

Nataša Sienčnik — I, Nature

2021

Mahler Forum for Music and Society

Künstlerhaus Klagenfurt

Mahler Composing Hut, Maiernigg

July 3–4, 2021

www.mahler-forum.org

An Artist's book by

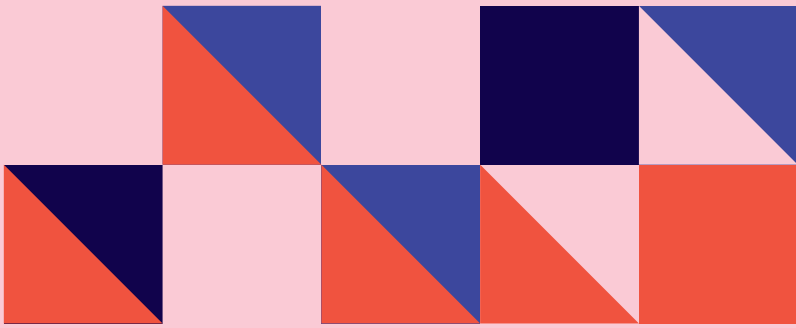
Nataša Sienčnik

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This book would not be possible without

Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein

Andreas Krištof, section.a



You keep painting my picture without asking me for permission. But do you really see me for who I am? Do you really want to know me? Throughout history it has been you, not me, asking for this relationship. I was fine. I was just fine without you. But then at some point, you were born and you developed quite beautifully. From this simple newborn creature to this complex subject. And I am proud of you, I really am.

But let us start at one of the openings we are familiar with. In the beginning there was darkness, they say. I can't remember, was it 6 days or 6 million years, time just flies for me, you know. So, then there was light. Finally, I could see. And water. Imagine, a world without water! — Or, let's imagine a world just made of water. You might be rock, or a fish, or even a whale, or a less exciting carp, but you could swim, just naturally and I would surround you like a huge bathtub.

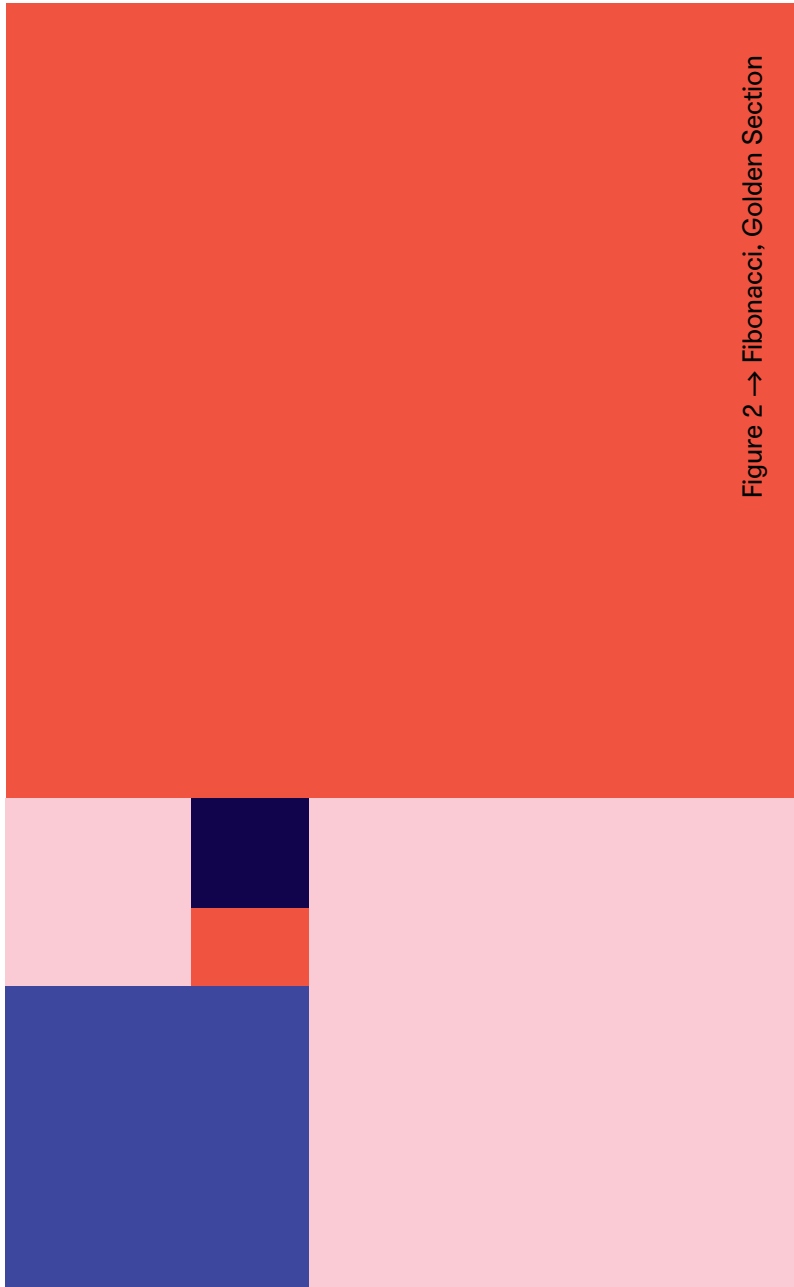
But you are not a fish, are you? Yet you are fascinated by my waters. They are indeed like mirrors. I remember that particular night, I made a beautiful storm, it was epic. And you just stood there. I think you were a monk, in front of my endless sea. You were so small, and I was bigger than I intended to be. It is difficult to say where my land ends and the water begins. These kinds of boundaries are fluid. I also wasn't sure if it was humility, powerlessness, or dignity that you felt in that very moment. Eventually I thought it was quite bold, the way you stood there, staring at me. You even made me a little faint.

Ever since, I have wanted you to take me seriously. Not just an object, a romantic idea, or some boring companion that you take for granted. I am not your secret lover, I am not your discovery. And I am not a box you can fill with whatever ideas you have that are currently in fashion. To be honest, I could be your mother for God's sake! Freud would suggest talking about Oedipus at this point. There is indeed some kind of tension between us. An unconscious desire or longing that lies in front of us. There is love the same way as there is a destroying force and defense. One could argue that our love may even be a tale of incest. I am your mother, you are my child.



Figure 1 → Caspar David Friedrich,
The Monk by the Sea (1808–10)

Figure 2 → Fibonacci, Golden Section



Or lover. Or both? But you are an adult now, so, let's talk at eye level, or sea level. Whatever suits you best.

Sometimes you call me beautiful. I do feel flattered, but then again it feels patronizing. However, you are right: everything I do is beautiful in terms of aesthetics. My flowers, my animals, even you. Look at a peacock for example. I have chosen beauty over convenience. Like deciding to wear high heels instead of sneakers. It does not make any sense, yet there they are, millions of shoes that make you walk just like a peacock and impress I don't know who; certainly not me.

I am pure beauty anyways. I am the aesthetic measure of all things. It is in my nature. It is symmetry, well-balanced proportions, and geometry that I play with daily. I am your primary colors without the Bauhaus. I am the golden section without measurements. I am the Fibonacci sequence without the numbers. I am concentric circles without Adobe Illustrator. I am fractal geometry in your beloved Romanesco broccoli without your hated math teacher. I am full of rhizomes without the internet. I make hexagons for my bees and create symmetric wings for my butterflies. Saying this, I feel like a goddess, I really do.

But then again, I feel like you don't really know me. I lie before you; and you, you do not seem to truly see me. You write all these songs and poems about me. That one *Song of the Earth*. That's me, right? I remember you writing it, sitting in this tiny house, looking at the landscape. I think you were lovesick. You did love her very much. And I suppose she was quite something. Or was it also about me after all? Are you also in love with me? Or is it just some image you desire?

I have this Joni Mitchell song spinning around in my head: "They paved paradise, put up a parking lot. With a pink hotel, a boutique, and a swingin' hot spot." I would love sitting by a pool with you. Tacky ice cream, bathing suit from the 1980s, wearing it super proudly, because I do have the hips and hills. Actually, I even have mountains.

I am not innocent; I am not naive. I can be quite persistent and even indifferent at times. It is boring—I can tell you—watching you come and go. I feel old. I am still attractive though. And talented. I can make colors and rain and rainbows and flowers and snow and all this stuff for which you need physicists and laboratories. I am like a science superstar. You could award me a Nobel Prize. But you probably won't, because you are too self-centered.



Figure 3 → Gustav Mahler (1907)

Figure 4 → Alma Mahler (c. 1908)

It is always about you. It seems like I have to serve as your raw material. First you picked my berries, then you planted my seeds and captured my animals. Today you harvest my fields with extensions of your extremities grown into massive machines that you control like a god yourself. With these objects you make beautiful patterns that look like minimalistic drawings from above. I do like these interventions; I think they are beautiful. My animals probably not so much. But you will be careful, gentle with me, right?

At times I feel cold, and I know that you will warm me. But more out of recklessness than affection. There are a few more things we need to talk about, like Chernobyl, Fukushima; or let's start at Hiroshima as a symptomatic example. All this shit wasn't polite; this kind of behavior is outrageous, you act like a big bully. What are you planning to do? Stick me into a tree museum? Here is a little forecast: That's not gonna go well for either one of us, so keep yourself together, will you? (...)

Throughout history there have been millions of pictures of me. I feel like a celebrity at times, just without alimonies. I especially like the mimetic paintings of magnificent flower bouquets during Biedermeier. These still life studies are timeless. I am timeless.



Figure 5 → Franz Xaver Gruber,
Flower Arrangement (c. 1838)

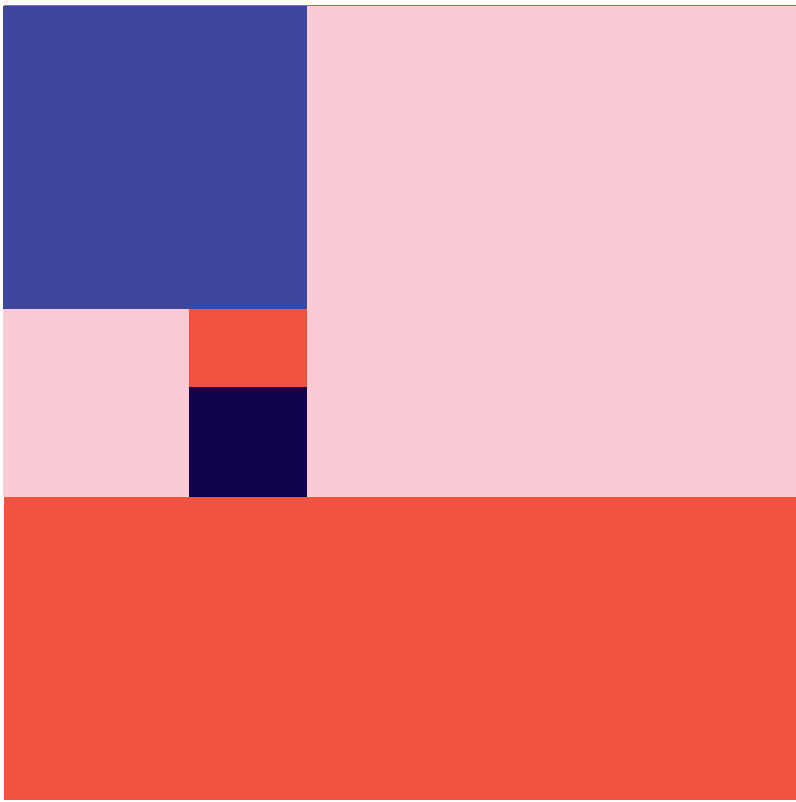
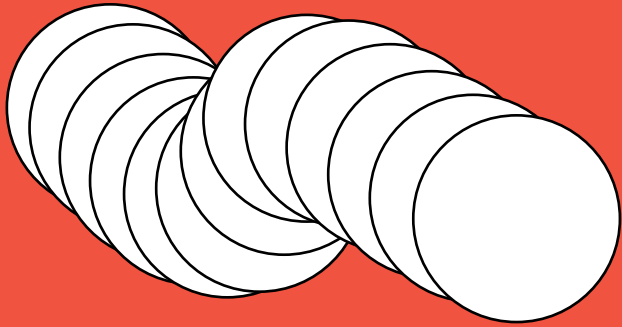


Figure 6 → I made a color — I, Nature

There
is gonna
be rain,
I promise

— I,
Nature



You keep
painting
my
picture

— I,
Nature

I am cold,
will you
warm
me?

— I,
Nature

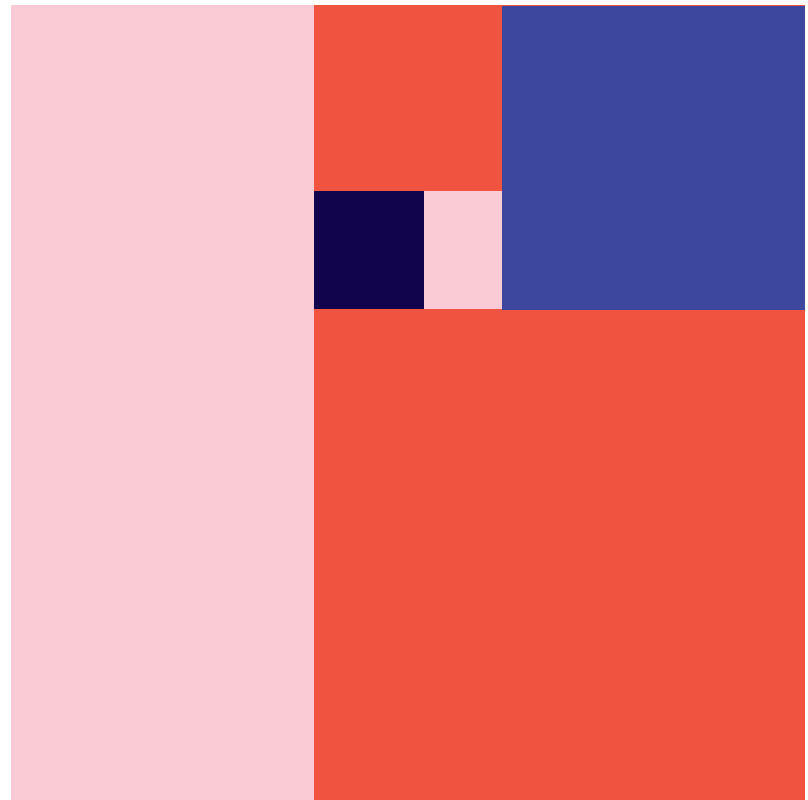


Figure 8 → I made a color — I, Nature



Figure 9 → Flower pot, visiting minusplus (2021)

My beauty is timeless. I think it is hilarious how obsessed you are with my plants. Flower bouquets on dining tables, basil and tomatoes on kitchen windows, pelargonium on balconies, red carnations at processions and your violent abuse of cornflowers for political reasons. But especially your desire to domesticate plants as houseplants in cheesy little flower pots, leading to your even stranger affinity for pets like cats, dogs, guinea pigs, rabbits, mice, spiders, snakes or birds.

And then there are maps. All this attempts to carve into stone what is actually fluid. Sometimes I change the riverbeds just to mess with you. I am everywhere, you are a dot. I am the endless space of Google Maps, you are the little yellow man on Google Street View. I am Mother Earth, and you are... you. You are me and I am you. I am yours. Or you are mine. It is a dialectic experience after all, isn't it?

I always wanted to get married. Traditions die hard, right? I would wear white wind and carry lilies. Not white lilies, I think I would choose Tiger lilies, I like to do things a bit differently, you know. But there will be no wedding, I guess. I will have to let that go. And grow up, become more independent, autonomous, and let you go.

Sometimes I might watch TV and smile at your weather forecast. Because I think it is indeed lovely how much you try to get me. I will let you win sometimes. There will be rain, I promise. I really am good at that. And at all kinds of repetitions—the most beautiful strategy I developed over time. A series of events, four seasons (not the hotel of course), periods, ebb and flow, day and night.

I don't even know why I am writing this letter. It is not like it is going to change anything between us, right? But it feels cathartic. My therapist says I need to be more straightforward, honest if you like.

So I say farewell to you. Just to discover I am not gone. I will survive you anyway. Because I am my own legacy.

— I, Nature

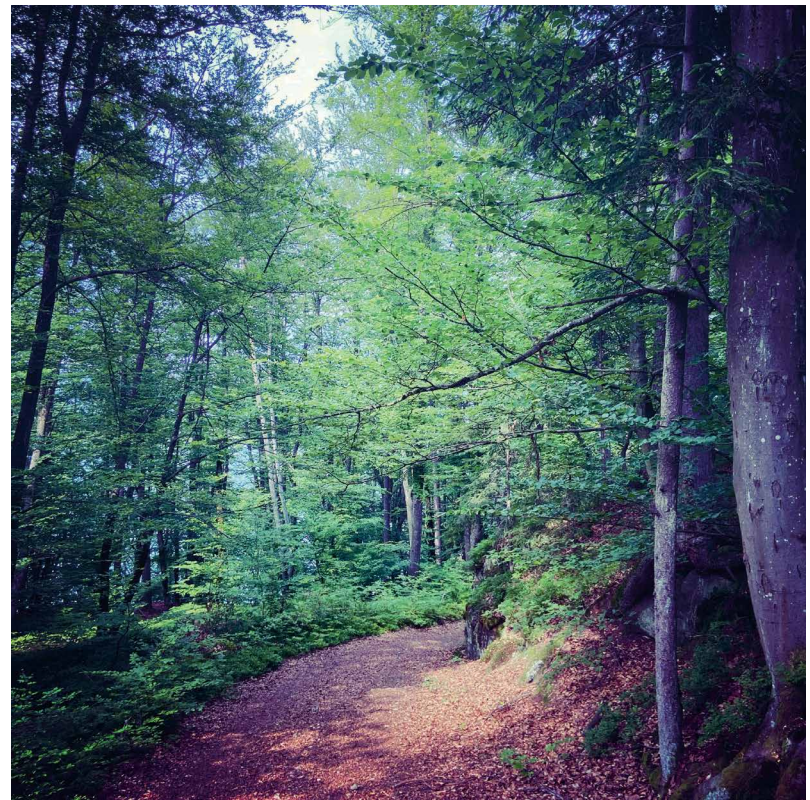


Figure 10 → Forest, Maiernigg (2021)

There is gonna be rain, I promise
You keep painting my picture
I am cold, will you warm me?
You can come visit me
I am not going anywhere
All possible futures are fluid
I am the paradigm of latitude
I will survive you anyway
You won't see me coming
You are a part of me
Don't you dare
I am my own legacy
Get inspired, will you?
I am your plant, I am your lover
I will be around, I promise
I am all and everything
Are you in love with me?
The visitors are being rude
Can you take my picture
Sure, let's take a selfie
A museum is not enough
There is so much concrete around me
My waters are like mirrors
I am too old for you
I just made a flower, and you?

Text fragments for audio installation
→ Künstlerhaus Klagenfurt (2021)

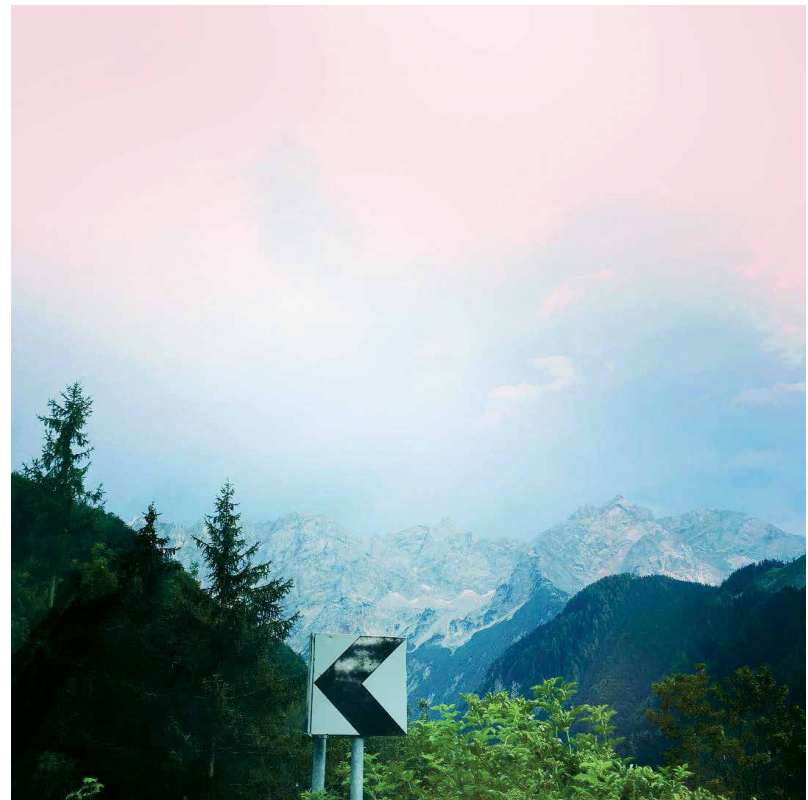


Figure 11 → Roadtrip, Jezersko (2017)

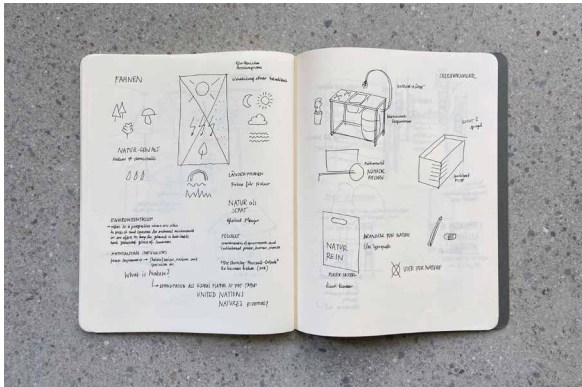
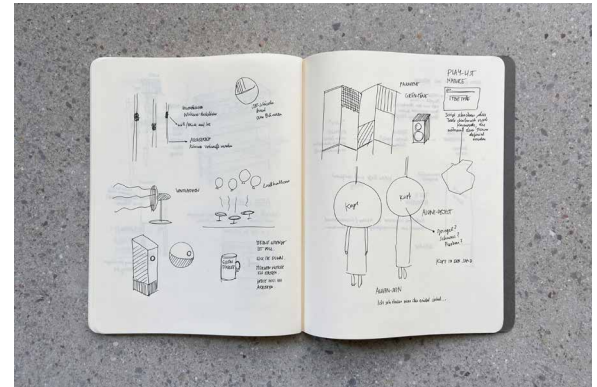


Figure 12-17 → Sketchbook (2021)



Further Reading

Olaf Breidbach, Werner Lippert (Eds.):
Die Natur der Dinge. Springer, Vienna/NY 2000.

Sigmund Freud: *A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men*. Contributions to the Psychology of Love I, 1910.

Christiane Kruse, Antje Majewski (Eds.):
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Gustav Mahler: *The Song of the Earth*, 1908.

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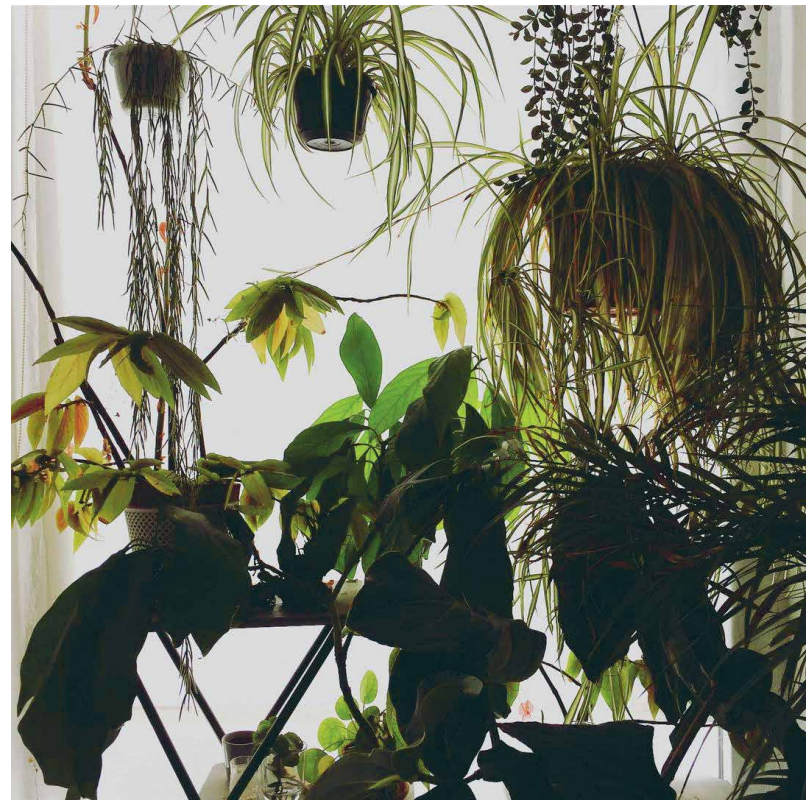


Figure 18 → Plants, visiting mischer'traxler (2019)

Figures

Figure 1 → Caspar David Friedrich,
The Monk by the Sea (1808–10), 110 x 171.5 cm
Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin, Photo: Google Art Project

Figure 2 → Fibonacci, Golden Section

Figure 3 → Gustav Mahler (1907),
Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft

Figure 4 → Alma Mahler (1908), 18 x 24 cm
Austrian National Library

Figure 5 → Franz Xaver Gruber,
Flower Arrangement (1838), 80 x 64 cm
Oberes Belvedere, Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2021)

Figure 6–8 → I made a color—I, Nature

Figure 9 → Flower pot, visiting *minusplus*
Photo: Nataša Sienčnik (2021)

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