**

It is as if though we were unable to listen and see the **warning signals** that were being given to us about possible **upcoming changes**. Instead, most of us chose the routine, we opted for the comfortable path to go blindly about our future and take it as it comes. Was this a plan thought out a long time ago or was this the desire in each and every one of us for a more fundamental change leading to more **JUSTICE** in our life? I leave every one to answer this question on his or her own terms....



"In spite of all odds...",
2021, canvas, acrylic paint,
golden gilding paste,
50 x 40 cm

“DESPITE ALL ODDS...” is my next painting in line. At first glance it differs from the **“Windows, Doors and Bridges”** cycle. However, it is a continuation of a topic which concerns a number of us: **our distancing from nature; our depersonalization in the grayness and monotony of large cities; our striving to domesticate various types of plants and trees** in order to beautify our lives without taking into consideration that we have uprooted them from their natural environment. During the last one year, we also experienced **our own confinement** in our homes and **our distancing** from our close relatives and friends under the threat of disease which intensifies further this illusionary striving and **alienates us**.

In this painting I present you with a fairly old tree – **the Olive tree**. We have been cohabitating with it since ancient times. It accompanies our development. We have vested this tree with numerous meanings: friendship, reconciliation, purification, healing, hope, victory, but most of all – stability, tranquility and peace. The olive grows in dry, infertile and dusty soil and does not require much irrigation. Olive trees often show us exceptional examples of disobedience, tenacity and stamina, courage, strength, perseverance, flexibility, agility and ingenuity. It is no wonder they are called **“trees of eternity”** for their evergreen canopy. The average age of an olive tree varies around 800 years.

An olive tree can grow alone or in olive groves or plantations. This characteristic of **adaptability** it possesses is also intrinsic to us humans .

Herein you see a lone olive tree in a cage whose branches make their way through the cage bars and strive outward, sideward and upward, thus symbolizing **our aspiration to make contact with the surrounding world. Today, we are familiar with this state of distancing, conformity and fear of thinking differently** which many of us have been subjected to by being confined alone in our homes trying to continue the fight for life in conditions which are unwonted and unusual for us.

In these times of forced differentiation from one another, I hereby ask: **“Can an olive tree or an olive grove grow at will if we put bars around them?”...The same is valid for us people.** Like trees, we too tend to grow and develop best when we have the support of our **“shared forest”**. We have been programmed to constantly seek contact with those around us. That in turn allows us to give and contribute.

Hermann Hesse notes in his novel “Damien”: ***“The impetus that makes you fly is our great human possession. Everybody has it. It is the feeling of being linked with the roots of power, but one soon becomes afraid of this feeling...It is hellishly dangerous. That is why most people shed their wings and prefer to walk and obey the law.”***

It is by no chance that the birds flying around in the lower half of the canvas are dark-coloured. As we look up, they gradually turn glistening white in its upper half. This symbolizes the **gathering, consolidation and harnessing of our internal strength to overcome the fear which has enveloped us and pervaded our behavior in order to continue our flight forward with courage ...in spite of all odds.**



**"The Devil's
Bridge"**, 2020,
canvas, acrylic paint,
golden beige, silver
and copper metallic
gilding paste,
50 x 50 cm

"THE DEVIL'S BRIDGE" is part of the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle of paintings.

The bridge is an old mediaeval structure in Bulgaria which connected the roads passing through Thrace in the direction of the Aegean Sea. It was built by the Bulgarian builder Dimitar between 1515 and 1518 under the order of Sultan Selim I. It is located near the town of Ardino and crosses over the Arda river in the Rhodope mountains in southeastern Bulgaria.

I chose to depict this famous bridge because of an interesting story associated with its creator. In the 15th century, the Arda river was deep, rough and wild, running at high speed and demolishing everything on its path. All attempts to build bridges over it failed. The older people in the region believed this area had been cursed.

A master builder named Dimitar decided to try to build a bridge that would withstand the watery elements. The Devil appeared in this moment and offered to reveal to him the secret to building such a lasting construction. However, some requirements had to be met: Dimitar was obliged to finish the bridge in just 40 days, the Devil's image had to be ingrained in the construction of the bridge so that it would be both visible and invisible, touchable and non-existing, and finally - Dimitar had to capture the shadow of his wife in the construction (a common theme in numerous Bulgarian legends) meaning that his wife would lose her life. If the builder failed to execute any of the requirements, the Devil would also take his soul. Dimitar took on the task and managed to complete the bridge in the specified period. The Devil's image is indeed visible around noon on clear and sunny days provided one tilts his/her head to the right and looks at the construction from that angle. One can see the Devil's horns, eyes and face. Finally, Dimitar's wife's image adorns one of the arches of the bridge where it is believed her soul is locked. As a result, 500 years have passed, the bridge is still standing robust and not a single rock has chipped away from its frame.

Some contemporary scholars believe that the bridge is much older and was built by the Romans – hence the local population in the mountains call it “the Roman bridge”. If that is correct, it means that it was built approximately 1700 years ago.

I was drawn to this story not only because it was a challenge to capture the image of the Devil in the painting through the technique I am using (acrylics), but mostly because it describes well **the pursuit of excellence and perseverance necessary to achieve** something difficult. Taking aside the legend, this **bridge** which is a symbol of **connectedness** between two fertile and geographically important regions in this part of the world, proves that notwithstanding the controversies of history, one man’s **vision** of how this connectedness should look like, has remained untouched by time until the present day. Despite the numerous historical divides between the populations in these regions, people in them have remained connected to this day. It is the idea that provides a feeling for **purpose, energy and direction** and inspires **action**.

Have a look at the Devil’s image here

(*photo source:* http://www.rodnoto.bg/2015/12/blog-post_80.html):





"Door to the Mediterranean",
2020, wooden panel,
acrylic paint, golden
metallic gilding paste,
50 x 50 cm

"DOOR TO THE MEDITERRANEAN" is a natural reflection in the direction of the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle of paintings. It contains one of the components of the cycle – **the door**.

A door is a symbol deeply ingrained into our psyche depicting the ideas of **passage of boundaries or their closure**. It represents the **entry** from one space or time to another, a **threshold**, a **metamorphosis**, a **potential opportunity** or a **new beginning**. However, it can also be seen as a **boundary, barrier** or **keeper of a secret**. Sometimes gaining access may be as simple as turning the handle, but at other times a door is locked and presents us with a choice to either try to enter peacefully or surmount it forcibly. We may need to knock or ring the bell and negotiate with the guardian of the door or submit a password which will secure our passage. This theme recurs in countless stories, literary works, fairytales and myths.

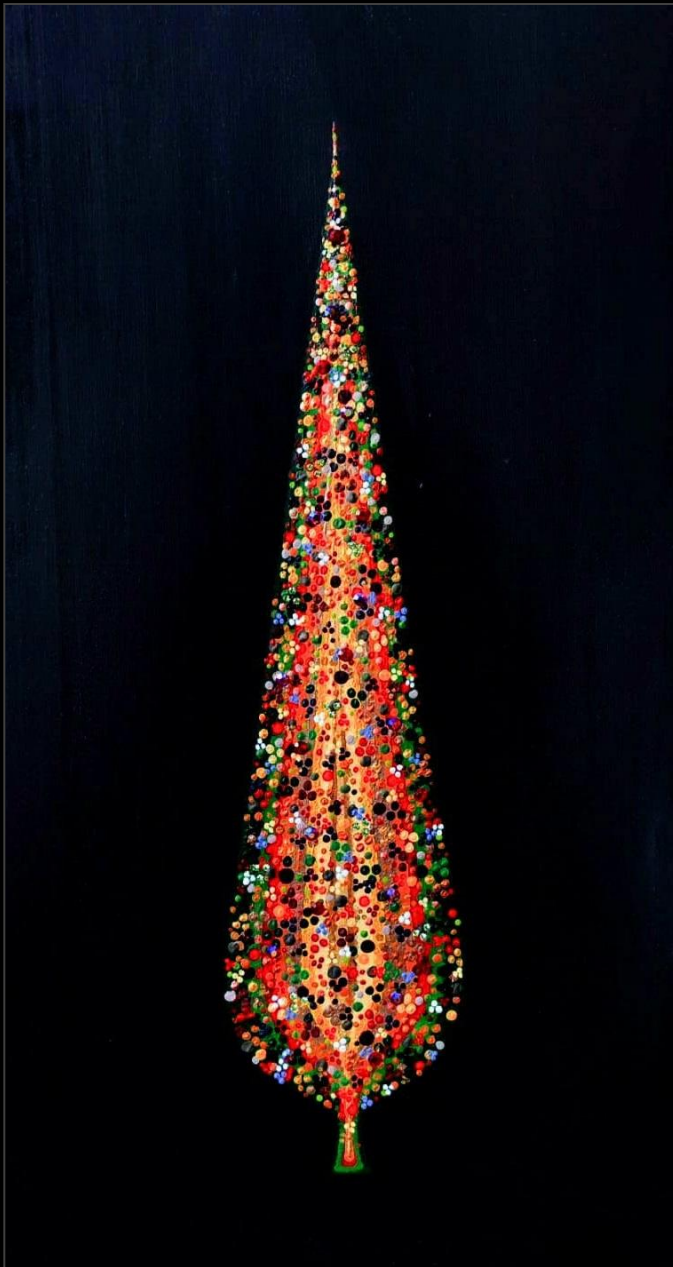
This particular door is typical in the countries around the **Mediterranean**. Why the Mediterranean, you would ask? It is a place I consider very dear to me. I love it because of the warm sea water, the tiny cities and villages, scattered like beehives along its shores, the numerous islands and islets dotting its map, the people there - who are better natured than those living inland due to their tough fate; also - because of the ghostly sunrises and golden sunsets and generally because one can see and feel life's vibrancy along these coasts. While oceans are characterized with long and far away distances, the Mediterranean is **a sea of proximity and neighborhood**, especially in its Eastern part. This is one of the regions in which numerous trading and transportation routes have historically intersected trajectories: those of wine and olive oil, salt, wheat and spices, silk and amber, knowledge and science. Well...there was another road passing close to the Mediterranean – the road of war. The Eastern Mediterranean was and still is one of the **crossing points between East and West**. It was conquered, divided, appropriated and liberated by various states, peoples and religions. All of them left their marks on its appearance, history, economics, culture and traditions.

Usually the doors I have photographed in the Eastern Mediterranean (which motivated me to begin the "Doors" topic in my work) have not been all closed. On the contrary - most **were widely open** - inviting me to peek inside and get a quick glimpse of life in these regions, a snapshot of what the people there are like. I believe that the reason why most were widely open lies in the predominant **inherent lack of solitude, quiet and loneliness in the Mediterranean.**

The people in the Mediterranean have mostly lived together, in close daily contact with each other, sharing all moments of life and talking a lot about them, discussing them loudly and energetically. "Social distance" has never been practiced in these regions for whatever reasons. Neighbours have always kept their doors open to each other. When it rarely happened the outer doors facing the streets to be closed, inside between the neighbors' houses and courtyards there were always internal small doors which gave them access to one another, without the external world seeing this. Thus, they could **always reach out to one another** even behind "closed doors".

In this particular painting of mine, however, **the door is closed.** The reason was once more connected to the ongoing situation most of us are undergoing in relation to **lockdowns.** During the months of **isolation** most of us stayed behind closed doors leaving the beauty of nature, sunlight and rapid movement outside. Communication with family and friends was reduced to online and telephone exchange. We were forced to turn inwards and to possibly **inventory and reevaluate our inner world.** This process has a multitude of results, some good, some not so good.

In front of the door one can see the typical for the Mediterranean vessels - baked clay jars and amphorae in which wine, spices, olive oil and other liquids were kept and transported. Some of the plants in these vessels are also symbolic: the olive tree, the Cyprus tree, the pomegranate, the lemon, the sansevieria plant (which goes by the name of "mother in law's tongue" in some countries in the region), the ilex and others.



"No matter how strong the wind blows, I will not brake... Cypress Tree", 2020, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden metallic gilding paste, crystal elements, 80 x 40 cm

The next painting is called **“NO MATTER HOW STRONG THE WIND BLOWS, I WILL NOT BRAKE...CYPRESS TREE”**.

We often encounter **the cypress tree** in the works of various artists depicted as a variation of the Tree of Life motif ((for example, it appears in the "Shahnameh," a Persian epic by Ferdowsi (approx. 932 – 1020)). The cypress symbolizes **death**, but it also signifies **eternal life**. It is one the most popular trees planted in Persian gardens. We see its motif woven into the imagery of Persian garden carpets and scarve-making traditions.

For me personally, the cypress is one of the proudest, most agile and resilient trees, **aiming upwards to the skies**. A quite sturdy and flexible tree, it usually shows up in almost all of my solo exhibitions and it adorns the homepage of my website (www.silviakaramfilova.com).

This work is part of the cycle of paintings called **“Trees and Flowers in Time”** that I have been working on for a very long time and keep returning to. It is representative of my style of utilizing crystal elements whose ability to reflect light is very strong and gives the image a magic-like appearance.

A large number of my paintings have black as their background, including this one. The idea for this originates in my first cycle of paintings devoted to the Balkans under the motto **“The Balkans – Captured Moments”** (1998 - 2000), as well as a subsequent exhibition in Izmir, Turkey called **“Neighbours”** (2002). Held in the midst of the Yugoslav wars at the time, the **“Balkans”** represented a mosaic of impressions of the historical cohabitation of different ethnic groups on this small strip of land.

This mosaic was expressed through the architecture of various temples (churches, synagogues, mosques), often positioning them in close proximity of one another and showing their similarities, shared traditions, heroes associated with them, etc. All paintings in this collection were on **black background** because the Balkans were often regarded as **a dark place** ("temnitza" as coined by the Yugoslav novelist, poet and short story writer Ivo Andric, the 1961 Nobel laureate) or a dungeon. The "Dark Balkans" – this is how the Balkans used to be referred to.

During the long dark years of subordination at the times of the Ottoman rule, it is exactly here on the Balkans that books were printed, numerous schools were organized in monasteries and wonderful architecture was created in churches, chapels and monasteries, as well as amazingly enigmatic Byzantine art was made especially in praise to the eternal mother – the Holy Virgin. Thus, it was not borders that separated us on the Balkans, but rather our own **prejudices**. As a result of these different prejudices and the resulting death, the colour black remained even in our clothing. The **overcoming of these prejudices** has been standing as an obstacle before us in the **past** and continues to do so until **present**. It is the process of overcoming these prejudices that will help us to continue to **cohabitate peacefully** here on the Balkans in **tolerance and respect** towards one another. This is why my cypress tree is set against a black background. Through the crystal elements ingrained in the painting, it emits light – **the internal light of spirit** which Ivo Andrich discusses in his novels. This is the light that supported people in their pursuit towards the dearest of all things – **FREEDOM**.

This is also the reason why I made yet another version of the cypress tree - because it **emits light once again** – **the light of HOPE** and because it can bend under the pressure of the tumultuous wind of History, but it will not brake.



"Poet", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden metallic gilding paste, 48 x 48 cm

The **"POET"** is part of the **"De Personae"** (Personalities) cycle of paintings aiming to arrive at my own interpretation of images of **personalities** representing various cultures and symbolic ideas. Some of these existed, others - did not, still others represent collective images. However, all hold a significant place in history. No matter how their images reappear in the light of the present, their essence and meaning, as well as the myths and legends surrounding them, they are still overshadowed by the darkness of the passing times. It is interesting to try to "call" some of them to "our" time and see **what messages they carry**, especially in the present turbulent times we find ourselves in.

The **purpose of poetry is manifold** – to help us **to discover and explore** the deeper meaning of **human connections**, to assist us in **understanding** better **ourselves** and how we **relate to our environment**. Poetry does not give us straight answers or encyclopedic facts, it gives us something new or something old in a way which will lead to an **amazing discovery** or **change our thought paradigms**.

Usually poets have the uneasy task of **navigating through the multitude of symbols** surrounding us and facilitating the **passage of ideas**. For some, poetry provides an **escape** from everyday grayness. For others, poetry is utilized to gather and **unite people** towards a shared, common aim. For still others – to **seek their truths**. For yet others – to **discover beauty and detail** in subtle things. There are also those who enjoy the fluidity, rhythm and versatility of **poetic language and sound**.

Poetry suggests to us to care, grow, develop, adapt, overcome, nurture, protect, foster, cherish. It invites us to laugh, reflect, cry, strive, persevere, rejoice. Basically, poetry makes us more human.

In a way, poets are also **chroniclers of their times**. The most important message they bring to us is to keep **MEMORY** alive because...**nothing should be forgotten**.

In his book "The Banquet in Blitva" (1938), the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža asked through one of his protagonists "...in the end, what do we have left after so many disappointments, so many lost battles, so many trampled hopes and so many triumphs of infamy and turpitude?" The answer... "A box filled with letters made of lead which isn't a lot...but it is our only weapon until present day that has been invented by people to defend **HUMAN DIGNITY.**"

In the painting, you see intricate decorative elements creating the illusion that the old, web-like, cover of history has been cast over the image, thus giving it an air of otherworldliness. Yet, the eyes of the poet are sharply focused towards our times... and many new stories are yet to be recounted. **The Poet's Muse** usually accompanying him is the **STAR** guiding him (do you see it?). **The laurel wreath** on his head symbolizes **fame and victory.**

Here are the words of a poet written so many years ago which seem to relate so well to our present day...

*Новый год – это новое счастье.
Новый год – это тоже весна.
Это, может быть, Ваше участие,
Ваша роза в бокале вина.
Новый год – это голос метели.
Это ночь, что должна быть светла.
Это, может быть, праздник без цели.*

Это - знак, что уходят года.

Павел Антокольский (1916 г.)

*The New year – this is new happiness.
The New year – this is Spring too.
Perhaps, this is your participation,
Your rose in the glass of wine.
The New year – this is snowstorm's voice.
This is the night which has to be bright.
This is probably a holiday without aim.*

This is a sign that the years are passing by.

Pavel Antokolsky (1916)



"The Trigger Woman", 2020,
wooden panel, acrylic
paint, golden, beige,
silver and copper
metallic gilding paste,
crystal elements,
metal elements,
50 x 50 cm

"THE TRIGGER WOMAN" was inspired by the film "The Color of Pomegranates" made by the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Parajanov in 1968. It is also a part of the **"De Personeae"** (Personalities) cycle of paintings aiming to arrive at my own interpretation of images of personalities representing various cultures and symbolic ideas.

The film "The Color of Pomegranates" represents a series of "film paintings" (chapters or episodes) that recount the life of the 18th-century poet and troubadour, turned monk, also known as Sayat Nova, a Persian nickname that means "King of Songs". These unusual film fragments create a structure of frames which encompass different snapshots filled with messages. It is a visual cryptic film with little to no dialogue where Sayat Nova's poems are more seen rather than heard. The story is told much more in images than it is in words, reminding us of the time of silent film. A lot of the imagery in the film is taken from Sayat Nova's works. It shows in a lot of detail the world which inspired him in his work: national architecture, folk art, nature, daily life, music, food, clothing, traditions, rituals, ornaments, and others. In terms of symbols and metaphors, this is indeed a unique film.

One of the images in the film that made a strong impression on me was that of **a woman** wearing a hat made of feathers, with almost ghostly like appearance, dressed in grayish coloured clothes. She appears briefly on a couple of occasions, usually at the cusp of two episodes, raising **a gun** to the air, pressing its trigger and firing it. As a result, someone else was hit in the film, wounded or died, although she did not directly aim at them. I took her image and interpreted it as the **"Trigger Woman" - the one who "declares" that a change has come into effect** in a string of situations or perhaps causes it (I wonder weather such a woman - **harbinger** - will appear in today's world?...) I did not depict her pistol because it was not so important to me as an image as was the sound it produces. It is the one that causes the changing circumstances. Sound-symbols affect the viewer's psyche as forcefully as image-symbols do.

The shooting sound of a gun is a symbol of **suddenness and abruptness**. It shatters the stillness and peacefulness which existed before it. It startles and scares. It alerts that **change or death is coming**. The result of the shooting is the **glass broken into a myriad of pieces**, flying in all directions, appearing in the upper part of the painting.

There are three episodes in the film in which **three other women** appear holding respectively **white, red and black lace**. They are not portrayed in the painting. Each color of the lace represents **the three most important phases in life: the white lace** is symbolic of birth, **childhood**, innocence and discovery; **the red one** - of **adulthood**, energy and love; **and the black one** - the withering, **old age** and end of life. In the midst of all these appears the "Trigger Woman". From beginning to end, **she ties them all together** in a seemingly continuous thread. I plan to paint these too in the future.

There are a few other important symbols in the painting:

- ❑ **the pomegranate** - one of the most utilized symbols of Armenian tradition, associated with **fertility, seduction and desire**. Writers like William Saroyan, painters like Leon Tutundjian, and filmmakers like Atom Egoyan have all utilized it in their works as a safeguard of their cultural memory. The pomegranate appears also in the context of important celebrations or liminal (threshold) moments when someone passes from one stage of life to another: from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, journey, marriage, or funerals. However, Parajanov deconstructs the symbol of the pomegranate to also show the exact opposite meaning - **destruction** replaces creation, **repulsion or grievance** replace desire, **death** replaces fertility. Hence in my painting there is a blue pomegranate representing the dark side of life and a red one which carries the traditional meaning.
- ❑ **the trees** on both sides of the "Trigger Woman" symbolize **growth, decay and resurrection**.

In the end, I would like to make the provision that the "Trigger Woman" is my own interpretation of a very miniscule part of this extraordinary film. If Parajanov was alive today, perhaps he would not have accepted this interpretation, however, I believe that it points to a moment of the present day. If that is so, as an excuse, I will cite Parajanov's own words which appear in one episodes of the film: "**the world is a window.**" We are all "looking intensely through our own windows" and seeing different images. We then interpret them and learn something new. This takes place daily. It is exactly this idea that underlies the creation of my painting.



***"Warrior - Saint,
St. Theodore
Stratilates",***
2019, wooden panel,
acrylic paint, golden
metallic paste, 50 x 50 cm

The painting "**WARRIOR SAINT, ST. THEODORE STRATILATES**" is part of the "**De Personae**" (Personalities) cycle aiming to arrive at my own interpretation of images of personalities representing various cultures and symbolic ideas.

For me he is one of the important **archetypes** of the **Warrior-Saint** concept. What did it mean to be a Warrior-Saint? Saints intervened in ordinary people's lives by **performing good deeds or miracles**, they warded off demons, **protected people** on their journeys, cured their illnesses, and helped them become wealthy if they were poor. They also protected the soldiers in numerous armies. They themselves were originally **soldiers** in the Roman army who had **secretly adopted Christianity** for which they were persecuted. Very often they became **martyrs**.

The cult towards the Warrior-Saint was largely independent until the 10th century when emperors developed an increased interest in the **sacred nature of warfare**. The development within the Byzantine army of an interest in the role of religion in warfare, and in the **relationship of soldiers to martyrs** in particular, is essential to understanding the development of the cult to military sainthood.

St. Theodore Stratilates was **one of the most recognizable Warrior-Saints** together with St George, St Demetrius and others. St Theodore was **a soldier and a devout Christian** in Asia Minor (Anatolia, modern day Turkey). His bravery was revealed after he, with the help of God, killed a giant serpent. The beast had devoured many people and animals, terrorizing the countryside of his town. Thus, for his bravery, St. Theodore was appointed **military commander**, "stratelatos", in the city of Heraclea Pontica where he combined his military service with preaching the Gospel among the pagans. His **mastery in persuasion**, reinforced by his personal example of Christian life, convinced many to accept Christianity.

I chose the story about the Warrior-Saint because it characterizes the important qualities of every person who dares to directly or figuratively call themselves warrior in life: **the will to achieve an aim by way of patience, willfulness, perseverance and persuasiveness.**

St Theodore died a martyr's death in 319 AD as a defender of the Christian faith during the reign of Roman Emperor Licinius I (r. 308-324 AD). To this day he is regarded as the **patron saint of soldiers** and is venerated with the title Great-martyr in almost all Christian churches in Europe and the Near East. He was also mentioned as a patron of Venice before St Mark.

The painting "**ST THEODORE STRATILATES**" is **based on the devoted to the saint oldest Bulgarian-made ceramic icon dating back to the 10th century AD.** The icon, of which no analogue exists in the world, was found in the beginning of the 20th century during archaeological excavations of the medieval Bulgarian monastery "Saint Panteleymon" in Patleyna located 2 km south of Veliki Preslav, today a small town in Northeast Bulgaria. St Theodore Stratilates was also **patron of the first Bulgarian capital city** – Veliki Preslav – during the first Bulgarian kingdom (893 – 970 AD). He was connected with the reign of Tsar Simeon the Great (893-927 AD) and the period known as the First Golden Age of Bulgarian literature and culture. At the time, Patleyna was among the leading centers of the Preslav Literary School and the biggest producer of painted decorative ceramic images consisting of separate ceramic tiles. They were also utilized in a number of churches built in the town of Nessebar on the Black sea coast in Bulgaria.

This story about the Warrior-Saint Theodore Stratilates together with the unique ceramic icon from the 10th century, gave me the courage to create my own version of his image.



"A Woman from the Eastern Holy Lands. Saint Eudokia", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden metallic gilding paste, crystal elements, 50 x 50 cm

"A WOMAN FROM THE EASTERN HOLY LANDS. SAINT EUDOCIA" is also part of the **"De Personae"** (Personalities) cycle aiming to arrive at my own interpretation of images of personalities representing various cultures and symbolic ideas.

I saw her depicted in the form of a mosaic on the exterior of the St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia, Bulgaria. It was **her strong presence and willful gaze** that drew me to discover who Elia Lycinia Eudocia was.

Her biography recounts that she was born in Athens or Antioch (modern day Antakya, Turkey) around 400 AD and was named Athenais. Her father was the sophist philosopher Leontius who taught his daughter **literature, rhetoric and philosophy**. She later became **empress** after converting to Christianity and marrying the Byzantine emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–450 AD) in Constantinople. Thus, she became known as Elia Lycinia Eudocia ("the benevolent will of God").

Eudocia used her power in court to protect and aid pagans and Jews. Her latter part of her life, after her withdrawal from Constantinople, was **devoted to literature**. Her most famous piece of writing were her Homeric centos (verses) or "Homeric stitchings". They were a form of poetry comprised of fragments taken from the Iliad and Odyssey and "stitched" together with stories from the Bible. Unfortunately, very little of her literary work has survived which explains why it has not become so popular.

I chose to interpret her image in painting because of **her admiration, search and collection of knowledge**.

The period between 395 AD and 476 AD into which Eudocia was born and lived describes an important transitional period in the history of social, political, and religious life. One of the most interesting aspects of change in this era was **the phenomenon of the female ruler** "basileía", the officially sanctioned partnership of women in imperial power. Beginning with Flaccila (c. 355-386), empress and wife of Theodosius I, is a line of imperial women who wielded public power in a way that the Roman world had never before seen. Eudocia was considered as one of the most appealing of these women because of her intelligence and dignity. In support of this is Eudocia's influence over Theodosius II in taking the decision to found a university in Constantinople in 425 AD which competed with the traditional schools of classical education already existing in Antioch, Alexandria, and Athens. Teaching in it was focused on combining Christian learning with classical disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and jurisprudence.

As an empress Eudocia set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem from where she brought back a number of relics. For her contribution to the Eastern Orthodox Church, she was acknowledged as saint whose holiday is celebrated on 13th August.



"White Peonies",
2018, wooden panel,
acrylic paint, golden
metallic gilding paste,
crystal elements,
60 x 50 cm

“WHITE PEONIES” was created in the context of the cycle **“Trees and Flowers in Time”** which I have been working on for quite some time and keep returning to.

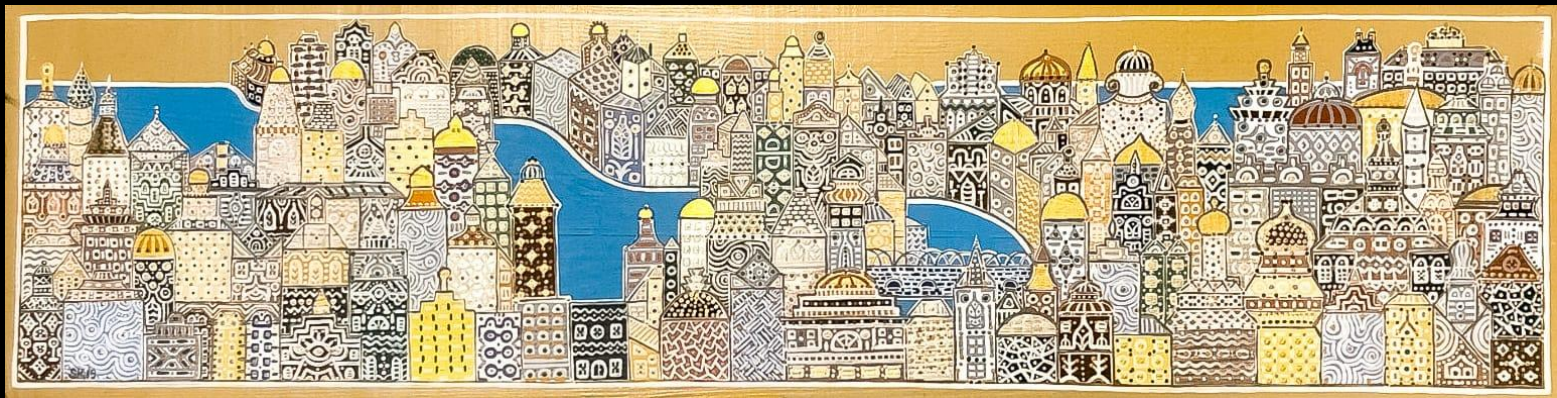
The idea for it sprung from various stories in holy books, as well as from my travels to the Near East. Trees and flowers have always been an inseparable part of our life, being symbols of various cultural traditions, mythology, music, art, literature, medicine, architecture, decoration, and not last, but not least – sustenance. Trees and flowers provide us with remarkable examples for non-obedience, courage, persistence, ingenuity and inventiveness. Their symbolism was used by many artists to convey secret messages that could be deciphered by experts who understand their meaning, colours and etymology. Flowers have always helped people express their feelings without actually using words.

The mythology surrounding the origin of the peony has multiple versions. It came from China where it was cultivated more than 2000 years ago. This amazingly pretty flower was even referred to as the **“king of flowers”** or the **“imperial flower”**. The peony tree was brought to Europe in 1789.

It **symbolizes: honor, beauty, love, romance, wealth, shame, remembrance and rebirth of relationships**. These meanings vary according to the different colours of the plant, the most usual of which are red, white and pink. The peony is named after the Greek physician of the gods, Paeon, and is a testament to the plant’s healing qualities as the peony’s roots, seeds, and flowers were frequently used in medicine. It is an ever green plant that **blooms only for a very brief period** lasting about 5 to 10 days only.

I decided to include this painting in this exhibition because on the first day after the lockdowns in 2020 I had a friend give me a pot of peonies. I immediately associated the painting of the peonies with their short blossoming period. My idea is that a lot of good things in life are short-lived and we should not take them for granted as they may disappear for long before they are given to us again, if at all. It is good to try to capture and savor these moments when they are bestowed upon us, i.e. to **live in the present.**

As I mentioned, the peony is an evergreen shrub blooming for a short time only and if it is taken care of in the right environment, it could bloom over and over again. The peony in my painting is also associated with the **rebirth of friendship.** The pandemic subjected to trial many relationships as it revealed the true nature of the difficulties encountered in a lot of them. It broke some of them, but it also managed to rekindle many. This painting is a tribute to the efforts all of us make in order to continue tending to our friendships despite the differences and difficulties springing up in front of them.



"City of Human Stories", 2020, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden, silver, copper and beige metallic gilding paste, 80 x 30 cm

“THE CITY OF HUMAN STORIES” is part of a cycle of paintings called **“The City”** on which I began working in 2016. The inspiration for it originated from my own experience of having lived in large cities until recently. Upon moving to the Belgium, Luxembourg and France borderline area, I discovered that the size of **a city** influences how one perceives the world around him/herself.

Each city is usually **established by different people**. They instill in it their very spirit, experiences, culture, interests, desires, etc... They **fill the city with their separate stories** all of which merge to establish a specific quality characteristic of the nature of that city. In choosing where to live, each one of them becomes part of the city scape and thus contributes to the city’s growth, change, improvement and its subsequent decline. The city is **a place which facilitates the interaction, exchange, convergence or clash between various elements:** thoughts, ideas, commodities, skills, persons, interests, fortunes, desires, sensibilities, ideologies, and even stupidities.

This specific painting is not of an illustration of an existing city, but **a collective image** combining various architectural elements and styles representative of different cultures and traditions which intertwine and overlap with one another. The result is an almost fairy-tale like skyline whose numerous golden domes shine brightly reflecting the gleaming light streaming upon them. Light can have both a physical impact and a spiritual one leading to a peculiar and unique state of mind.

Notwithstanding the synthetic character of this city which has combined the differing stories of the people inhabiting its different sections, one gets the feeling that **life is similar everywhere**. The typical for the city shared human fates of families, friends, professional connections or relationships between total strangers, are characteristic of every city. When we put aside all of this, we understand that very often the borders between us slowly hush down and disappear. This suggests to us that we **must strive to overcome our differences**.

At a certain moment, this painting resembles an engraving. It has a geometrical structure which I often apply in my art. Perhaps it is appropriate to remind what the German mathematician, astronomer, and astrologer Johannes Kepler has said: *"geometry is the archetype of Beauty in the world"*.

In fact, I oppose the old classical cities with their specific atmosphere to the new type of "smart cities" with their technological innovations and constant video surveillance... In the old charming and not so charming cities (because all of us have a favourite city in the world) we still have the feeling of internal freedom. **What will the city of the future bring us?!....**Time will show...



"The Key to the Enchanted Garden. Two Worlds Apart.", 2020, panel, acrylic paint, golden metallic gilding paste, 60 x 60 cm

"THE KEY TO THE ENCHANTED GARDEN. TWO WORLDS APART" is another one in the cycle **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"**. It was also painted during the first lockdown in France in the spring of 2020. It contains one of the components of the cycle – **a door**.

The painting represents two distinct worlds separated by a massive stone wall. One world is dark, cold, raw and unfriendly, covered in stone. The other - is a place of peacefulness, quiet, beauty, airiness, bright light, meditation, stillness, illumination and feeling of freedom. It is a world organically connected with nature and experiencing the elements, discovery, communication, socializing, regeneration of the senses and thriving. The tired soul has been hard pressed by the "stone clad walls" of the gray daily grind. The stone covered world is one of closure, isolation, loneliness, rigidity and desolation.

In between the two worlds stands a door. It is a symbol deeply ingrained in our psyche – the idea representing the **passage of borders or their closure**. A door facilitates the **entry** from one space or time to another. It is a **threshold, a metamorphosis, a potential opportunity or a new beginning**. However, it can also be seen as a **boundary, barrier or the keeper of a secret**. Sometimes gaining access may be as simple as turning the handle, but at other times the door remains locked and presents us with a choice to either try to enter peacefully or overcome it forcibly. We may need to knock or ring the bell or negotiate with the guardian of the door or submit the correct password which will secure our passage.

In this specific case, **the door** separating the two worlds **is open**. In most cases, **we are the ones holding the key** deep down inside us and it is **our own choice whether to use it or not**. In the 13th-century, the Persian poet, scholar, theologian, the Sufi mystic Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī Mevlana wrote *"You suppose that you are the lock on the door. But you are the key that opens it."*

I would like to emphasize that, on the one hand, the painting is an allusion to the story in the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett "The Secret Garden" (first published in 1911), considered one of the most enduring classics of children's literature. On the other hand, it implies to the lockdowns we have all been experiencing as of late.

Similarly to the main character in the novel, a spoiled little girl from a wealthy British family, who became orphaned as a result of a cholera epidemic in India and found herself living in an isolated estate with her uncle in England, we too became isolated from family, friends, work and the outside world.

In the story, the little girl finds out about the existence of this garden which was locked many years ago after her uncle's wife had died and she becomes determined to find it. In a while she discovers the key and eventually the doorway into it. She finds that it is overgrown with dormant rose bushes and vines, but she spots some green shoots, and she begins clearing, weeding and tending to it. Her caring for the plants spurs a transformation in her: she becomes kinder, more considerate, more curious and outgoing. With the passing of time she also meets her uncle's wheelchair-ridden son and another boy-gardener in the estate. The three children plant seeds to revitalize the garden, her uncle's son slowly starts walking and through their friendship and interaction with nature they grow healthier and happier.

After the lockdowns, many of us have found a new love of being outside and appreciating Nature and the contrast with our previous way of living, characterized by the rat race for sustenance and material goods. What we took for granted in the past has now attained a different value for many of us. This has led us **to embark on a road towards an amazing transformation of our souls and a newly rejuvenated outlook on life with the help of nature of which we are an inseparable part of.** Some of us will continue on this pathway, other will not. It depends on who manages to find the "key" to the enchanted garden and transform it into a real garden by caring and tending to it...



***"The Bridge over
the Drina River",
2020, panel, acrylic
paint, 60 x 60 cm***

"THE BRIDGE OVER THE DRINA RIVER" is part of the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle. It was created during the first lockdown in France in the spring of 2020. It contains two of the components of this cycle – **a window and a bridge**.

The Window is an architectural element with a symbolic meaning in art usually associated with the **intermediation between interior and exterior**. It is a means of observation, inadvertent voyeurism, communication, liberation, hope, opportunities or escapism. Although life indoors is limited by walls, it is enough to open a window and look outside. Thus, we observe and discover the outside world, nature and the unknown horizons. We strengthen our sense of community and belonging. The air and light passing through bring us hope and lift our spirit.

The Bridge is an element that **connects** two sides or shores or two realms. It can be actual or abstract. By crossing over a bridge one overcomes **an obstacle**, be it concrete as a river or a gorge, or a more abstract one. Thus, it represents also **transition or a voyage**. Every bridge has its story.

The writer who wrote the wonderful essay "Bridges" is Ivo Andrich, a Yugoslav novelist, poet and short story writer who won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1961. This painting is the result of reading four of his novels in order to arrive at the idea for it: "The Bridge on the Drina", "Bridges", "Oluyachani" and "Hard year".

The painting combines the following elements: the window, the bridge, the river, the high mountains and the walnuts. All of them carry a certain symbol.

- ❑ **The bridge** is black because it is a **symbol of overcoming** an obstacle. Ivo Andrić writes in the essay "Bridges": *"...They are all essentially one, they are equally worthy of our attention, because they show the place where humankind encountered an obstacle and did not stop before it, but overcame and bridged it the way humankind could, according to understanding, taste, and circumstances..."* He goes on *"In the end all that our life is expressed through – thoughts, efforts, gazes, smiles, words, sighs – all of it strives towards the other shore to which it is directed as if towards an aim and where, once reached, it receives its true meaning. All of this has to be overcome and to pass through an obstacle of some sort: chaos, death or meaninglessness. All of this represents passage, a bridge whose ends are lost in the endlessness and in comparison to it all earthly bridges are mere children's toys, pale symbols. All of our hope lies beyond."*
- ❑ **The obstacle** in fact is **the river**. It is, however, also a symbol of life, filled with storms, through which we have to make our way crossing over bridges.
- ❑ **The high mountains** are **the keepers and protectors of the secrets of the people** inhabiting them.
- ❑ In the Balkans, **the walnuts** are **symbol of fertility and abundance**, but also of **strong-willed power and toughness, stability, durability, firmness and resistance**.

The story of this painting is about one's **determination** to use his or her **will to overcome the difficulties** they are faced with.



***"The Key Which
Opens Doors", 2018,
wooden panel, acrylic
paint, 50 x 30 cm***

"THE KEY WHICH OPENS DOORS" is part of the **"Windows, Doors and Bridges"** cycle of paintings and was created in 2018.

The key symbolizes our **ability to gain access** to those things of either a material or spiritual nature which are of the greatest significance to us. It is connected with gateways and portals, doorways to the unknown, knowledge, mysteries, powers, initiations, secrets, new ways, forbidden things and answers to curious questions. Wooden locks and keys were in use as early as 4000 years ago in ancient Egypt. In art, Christian saints (like Saint Peter), pagan gods, and medieval kings alike were depicted holding keys as symbols of their spiritual or temporal power.

Whether they unlock or close doors, treasure chests, and why not somebody's soul and metaphorical heart, **keys let us into unknown worlds**. Sometimes they are the difference between freedom and prison, or life and death. In most cases **we are the ones who hold the key** deep down inside us and **it is our own choice whether to use it or not**. During the 13th-century the Persian poet, scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī Mevlana wrote "You suppose that you are the lock on the door. But you are the key that opens it."

The painting is a symbol for **our search into our inner worlds and experiences** in the pursuit of the "keys" or **solutions to the problems we encounter** in our daily lives. It is not by chance that the ancient Egyptians left us the **"Ankh"**, an ancient hieroglyphic symbol that was most commonly used in writing and art to represent the word for **"life"**. Thus, from start to end **our life is a series of choices "which door to unlock and venture into"**.



"The Road of Life", 2021,
canvas, acrylic
paint, 40 x 50 cm

"THE ROAD OF LIFE"

The idea for it was inspired by a scene in one the Koker Trilogy of films directed by the acclaimed Iranian film-maker Abbas Kiarostami, comprised of: "Where is the Friend's Home?" (1987), "Life and Nothing More" (1992) and "Through the Olive Trees" (1994). All of them were filmed in the village of Koker in the northern part of Iran which was ravaged by a strong earthquake and **focused on the shared theme about life's preciousness** after the great losses resulting from the natural disaster. In the Trilogy's films, the audience sees the stories of different people trying to pick up what is left of the pieces of their lives and putting them together to start anew.

"Through the Olive Trees" depicts the drama between two non-professional actors in the Trilogy. Their story revolves around the proposal for marriage made by a young man to a girl whose family won't accept it because he is poor and illiterate. She keeps avoiding him when they are on the set of the film. In the final scene they are walking on a zigzag shaped road upwards a hill. This seems to be the moment when she finally gives an answer to him and we see how he turns around and descends back on the road through the olive groves. The audience is left to wonder what response was given by the girl.

This is exactly **how life is** in most cases – **nothing is black and white**.

I liked Kiarostami's zigzag road and positioned it in a vast field comprised of eight consecutive smaller sections aligned from bottom to top on the canvas. **Each of these sections is symbolic on the path of life:**

1st section: is the inside of the home which is sacred and provides us with shelter, warmth, safety, sustenance, sense of belonging, support, understanding, encouragement, beauty, dreams, etc. These are all expressed through the pretty flower pots, fruits and the lace cover of the large table on which they are placed. The home is the starting point in most people's lives. It is the place that defines our core and roots.

2nd section: shows the threshold to the outside world - a sturdy wooden balcony railing. It protects us while we are young, but a time comes when we are ready to leave the home. The choice to return is up to every one individually. If we decide to leave it for good, the thread that ties us to it may brake; we can restore it, however, a knot will always remain. However, life is stronger and before such a decision is made, we have to go outside and take the path of life.

3rd section: is the beginning of the start of our life which is usually in Spartan conditions. It is illustrated through the bare and cracked soil which hasn't been cultivated yet. We work that soil, water it and plant our first trees there in the hope that they will grow into a forest.

4th section: is the period of life in which we collect knowledge and learn. Before us lay fields filled with numerous ears of wheat – knowledge is not straightforward. Hence not all ears of wheat can be golden.

5th section: is the part of life in which we have collected enough knowledge and experience. The large grove of olive trees symbolizes this knowledge. The Olive tree is a symbol of wisdom, fertility, prosperity, health, luck, victory, stability and the foundation of the home and roots shaping who and what we are.

6th section: is the time in life when we think about what we can give back to our families and communities. It is illustrated by various crops, trees and plants. These are the fruits of our labour, personal growth through the years, which we share with others. It is by no chance that they are placed on mountainous grounds – this is symbolic of the difficulties associated with this part of life.

7th section: is the period when we achieve the ability to synthesize. Synthesis involves pulling together knowledge and experience gained in life and processing it to arrive at wisdom. Usually, such factors as age, experience, intelligence, knowledge, intuition, common sense, and personality variables underlie wisdom, but no one has attempted to link these factors to say what exactly wisdom is. In visual terms, I have tried to depict wisdom in this painting as a mountain, majestic and humble. It has varying faces - it can be inviting and sunny, but it can also be dangerous and full of surprises.

8th section: is probably most difficult to describe because of the mixed feelings it calls in me as I have little knowledge about its essence. This is the last part of the road of life, but does not represent death. I would best coin it "illumination". I think it is not given to everyone to achieve. I chose to represent it through the turn the road of life takes beyond the mountains and into the horizon where it fuses with the skies. There are translucent clouds there, birds, plenty of sunlight whose rays illuminate the previous sections of life.

Throughout all these periods in life, the only certain thing is the road on which we all walk from our birth onwards. These phases can interchange and take place in a different order, they can skip or omit certain levels, or one can get stuck in a certain phase never to continue on to the remaining ones. Life is versatile. It offers us many opportunities to learn.



"Lilies", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Snowdrops I", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Carnations", 2019,
wooden panel, acrylic
paint, golden gilding
paste, crystal elements,
10 x 10 cm



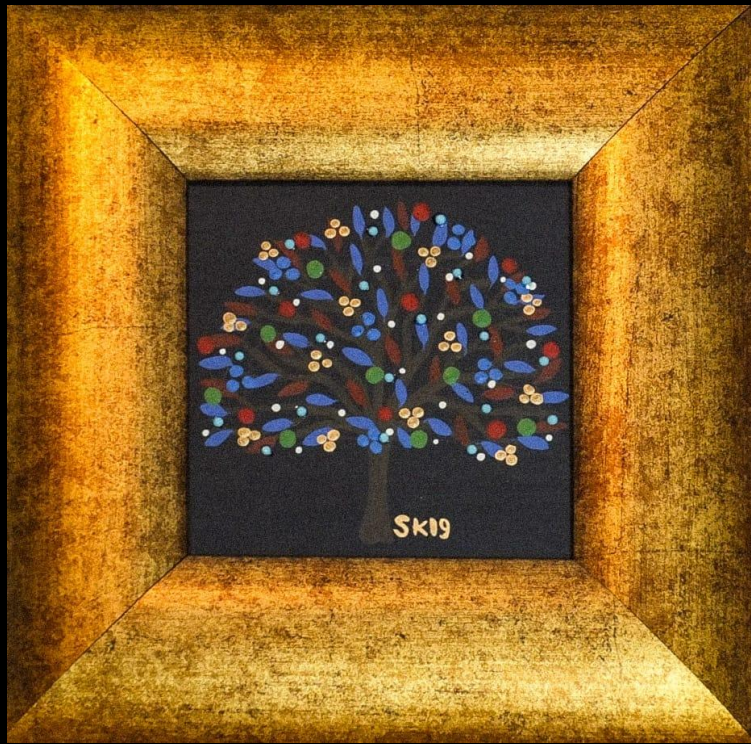
"Snowdrops II", 2019,
wooden panel, acrylic
paint, golden gilding
paste, crystal elements,
10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm



"Trees of life", 2019, wooden panel, acrylic paint, golden gilding paste, crystal elements, 10 x 10 cm

The twenty paintings above depicting flowers and trees are part of a bigger cycle of paintings called "**Small paintings**" consisting of two parts: "**Whispers of the Leaves**" and "**Other Tiny Paintings**". They are characterized by their size which is, with a few exceptions, always 10x10 cm. The "**Whispers of the Leaves**" part is in a way a continuation of one of my first cycles "**Trees and Flowers in Time**".

Trees, flowers and plants have always been an **inseparable part of our life**. Beyond their decorative properties, they usually have a symbolic meaning or association that is related to the subject of each painting.

Botanical symbolism has its origin in the literature of antiquity, where plants were often used as metaphors for virtue and vice.

In **classical mythology**, some human beings were transformed into plants and trees as a reward or punishment for their deeds. Such is the story of Narcissus, the vain youth who fell in love with his own reflection and was changed into a flower that bears his name. Other plants are mentioned as attributes of gods and goddesses: grapes for Bacchus, god of wine, corn; wheat or other grain cultures for Demetra and Ceres, goddesses of abundance and agriculture; and others.

Religious writings also provide a wealth of tree and plant symbolism. The Bible and the Apocrypha writings contain many references to this.

A third major source for tree and plant symbolism were the **medieval herbal recipe accounts**. They described the natural properties of plants, the method for their cultivation, and their application in cooking and medicine.

Today, the association of trees, flowers and plants with various cultural traditions, mythology, music, art, literature, medicine, architecture, decoration, and last, but not least – sustenance, continues being wide spread and further embellished.

However, as humans' knowledge of plant and tree world grows, we realize it is not merely a **source for providing materials for sustenance, shelter, medical treatment or used in practicing religious beliefs, traditions and practices**. It is responsible also for **moderating ground temperatures, preventing soil erosion, acting as the lungs of our planet**, etc. Also trees and plants can and do "talk" to each other via a complex system of "whispers" exchanged between their roots underground. Thus, it is not surprising that for many years the "structure" of trees and plants has been **utilized for graphical classification and representation of knowledge and complex information**.

*"Throughout human history **the tree structure** has been used to explain almost every facet of life: from consanguinity ties to cardinal virtues, systems of law to domains of science, biological associations to database systems. It has been such a successful model for graphically displaying relationships because it **pragmatically expresses the materialization of multiplicity** (represented by its succession of boughs, braches, twigs and leaves) **out of unity** (its central foundational trunk, which is in turn connected to common root, source, or origin). This model continues to bear great significance in genetics, linguistics, archeology, epistemology, philosophy, genealogy, computer science, and library and information science, among many other fields", writes Manuel Lima in his "Book of Trees. Visualizing Branches of Knowledge".*

Manuel Lima also describes Leonardo da Vinci's discovery of a mathematical principle which finds correlation between the size of the trunk of a tree and the size of its branches which pertains to all species of trees. Leonardo da Vinci noted that "*as trees branch out, at any given height, the total cross-sectional area of the daughter branches equals roughly the area of the mother trunk or branch*". This correlation underlies all modeling of realistic computer-generated trees (fractals).

Furthermore, this correlation led to another discovery by the physicist Christophe Eloy, in 2011, in which he found out that the reason for the above principle of tree branching is not rooted in the way water flows through the tree's branching system, but in the need for it to withstand wind. Thus, the tree has a fractal structure reflecting its need for resistance to the bending forces exerted by gusts of wind. This knowledge is widely used in achieving more efficient design of wind resistant objects and buildings, reflecting man's efforts in trying to tame nature.

However, **the most explicit symbol of trees and plants still remains connected to their roots, birth and growth, processes of decay, seasonal death and revival, all encompassing the cycle of life. The structure of a tree** embodies the early views of the universe arrangement: **roots** were considered like the underworld and place of origin (home), **a trunk** was considered as the earth and **a crown** of a tree was associated with the sky. A lot of the folklore characters reached for the sky climbing up the limbs of trees. This denotes the constant striving of humans towards the hidden secrets of the skies and the universe. Humanity has reached spiritual enlightenment and salvation making it to the top of the **Tree of Life** in all epochs.

In the end, I would like to note that I am strictly focusing on the artistic presentation of trees and flowers related to their meaning and visually pleasing my audience. I am not a botanist as my images are not intended to be used for scientific purposes as they are not 100% botanically accurate.

The more mundane idea of this collection of small paintings is to make **a mosaic of still lives of flowers and trees** which we use in our lives for beautifying the spaces we live in, to commemorate important events in the lives of our dear ones, to use them as a tribute to the sustenance and healing properties these plants and trees have, as well as to embody them in the form of small amulets which adorn our homes with a symbolic protective function.

Each of these still lives can be viewed upon as a separate image with its own symbolic meaning. However, they can also be regarded as a compact mosaic or serigraphy. Hence their collective name **"Whispers of the Leaves"** – they are like small echoes from the forest's different botanical inhabitants which come in a series of little ethereal waves. It is up to each one of us whether to hear them or not, to extract and summarize a distinctive message for him or herself and to decide how to feel them.

EPILOGUE

In conclusion, I would like to cite the words of Ivo Andrich in support of the ideas underpinning my paintings and the messages they bring to those of you who will take some time to observe them:

"Between the fear that something would happen and the hope that still it wouldn't, there is much more space than one thinks. On that narrow, hard, bare and dark space a lot of us spend our whole lives."

This is precisely why we should **be insightful...**

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Thank you for spending time viewing this exhibition and reading the accompanying notes to it. I hope it has brought you new knowledge, hope and pleasure.

With my best regards,

**Silvia Karamfilova
Artist**