



Kristina Zimbakova – 2025 FF Symposium IMDI Travel Grant Recipient

As an artist, I would never have been able to attend the IFF Symposium at the island of Gran Canaria if it had not been for this generous travel grant. I had already shipped my three artworks for display at the group exhibition, and that would have been the end of it. Nonetheless, shortly afterwards, the organisers informed me that I had been awarded the prestigious grant, which implied my first ever attendance of this unique event, and I was delighted.

My art practice is interdisciplinary, fusing visual art, poetry and natural science. I create symbolic and figurative mixed-media paintings with fungi and lichens as primary media, which often sit in between the borders of painting and sculpture. I have been applying

fungi in my practice for nearly 25 years, and creating handmade fungal paper for 9 years. Fungi and lichens are applied for drawing figures, creating mosaic or inscribing text to evoke emotions. Language is a prominent feature of my work, with references to the poetry of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton & playwright B.R. Platnar.

I am an avid mountaineer, and I collect the fungi and lichen specimens for the artworks by myself in the mountains of Macedonia. I have been an active member of the Macedonian Mycological Society, going to field trips with them, and they also assist me with species identification. In addition, I obtain fungal species that are visually inimitable, rare or endemic from dry collections from overseas, in collaboration with bio-scientists (species from Antarctica, the Arctic circle, South America, Asia, Australia). During the symposium, I had the opportunity of going on fungi forays with the Mycological Society of Gran Canaria to Tamadaba National Park, with its endemic forest of *Pinus canariensis*, to Moya, with the eucalyptus woods, and also to Finca de Osorio, with its laurisilva, forest of cork oak and *Canarina canariensis*. The fungi collected in these distinctive environments will be incorporated into future artworks of mine, and they will be the first ones to originate from Africa, thus bringing the energy of the unique space they hail from.

Networking with colleagues who share the same passion for fungi, and, in particular, practical learning of a range of techniques and tips germane to eggshell painting and printmaking with fungi pigments, will certainly further my art practice by introducing novelties in the process, and it will certainly contribute to taking it to the next level.

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