

# Showpark

Eva Yurková



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# The Pussy Willows

On Easter Sunday the men of the family gather to collect willow branches. At this time of year, the willow tree has just sprouted. Before growing new leaves, there are little hairy tufts on the surface of its branches. At this stage, the branches are called pussy willows. They only appear for a very short time in the spring, but they grow abundantly around my hometown.

Once the twigs have been collected, they need to be processed and prepared. The hairy tufts must be cut off with a knife and the branches cleaned up. In my family, this act takes the form of a gathering around the campfire. The men in the family weave the twigs into pom-poms, and pass on the methods to the young boys at the same time. The twigs are plaited into braids approximately one meter long with a handle and an ending. The length and thickness of the pom-pom is a matter of taste. Each one of these details will affect the way it functions, when you use it to whip a woman. The tighter you make the whip, the more painful it will be. The general belief is, that the more the whipping hurts, the healthier the woman will be in the coming year.

As a gesture of gratitude women should, among other things, give the boys ribbons to attach to the end of their pom-poms. The ribbons should be there to counteract the roughness of the whipping. However, young boys attach them as a memento of the particular girl they have whipped. The older men usually do not attach the ribbons to their whips.

On Easter Sunday, while the men are braiding pom-poms, the women stay at home and prepare the house for visitors on Easter Monday. The home should be tidy and have something to offer. All the women in the household should help to clean and dye Easter eggs.

On Monday, the men will visit the women they know in order to give them a whipping. If the doorbell rings, you have to open the door. It would be considered rude not to answer if you are at home. In any case, you can refuse to let someone in that you are not familiar with.

Men usually come in groups. Sometimes they are a group of classmates. Sometimes they are friends. Mostly they come as members of the same family.

The act of whipping itself creates a socially awkward situation. You can either just bend over and offer your behind, or you run around and attempt a futile escape.

While the men whip your butt, they recite a poem that roughly translates as:

Feast, feast, feast,  
give the painted egg.  
If you don't give a painted one...,  
...at least give a white one,  
the hen will lay another one.

As a matter of rule, the man must receive a painted egg in exchange for his action. In addition, boys usually receive sweets and money, and adult men a shot of schnapps. The tradition of Easter eggs originates from Christianity and symbolizes new life and the resurrection of Jesus. All other parts of this tradition, as done in my country, are rooted in paganism.

The execution of this tradition varies slightly depending on which region you are in. However, regardless of the place, the entire spectacle must end at noon. After that, no one is allowed to give a whipping anymore. In some areas, women may take revenge on men after 12 o'clock by pouring ice cold water over them. In the region where I grew up, this is not the custom. The moment the clock strikes, it is done and the tradition is over for another year.



Tulips, Oil on wood, 110 x 140 cm, 2022

Traditions and similar narratives have always played a key role in mediating social events and family gatherings. It only occurred to me, how fundamentally these traditions had influenced my own understanding of culture, when I moved away from my home country. The awareness of their impact came up gradually, as these narratives began to infiltrate my work. In particular, I found that my works have been strongly reflective of the tradition of the Easter whipping. Despite my deep disregard for this tradition, it has always been a very important ritual for my family and thus has occupied a pivotal place in my life as well.



My memories are tightly interwoven with plants. They are instrumental in my mapping of personal memories and events. Their familiarity creates a visual context to the most prevailing recollections of home to me.

The geranium on the window sills in my home district. The huge Monstera at the foot of my bed. Little onion flowers on a plate at my grandma's Sunday lunch.

The impulse to commune with nature rises during times of great uncertainty. At times of crisis, plants begin to act as a grounding element. They simulate an utterly safe and comfortable environment. Nature enables me to build and cultivate a reality of my own. I almost see this as a form of escapism — a place where I can reside when given reality seems elusive and incomprehensible.

Whenever I start thinking of my works as immersive landscapes, the hierarchy of objects in the works changes. The flowers push to the forefront and the abstracted flora in my compositions begins to materialize into concrete plants. Suddenly they seem to morph into objects, just like the bodies they previously covered.

As the bodies recede into the shadows, the plants begin to take over their physical functions. They start to produce fluids from their thorns, to sweat, to bend, and to take over the emotions of idle bodies, which now barely manifest any physical functions. They are laid in the wet grass and a soft gentle voice guides them, as they melt away in a physical and mental retreat.

# Yoga for Gardeners

“Today we have a little practice to remind you that you are loved. This practice is for everyone. For the actual gardener and for the metaphorical gardener as I call it. Just planting that seed, no pun intended, you are taking the time to connect to yourself, but also to the big picture. To your community. To society. Let go of the day thus far. And really take this time for yourself to reconnect to the earth.

Bring the two knees in to kiss each other. Nice deep breaths here. Just don't worry about looking silly or feeling strange. See if you can move past that a little bit. Even if it's just an inch.

This is a very simple practice. Don't be judgmental. Be kind.

Take a deep breath in and as you exhale melt your heart to the ground. Forehead towards the earth. Gently allow your eyelids to get heavy. Close your eyes and relax.

Hands can rest gently on the belly. Inhale lots of love. As you exhale, close your eyes, lots of love out.

We're going to slowly move forward onto all fours.

Then nice and slow you are going to begin to rock the head side to side and if you see that you can, just do some gentle neck circles. Soft and easy movement here.

And for those who aren't actually gardeners or do any gardening in reality, we will take our metaphorical gardeners and we are going to do a big lion's breath. Here we go. Big roar.

Now take the time to inhale and as you exhale, lean forwards. We will take a couple quiet moments here to allow the benefits and nutrients of our practice to settle in the soil, so that when you sit up nice and tall, you can feel renewed knowing that you can evolve and grow.

One last active breath. Breath in. And exhale. We let everything go.”



Figs, linocut on paper, 70 x 50 cm, 2022

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