

Macedonian artist uses lichens to enlighten

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The gravestones, greenly luminous in the thick dusk, looked as if their ancient lichens might possess some magical power of phosphorescence. –Sylvia Plath

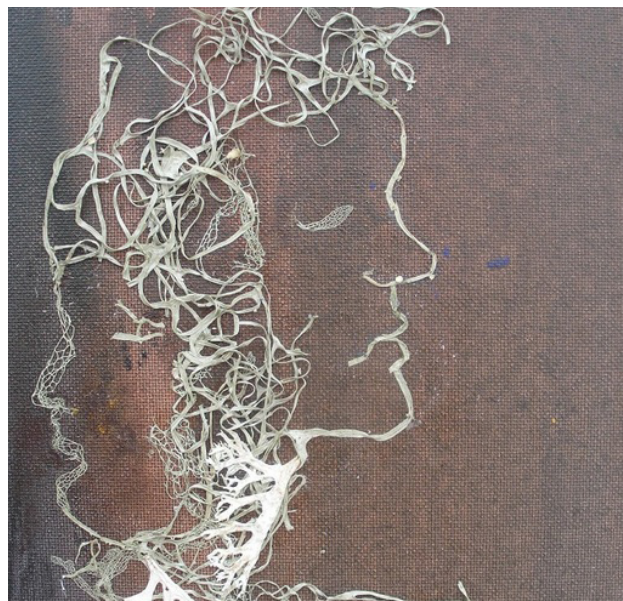
Macedonian artist Kristina Zimbakova describes her art as “transdisciplinary, bringing together visual art, poetry and natural science by creating paintings that endeavor to push the boundaries.” Many of Zimbakova’s art pieces include specimens of lichens and/or fungi. She obtains the specimens from dry collections or harvests them during personal forays, in collaboration with both Macedonian and foreign scientists, who also assist in identifying the species. In particular, the Macedonian Mycological Society and Skopje fungarium have been important resources for her work.

When lace lichen was named as California’s state lichen, Zimbakova reached out to the California Lichen Society to see if she could obtain a specimen of lace lichen for use in her artwork. Since lace lichen grows quite prolifically in many areas of California and often falls to the ground during storms, CALS members were able to safely provide a sizable clump of lichen for inspiration and incorporation into Zimbakova’s art. When asked about collection practices, Zimbakova stressed that sustainability comes first, and she hopes that her careful use of lichen specimens will ultimately lead to increased awareness about these often overlooked organisms. She works with species from across the globe and likes to include their scientific name and place of origin as part of the art piece.

Upon receipt of the lace lichen, Zimbakova created a piece entitled “The Hard One” (“Тешкото”). She says, “The Hard One is an iconic traditional Macedonian male dance called ‘oro’. My dance has only one male in the middle. The [piece shows] the dance climax that

I have tried to capture in my artwork when the dance leader gets on the drum.” The image – which uses both lace lichen and the fungus *Daedalea quercina* – captures both cultural and natural landscapes in a unique and beautiful piece of art. In another piece called “The Harp of my Heart”, Zimbakova highlights the intricate lace lichen nets as they form the features of two faces in profile.

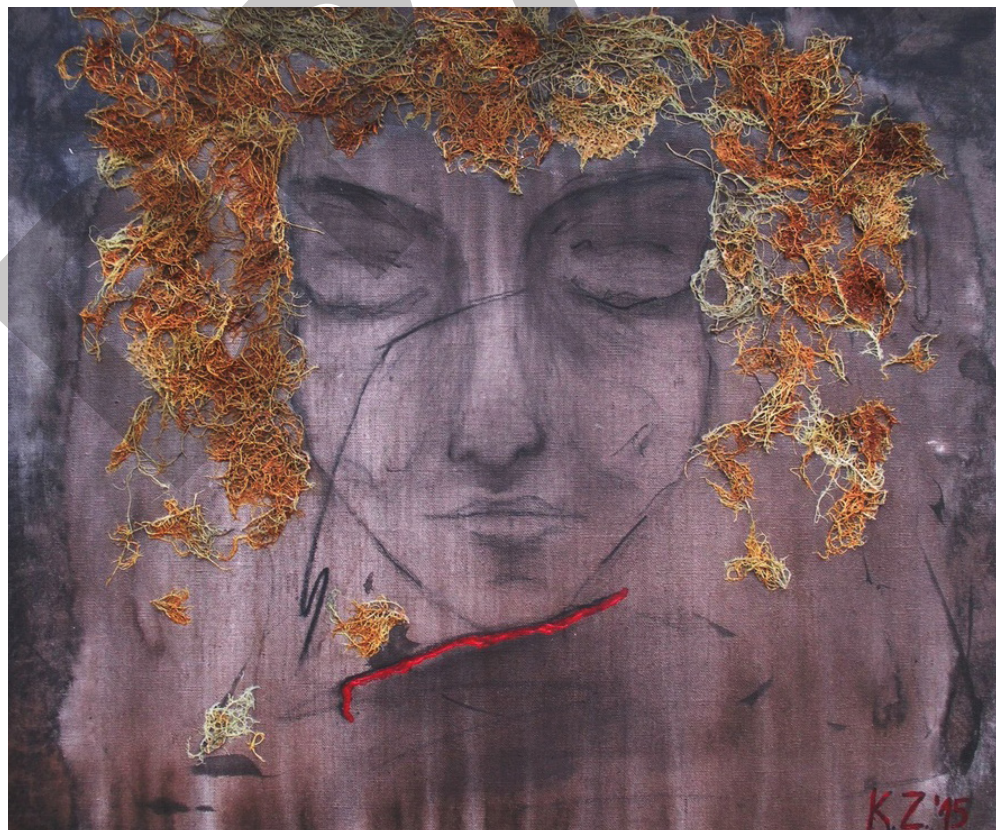
Of her work, Zimbakova says the following: “The closing lines of the poem Mushrooms by Sylvia Plath, ‘We shall by morning / Inherit the earth./ Our foot’s in the door.’, have an underlying purport I aim to convey: the fascinating power of poetry via fungi as symbols of poems. I maintain that the aesthetics of nature can faithfully epitomize human states of mind and heart, and that they are intrinsically related just as many fungi are connected to plants or algae in symbioses called mycorrhiza or lichens, respectively.”



Detail from *The Harp of My Heart* (Харфата на моето срце). Acrylic, lichens *Ramalina menziesii* from California & *Evernia prunastri*, silk on canvas; 50 x 70 cm; 2016. Artwork by Kristina Zimbakova.



The Hard One (Тешкото). Acrylic, ink, charcoal, fungus *Daedalea quercina*, lichen *Ramalina menziesii* from California, USA, glue on canvas; 50 x 70 cm; 2016. Artwork by Kristina Zimbakova.



She will Wolf Down Her Heart (Срцето ќе си го излапа). Acrylic, ink, charcoal, lichen *Usnea* sp. on canvas. 50x60 cm; 2015. Artwork by Kristina Zimbakova.