

ARCHIVES OF THE LIVING

AUSTRIA

How Much Memory Can a Plant Hold?

Ruth Mateus-Berr

Catalogue Text / Research Version 2026

RESEARCH NOTE

The research underlying this catalogue grew out of the artist's personal curiosity and was supplemented and expanded with the assistance of ChatGPT over the course of the working process. Botanical, ecological, historical, mythological, medical and pharmacological sources were consulted alongside cultural-historical traditions and personal associations.

The information compiled here makes no claim to scientific completeness or infallibility and is provided without warranty. Historical plant names, mythological traditions and medicinal attributions in particular cannot always be unequivocally correlated with contemporary botanical species or current scientific knowledge.

The research should therefore not be understood as a scientific reference work, but as part of the artistic process of Archives of the Living. It makes visible the paths the artist follows from the starting point of a plant: from a botanical peculiarity to a historical source, from a name to a myth, from an active compound to a memory, or from an ecological relationship to an unexpected cultural connection.

This openness is intentional. The texts seek to make comprehensible how curiosity becomes research and how research, in turn, becomes Florilegical Narration. Above all, they aim to encourage readers to ask further questions, read further, disagree, discover connections—and perhaps become infected by the artist's curiosity about the stories and relationships carried by plants.

ARCHIVES OF THE LIVING — PREHISTORY

Still lifes, flowers and plant motifs have recurred in Ruth Mateus-Berr's work for many years, though never merely as decorative or botanical subjects. They appear in very different social, medical, societal and ecological contexts. Plants and flowers often function as proxies, metaphors or visual figures of thought through which questions of vulnerability, responsibility, the body, care, transformation and the environment are negotiated.

An early example is the staged photograph *Sometimes I Would Like to Be a Gardener*, created in the context of an artistic engagement with error culture in intensive care medicine. The starting point was interviews with physicians and nursing staff about dealing with mistakes, responsibility, strain and the particular conditions of intensive-care work. Their statements were not illustrated in documentary form, but translated into artistic situations and

images. Here, the idea of gardening already appears as a counter-image to a highly technologised medical environment: caring, observing, responding, allowing growth—and at the same time dealing with unpredictability and the possibility of failure.

Other works from this period also examined medical and body-political questions. In the staged photograph *New Beautox*, for example, Mateus-Berr engaged with Botox and thus with medical technology at the intersection of therapy, bodily optimisation and social ideals of beauty. In these works, medical knowledge does not appear as a neutral system, but as a cultural practice in which scientific knowledge, personal decisions, institutional conditions and conceptions of the human body overlap.

At the same time, plants and flowers became means of making relationships between people visible. During an artist-in-residence period in Krastal, four women artists were asked to respond to one another. Mateus-Berr assigned a flower to each woman. The plant thereby became a portrait, a projection and a relational sign: what mattered was not botanical identification alone, but the question of which qualities, memories and attributions a plant can trigger in relation to a person.

These earlier works form an important background to *Archives of the Living*. The interest in plants did not arise from a conventional understanding of the floral still life as a genre. Rather, plants increasingly became epistemic figures—media through which knowledge can be investigated and relationships made visible.

Sustainability and climate change also played a significant role in Ruth Mateus-Berr's work long before the current series. Artistic practice repeatedly intersects with scientific research and with the question of how complex knowledge can be translated into an experiential form.

One example is *4 Layers of Sari*, for which she received the Neptun State Prize. The work took as its point of departure microbiologist Rita Colwell's scientific research on cholera prevention in Bangladesh. Her studies showed that several layers of tightly folded cotton cloth—such as sari fabric—used to filter water can retain a very large proportion of the particles and microorganisms with which cholera bacteria are associated. An everyday textile practice thus became an extremely simple, inexpensive and locally available means of health prevention.

What interested Mateus-Berr was not only the scientific result. Crucial was the relationship between scientific insight based on observing women in Bangladesh handling water, everyday knowledge, material and social application. The sari becomes a filter; a textile cultural object becomes part of a microbiological process. Knowledge does not arise exclusively in the laboratory, but unfolds its significance where it can be translated into existing lifeworlds.

Another early project in the context of sustainability and climate change was *100 Cool Cities*, developed as an interdisciplinary and international project within a competition organised by departure and the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts Vienna. At its centre was the question of how urban heat islands could be reduced and which planning, design and ecological measures might prepare cities for increasing temperatures.

The project emerged at a time when terms such as urban heat island, climate adaptation, urban greening or cooling public space played a far smaller role in everyday Austrian discourse than they do today. Scenarios that have since become immediate experiences for many city dwellers—overheated apartments, the growing desire for air conditioning, heat-stressed streets, or demands for more trees and unsealed surfaces—were already being examined as design and research questions.

Plants and the motif of gardening also return in a remarkable way in the body of work on art, design and dementia. Together with Pia Scharler, Ruth Mateus-Berr developed personalised critical/speculative design rollators conceived not merely as functional medical aids, but as carriers of biography, identity and memory. One of these rollators was developed around the figure of a gardener and combined with a small raised bed. The rollator thus shifted from a standardised care object to a mobile space of memory: movement, plant care, biographical experience and self-efficacy became intertwined.

In this context it becomes particularly clear that the plant motif in Mateus-Berr's work does not function only symbolically. Plants can enable action. They can trigger memories, activate routines, evoke sensory experiences and stimulate communication. Gardening appears as a practice of caring, observing and repeating—activities that can relate both to plants and to interpersonal relationships.

The root structures that recur throughout Archives of the Living also acquire an additional meaning against this background. Formally, roots can be associated with neuronal branching, synapses and communication networks. They branch, establish connections, respond to their surroundings and remain largely hidden from immediate view.

This formal affinity opens a connection to communication, memory and forgetting. Like neuronal networks, root systems are not isolated lines but relational structures. They exist through connection, exchange and mutual dependence. In the soil, roots interact with fungi, microorganisms and other plants; in the brain, memory and perception likewise do not arise at a single point, but within complex networks.

For Ruth Mateus-Berr's work, an important continuity emerges from this: the interest in plants leads from the gardener metaphor in intensive care medicine, through the gardener in the context of dementia, to the roots in Archives of the Living. Caring, remembering, communicating and being connected appear as related processes. The plant increasingly becomes more than a motif. It becomes a model for relationship and memory. The root is particularly suited to this: it is vital yet largely invisible; it stores, supplies, connects and responds. At the same time, a damaged or interrupted root system can become an image of loss and forgetting.

In Archives of the Living, these earlier experiences ultimately lead to an expanded perspective. Plants no longer stand exclusively for human conditions. Their own networks, dependencies and forms of persistence are taken seriously. Yet the connection to human beings remains. Root and neuron, mycorrhiza and communication, vegetal persistence and human memory begin to mirror one another visually and conceptually.

A continuity thus becomes visible that is crucial to Archives of the Living: Mateus-Berr is interested in situations in which scientific knowledge becomes—or ought to become—socially effective. Medicine, care, public health, design, climate change, biodiversity and interpersonal relationships do not appear as separate subjects. They are connected through the question of how people deal with complex and often invisible dependencies. Within this development, plants have increasingly moved to the centre.

In earlier works, flowers could still function metaphorically for human relationships, bodies or social conditions. In Archives of the Living, this perspective changes. Plants are no longer merely stand-ins for human themes. They become actors in the narrative.

Their own histories become important: their morphology and ecology, their endangerment, their medical and pharmacological uses, their mythological attributions, their names, their cultural migrations and the landscapes on which their continued existence depends.

The Austrian group of works in Archives of the Living therefore turns its attention to plants that are part of a seemingly familiar landscape and, precisely for that reason, are easily overlooked. Some are cultural icons of the Alpine region; others are scarcely known outside specialist botanical circles. Some are endangered throughout Austria, others primarily at regional level or under pressure because their specific habitats are changing. What they share is that their existence cannot be thought independently of the landscapes and relationships in which they grow. The Austrian series brings together plants in different states of endangerment: species threatened with extinction nationwide, regionally endangered plants, species on the Near Threatened list, and plants whose populations are declining in particular natural regions. Endangerment thus appears not as an immutable property of a species, but as a relationship between plant, habitat, human use and geographical location.

An essential scientific reference is the Red List of Ferns and Flowering Plants of Austria by Schratt-Ehrendorfer, Niklfeld, Schröck and Stöhr (2022). It makes clear that “endangerment” is not a simple category. A species may still appear relatively stable nationally while declining significantly in individual regions. The loss of a plant often begins long before its complete disappearance becomes visible.

A second historical layer of knowledge is provided by *De materia medica* by the Greek physician and pharmacologist Pedanius Dioscorides from the first century CE, which Ruth Mateus-Berr encountered and was able to sell as a facsimile during an internship at the Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt while she was a student. Dioscorides is not read here as a modern medical authority. Rather, his texts document how closely plant observation, medicine, cultural tradition and ideas about hidden powers of plants were already intertwined in antiquity. Where a plant described by Dioscorides cannot be unequivocally identified with a present-day botanical species, this uncertainty is explicitly acknowledged.

From these different forms of knowledge, Florilegical Narration develops. It connects botanical observation with history, magic and myth, medicine, pharmacy, ecology, and personal and collective memory. The artwork does not illustrate these bodies of knowledge. It brings them into relation. The classical still life changes its function: it is no longer merely a representation of plants, vessels and objects, but becomes a space of research. The plant

carries different times and forms of knowledge simultaneously. What appears as a flower can therefore be, at the same time, a medicinal plant, a pharmaceutical drug, a myth, a cultural symbol, an endangered species, a personal memory and part of a highly complex ecosystem. Archives of the Living begins at precisely this point: with the question of what we actually see when we look at a plant—and which knowledge, memories and relationships might disappear with it.

ARCHIVES OF THE LIVING — AUSTRIA

The Austrian group of works in Archives of the Living emerged from an engagement with rare, endangered, protected and culturally charged plants of Austria. It develops the early, deliberately reduced Vanitas still lifes of 2024–2025 further: the plants still stand upright in vessels, yet the restrained palette—particularly Naples yellow, black and grey—points to chlorophyll loss, time and possible disappearance. Viewers supply the missing natural colour from memory. From this strategy develops Florilegical Narration, in which botanical research, history, medicine, pharmacy, ancient sources and cultural memory are brought together as an open form of pictorial knowledge.

The plant is treated neither as a mere object of illustration nor as a symbol with a fixed meaning. It becomes the starting point of research in which different forms of knowledge enter into new relationships within the image.

RED LIST

A central reference is the third, completely revised edition of the Red List of Ferns and Flowering Plants of Austria (Schratt-Ehrendorfer et al., 2022, Stapfia 114). It distinguishes between national and regional threat status and shows that a species may be unthreatened across Austria while declining sharply in individual major landscapes. This distinction is crucial to the body of work: endangerment is not a uniform condition, but is spatially, ecologically and historically situated.

Examples: *Arnica montana* is listed nationally as LC—Least Concern—in the 2022 Austrian Red List, although substantial declines have been observed particularly at lower elevations. *Cypripedium calceolus* is assessed nationally as NT—Near Threatened—but regionally reaches EN and CR. For plants identified in the work list only at genus level—especially *Gentiana* sp.—no species-specific threat status is invented.

DIOSCORIDES / DE MATERIA MEDICA

Pedanius Dioscorides' *De materia medica* (first century CE) is not a modern pharmacological authority for this archive, but a historical source of knowledge. The work demonstrates how closely plant description, medicinal knowledge, naming and cultural experience were already intertwined in antiquity. Relevant ancient traditions exist for gentian, poppy, lilies and orchid-like tubers. Where a modern species—such as *Arnica montana* or *Leontopodium alpinum*—cannot be unequivocally matched to a plant in Dioscorides, this is explicitly stated. Historical plant descriptions are cautiously related to present-day botanical knowledge, because a plant described by Dioscorides cannot always be unambiguously assigned to a species as scientifically defined today.

ARNICA / ARNICA

Arnica montana L.



BOTANY

True arnica belongs to the daisy family (Asteraceae). The perennial plant forms a basal rosette of leaves and an upright stem with characteristic orange-yellow flower heads. It grows primarily in acidic, nutrient-poor meadows, mat-grass grasslands, heathlands, and montane to subalpine habitats.

Precisely this dependence on nutrient-poor habitats makes it sensitive to changes in land use. Fertilisation, intensification, abandonment and afforestation can alter suitable sites or cause them to disappear completely.

The 2022 Red List of Ferns and Flowering Plants of Austria lists *Arnica montana* nationally as LC—Least Concern. This overall assessment, however, conceals considerable regional differences: in the Bohemian Massif it is considered Endangered, and in the northern and south-eastern Alpine foreland even Critically Endangered. The species has undergone substantial declines particularly at lower elevations.

HISTORY

Arnica is now one of the best-known medicinal plants of the Alpine region. Vernacular names such as Bergwohlverleih point to its long integration into European folk medicine.

An unequivocal identification of *Arnica montana* in the ancient *De materia medica* of Pedanius Dioscorides, however, has not been established. The familiar European arnica tradition developed largely in later herbals and practices of folk medicine.

Historical plant descriptions are therefore cautiously related to present-day botanical knowledge. A plant described by an ancient author cannot always be unequivocally assigned to a species as scientifically defined today.

MAGIC AND MYTH

Arnica was not only a medicinal plant, but also a protective plant. Its yellow flowers and flowering season linked it in European folk belief with the sun and the summer solstice. As a “St John’s flower”, it became part of customs surrounding St John’s Day.

Regionally, it was credited with the ability to protect houses, farms or fields from lightning, hail, fire and other harmful influences. Arnica could thus become an apotropaic object—that is, a supposed means of warding off harm.

James George Frazer documents related Central European plant customs in *The Golden Bough*. The Research Group on Monastic Medicine likewise points to connections between arnica, St John’s Day, solar symbolism and ideas of protection.

This history is particularly striking in the work: precisely the intense yellow that encouraged the cultural association with the sun is withdrawn in the painting. Viewers have to remember it.

MEDICINE

Arnica is traditionally used externally for blunt injuries, bruises, sprains and local musculoskeletal complaints.

Historical use and present-day medical assessment must be distinguished from one another. In particular, uncontrolled internal use is problematic because of possible adverse effects.

PHARMACY

Among the pharmacologically relevant constituents of arnica flowers are sesquiterpene lactones, especially helenalin and related compounds. These plant constituents contribute substantially to arnica’s anti-inflammatory activity. At the same time, they can cause skin irritation and allergic contact reactions in sensitive individuals.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) lists arnica flower as *Arnicae flos* in a herbal medicinal-product monograph.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The larger-format arnica painting shifts the familiar medicinal plant from the realm of the household remedy into the status of a portrait. The reduced palette deprives it of the bright yellow we expect; the colour has not disappeared, but has been displaced into the viewer’s memory. What we believe we know and see about arnica is completed in the act of looking.

The plant appears upright, yet already in a state of visual transformation. The image thus connects botanical presence with the tradition of *Vanitas*: it is not an already wilted plant that announces transience, but a living one whose familiar appearance has begun to falter.

Arnica is deliberately placed in a kitchen setting—an everyday place of preparing, mixing, extracting and storing. Kitchen and home pharmacy overlap. The space thus refers to experiential knowledge passed down over generations, through which plants became remedies long before their constituents could be pharmacologically isolated and standardised. The kitchen appears as an early laboratory of everyday life.

Yet this space offers no security. Everything is distorted; nothing is quite right. Perspectives tilt, proportions and spatial relations resist a clear order. This very irritation contradicts the idea of a controllable laboratory or kitchen environment. Arnica occupies a place where something healing might be made from nature—and at the same time a world whose order has come apart.

A paradox emerges: the medicinal plant, of all things, stands in a space that itself seems to require healing. Arnica thus becomes not only an object of medical memory, but an image of a present in which inherited plant knowledge, ecological vulnerability and the human desire for control are increasingly drifting apart. The contemporary Vanitas lies not only in the plant's possible disappearance. It also lies in the fragility of the relationships and forms of knowledge that have connected people with it for centuries.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The Florilegical Narration of arnica begins with a contradiction: a plant that has been used for centuries to treat injuries is itself dependent on vulnerable habitats. Arnica stands for healing, yet it can disappear where nutrient-poor meadows are abandoned, intensified or altered.

In the painting, these two stories meet. Arnica stands in a kitchen—that everyday place where plants were traditionally processed, dried, boiled or prepared as household remedies. The kitchen setting therefore refers to knowledge of plants and their effects passed down over generations. At the same time, nothing in this space is quite right: perspectives are displaced, proportions unsettle, the familiar place loses its order.

Arnica itself no longer fully corresponds to our memory either. Its characteristic yellow is absent or greatly reduced. Viewers must supply the familiar colour from their own memory.

Arnica → Alpine meadow → medicinal plant → kitchen → inherited knowledge → medicine → missing colour → altered landscape → memory.

The question posed by the painting is therefore not only whether arnica will survive. It also asks: What happens to our knowledge of a plant when the habitats in which we could encounter it disappear?

INSPIRING FURTHER READING / SOURCES AND LINKS

Dioscorides, P. (2005). Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus: De materia medica (L. Y. Beck, Trans.). Olms-Weidmann. (Original work ca. 50–70 CE).

European Medicines Agency. Arnicae flos.

Frazer, J. G. (1913). The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (3rd ed.). Macmillan. Particularly relevant to arnica, St John's Night, and protection against lightning and hail.

Research Group on Monastic Medicine. Bergwohlverleih – *Arnica montana* L. (Asteraceae). Historical medicine, St John's customs, solar symbolism and arnica as an apotropaic protective plant.

Schratt-Ehrendorfer, L., Niklfeld, H., Schröck, C., & Stöhr, O. (Eds.). (2022). Rote Liste der Farn- und Blütenpflanzen Österreichs. Stapfia, 114. Land Oberösterreich.

WWF Austria. Die Arnika – der "Bergwohlverleih".

BEE ORCHID

Ophrys apifera Huds.



BOTANY

The bee orchid belongs to the orchid family (Orchidaceae). Its flower is extraordinary: the velvety, brown-patterned lip resembles the body of an insect.

The genus *Ophrys* is known for highly specialised pollination systems. *Ophrys apifera*, however, has an important particularity: it is frequently self-pollinating. The pollinia can bend down towards the stigma. It should therefore not simply be equated with the spectacular sexual-deception mechanisms of other *Ophrys* species.

In Austria, the bee orchid is very rare and is described by the Austrian Orchid Conservation Network as highly endangered.

HISTORY

Orchids have fascinated people since antiquity. Even the family name carries a bodily history: the Greek *órchis* means “testicle” and refers to the paired tubers of various orchids.

The form of a plant organ became the starting point for a story about the human body.

MAGIC AND MYTH

In *De materia medica*, Pedanius Dioscorides describes orchids, or *Orchis*, and records beliefs according to which different tubers could affect sexuality, fertility and even the sex of a future child.

These are ancient concepts of analogical medicine, not modern pharmacological findings.

Moreover, this tradition is not species-specific to *Ophrys apifera*. It forms part of the historical resonance surrounding orchids.

Yet this produces a remarkable connection: humans interpreted orchids through bodily resemblances, while the flower of *Ophrys* itself, in turn, creates for the human eye the resemblance of an animal body.

MEDICINE

There is no established modern medical use for *Ophrys apifera*.

Historical ideas concerning orchid tubers are sources for cultural and medical history, not medical recommendations.

PHARMACY

The bee orchid is not a recognised herbal medicinal substance of the European Medicines Agency.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The plant is biologically already an image.

The painting depicts something that itself generates resemblance. By reducing the colour, attention shifts from the orchid's spectacular coloration to structure, hairiness and corporeality.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The plant demonstrates how strongly human knowledge is shaped by resemblance. What we believe we recognise always also says something about our own way of seeing.

INSPIRING FURTHER READING / SOURCES AND LINKS

Beck, L. Y. (Trans.). (2005). *Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus: De materia medica*. Olms-Weidmann. Original work ca. 50–70 CE.

Dafni, A., et al. (2021). Research on the Doctrine of Signatures, particularly orchids, bodily analogy and historical concepts of fertility.

Austrian Orchid Conservation Network. *Ophrys apifera* – Bee Orchid.

Schratt-Ehrendorfer et al. (2022). Rote Liste der Farn- und Blütenpflanzen Österreichs. *Stapfia*, 114.

Darwin, C. (1862). *On the Various Contrivances by Which British and Foreign Orchids Are Fertilised by Insects*. John Murray. A foundational historical text on the fascination of orchid pollination.

EDELWEISS

Leontopodium alpinum Cass.



BOTANY

Alpine edelweiss belongs to the daisy family (Asteraceae). What appears to be a large white flower actually consists of small yellowish flower heads surrounded by star-shaped, densely white-woolly bracts.

The dense hairs are part of the plant's adaptation to extreme Alpine environmental conditions such as intense solar radiation, wind, drought and temperature fluctuations.

HISTORY

Few Alpine plants have been culturally transformed as profoundly as edelweiss. In the nineteenth century it became a symbol of mountaineering and later a sign of Alpine and national identities. The plant migrated from the mountain onto badges, uniforms, coins, souvenirs and logos. It also lent its name to resistance against National Socialism. An organism became an emblem.

A particularly influential international reinterpretation emerged through the musical *The Sound of Music* by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, which premiered on Broadway in 1959 and was adapted for film in 1965. The song "Edelweiss" is not a traditional Austrian folk song, although its musical style has often led people to assume that it is. Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote it specifically for the musical. In the story, Captain von Trapp sings it as an expression of his attachment to Austria and as a quiet protest against the National Socialist annexation of the country. The Rodgers & Hammerstein rights holders explicitly describe it as a "subtle protest" against the Nazi Anschluss.

Edelweiss thereby acquired an additional international layer of meaning: the Alpine flower became not only an image of homeland, but also a symbol of an Austria under threat, whose independence is asserted in the story against National Socialism. This symbolic charge, however, belongs to the later American history of the musical and film and should not be confused with an historical Austrian resistance song from 1938–1945.

The best-known resistance song to draw a direct connection between edelweiss and opposition to the Nazi regime in the years 1938–1945 is the song of the Edelweiss Pirates. Although the Edelweiss Pirates were a youth protest and resistance movement active primarily in Germany's Rhineland, their clandestine song explicitly invokes Austria as a place of refuge and a symbol of freedom. The young people used the edelweiss as a secret identifying sign on their clothing, often beneath the lapel. They refused to join the Hitler Youth and engaged in active resistance. In their imagination and songs, the Austrian mountains represented a wild, free place beyond the reach of the Gestapo.

The symbol of edelweiss also played a role in regional resistance. Although no Austrian group bore precisely this name, edelweiss in the mountains could function as a sign of solidarity. Women from the region helped supply men hiding in the mountains with food at great personal risk, including Theresia "Resi" Pesendorfer (1902–1989). In Upper Austria there was no independent "Edelweiss resistance group", but edelweiss is associated in cultural memory with mountain resistance in the Salzkammergut, including the Willy-Fred group, and is the title of a well-known novel about this Upper Austrian resistance.

MAGIC AND MYTH

The myth of edelweiss is surprisingly recent. In the nineteenth century, the romantic idea spread of a young man risking his life by climbing inaccessible rocks to bring an edelweiss to his beloved. The plant became a symbol of love, courage, fidelity and self-sacrifice. Other Alpine traditions connect it with supernatural female figures or explain the origin of the white flower through tears. In the Zillertal, a tradition is also recorded of burning edelweiss as incense to keep harmful influences or spirits away from livestock. There is, by contrast, no unequivocal reference to *Leontopodium alpinum* in Dioscorides. This is precisely what makes edelweiss interesting: modern societies, too, create plant myths.

MEDICINE

Edelweiss was used regionally in Alpine folk-medical traditions. Such uses must be distinguished from modern clinical evidence.

PHARMACY

Modern research investigates constituents of *Leontopodium* species, among other things, for antioxidant and inflammation-modulating properties. No general medicinal indication can be inferred from this.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The painting confronts one of the best-known Alpine plants with the loss of its familiar appearance. What happens when precisely those features through which a cultural symbol is instantly recognised are withdrawn? The painting leads from emblem back to organism.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The plant becomes a projection surface for human values. The work asks what remains visible of the actual plant behind the symbol.

INSPIRING FURTHER READING / SOURCES AND LINKS

Auerbach, B. (1861). Edelweiss. A literary source for nineteenth-century edelweiss reception.

Scheidegger, T. (2008). Mythos Edelweiss: Zur Kulturgeschichte eines alpinen Symbols.

Austrian Alpine Club. Materials on the cultural history and legends of edelweiss.

Swiss Confederation. Mystisches und mythisches Edelweiss.

Schratt-Ehrendorfer et al. (2022). Rote Liste der Farn- und Blütenpflanzen Österreichs. Stapfia, 114.

GENTIAN

Gentiana sp.



BOTANY

The genus *Gentiana* belongs to the gentian family (Gentianaceae) and comprises numerous species occupying very different habitats. Since the existing documentation of the work identifies the plant only as *Gentiana*, no species is deliberately added. Without an unequivocal species identification, assigning a specific Austrian Red List category would not be scientifically defensible.

HISTORY

The name *Gentiana* is traditionally associated with the Illyrian king Gentius of the second century BCE. Pliny the Elder credits him with discovering the medicinal properties of gentian. The plant thus acquires an origin story already in antiquity.

MAGIC AND MYTH

The story of Gentius moves between medical history and legend: medicinal knowledge is given a discoverer and therefore a memorable human figure. Dioscorides likewise describes

gentian as a medicinal plant in *De materia medica*. In later Alpine culture, gentian became a symbol of the mountains, resilience and homeland.

MEDICINE

The medicinal use of yellow gentian, *Gentiana lutea*, is particularly well documented. Its bitter root is traditionally used for loss of appetite and digestive complaints. This effect, however, must not automatically be transferred to the *Gentiana* species depicted in the work, which has not yet been identified to species level.

PHARMACY

The European Medicines Agency lists *Gentianae radix*, the root of *Gentiana lutea*, as a herbal medicinal substance. Pharmacy thus makes visible something that is also important for the art: botanical precision matters.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The reduced palette activates cultural memory of the gentian. If viewers expect an intense blue, that colour may arise more strongly in memory than on the surface of the image. Memory becomes a second layer of pigment.

The Florilegical Narration therefore deliberately contains a gap. An archive does not have to pretend that it knows everything. The gentian, rendered as a delicate coloured-pencil drawing, stands in an improvised vase: the iconic small Campari Soda bottle designed in 1932 by the renowned Italian artist Fortunato Depero. It is regarded internationally as a masterpiece of modern industrial design.

INSPIRING FURTHER READING / SOURCES AND LINKS

Beck, L. Y. (Trans.). (2005). *Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus: De materia medica*.

European Medicines Agency. *Gentianae radix*.

Campari. (n.d.). Campari Soda.

Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis historia*.

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. *Plants of the World Online: Gentiana*.

Schratt-Ehrendorfer et al. (2022). *Rote Liste der Farn- und Blütenpflanzen Österreichs*. *Stapfia*, 114.

SHADBUSH / SERVICEBERRY

Amelanchier ovalis Medik.



BOTANY

The common serviceberry belongs to the rose family (Rosaceae). This deciduous shrub prefers sunny, dry and rocky sites as well as open woodland and scrub. Its white, five-petaled flowers develop into dark, edible small pomes. *Amelanchier ovalis*—often also called Edelweißstrauch in Austria—is the only serviceberry native to Austria. It appears on Austria's Red List of threatened species. In some federal states and regions it is rarer than in others and is therefore considered regionally endangered.

Its German name, Felsenbirne, refers directly to its habitat: it connects rocky, stony sites with pear- or apple-like fruit. Botanically, the fruits are in fact small pomes.

Amelanchier ovalis is by no means exclusively Austrian or Alpine. Its range extends across parts of Central and Southern Europe and the Mediterranean region. This geographical mobility is particularly interesting for Archives of the Living: the serviceberry appears both in the Portugal series and in the Austrian body of work. The plant thereby crosses the national systems of order by which the artistic archive is initially organised. The plant knows no national borders. It is human beings who turn its occurrence into a Portuguese, Austrian or Italian story.

HISTORY

The serviceberry does not possess the monumental cultural history of edelweiss, poppy or lily. Precisely for this reason, it opens another perspective on the relationship between plant and memory.

Its history is less a history of grand symbols than one of observation, seasons and everyday knowledge. Flowering, fruit ripening and habitat could indicate what was changing in a landscape. Plants thus became biological calendars.

The English name Shadbush, or shadblow, is particularly revealing. It originates in North America and refers to North American *Amelanchier* species: their flowering was traditionally associated with the season when shad—migratory fish of the genus *Alosa*—swim upstream to their spawning grounds.

This history of the name must not be presented botanically as a historical tradition specific to *Amelanchier ovalis*. It belongs to the cultural history of the genus *Amelanchier* in North America. For Florilegical Narration, however, it is extraordinarily productive. A plant name preserves an observation of synchrony between different living beings: when the plant flowers, the fish move. The plant becomes a clock.

MAGIC AND MYTH

No independent European mythology comparable to that of edelweiss, lily or poppy can be reliably demonstrated for *Amelanchier ovalis*. Nor is there a securely identified description in Pedanius Dioscorides that can be unequivocally equated with the modern species *Amelanchier ovalis*.

Not every plant became a sacred plant, a medicinal plant or the bearer of a grand mythological narrative. Some plants remained culturally quieter, although ecologically they are equally part of complex relationships. In *Amelanchier*, something else can take the place of classical myth: the idea of a living calendar. The name Shadbush tells of people observing relationships between phenomena: plant flowering, season, water, fish migration and human life practice belonged to a shared rhythm. What seems magical here is not the supernatural. It is the simultaneity of the living.

MEDICINE

Various *Amelanchier* species have a long history as food plants. Their fruits contain, among other compounds, phenolics and anthocyanins—the plant pigments partly responsible for the dark colour of ripe fruit. Here again, distinctions between species within the genus are necessary. Findings on North American *Amelanchier* species cannot simply be transferred to *Amelanchier ovalis*. There is no established contemporary European medicinal use of *Amelanchier ovalis* comparable to arnica or gentian.

PHARMACY

Amelanchier ovalis is not an established herbal medicinal substance of the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Pharmacological research on the genus *Amelanchier* includes polyphenols, flavonoids and anthocyanins and their antioxidant properties.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Within Archives of the Living, the serviceberry occupies a particular position because it appears more than once and in more than one geographical context. Amelanchier had already become a subject of painting in the Austrian series. In the Portuguese works, the plant returns. Something therefore emerges that goes beyond the individual plant portrait: the plant begins to wander through the archive.

The different stagings also alter its meaning. While one version appears in a restrained palette, another presents the plant before a yellow curtain and on an elaborately draped cloth. The plant is almost placed on a stage like a person. The still life becomes a portrait. The curtain reinforces this impression: it separates foreground and background, conceals and reveals at the same time, and recalls staging strategies from historical portrait painting. The cloth beneath the plant lends it a preciousness that stands in marked contrast to its natural occurrence on dry, stony and often barren sites. A plant capable of growing on rock is suddenly given a stage.

This displacement is essential: painting grants attention to a plant far less present in cultural memory than edelweiss, poppy or gentian.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The serviceberry demonstrates particularly clearly what is meant by Florilegical Narration. Its story neither begins nor ends with the botanical species. Through the English name Shadbush, the narrative opens beyond Europe. The flowering of a plant and the migration of a fish become simultaneous events. A plant name stores this observation across generations.

This produces an idea of landscape in which organisms do not exist in isolation. Plant, fish, water, insect, bird, season and human being form different parts of a shared temporal structure. The return of Amelanchier in the Portuguese and Austrian series extends this idea once more. The artistic archive itself no longer functions according to unequivocal geographical borders. A plant can appear in Austria and return in Portugal. Its botanical name remains the same, but its surroundings, staging and associated memories change.

The serviceberry therefore poses a fundamental question to Archives of the Living:

To whom does a plant belong—to a country, a landscape, a culture, or to the relationships through which it lives?

Perhaps this is precisely its form of magic. Not an inherited legend, but the ability of an inconspicuous plant to connect distant places and living beings.

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LADY'S-SLIPPER ORCHID

Cypripedium calceolus L.



BOTANY

The lady's-slipper orchid belongs to the orchid family. Its large yellow, slipper-shaped lip forms a so-called pitfall trap. Attracted insects enter the flower and, in order to leave it, must follow a particular route, during which pollen can be picked up or transferred. Like other orchids, the lady's-slipper also depends on complex relationships with fungi.

The 2022 Austrian Red List classifies *Cypripedium calceolus* nationally as NT—Near Threatened. Regionally, the situation is considerably more critical, reaching EN—Endangered—and CR—Critically Endangered.

HISTORY

The lady's-slipper was depicted and described in early European botany. The extraordinary shape of its flower also made it highly desirable—a form of cultural attention that, paradoxically, could itself contribute to its endangerment through digging up and collecting plants.

MAGIC AND MYTH

The botanical name itself contains mythology. Cypris, or Kypris, is an epithet of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. The name *Cypripedium* combines this reference with the Greek term for shoe or sandal; *calceolus* means “little shoe” in Latin. Linguistically, the plant thus becomes the slipper of the goddess of love.

Later flower legends accordingly tell of a lost slipper of Venus. These stories should not, however, be presented as an original ancient myth. Historically more robust is the mythological etymology of the name.

MEDICINE

There is no established modern medicinal use of *Cypripedium calceolus* that would justify removing it from the wild.

PHARMACY

The lady's-slipper is not an established herbal medicinal substance of the European Medicines Agency. Today, its significance lies far more in species conservation than in pharmacy.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The unusual flower possesses an almost bodily presence. The “slipper” appears precious, desirable and at the same time precarious. Yet the vessel of the still life cannot replace the habitat. A flower can be represented or possessed—but its ecological relationships cannot be taken into the vase with it.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

What people most want to preserve because of its beauty can be endangered precisely by that desire.

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COMMON POPPY / CORN POPPY

Papaver rhoeas L.



BOTANY

The common poppy belongs to the poppy family (Papaveraceae). This annual plant prefers open and disturbed soils and for centuries was a characteristic companion of traditionally cultivated cereal fields. Its red petals are exceptionally thin and translucent. The flower combines intense colour with extreme fragility.

HISTORY

Poppies have accompanied agriculture for millennia. In the twentieth century, the red field poppy acquired an additional meaning as a symbol of remembrance for those who died in the First World War—particularly through John McCrae's 1915 poem *In Flanders Fields*. The flower became an image of collective memory.

MAGIC AND MYTH

Since antiquity, poppies have been associated with sleep, dream, death and fertility. In Greek and Roman iconography they appear in connection with Demeter/Ceres and with Hypnos/Somnus. These traditions, however, often refer to poppies in general or to *Papaver somniferum* and should not automatically be treated as species-specific evidence for *Papaver rhoeas*.

This distinction is important to the archive: cultural memory often works with images of plants more broadly than botanical taxonomy does.

MEDICINE

Corn poppy has traditionally been used, among other purposes, for its mildly calming properties. Pharmacologically, however, it must be clearly distinguished from opium poppy and its opium alkaloids.

PHARMACY

Papaver rhoeas contains various alkaloids and other secondary plant compounds whose pharmacological properties have been investigated. The crucial point remains: corn poppy is not opium poppy.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Precisely the red—the colour through which the corn poppy is most strongly remembered culturally—is withdrawn in the painting. Viewers supply it themselves. At the same time, the ornamented surroundings lead the plant into another form of archive. Botanical form becomes pattern and repetition.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The image investigates how a colour can become a carrier of collective memory.

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NARROW-LIPPED HELLEBORINE

Epipactis leptochila (Godfery) Godfery



BOTANY

The narrow-lipped helleborine belongs to the orchid family. It grows mainly in calcareous beech and mixed forests. As with other orchids, its life is closely connected to fungi. The tiny orchid seeds possess very few nutrient reserves of their own and depend on suitable fungal partners during development. The visible plant body is therefore only one part of a much larger network of relationships.

HISTORY

The narrow-lipped helleborine itself does not possess a major independent cultural history. It does, however, belong within the millennia-old cultural history of orchids. The distinction between the history of a species and the history of a plant family remains important.

MAGIC AND MYTH

The ancient association of orchids with sexuality and fertility relates especially to species with conspicuous paired tubers. Dioscorides records corresponding ideas concerning *Orchis*. These must not be transferred species-specifically to *Epipactis leptochila*.

In the helleborine, however, a real form of the hidden takes the place of the historical idea of magical plant power: mycorrhiza. A substantial part of its existence depends on fungi and exchange processes taking place in the soil and remaining largely invisible to us.

MEDICINE

There is no established modern medicinal use for *Epipactis leptochila*.

PHARMACY

The species is not a recognised herbal medicinal substance of the European Medicines Agency.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The restrained appearance of the helleborine resists the popular image of the spectacular orchid. The painting demands slow looking. Precisely what is inconspicuous becomes the focus of attention. The plant appears between a suggested curtain or ornamental enclosure reminiscent of nineteenth-century visual language. The root network essential to its existence remains invisible.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

What was once imagined as a plant's hidden power appears today in another form—as a real network of relationships.

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Further reading: scientific literature on orchid mycorrhiza as the basis of the relationship between the visible plant and the invisible fungal network.

TURK'S-CAP LILY

Lilium martagon L.



BOTANY

The Turk's-cap lily belongs to the lily family (Liliaceae). Its nodding flowers have strongly recurved tepals, while stamens and style project far beyond the flower. This morphology creates an extraordinary spatial tension: the flower draws its floral segments back while simultaneously exposing its reproductive organs.

HISTORY

The German name *Türkenbund* and the English name "Turk's-cap lily" refer to the historical perception of the recurved flower as resembling a turban. The name therefore tells us not only something about the plant. It also tells us something about the cultural images of the people who named it.

MAGIC AND MYTH

Lilies are among the most mythologically significant flowers in European cultural history. In Greek traditions, lilies are associated with Hera. In later Christian iconography, the white lily in particular became an attribute of Mary and a sign of purity and the Annunciation. This general lily iconography, however, must not be presented directly as a specific mythology of *Lilium martagon*.

Dioscorides describes lilies and their medicinal uses; here too, caution is required when equating historical names with present-day species. In *Lilium martagon*, the particularly interesting mythopoetic layer lies in the name itself: the plant wears a turban because people saw a turban in its form.

MEDICINE

Various lily species were used medicinally in the past. For *Lilium martagon*, however, there is no established modern medicinal indication that can be derived from these traditions.

PHARMACY

The genus *Lilium* is the subject of phytochemical research. *Lilium martagon* is not an established herbal medicinal substance of the European Medicines Agency.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The unusual floral morphology becomes the movement of the image. Recurving and projecting, protection and exposure occur simultaneously. The flower appears almost like a choreographic gesture. Instead of an assumed fallen blossom on the suggested cloth, a wave-shaped shell lies there. Within the vase itself, curving lines formally echo the flower.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The Turk's-cap lily makes something visible: plant names, too, are archives. They preserve not only botanical information, but historical perceptions and cultural images.

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WATER CLOVER AND SERPENTINE SPLEENWORT

Marsilea quadrifolia L. & *Asplenium foreziense* Le Grand ex Magnier



BOTANY

Two ferns, two almost opposing habitats: *Marsilea quadrifolia*, the water clover, is tied to water and periodically flooded areas; *Asplenium foreziense*, the serpentine spleenwort, primarily inhabits rocky, siliceous sites. In the image, water and rock, flooding and drought, four-part leaf form and the classical fern frond thus encounter one another.

Water clover belongs to the family Marsileaceae. Despite its clover-like appearance, it is not a clover but a fern. Its long-stalked leaves usually consist of four fan-shaped leaflets. It grows in shallow waters, along pond margins and on muddy surfaces that may periodically flood and later dry out again. In Austria, this rare aquatic fern is now found at only a few sites.

Marsilea quadrifolia is remarkably adapted to these changing conditions. Depending on the water level, its long-stalked leaves may rise above damp soil or float on the surface of the water. Underground, the plant spreads through creeping rhizomes. One of its most extraordinary survival strategies, however, lies in its sporocarps. These small, hard, brown and initially inconspicuous structures contain the reproductive organs. They protect the spores from unfavourable environmental conditions and can survive periods of drought. Only when suitable conditions return—especially after renewed access to water—can reproduction continue.

The sporocarp is therefore more than a botanical peculiarity. It is a kind of biological time archive: outwardly, almost nothing is visible in the present, while within it the possibility of future life is preserved.

Asplenium foreziense belongs to the spleenwort family (Aspleniaceae) and inhabits mainly rocky, siliceous sites. Its more conventionally fern-like fronds contrast with the clover-like appearance of *Marsilea*. The pairing of the two species brings together very different ways of living and makes visible the extraordinary adaptability of ferns.

HISTORY

Ferns belong to some of the oldest groups of vascular plants on Earth. Their evolutionary history reaches far back before the emergence of flowering plants. They reproduce through spores rather than flowers or seeds. Their form therefore carries a memory extending far beyond human history.

Water clover occupies a particular position within this history. Its four-part leaves repeatedly caused it to be perceived as a clover, although botanically it belongs to an entirely different group of plants. This resemblance makes visible how comparable forms can emerge along different evolutionary paths.

In botanical collections and florilegia, ferns were especially valued for their differentiated leaf structures. Their fronds offered opportunities to represent rhythm, repetition and branching, linking natural-historical observation with ornamental design.

MAGIC AND MYTH

For centuries, ferns have been associated with ideas of the hidden. Because they produce no visible flowers or seeds, their reproduction long remained mysterious. European narrative traditions therefore developed myths of an invisible fern flower or mysterious “fern seed” capable of granting special powers.

Biologically, this folklore is particularly revealing precisely because ferns produce neither flowers nor seeds, but spores. A scientific gap in knowledge became a space for myth.

Water clover adds another layer through its resemblance to four-leaf clover. Its leaf structure visually activates ideas of luck, protection and the rare find. Yet the plant simultaneously undermines this attribution: what looks like clover is a fern. For *Marsilea quadrifolia*, four leaflets are not an exceptional mutation but its ordinary form.

Popular culture extends this numerical symbolism still further. In Black Clover, the familiar symbolism of the four-leaf clover is transformed by the imaginary fifth leaf: the sign of luck becomes a sign of despair, demonic power and resistance to magic. The plant itself does not change; what changes is the meaning human beings attach to its form.

What appears rare acquires meaning. What escapes the eye is narrated. And what is narrated can completely transform the meaning of a plant form.

MEDICINE

Various species of the genus *Asplenium* have been used regionally in folk medicine. Such uses cannot simply be transferred to *Asplenium foreziense*.

Marsilea quadrifolia has likewise been used in different regional healing traditions. These accounts document ethnomedical knowledge; they are not equivalent to evidence of clinically established efficacy.

FOOD, ETHNOMEDICINE AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

For *Marsilea quadrifolia*, ethnobotanical reports from South Asia document its use as a leafy vegetable and in local healing practices. In Jharkhand, West Bengal and Bangladesh the plant is known as Sushni or Sushni Saag. A study by Soni and Singh describes its collection, sale in local markets and use as food within communities around Jaduguda in Jharkhand.

The study also records a wide range of local ethnomedicinal applications. These reports must be understood as documentation of traditional practice rather than as proof of clinical efficacy. Soni and Singh themselves call for further phytochemical, pharmacological and nutritional investigation.

The plant also has a concrete economic dimension. The market survey documented Sushni Saag as a source of income, particularly for women: 24 of the 36 vendors recorded in the study were women. The authors therefore connect conservation not only with species protection, but also with sustainable use, local economies and the recognition and preservation of Indigenous knowledge.

FROM MARSILEA QUADRIFOLIA TO NARDOO

A second and clearly distinct story leads to Australia. It concerns not *Marsilea quadrifolia*, but the related species *Marsilea drummondii*—Nardoo. Its sporocarps were processed as food by Australian Aboriginal communities.

Nardoo became particularly well known through the Burke and Wills expedition of 1860–1861. The story is remarkable because the sporocarps can provide starchy food, while *Marsilea drummondii* may also exhibit high activity of the enzyme thiaminase. Thiaminase interferes with the availability of thiamine (vitamin B1). Traditional Indigenous processing techniques made Nardoo usable as food; the European expedition members apparently did not fully understand or adopt this knowledge. Severe vitamin B1 deficiency has therefore been discussed as one possible major factor in their physical decline.

The two stories must not be confused botanically: Sushni is *Marsilea quadrifolia*; Nardoo here is *Marsilea drummondii*. Taken together, however, they demonstrate something crucial: a plant cannot be understood through its chemical constituents alone. Knowledge of when it is collected, which part is used and how it is processed is equally decisive.

PHARMACY

Neither of the two species depicted has an established herbal medicinal-product monograph of the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Traditional experiential knowledge,

ethnobotanical application, phytochemical evidence and evidence-based medicinal efficacy are different forms of knowledge about a plant.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The two ferns enter into a visual dialogue through their contrasting forms. The classical branching fern frond meets the four-part, clover-like leaf. Their juxtaposition brings different ecological worlds into the same pictorial space: rock and water, dryness and flooding, visible growth and hidden reproductive structures.

The composition turns botanical difference into a field of relationships. The plants are not isolated specimens. Their forms connect with ornament, fabric, vessels and the spatial order of the still life. The distinction between botanical observation and cultural pattern becomes permeable.

The water clover is especially significant in this respect. Its four leaflets look like a familiar sign of luck, yet botanically they belong to a fern. What the eye believes it recognises is immediately unsettled by knowledge.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The Florilegical Narration of the water clover begins with an apparent contradiction. It looks like clover but is a fern. Its four leaflets evoke a rare symbol of luck, although for this plant the number four is completely ordinary. Ferns, in turn, were historically associated with an invisible seed, even though they form no seeds at all.

Its sporocarp opens another dimension. It is a capsule of the future. Outwardly inconspicuous, it preserves the possibility of later life. Only when particular environmental conditions return is this stored potential activated. Cultural knowledge can function in a similar way: it too must be preserved, transmitted and applied under the right conditions.

The story of Nardoo makes dramatically visible that survival is not only biological but relational. It depends on plants and water, climate and habitat—but equally on observation, experience, communication and memory.

What must be preserved so that life can be passed on?

Not only the species. Not only the seed or spore. Above all, the knowledge of relationships.

The magical idea of the invisible fern seed and the real sporocarp meet at an unexpected point: both tell of something initially inconspicuous or hidden that nevertheless carries a future within it. The four-leaf symbol of luck changes meaning as well. The real stroke of luck is not finding a rare four-leaf clover. It is that plant, habitat and knowledge are able to persist.

The painting thus becomes another archive: a place in which botanical knowledge, Aboriginal ecological knowledge, European plant magic, ecological endangerment, ornament and personal memory are held simultaneously—not as a closed story, but as relationships that can continually be read anew.

Black Clover adds a contemporary pop-cultural transformation. Plant forms do not exist only within botanical systems. They migrate through folk belief, mythology, literature, images and

popular culture, accumulating new meanings. The actual rarity ultimately lies elsewhere: it is not the number of leaves that becomes rare, but the habitat in which the plant can continue to exist.

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SNAKE’S-HEAD FRITILLARY / CHECKERED LILY

Fritillaria meleagris L.



BOTANY

The snake’s-head fritillary or checkered lily (*Fritillaria meleagris* L.) belongs to the lily family (Liliaceae). From a bulb it develops a slender stem with narrow, grey-green leaves and usually a single, downward-hanging, bell-shaped flower. Six similar-looking tepals form a striking bell whose purplish-red to brown-violet surface is traversed by lighter fields. This creates the regular chequered pattern that gave the plant its German name Schachbrettblume.

It is tied to wet meadows, floodplain habitats and high groundwater levels. This very dependence makes it sensitive to changes in the water regime.

In Austria, it is among the rarest plants in this series. The Red List of Ferns and Flowering Plants of Austria lists it as CR—Critically Endangered. Natural Austrian populations are concentrated in eastern Styria and southern Burgenland. In Burgenland, populations occur especially near Hagensdorf and Luisig; in Styria, the snake’s-head fritillary meadow at Großsteinbach is an important site. A historical population in Upper Austria is already extinct.

The snake’s-head fritillary thus becomes a particularly precise indicator of ecological change: if groundwater levels fall or wet meadows are drained, it disappears.

HISTORY

The scientific species name *meleagris* refers to the guineafowl (*Meleagris*), whose speckled plumage Linnaeus apparently associated with the pattern of the flower. German names such as Schachbrettblume, Schachblume and Kiebitzwei likewise arise from acts of seeing: people translate the plant’s unusual surface into familiar images.

Its Austrian history is also a history of traditional cultural landscapes. At Großsteinbach it was able to survive in extensively managed meadows. Drainage, intensive fertilisation and

changes in land management, by contrast, threaten its population. The Province of Styria explicitly notes that traditional forms of management are essential to its continued existence.

MAGIC AND MYTH

For the snake's-head fritillary, the strongest cultural narrative lies less in an unequivocal ancient myth than in its extraordinary pattern. The flower seems to possess something we usually attribute to human beings: a geometric design. Nature suddenly appears constructed. The grid—one of the most elementary human systems of order—appears on a living flower.

Caution is again necessary with Dioscorides. Pedanius Dioscorides describes various lilies and bulbous plants in *De materia medica*, but none of these historical plants can be securely equated with the modern species *Fritillaria meleagris*.

MEDICINE

The snake's-head fritillary is not a medicinal plant for self-treatment. Species of the genus *Fritillaria* contain biologically active alkaloids; at the same time, plant parts such as the bulb may contain toxic substances. Historical or pharmacological studies of other *Fritillaria* species must therefore not be transferred uncritically to *Fritillaria meleagris*.

PHARMACY

The genus *Fritillaria* is the subject of extensive pharmacological research, particularly concerning steroidal alkaloids. This does not mean that the Austrian snake's-head fritillary is an established medicinal drug.

Phytochemical relatedness is not the same as medicinal usability.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Hardly any other plant in the Austrian series connects nature and ornament so directly. The chequered pattern seems to dissolve the boundary between organic growth and human design. The flower appears at once natural and artificial, alive and constructed.

This produces a paradox: a plant with an almost impossible-to-overlook appearance can nearly disappear from a landscape.

The pattern becomes an order on an endangered surface. With a movement, the plant seems to lift a curtain away and at the same time become part of it. Perhaps it was only the beat of the butterfly's wings above it. It stands in a glass vase on a draped cloth that itself forms an ornament and integrates a fallen blossom into its pattern.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The image therefore asks a simple question:

What use is the most perfect order on a flower when the conditions of its life fall out of order?

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FEATHER PINK

Dianthus plumarius agg.



BOTANY

In Austria, the name “feather pink” encompasses a taxonomically complex group. It includes taxa whose geographical ranges are in some cases extremely restricted. The Mödling feather pink, for example, occurs only in the Mödling area; the beautiful feather pink has its range in the Totes Gebirge and the Ennstal Alps, while the Styrian feather pink occurs in Styria and Carinthia as well as in neighbouring Slovenia.

Characteristic features are the narrow, grey-green leaves and the deeply incised or “feathered” petals. The flower seems almost to dissolve at its edges. Threat status must be assessed for the respective taxon. The current Austrian Red List, for example, explicitly mentions the Hainburg feather pink in connection with the increasing shading of its rocky habitats by advancing woody vegetation.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The genus name *Dianthus* is derived from the Greek *dios* and *anthos* and is usually translated as “flower of Zeus” or “divine flower”. Over the centuries, the garden and cut carnation in particular developed into a flower with a powerful cultural charge. It could

symbolise love, fidelity, engagement and passion, and later also political affiliation, resistance and social change.

A botanical distinction is essential here: although the Hainburg feather pink belongs to the genus *Dianthus*, it is not the carnation species usually used in the political movements of European history. The famous red carnations were predominantly cultivated forms of the garden carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), or *Dianthus* forms generally used as cut flowers.

It is precisely this botanical difference that makes the cultural association interesting. The image does not show a red political carnation, but a rare wild pink. Yet through its genus it carries with it a cultural archive in which carnation, politics and resistance are interconnected.

THE POLITICAL SYMBOLISM OF THE CARNATION

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries onward, the red carnation in particular became a symbol of the workers' movement and of socialist and social-democratic movements. It was worn at demonstrations, meetings and on May Day. The flower functioned like a small, portable political sign: a living organism became a visible declaration.

Its best-known political significance, however, emerged in Portugal. On 25 April 1974, a largely bloodless military coup brought an end to the decades-long authoritarian dictatorship of the Estado Novo. The population joined the insurgent sections of the military in the streets. Red carnations were handed to soldiers and placed in the barrels of their rifles. The flower became the image of a revolution whose collective memory remains inseparable from it to this day: the Revolução dos Cravos—the Carnation Revolution.

The image of the carnation in the barrel of a rifle radically reverses the meaning of an object: where a weapon might exercise violence, there is a flower. The carnation thereby becomes an extraordinary political symbol because its fragility is not the opposite of political force. It is precisely the fragile flower that assumes the role of resistance.

For Archives of the Living, this also creates a connection to another geographical archive within the artist's own work: Portugal. Through its genus, the Austrian Hainburg feather pink carries an association that leads to the Portuguese landscape and history that play a central role in Arquivos Precários da Memória.

MAGIC AND MYTH

The carnation thus moves through very different systems of meaning. Its botanical name leads to the divine; Christian iconography connects it with love, fidelity and the Passion, while modernity politicises it.

This is particularly interesting in relation to the Hainburg feather pink. The three blossoms in the glass vase initially appear delicate, almost private. Yet within the cultural memory of the genus, the same floral form can suddenly become political.

The carnation thus demonstrates exemplarily that plants do not determine their own meanings. Human beings inscribe meanings into them, wear them on their bodies, give them to one another, place them on graves or insert them into rifle barrels. A plant can thereby

become, at the same time, a sign of love, a religious symbol, an emblem of the workers' movement and an icon of a democratic revolution.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Against this background, the three blossoms of the Hainburg feather pink in the glass vase acquire an additional tension. They are not red, and they are not the carnations of the Portuguese revolution. Precisely for this reason, the image should not be read directly as a representation of political resistance. Yet the cultural memory of the carnation is present.

The vase functions almost like a museum vessel: it isolates, protects and presents. What was carried into the streets in political movements is here situated behind a transparent boundary.

On the left, however, another movement begins. The Nosferatu spider (*Zoropsis spinimana*) attempts to cross this glass boundary. Different forms of movement thus encounter one another in the image: political movement—ecological movement—geographical expansion. The carnation carries the memory of social movements; the Nosferatu spider embodies a contemporary biogeographical movement. At the same time, both are confronted with a rare wild plant whose own habitat is becoming increasingly spatially restricted.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The Hainburg feather pink thus opens an unusually complex narrative in which two entirely different meanings of the word movement overlap. People form political movements in order to change social conditions. Species alter their ranges when ecological conditions shift.

In the image, these levels encounter one another. The Hainburg feather pink represents a plant with an extremely restricted occurrence. Its botanical kinship simultaneously activates the memory of a flower that became an international symbol of political change.

The Nosferatu spider, by contrast, comes from the edge. It moves towards the vase and belongs to those species whose distribution is currently expanding northwards. One story concerns the struggle for social space. The other concerns the struggle—or the possibility—of finding ecological space.

The spider should not, however, become a metaphor for an “invasion”. Such a reading would too quickly translate ecological change into political categories of foreignness and belonging. Far more interesting is the open question created by the encounter: Who can move when conditions change—and who remains bound to an ever-shrinking habitat?

The three feather pinks stand still in their glass vase. The spider climbs. And behind both lies the memory that a carnation was once placed in the barrel of a rifle.

The image thus connects biodiversity, migration, climate change, political history and resistance without equating these levels. Perhaps this is the decisive Florilegical Narration of the work:

A flower can lose a place. A spider can reach a new place. And a carnation can become a sign that social orders, too, are not immutable.

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COMMON CENTAURY

Centaureum erythraea Rafn



BOTANY

Common centaury belongs to the gentian family (Gentianaceae). The usually biennial plant develops an upright, branched stem and numerous small pink to purplish-pink flowers. It inhabits meadows, woodland clearings, roadsides and other open sites, among other habitats.

Centaureum erythraea is not endangered throughout Austria. In Burgenland, for example, the species is currently classified as LC—Least Concern. In other natural regions, however, the situation may be considerably less favourable. Regional threat classifications exist for the northern Alpine foreland and Upper Austria.

This makes the plant particularly interesting for Archives of the Living: endangerment has a place.

HISTORY

Hardly any plant name connects medicine and mythology so directly.

The name *Centaureum* was historically associated with the centaur Chiron, the healer and teacher of numerous heroes in Greek mythology. Through language itself, the plant thus became a plant of healing.

The German name *Tausendguldenkraut*—literally “thousand-guilder herb”—increases its supposed value still further. Through folk etymology, a “hundred”, or *centum*, eventually became a thousandfold: linguistically, the healing plant becomes priceless.

MAGIC AND MYTH

The name *Centaureum* was already associated in older botanical literature with the healing centaur Chiron. According to tradition, Chiron treated a wound with a plant called *Centaureon*. It is not possible, however, to determine with certainty which present-day botanical species lay behind ancient names such as *Centaureon*.

The centaur Chiron creates a particularly powerful connection between myth and medicine. His hybrid body—half human, half horse—stands itself between nature and culture. Chiron was regarded as a teacher of the healing arts. The plant thus becomes part of a narrative in which botanical knowledge does not originate in a modern laboratory, but is transmitted by a being who himself crosses the boundary between human and animal.

Dioscorides also discusses Kentaury plants. The historical names must, however, be connected cautiously with the modern botanical species *Centaureum erythraea*; ancient plant names do not automatically correspond to modern taxa.

MEDICINE

In the case of common centaury, the medical history is not merely legend.

The herb contains characteristic secoiridoid bitter compounds. Its pronounced bitterness led to a long tradition of use in relation to appetite and digestion.

Here, sensory experience and pharmacology meet directly:

One can taste the chemistry of the plant.

PHARMACY

Centaur is one of the traditional European bitter herbal drugs. Its constituents and extracts are the subject of phytochemical and pharmacological research. A distinction must be made between traditional use, experimentally demonstrated biological activities and clinically established efficacy.

Research addresses, among other things, secoiridoid glycosides and antioxidant or antimicrobial properties.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

In the image, the delicate appearance of common centaury meets its astonishingly extensive medical and mythological significance. The small pink flowers appear almost weightless against a bright, nearly white background. Nothing in their restrained appearance initially suggests the extraordinary value already claimed by the German name: a thousand guilders.

The plant stands in a semicircular glass vase. At first, the transparent vessel seems like a protective, almost ideal space. At the same time, its rounded form creates an unstable equilibrium. This apparent stability is disturbed by a second actor in the image: an oversized aphid has positioned itself on the vase and sets it swaying.

The proportions have deliberately been suspended. An insect normally only a few millimetres long becomes monumental and thereby acquires a power it does not possess in our everyday perception. What is ordinarily overlooked can suddenly destabilise the entire structure.

The aphid, however, is not merely a symbol. Aphids exist in real and complex ecological relationships with plants: they feed on the sugar-rich phloem sap of their host plants, can weaken plants and in some cases transmit plant viruses. At the same time, they are food for

numerous other organisms and, especially through the honeydew they excrete, enter into relationships with ants. The supposed “pest” is therefore itself part of a much larger ecological network.

The roles consequently shift within the image. It is not the human being who directly threatens the plant. Plant and insect encounter one another as two actors within a living system. Only the extreme enlargement of the aphid makes visible a relationship that normally remains below our threshold of perception.

The swaying vase extends this relationship into a contemporary Vanitas. The flowers are still upright, the glass has not yet fallen, nothing has broken. Yet the stable condition has already been suspended. The decisive moment lies between equilibrium and a possible fall.

This is precisely what distinguishes the image from the traditional Vanitas still life: transience is not represented by already wilted flowers or broken objects, but as an unstable relationship. A minimal displacement can be enough to alter an existing equilibrium.

For common centaury, the situation acquires an additional irony. A plant whose name asserts an almost immeasurable value and whose cultural history has been associated with healing knowledge and the figure of the healing centaur Chiron can be thrown off balance by a tiny living creature: value does not protect against vulnerability.

At the same time, the oversized aphid reverses the familiar human hierarchy of perception. The large does not necessarily dominate the small. A scarcely noticed organism can trigger a movement that affects the entire system.

A chain of mutual dependencies thus emerges in the image. Perhaps the decisive question is not what the plant is worth, but: How stable is a system if an apparently insignificant actor is enough to set it swaying?

The value of the plant lies neither in its size nor in its rarity. It has been inscribed into it through experience, taste, healing knowledge, language and narrative.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The plant thus poses another question to the archive:

When do we recognise the value of a plant—when it is useful to us, or only when it disappears?

How stable is a system if an apparently insignificant actor is enough to set it swaying?

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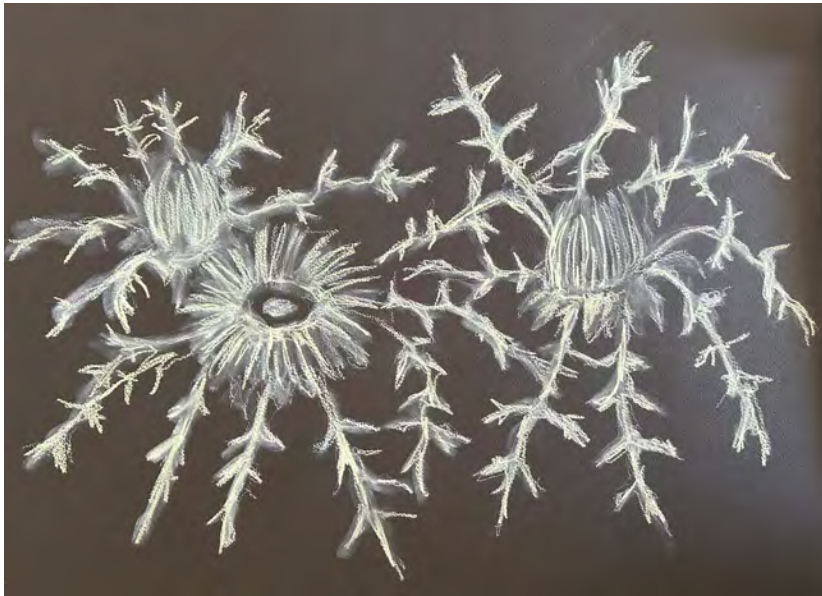
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SILVER THISTLE / WEATHER THISTLE / “HUNTER’S BREAD”

Carlina acaulis L.



BOTANY

The silver thistle belongs to the daisy family (Asteraceae). Its spiny leaves form a low rosette, at the centre of which sits a large flower head. The silvery-white inner involucral bracts create the impression of a single large flower, although numerous small tubular florets occupy the centre. Its taproot can reach deep into the soil. The species prefers warm, dry, nutrient-poor and often grazed calcareous grasslands on base-rich soils.

It is not rare or endangered throughout Austria. In many places it is still common. Regionally, however, the picture changes considerably: it is considered endangered in the Pannonian region, the northern Alpine foreland and the Bohemian Massif; the current Burgenland Red List classifies *Carlina acaulis* as VU—Vulnerable.

The name *Carlina* is probably derived, via a northern Italian dialect form (*cardelina* for the thistle-like taxon) and the goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), from the Latin word for thistle, *carduus*.

HISTORY

The silver thistle is a plant of reading. People observed that its involucral bracts respond to atmospheric humidity. In dry weather they open; as humidity rises, they close over the flower head. This gave rise to the name “weather thistle”.

Before meteorological data appeared on displays, a plant could become a weather indicator from which people read atmospheric changes. Its silvery-white involucral bracts respond to changes in humidity: as moisture increases, they curve inward and close protectively over the flower head. This hygroscopic response led to the vernacular name *Wetterdistel*. The plant does not actually predict the weather; rather, its tissue responds directly to changing

environmental conditions. Human observation of this reaction turned it into a biological weather indicator.

A second historical name refers to the plant's use as food. The fleshy receptacle was eaten and used in a manner similar to an artichoke. Regional names such as Jägerbrot or Jagerbrot—"hunter's bread"—derive from this practice.

The Gestapo had taken over my grandmother's apartment in Maribor. The doors had to remain open. They laughed as they told one another about the most horrific crimes they had committed. My grandmother refused to give the Hitler salute, cooked enormous pots of food and brought it to people in prison.

One morning she too was deported—after her son, who had contracted polio, had been taken away and brutally murdered at the regional hospital in Leoben, something that, incidentally, has still not been properly addressed in Austria. She begged to be allowed to cook for the people in the cattle wagon—babies separated from their mothers, elderly people. Five times she was escorted; on the sixth occasion she escaped.

For two weeks she made her way through the forest in hiding. Because her mother had been a midwife and herbal specialist who supplied entire villages in the surrounding area with natural remedies, she knew that one could eat Jägerbrot in the forest, even though it was not enough to satisfy hunger. Nevertheless, she survived—and that is why I am able to tell this story.

MAGIC AND MYTH

Carlina is associated with the so-called Charlemagne legend. In different versions, Charlemagne—or an angel—is said to have pointed to the plant as a remedy against an epidemic. Botanically, this story of the name is not unequivocally established. As a cultural-historical narrative, however, it demonstrates how plants became connected with rulership, divine intervention and healing.

According to the legend, an angel appeared to Charlemagne in a dream and showed him the silver thistle as an effective remedy against the plague.

The weather thistle also possesses something almost oracular. Its movement seems to predict future weather. Of course, it does not prophesy. It responds. Yet precisely this response was culturally read as a sign.

MEDICINE

The aromatic rhizome or root was used in folk medicine. The receptacle is also edible, which gave the plant regional names such as Jägerbrot. Historical applications must be distinguished from modern medical evidence.

PHARMACY

Carlina acaulis contains various essential-oil constituents and other bioactive compounds and is the subject of phytochemical research. Today, however, it does not have the status of an established European herbal medicinal drug comparable, for example, to arnica.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The three silver thistles appear almost like white suns against the black ground.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

Its history demonstrates particularly clearly that traditional knowledge of plants could arise from close observation. The weather thistle is therefore not merely an object of human knowledge. It measures its environment itself.

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UPRIGHT CLEMATIS

Clematis recta L.



BOTANY

Upright clematis (*Clematis recta* L.) belongs to the buttercup family (Ranunculaceae). The specific epithet *recta* comes from Latin and means “upright”, because unlike most other clematis species, this species does not climb but grows as an upright perennial. Its very habit disrupts the expectation evoked by its genus name. While many clematis species climb, *Clematis recta* grows herbaceously and largely upright. Numerous small white flowers form loose inflorescences. The oppositely arranged leaves are imparipinnate, with five to nine leaflets, and are about 20 centimetres long. The species prefers warm, open fringes, dry and semi-dry grasslands, open scrub and woodland edges. Its origins lie in Eastern Europe.

According to the current Austrian Red List, it is classified as NT—Near Threatened; a recent Lower Austrian study likewise gives NT for the Pannonian region. It is therefore not acutely threatened with extinction, but is already in a category that requires attention. In Styria, upright clematis is also explicitly listed in the provincial species-protection regulation.

HISTORY

The name *Clematis* derives from Greek and referred to twining or climbing plants. *Recta*, by contrast, means straight or upright. The scientific name therefore already contains a tension: an upright climbing plant. The species resists the expectation of its own genus. *Clematis recta* was first published by Carl Linnaeus in *Species Plantarum* in 1753.

MAGIC AND MYTH

Clematis species have a long history in folklore. Their twining forms, which attach themselves to other plants, have been associated with binding, entwining and movement. In *Clematis recta*, however, this symbolism is disrupted. It does not need to climb in the same way. For Florilegical Narration, it is precisely this botanical difference that becomes interesting: a plant belongs to a group but does not fully conform to the image we have of

that group. Historical uses of the name *Clematis* cannot be equated with present-day *Clematis recta* without taxonomic examination.

MEDICINE

Like other members of the buttercup family, the fresh plant contains irritating substances. Traditional uses of clematis therefore cannot be equated with safe modern medicinal-plant use. The plant is an old folk medicinal plant, formerly valued for its acrid constituents such as protoanemonin.

The “beggar’s herb” trick: fresh plant sap strongly irritates the skin and produces artificial blisters. In earlier centuries, upright clematis was therefore reportedly misused by some beggars to simulate skin diseases and arouse pity. Once dried, however, the plant loses its irritating effect. *Clematis recta* continues to be used in homeopathy, including for skin and mucous-membrane irritations. All parts of the fresh plant are poisonous; dried plant material is described as having lost the toxic irritant compounds. Principal constituents cited in older literature include protoanemonin, anemonin and anemonol.

PHARMACY

The genus *Clematis* has been pharmacologically investigated because of various secondary plant compounds. *Clematis recta*, however, is not an established European herbal medicinal substance comparable to arnica or centaury.

Here, the pharmacological gap is as much a part of the archive as the knowledge that is available.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Upright clematis introduces a movement into the series that at first appears unspectacular: it grows upward. Yet precisely this is its particularity. While many of its relatives twine, hold on and use other plants or structures for support, *Clematis recta* lives up to its name: it stands by itself. Its small white flowers give it an almost fragile lightness that contrasts with the determined verticality of its growth.

In the image, this relationship is intensified. The plant rises from a vase far too small to seem capable of carrying its body. The vessel offers support and at the same time appears inadequate—as though the balance could be lost at any moment. The proportions of the image likewise refuse a realistic order. In the left foreground, an oversized aphid appears, moving towards the plant. Plant, vase and insect bear no plausible relation of scale to one another.

This displacement is deliberate: what normally remains tiny and almost invisible suddenly acquires a threatening presence; what ought to provide support appears too small; and yet the fragile plant maintains its upright position. The image therefore plays not only with botanical proportions but with a more comprehensive condition of imbalance. Familiar measures come apart. Small and large, fragile and threatening, support and lack of support reverse their accustomed relationships.

Amid this unstable order, the clematis remains upright. Its verticality therefore appears less as a botanical characteristic than as a form of assertion: it stands even though the conditions around it are no longer right.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

In Archives of the Living, *Clematis recta* can therefore embody another form of endangerment. It is not only imminent disappearance that matters. Near Threatened is already a story. It describes the moment in which a plant is still present, yet changes have already become visible.

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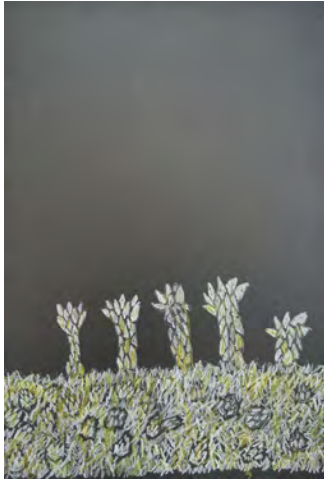
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GLOBULAR HOUSELEEK / SHORT-HAIRED GLOBULAR FRINGED HOUSELEEK

Sempervivum globiferum subsp. *hirtum* (L.) 't Hart & Bleij

Syn.: *Jovibarba globifera* subsp. *hirta* (L.) J. Parn.



BOTANY

The short-haired globular fringed houseleek belongs to the stonecrop family (Crassulaceae). It is a perennial succulent whose fleshy leaves are arranged in compact rosettes. These leaves can store water—an essential prerequisite for survival in dry, sunny and rocky habitats.

Its vegetative reproduction is particularly characteristic. Small spherical daughter rosettes develop beside the mother rosette. They sit relatively loosely on short runners, can detach and take root again at some distance from the parent plant. The plant therefore does not spread exclusively by seed: an already developed small plant body can detach itself, leave its original location and continue living elsewhere.

This form of reproduction is particularly significant for Florilegical Narration. Separation does not necessarily mean loss. Detachment is the prerequisite for transmission and new growth.

The name currently accepted by Plants of the World Online of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is *Sempervivum globiferum* subsp. *hirtum*. *Jovibarba globifera* subsp. *hirta*, under which the plant also appears in Austrian botanical and conservation sources, is treated there as a synonym. Its natural range extends from northern Italy through Austria to the north-western Balkans.

The short-haired fringed houseleek is included in Austrian sources on threatened plants. Austrian botanical and conservation literature also lists it under *Jovibarba globifera* subsp. *hirta*. It occurs in several Austrian federal states; in Carinthia, for example, it is explicitly included in the plant species-protection regulation. For Burgenland, *Jovibarba globifera* (subsp. *hirta*) is classified in the 2022 Red List as VU—Vulnerable, with still higher threat

levels reported regionally. This is, however, a province-specific assessment and must not be equated with a nationwide Austrian threat category.

HISTORY

Houseleeks have accompanied European cultural history for centuries. Their ability to survive on rocks, walls and roofs under extreme conditions made them plants of the house and of protection. Theophrastus already described houseleek growing on walls and roof tiles in the fourth century BCE.

A particularly remarkable reference appears in the early Middle Ages. The so-called *Capitulare de villis vel curtis imperii*, a Carolingian ordinance on royal estates dating from around 800, sets out in detail which useful and medicinal plants were to be cultivated on royal properties. The work is traditionally associated with Charlemagne, although its dating and direct authorship remain debated in historical scholarship.

At the end of the extensive plant list in Chapter 70 appears an unusual instruction: “Et ille hortulanus habeat super domum suam Jovis barbam.” In essence: the gardener should have “Jupiter’s beard” on his house. Jovis barba, or Jupiter’s beard, has been associated with houseleek in historical botanical literature.

What is remarkable is the explicitly specified location: the plant was not simply to grow in the garden, but on the roof of the house. The instruction therefore connects plant cultivation and architecture. Houseleek becomes a plant at the boundary between nature and built space. It grows where the house itself ends and the sky begins.

Later folkloric traditions associate roof-growing houseleek with protection against lightning and storms. The name “Jupiter’s beard” reinforces this relationship: in Roman mythology Jupiter was, among other things, ruler of the sky, lightning and thunder. Corresponding German-language names such as Donnerbart and Donarsbart developed.

The *Capitulare de villis* is therefore particularly interesting for the history of houseleek. A plant whose actual botanical particularity lies in its exceptional resistance to drought and difficult sites acquires an additional cultural function of protection. From the observed ability of the plant to survive even on an exposed roof developed the idea that it might also protect the house and its inhabitants.

Plants of this group were cultivated on roofs and associated with protecting the home. A close relationship thus emerged between plant, architecture and the human need for safety.

MAGIC AND MYTH

Hardly any characteristic has shaped the cultural perception of houseleek as strongly as its ability to remain alive where other plants would dry out. On walls and roofs it became a protective plant. Houseleeks were associated with protection from fire, storms and, in particular, lightning.

Names such as Donarsbart or Donnerbart likewise point to this mythological charge. The plant was associated with Donar or Thor, the Germanic god of thunder. The botanical name

Jovibarba opens a related world of imagery: it can be read as “Jupiter’s beard”, connecting the plant with Jupiter, the Roman god of sky and weather.

A small succulent plant is thus symbolically connected with the most powerful phenomena of the sky: lightning, thunder and fire. This creates an interesting relationship between a real plant characteristic and cultural projection. Houseleek is indeed exceptionally resistant to drought. From this observable ability to survive developed a much more extensive idea of protection.

Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) quotes an 1883 herbal book with the saying, “Wer die Hauswurz hält in Ehren, kann so manche Übel verwehren”—roughly, “Whoever honours the houseleek can ward off many an ill”—pointing to the long persistence of the idea of houseleek as a protective and medicinal plant.

MEDICINE

Houseleeks have a long history of use in folk medicine. Traditionally, the juice of the fleshy leaves in particular was applied externally, for example to skin complaints, minor injuries or insect bites.

Historical accounts of medicinally used houseleeks must, however, be treated with taxonomic caution. Old plant names cannot automatically be assigned to *Sempervivum globiferum* subsp. *hirtum*. Plants described by Pedanius Dioscorides and other ancient authors should therefore be equated with modern species only where such identification is sufficiently supported botanically and philologically. Historical texts are significant as evidence of early plant knowledge, not as proof of modern medical efficacy.

PHARMACY

Traditional use of houseleeks must be distinguished from a pharmacologically or clinically recognised medicinal application today. There is no established herbal medicinal-product monograph of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) for *Sempervivum globiferum* subsp. *hirtum*. Research on constituents or biological effects of various *Sempervivum* species must likewise not be transferred to this subspecies without qualification.

Inherited experiential knowledge, ethnobotanical application, phytochemical evidence and evidence-based medicinal efficacy are different forms of knowledge about a plant.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

The image shows five mother rosettes on a natural ground that does not allow a clear distinction between meadow and daughter rosettes. Formally, the globular houseleek already differs markedly from the tall, upright plants in other works of the Austrian series. Its form is organised not through verticality but through concentration: leaves cluster around a centre, rosettes repeat, and small plant bodies emerge beside larger ones. Growth therefore appears not as a linear movement upwards, but as multiplication.

The daughter rosettes are decisive. What initially appears as an ornamental repetition of the same form is biologically already the possibility of a new, independent life. Particularly in drawing, this repetition can shift between botanical precision and ornament. Circle, rosette,

repetition and deviation render the boundary between scientific plant observation and cultural pattern-making permeable.

FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The Florilegical Narration of the globular houseleek begins with an apparently simple botanical characteristic: its ability to survive. For Archives of the Living, this shift is central: a botanical capacity is observed, retold and ultimately becomes magic.

The spherical daughter rosettes in particular transform the meaning of survival. The plant does not preserve itself by keeping everything in its original place. It survives precisely because a part of it detaches. This can be described as a botanical process. At the same time, it opens a much larger narrative about relationship and memory: what is passed on does not have to remain at its point of origin in order to remain connected to it. The daughter rosette carries its origin within itself and nevertheless becomes an independent organism.

In this respect, the globular houseleek differs in an interesting way from the water clover. There, the sporocarp preserves the possibility of future life through unfavourable periods. Here, the future is made possible through detachment and spatial change. The archive therefore does not appear as a static store. It can detach, migrate and continue living elsewhere.

This is precisely what makes the globular houseleek such a concise plant for Archives of the Living: preservation does not necessarily mean holding on. Sometimes the prerequisite for continuing to exist is precisely to let something go.

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FROM THE FLORILEGIUM TO FLORILEGICAL NARRATION

The Austrian body of work in Archives of the Living brings plants together not as isolated botanical portraits, but as carriers of different relationships between nature, human knowledge, memory and cultural attribution. Each plant opens its own Florilegical Narration.

Arnica stands for the paradox of healing and vulnerability: a plant used by people for centuries to treat injuries is itself dependent on sensitive habitats. The distorted kitchen setting connects inherited healing knowledge with a present whose ecological order has fallen out of balance.

Bee Orchid addresses resemblance and projection. Its flower recalls an insect body, while the history of orchids is shaped by human ideas about sexuality and fertility. It shows how strongly perception and knowledge depend on what people believe they recognise in a plant.

Edelweiss makes visible how a real plant becomes a cultural sign. Love, courage, Alpine identity, tourism, popular culture and political memory have been layered over the organism. Florilegical Narration therefore leads from the emblem back to the plant and asks what remains visible of it behind all these projections.

Gentian connects ancient medicinal knowledge with Alpine identity and, at the same time, with the limits of our knowledge. Because the precise species in the work has not been determined, botanical uncertainty itself becomes part of the archive: not knowing, too, may remain visible.

Shadbush crosses geographical systems of order. It appears in both the Austrian and Portuguese archives. Through the name Shadbush, it connects flowering, season, water and fish migration. It asks whether a plant can really “belong” to a country at all—or rather to the relationships through which it lives.

Lady’s-slipper Orchid connects beauty with desire and endangerment. Its name turns the flower into Aphrodite’s slipper, while its biology points to pollination, deception and invisible fungal relationships. What people particularly wish to possess and preserve may be endangered precisely by that desire.

Common Poppy turns colour into a repository of collective memory. Its fragile red flower connects agricultural landscapes with ideas of sleep and death and, ultimately, with remembrance of those who died in the First World War. In the painting, precisely this red is reduced and must be remembered by the viewers.

Narrow-lipped Helleborine directs attention towards the invisible. Its survival is connected with underground fungal relationships. What was once imagined as mysterious or magical plant power appears here as a real ecological network of relationships.

Turk's-cap Lily shows that plant names are already archives of cultural perception. The recurved form of the flower was read as a turban and named accordingly. Florilegical Narration thus examines how people interpret plants through the images of their own culture.

Water Clover connects the symbolism of luck, ecological endangerment, food, ethnomedical and Indigenous knowledge, and popular culture. Its sporocarp becomes a biological archive that preserves future life. Yet the decisive point is this: it is not the fourth leaf that is rare—the plant, its habitat and perhaps also the knowledge surrounding it are becoming rare.

Serpentine Spleenwort leads to the historical boundary of the visible. Because people could see neither flowers nor seeds on ferns, stories arose about magical fern seed. Florilegical Narration thus shows how myth can emerge from a gap in knowledge—and how scientific understanding does not simply erase older narratives, but makes them newly readable.

Snake's-head Fritillary connects nature and ornament. Its geometric floral pattern seems almost artificially ordered while the conditions required for its life are increasingly falling out of order. The central question is: What use is the most perfect order on a flower if the habitat that makes it possible disappears?

Hainburg Feather Pink connects spatial restriction with political and cultural movement. Through the carnation, the rare wild plant activates memories of love, the workers' movement and the Portuguese Carnation Revolution. The range-expanding Nosferatu spider sets an opposing ecological movement beside it: the plant remains bound to a small habitat while the spider reaches new spaces.

Common Centaury connects healing knowledge, the Chiron myth and the idea of an almost priceless vegetal value. In the image, an oversized aphid sets the vase swaying. Vulnerability thereby becomes visible as a relationship: even an apparently insignificant actor can destabilise an entire system. Value does not protect against vulnerability.

Silver Thistle / Weather Thistle connects observation, survival and personal memory. Its response to atmospheric humidity made it a vegetal weather indicator; its edible receptacle became "hunter's bread". In the personal family history, this knowledge becomes existential: plant knowledge can become survival knowledge. The plant therefore preserves ecological, cultural and biographical memory at the same time.

Upright Clematis tells of assertion and unstable equilibrium. Although its surroundings in the image have fallen out of proportion through a vase that is too small and an oversized aphid, the plant remains upright. At the same time, its Near Threatened status makes clear that an ecological story does not begin only when disappearance is immediately imminent.

Globular Houseleek turns survival into a story of letting go. Its daughter rosettes can detach from the mother plant and continue growing elsewhere. Historical ideas of protection from lightning, fire and harm thereby connect with a biological strategy of persistence. The archive does not appear as a static repository: what is to be preserved must sometimes leave its place of origin.

Together, these plants shift the historical florilegium from collecting and depicting towards Florilegical Narration. Plant, myth, scientific knowledge, healing knowledge, politics, popular

culture, personal memory and ecological relationship form a living archive. The central question is therefore not only: Which plants are disappearing? It is equally: Which relationships, stories and forms of knowledge disappear