

Two Springs

There are two springs, five years apart and ten thousand kilometres away from each other.

The first was in 2021. After months of lockdown during the pandemic, I was finally able to travel again. I stayed for ten days in Tangxi, an old mountain village in Zhejiang, China, and painted eighteen oil paintings in one burst.

At that time, I was full of a burning energy. My thoughts moved freely and wildly. From a single peach blossom to branches, orchards, valleys, fantasy and abstraction, I wandered between reality and emotion. Peach blossoms were no longer flowers. They became a space that kept expanding — a space made of emotion, memory and imagination. Painting, for me then, was a way of placing myself in the world. The image was only a means. I was the centre.

On the tenth day, I suddenly felt lost. I no longer knew what peach blossoms really were.

At the end of 2024, I came to Malta. I was immediately drawn to the greenery here. I had never imagined that this island, famous for its fortresses and the sea, could hold such rich and beautiful plant life. Throughout the winter and spring, we kept hiking, exploring unknown places, wandering between blue skies, the Mediterranean, and fields of flowers.

Then, after May, everything suddenly disappeared. The flowers and green fields turned into dry yellow earth under the blazing sun. It felt as if spring had only been a dream.



So I decided to paint wild flowers.

At first, I thought it was simply another spring. Later, I realised it was not.

Peach blossoms are grand. They bloom in abundance, filling valleys, filling the eye, and filling my emotions.

Wild flowers are the opposite. They grow in cracks of limestone, on cliffs, beneath old stone walls, and in abandoned places. Some are so small that they almost touch the ground. Some bloom for only a few days each year. Some can only be found if you crouch down and look carefully. I could no longer enter them as I once entered the peach blossoms.

I could only stop.

I learned their names, remembered where and when they appeared, photographed them, and returned home to paint them one by one on my iPad.

From October 2025 to June 2026, I painted sixty wild flowers. Much slower than I had expected, and slower and slower as time went on. Besides painting itself, much more time was spent walking, searching, observing and trying to understand. I enlarged them, looked closely, and looked again. I tried to understand their structures, their colours, and the environments in which they lived.

As I looked closer and closer, I felt a whole

world slowly unfolding before me — full of order, variation, and unexpected beauty.

Gradually, I realised that painting is not always about turning the world into something I want it to be. Sometimes, it simply teaches a person to crouch quietly in front of a small flower, and to recognise another kind of truth in the world.

By Yang Tang
Xemxija, Mlata
2026.06.20

When I painted peach blossoms, I saw only myself.

When I paint wild flowers, I see only the flowers.



Wild flowers 001 - *Narcissus serotinus* (Autumn Daffodil)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.12

Location: St. Paul's Bay, SPB, Malta



Wild flowers 002 - Colchicum Copanii (Mediterranean Meadow Saffron)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.19

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild flowers 003-Diplotaxis tenuifolia (wild rocket)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.25

Location: Mgarr, MGR, Malta



Wild flowers 004-*Scilla autumnalis* (Autumn Squill)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.12

Location: St. Paul's Bay, SPB, Malta



Wild flowers 005 – *Hylocereus undatus* (Pitaya)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.20

Location: Mgarr, MGR, Malta



Wild flowers 006 – *Leontodon tuberosus* (Tuberous Hawkbit)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.25

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild flowers 007 – Antirrhinum majus (Greater Snapdragon)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.25

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild flowers 008 – Asparagus aphyllus (Mediterranean Wild Asparagus)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.25

Location: Mgarr, MGR, Malta

251031

Alone, I crouches quietly beside an old stone wall, looking at flowers.

Nothing is on my mind.

I simply feels that the world is quiet, and real.

immediately become clear.

Then you realise:

this flower is not outside your mind.”

251101

I asked Apollo if any artists had ever painted the flowers of wild asparagus.

He said: “Not many artists are willing to spend several hours staring at a pile of thorns.”

251102

Wang Yangming, Instructions for Practical Living (Chuanxilu)

While travelling in Nanzhen, one of the Master’s friends pointed to a flowering tree growing among the rocks and asked:

“You say that nothing exists outside the mind. But this tree blooms and withers by itself in the deep mountains What does it have to do with my mind?”

The Master replied:

“When you do not look at this flower, it and your mind return together to stillness.

When you come to look at it, its colours



Wild Flowers 009– *Ceratonia siliqua* (Carob Tree)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.25

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild Flowers 010 – Rubus ulmifolius (Blackberry)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.01

Location: Mosta, MST, Malta



Wild Flowers 011 – Ecballium elaterium (Squirting Cucumber)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.04

Location: Marsaskala, MSK, Malta



Wild Flowers 012 – *Limbarda crithmoides*
(Sea Limbarda / Golden Samphire)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.04

Location: Marsaskala, MSK, Malta



Wild Flowers 013 – *Cardiospermum grandiflorum* (Showy Balloon Vine)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.01

Location: Naxxar, NXR, Malta



Wild Flowers 014– *Ranunculus bullatus* (Autumn Buttercup)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.01

Location: Mosta, MST, Malta



Wild Flowers 015 – *Bellis sylvestris* (Southern Daisy)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.08

Location: Qormi, QRM, Malta



Wild Flowers 016 – *Diplotaxis eruroides* (White Wall-rocket)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.08

Location: Siggiewi, SGW, Malta

251112

Wild Flowers 016 – *Diplotaxis erucoides* (White Wall-rocket)

My friend wrote this after seeing my painting of the white wall-rocket:

“I really like the strong contrast of light and shadow in this painting, the juxtaposition of blooming and withering, the sharpness of the grass against the hazy background.

The whole painting is quiet yet not peaceful, letting the intense joy sink into a deeper melancholy.”

I was deeply moved by this. His feeling might not be the same as mine — but that doesn't matter.

My understanding is not the same as the flower's either.

We don't need a standard answer.

What matters is to find something real within everything,

to see a universal truth that belongs to this universe.

That, I believe, is the most beautiful thing art can bring.



Wild Flowers 017 – *Foeniculum vulgare* (Wild Fennel)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.08

Location: Qormi, QRM, Malta



Wild Flowers 018 – *Asperula cynanchica* (Cynanchica Bedstraw)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.09

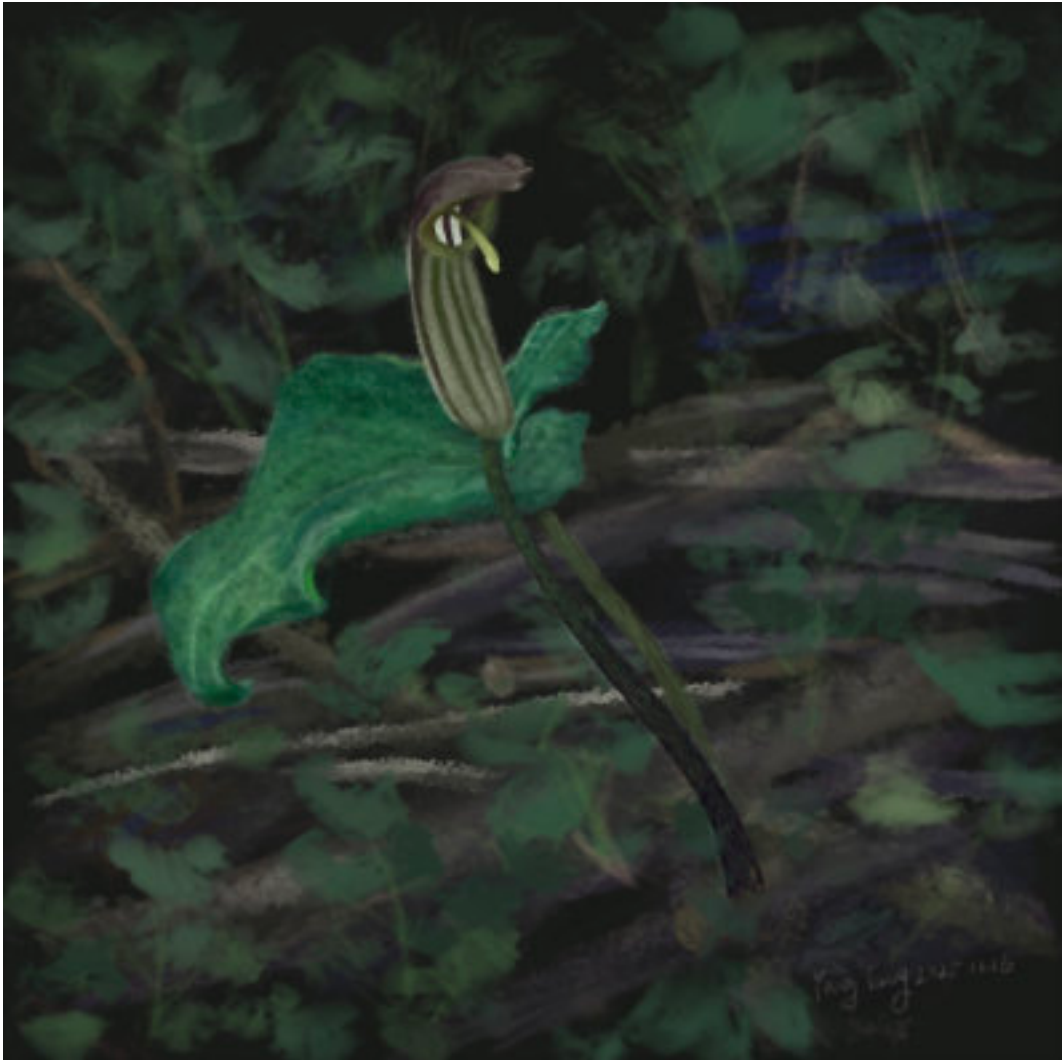
Location: Mellieħa, MLH, Malta



Wild Flowers 019 - *Dittrichia viscosa* (False Yellowhead)

Date of Encounter: 2025.10.26

Location: Gżira, GZR, Malta



Wild Flowers 020 – *Arisarum vulgare* (Friar's Cowl)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.08

Location: Mosta, MST, Malta

251117

Wildflowers ongoing.

I thought that after a few days I would get used to painting them, and things would become faster. But the opposite happened.

These flowers look so small and ordinary that no passer-by would give them a second glance.

Yet once you truly see one, then look again, and keep looking, you fall into it completely.

Some appear chaotic but hold a strict inner order.

Some look simple but are as precise as computer design.

Some grow densely, some wrinkle like paper, some shine like wax.

They live in the sea wind, on rocks, among tangled grass, beneath stone walls.

And I struggle on my iPad, trying to hold on to their real form.

At some point I even forgot that an artist is supposed to paint their own subjectivity.

In each of them, I saw a part of myself.

So I lost myself, and at the same time, I became free.

Why do we love plants?

Perhaps because loving them is the closest we

get to loving freedom.

251125

Week Three of Painting Wildflowers in Malta.

Matthew once told me: “Paint what you see, not what you think you know.”

I understand it much more clearly now.

Only when I admit my own ignorance—and put down the proud urge to “express myself”—can I step out of the trap of painting myself and move into a wider, truer space.

When I stop naming the flowers from above, and instead crouch down, draw close, and magnify them;

when I follow their forms with slow, clumsy strokes,

it feels as if an entirely new world opens.

Every tiny flower is its own universe.



Wild Flowers 021 – Prasium majus (White Hedge-nettle)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.18

Location: Mosta, MST, Malta



Wild Flowers 022 - *Erigeron bonariensis* (Flax-leaved Horseweed)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.08

Location: Luqa, LQA, Malta



Wild Flowers 023 – *Lonicera implexa* (Evergreen Honeysuckle)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.15

Location: Hal Gharghur, GHR, Malta



Wild Flowers 024 - Narcissus tazetta (Bunch-flowered Daffodil)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.15

Location: Hal Gharghur, GHR, Malta



Wild Flowers 025 - Erica multiflora (Mediterranean Heather)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.15

Location: Swieqi, SWQ, Malta



Wild Flowers 026 – Convolvulus oleifolius (Pink Bindweed)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.09

Location: Mellieħa, MLH, Malta



Wild Flowers 027 - *Silene vulgaris* (Bladder Campion)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.15

Location: Hal Gharghur, GHR, Malta

251211

“Summarising the world is easy; noticing its details is not.”

This sentence is almost an ontology of art in itself.

Summarising means: the artist decides the world.

Detail means: the world decides the artist.

When I used to paint landscapes, the freedom was mine.

I set the rhythm of the painting.

But painting wildflowers is different.

I can only follow them.

They say:

* This is exactly how I grow.

* You are not allowed to correct me.

* You cannot turn me into a symbol.

* You cannot use your formulas on me.

* You must admit that I am complicated.

* You must admit that you are not as skilful as you thought.

This kind of honesty hurts—

but it also makes you stronger.

251214

Malta Wildflower Drifting Project

I didn't plan this at all. It slowly happened on its own.

Last Christmas, I joined a small market in Valletta and turned twelve of my recent wildflower paintings into postcards, simply as an experiment. To my surprise, people bought them. A German girl chose two. A Swiss man chose one. They told me they wanted to send Malta's wildflowers to their families.

That moment stayed with me.

These wildflowers grow freely in Malta: between rocks, along roadsides, and in forgotten corners. I paint them quietly, one by one. Then I thought: what if these flowers could travel?

So I invited my friends to choose a wildflower they liked, and I promised to mail it to them for free. Not as a product, but as a small personal letter.

I received fifty-six replies. These postcards are now travelling to different countries around the world.

For several days, I sat down and wrote them one by one. Every card was different. Each felt more like a handwritten letter than a postcard, more intimate than any digital message.

One of them was sent to a photographer who has documented Malta's construction sites for many years. He records cranes, concrete, dust, and constant change. I paint what still quietly

survives in between.

Different views of the same island.

I find this deeply moving.

These small cards now carry Malta's wild and stubborn spirit to different corners of the world.

To me, this is one of the most romantic things I have ever done.



Wild Flowers 028 – *Clematis cirrhosa* (Early Virgin's-bower)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.15

Location: Hal Gharghur, GHR, Malta



Wild Flowers 029 — *Lomelosia cretica* (Mediterranean Scabious)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.15

Location: Hal Gharghur, GHR, Malta



Wild Flowers 030 — *Cichorium intybus* (Chicory)

Date of Encounter: 2026.11.16

Location: Gżira, GZR, Malta



Wild Flowers 031 — *Datura stramonium* (Jimsonweed)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.01

Location: St Julian's, STJ, Malta

251223

I came across this datura growing on a neglected slope in the brightly lit streets of St. Julian's.

At dusk, its white bloom felt blurred and unsteady — like a hidden danger, like stepping into something unknown.

It took me two days to finish this painting.

Looking back at Georgia O'Keeffe's datura (second image), I realised we are not painting the same world at all.

251227

Wild Flowers 032 – *Crocus longiflorus* (Italian Crocus)

I found her while visiting a giant cross on a hilltop with a friend. She was blooming quietly among Mediterranean daisies and scattered rocks, so small and low to the ground that neither of my companions noticed her at all.

But of course I did.

Just as I could never miss the cross standing on the summit, I could never miss her.

Whether immense or tiny,
both are miracles.

251230

Some friends asked why,

since coming to Malta,

my paintings seem more figurative and even quite realistic,

while much of my earlier work felt more abstract.

So what do we really mean by “figurative” and “abstract”?

To me, the figurative is simply what we think we already know.

The abstract is what we cannot fully define.

Seen from far away or extremely close, or from a different angle, the world is always abstract.

Flowers are the same. Each one looks so clear and recognisable, yet when I observe closely, I am amazed by their structure, symmetry, complexity, stability, colour relationships, and their almost geometric forms and lines. It feels like the underlying order of the world itself — an abstract reality we barely understand.

So I set aside the idea that “this is a flower” and tried to truly look, following its own rhythm while painting. In this seemingly realistic process, I found myself entering an abstract world.

One flower, one universe.



Wild Flowers 032 – *Crocus longiflorus* (Italian Crocus)

Date of Encounter: 2025.11.27

Location: Siggiewi, SGW, Malta



Wild Flowers 033 — *Silene colorata* (Pink Catchfly)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.11

Location: Hal Gharghur, GHR, Malta



Wild Flowers 034 — *Lobularia maritima* (Sweet Alyssum)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.11

Location: Hal Gharghur, GHR, Malta



Wild Flowers 035 — *Borago officinalis* (Borage)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.13

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild Flowers 036 — *Echium parviflorum* (Small-flowered Viper's-bugloss)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.13

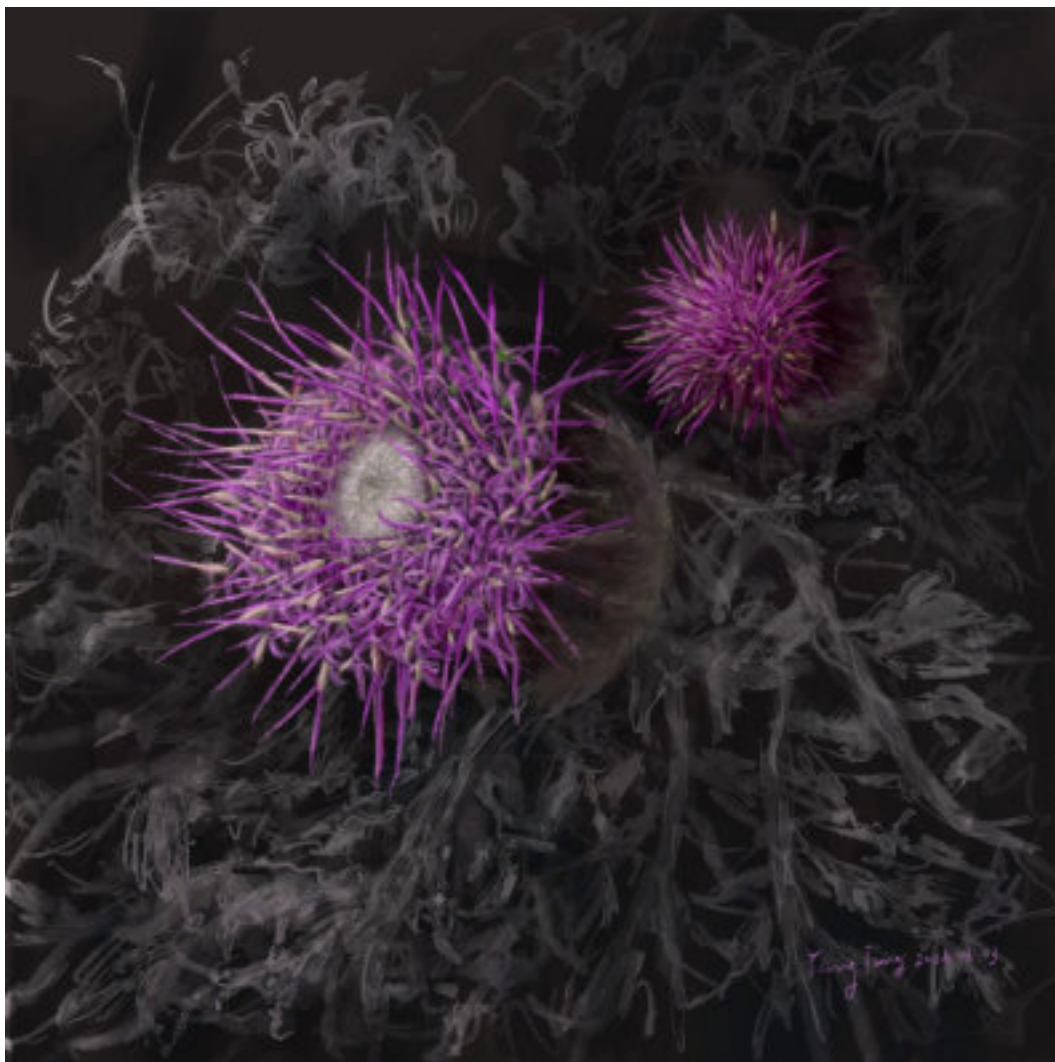
Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild Flowers 037 — *Fumaria capreolata* (White Rampion Fumitory)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.18

Location: Qrendi, QRD, Malta



Wild Flowers 038 — *Atractylis gummifera* (Pine Thistle)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.13

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta

260303

After the rush of Christmas and New Year, the January exhibition, and February's book editing, I can finally return to my wild flowers.

As spring spreads its colour across the hills, it feels almost untimely to recall a meeting in December. Yet I remember that purple thistle on the west coast, rising abruptly from stone, its silver-grey leaves hard and cold in the wind, like something alien.

So I follow the rhythm of spring in bloom, while turning back to paint the wild flowers of winter.

260303

They bloom in the cold winds of December.

Sunlight falls on them and turns to a restrained, wintry light.

They do not seek to please; they live entirely in their own world.

260320

By day, I follow spring in the wild, moving through hillsides dense with color.

By night, I return to the iPad, painting the cool, quiet lives I met in early spring—

like fragments of a stream-of-consciousness film.

Wildflowers, ongoing.

I'm still painting the flowers I met in early spring—small, ordinary, carrying a trace of cold.

After months of busyness, I return to them.

260324

Doubting, and continuing.

260401

I painted slower and slower, as if I could spend a whole life painting just one flower.

Spring is moving faster now.

Everything is in bloom, like a palette spilled open.

But I always find myself going back to paint the first one I met.

The surprise of that first Sulla in Gozo, last December,

still feels stronger than the red spreading across the hills in March.

I seem to remain there,
together with those flowers from the past,
staying in that moment of time.



Wild Flowers 039 — *Galactites tomentosus* (Boar Thistle)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.18

Location: Qrendi, QRD, Malta



Wild Flowers 040 — *Bellis annua* (Annual Daisy)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.13

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild Flowers 041 — *Daucus carota* (Wild Carrot)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.20

Location: Gżira, GZR, Malta



Wild Flowers 042 — *Oxalis pes-caprae* (Bermuda Buttercup)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.26

Location: Gzira, GZR, Malta



Wild Flowers 043 — *Erodium malacoides* (Soft Stork's-bill)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.29

Location: Qrendi, QRD, Malta



Wild Flowers 044 — *Teucrium fruticans* (Tree Germander)

Date of Encounter: 2026.02.10

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild Flowers 045 — Sulla coronaria (French Honeysuckle)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.28

Location: Żebbuġ, ZBB, Malta



Wild Flowers 046 — *Asphodelus ramosus* (Branched Asphodel)

Date of Encounter: 2026.02.01

Location: Pembroke, PBK, Malta



Wild Flowers 047 — *Hypericum aegypticum* (Egyptian St John's Wort)

Date of Encounter: 2025.12.28

Location: Ghasri, GSR, Malta



Wild Flowers 048 — Cerinthe major (Greater Honeywort)

Date of Encounter: 2026.02.06

Location: Gzira, GZR, Malta



Wild Flowers 049 — *Salvia clandestina* (Tyrrhenian Wild Clary)

Date of Encounter: 2026.02.01

Location: Pembroke, PBK, Malta

260404

Wild sage.

Everything outside is too bright. I keep wishing
I could dig myself a cellar and hide there to
paint.

I find myself asking: Why does it have so many
hairs? Why do so many plants insist on being
fuzzy?

Apollo told me:

The hairs protect them from the sun, shield
them from the wind, help them retain moisture,
keep insects away, and scatter the light into
something softer.

All so they can survive, and live well, in a
difficult world.

260408

Fringed rue. Such a beautiful name.

I paint slower and slower. Perhaps I am stuck.

The sea is too beautiful.

Nature is full of rhythm, detail, and harmony.

Why do I paint at all? What arrogance, to think I
could add anything to it.

260505

I was painting a poppy.

I spent forty-five minutes simplifying it,

then six hours

letting it return to its own complexity.

It became so complex that I could no longer
keep up with it,
and I stopped.

I kept painting,

not just for the exhibition.

The joy came back.



Wild Flowers 050 — *Ruta chalepensis* (Fringed Rue)

Date of Encounter: 2026.02.10

Location: Rabat, RBT, Malta



Wild Flowers 051 — Bituminaria bituminosa (Arabian Pea)

Date of Encounter: 2026.01.31

Location: Qormi, QRM, Malta



Wild Flowers 052 — *Fedia graciliflora* (African Valerian)

Date of Encounter: 2026.02.07

Location: Qrendi, QRD, Malta



Wild Flowers 053 -Tordylium apulum (Mediterranean Hartwort)

Date of Encounter: 2026.02.08

Location: Mellieħa, MLH, Malta

2026.04.25

Drawing Malta's Wildflowers Together

After last year's "Malta Wildflower Drifting Project," I began a second practice around wildflowers: Drawing Malta's Wildflowers Together.

On Nino's platform, around eighty participants joined this process, brought together by a shared love for flowers and drawing. Over the course of one month, everyone is working on thirty kinds of wildflowers found in Malta. I designed a gradual structure for this process: providing reference images and short descriptions, and hosting four online feedback sessions.

Today was the first session.

I reviewed nearly 150 works by twenty participants from the first week, trying, from the perspective of a maker, to look at this small segment of the process together with them—to see the attitude behind each drawing, its strengths and limits, and the direction that is beginning to form.

To be honest, I was deeply moved.

What I saw was not only drawings, but the people behind them —how they reach across distance and time to look closely at these wildflowers growing on limestone in the distant Mediterranean, and how they form their own connection with them. Many also wrote down

their thoughts beside the drawings.

So rather than "giving feedback," what I was really doing was simply looking together.

Shifting the angle slightly, changing the position, through these flowers, each person begins to see their own experience and response.

For me, this is a different kind of process. By looking at these works as a whole, through others' perspectives, and across different media, I find myself rethinking what it means to "see." In this sense, what I gain from this process may even exceed the participants' own practice.

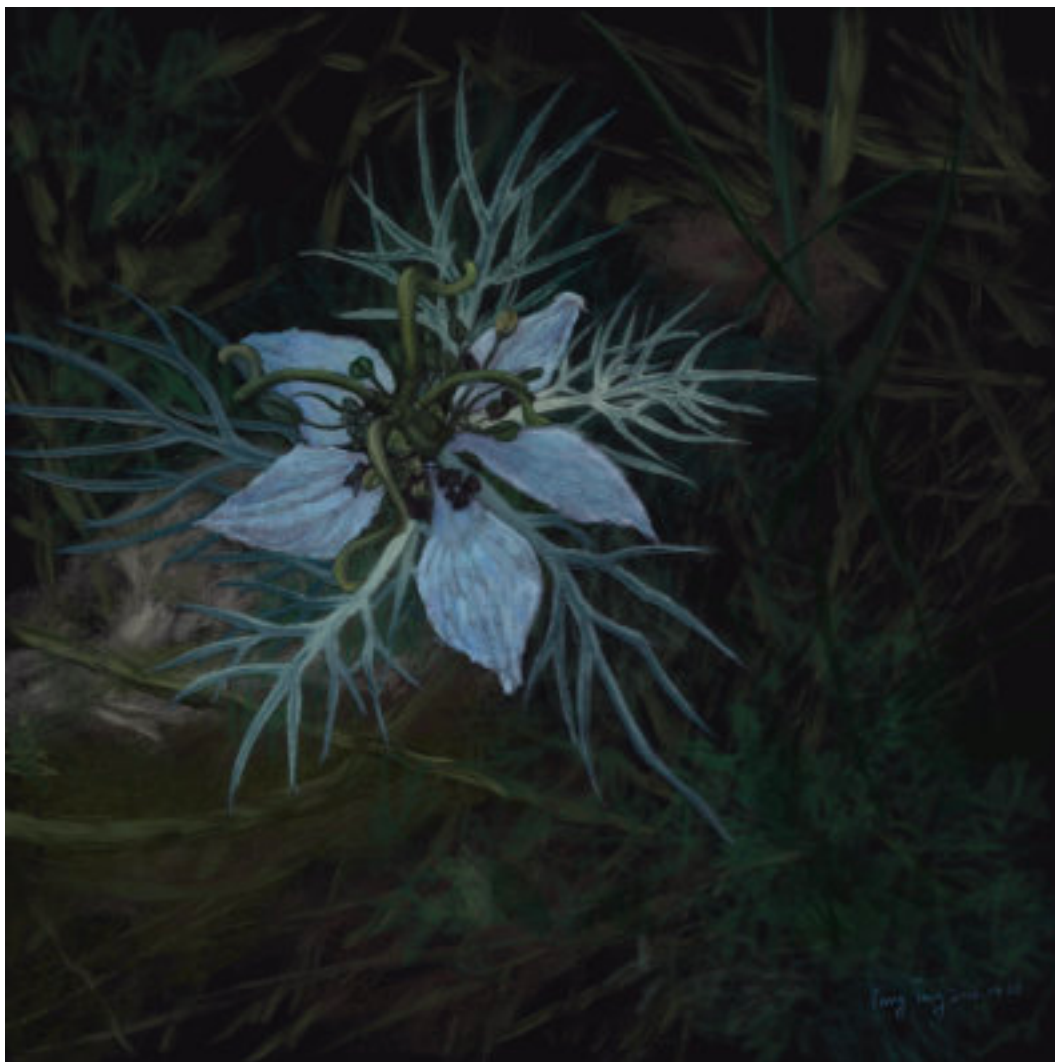
It is not an extension of my own painting, but a way of approaching these wildflowers again from another position — and of understanding more clearly what place art might take in life.



Wild Flowers 054 — Papaver rhoeas (Corn Poppy)

Date of Encounter: 2026.03.08

Location: St. Paul's Bay, SPB, Malta



Wild Flowers 055 — *Nigella damascena* (Love-in-a-mist)

Date of Encounter: 2026.03.08

Location: St. Paul's Bay, SPB, Malta



Wild Flowers 056 — *Plantago lagopus* (Hare's-foot Plantain)

Date of Encounter: 2026.03.14

Location: St. Paul's Bay, SPB, Malta

260421

The only necessity of painting
is not expression,
not beauty,
not even art.
It is that part of the world
you can only see
by making something with your own hands.

260429

Love-in-a-mist.
Such a romantic name, for such a delicate-
looking flower.
But look closely, really look, and she is not
delicate at all.
From her pale, melancholy blue petals rise
stubborn filaments;
dark, hard seeds gather at the centre;
beneath them spread defensive leaves, sharp
and branching like tiny tridents.
Love in a mist?
Indeed. The flower is exactly what its name
promises.

260429

Plantago lagopus (Hare's-foot Plantain)
A completely inconspicuous little flower.
No striking colour. No fragrance. It barely even
looks like a flower.
But when a whole field of hare's-foot plantain
dances in the wind, those tiny white highlights
leap and shimmer,
and suddenly it becomes harder to look away
than from the most beautiful blossom.
Every small flower, it turns out, has its own
special talent.
As my hand follows its rhythm, slowly
approaching its shape, those soft hairs and tiny
details begin to feel as if they are breathing.
The process fills me with quiet satisfaction.
As for whether this is good art— that question
seems to have less and less to do with me.



Wild Flowers 057 — *Glebionis coronaria* (Garland daisy)

Date of Encounter: 2026.03.09

Location: St. Paul's Bay, SPB, Malta



Wild Flowers 058 — *Moraea sisyrinchium* (Barbary Nut Iris)

Date of Encounter: 2026.03.19

Location: Mellieħa, MLH, Malta



Wild Flowers 059 — *Ophrys fusca* (Sombre Bee-orchid)

Date of Encounter: 2026.03.13

Location: St. Paul's Bay, SPB, Malta



Wild Flowers 060 — *Trifolium stellatum* (Star Clover)

Date of Encounter: 2026.03.29

Location: Mellieħa, MLH, Malta

260603

From Wild Flowers 001 — *Narcissus serotinus* (Autumn Daffodil) on 24 October 2025, I began following the rhythm of the seasons and the flowers across this small island.

In garigue landscapes, along cliffs, in fields, and among ruins, I encountered one wild flower after another.

I learned to identify them with Seek. I learned to ask questions from people who know far more about plants than I do.

I photographed them carefully, then returned home and painted them on my iPad.

Although these paintings are based on photographs, I deliberately simplified and darkened the backgrounds, so that each small flower could stand alone — like a living presence illuminated on a stage.

More than seven months have passed.

Malta has now entered summer, and every flower I painted has already faded.

I am grateful to have kept a trace of those encounters. Yet I know that, with or without me, they will return when the rains come again, full of life.

Wild Flowers 060 — *Trifolium stellatum* (Star Clover) is the final work in this exhibition.

The completed series of 60 wild flower paintings will be shown from 2–30 July at the Malta Society of Arts, as part of my solo exhibition Two Springs.

The exhibition also includes a group of peach blossom paintings I made in China five years ago.

I will continue painting Malta's wild flowers — I have only reached the flowers of March so far — but those future works will not be part of the July exhibition.

Some records.

“March 13.

I went out looking for bee orchids.

I walked for a long time between the sea and the hills, following the trail all the way to a dead end at the edge of a cliff.

It was getting late, and I was ready to give up.

I crouched down to tie my shoelace, and there she was — shining quietly from behind a rock by my feet.”

A Conversation with Marie Benoit

During the preparation of Two Springs, Marie Benoit asked me a series of thoughtful questions about the exhibition.

These questions encouraged me to look back on the past ten months and to reflect on what painting wild flowers in Malta has meant to me.

The following is our conversation.

Marie Benoit:

You speak beautifully about a “shift in the way of looking”. When did you first realise that your way of seeing had changed not just in the work, but in yourself as an artist living in Malta?

Yang Tang:

When I first learned to paint, I was taught how to simplify, organise a composition, and develop a personal style. Even without painting from life, I could make an image.

In 2022, I reached a point where I felt stuck. I began to ask myself: if art is about expressing the self, then what exactly is this “self”? So I stopped painting and started reading.

After moving to Malta, I joined an oil painting course at the Malta Society of Arts. My teacher Matthew asked us to paint still lifes from observation. I instinctively relied on theory and technique. One day Matthew said: “Paint what you see, not what you know.”

It sounds simple, but it was not easy. I had to

learn how to look again, slow down, and set aside what I thought I knew. This directly influenced the wild flower project. Instead of rushing to organise or simplify them, I spent long periods simply looking.

During my exhibition A Place of Return, I realised that painting wild flowers had taught me more than a way of painting. That was when I began to understand that this shift in seeing had changed not only my work, but also myself.

Marie Benoit:

The peach blossoms were painted in a concentrated burst, while the wild flowers unfolded slowly over months. How did these two different rhythms affect your inner state, your patience, your sense of time?

Yang Tang:

I painted the peach blossoms in the spring of 2021. It was my first time painting outdoors after the long restrictions of 2020, and there was a strong sense of freedom. I stayed in a small mountain village for ten days and completed eighteen paintings. But towards the end, my thoughts ran ahead of my hands. I gradually became lost, and went home early.

The wild flowers were completely different. The peach blossoms were all there waiting for me. The wild flowers appeared gradually over time. I could only meet them one by one, never knowing what I might encounter next.

When I decided to paint Malta’s wild flowers, someone told me there were more than a thousand species on the islands. I laughed and

decided to paint not what I knew, but what I met.

Some early works took little more than an hour. Star Clover took eleven hours. The wild flowers did not teach me how to paint faster. They taught me how to slow down, let go of control and learn to wait.

Marie Benoit:

You describe the wild flowers as “appearing” to you. What does that moment of appearance feel like — physically, emotionally, almost spiritually?

Yang Tang:

For me, “appearance” happens on two levels: the appearance of an encounter, and the appearance that happens through painting and understanding.

At the level of encounter, I do not plan these meetings. I am happy to meet any flower. But whenever I discover a new plant, learn its name, and begin to understand its habits, I feel a simple kind of joy. This is especially true during orchid season. After searching for a long time, almost giving up, and then suddenly finding one hidden in the grass, the feeling is difficult to describe.

The second kind of appearance happens while I am painting. When a flower is enlarged on my screen, I notice details I would never normally see.

Gradually, I stop seeing it as a species and start seeing it as this particular flower in front of me.

This process made me realise that very often we think we have seen something, when in fact we have only learned its name. Real looking begins after the name.

Marie Benoit:

*You mention that each drawing comes from a specific encounter. Is there one encounter — besides the *Crocus longiflorus* — that still lingers with you, perhaps because of the place, the weather, or your own state of mind?*

Yang Tang:

I remember almost every encounter with these flowers — where it happened, what the weather was like, and what the day felt like.

The *Datura* was a flower I encountered soon after arriving in Malta. It grew on a small patch of wild ground near the seafront in St Julian’s, glowing softly in the evening light. A year later, at the same time, I went back and found it there again.

But perhaps the most memorable encounter was with the Bumblebee Orchid. I walked along the cliffs from Xemxija towards Mistra Bay, looking for wild orchids, but finding none. By the end of the path, I had almost given up. I crouched down to tie my shoelace and there it was, growing quietly in the grass beside my feet. The evening sun was shining on it.

Marie Benoit:

In Malta, the landscape can feel overwhelming in its brightness and heat. How did working on such small, intimate subjects such as flowers change

your relationship with the island?

Yang Tang:

In Malta, we are outsiders. Although I have travelled a lot, this is the first time I have tried to live in a foreign country not as a visitor, but as a resident.

Living and travelling are completely different. When we travel, we look for things considered worth seeing: dramatic landscapes, historic sites, famous buildings, festivals and celebrations. When we arrived in Malta in 2024, we did exactly that. We walked many hiking routes, visited churches, watched fireworks and attended religious feasts.

But seeing and painting wild flowers changed something. It slowly turned me from a traveller passing through into someone who lives here.

In order to understand the flowers, I joined local wild flower groups and met people who had spent decades studying Malta's plants. I began learning which species were native or invasive, which flowers could be eaten, and which needed protection. The knowledge itself was not the most important thing. What mattered was that it allowed me to see Malta through the eyes of the people who live here.

Over time, I came to know the plants, the animals and the ordinary rhythms of life on the islands. Slowly, it began to feel like home.

Marie Benoit:

You originally imagined painting cacti – strong, sculptural, monumental. What do you think the wild flowers taught you that the cacti never could?

Yang Tang:

When I submitted my proposal to MSA last May, I originally planned to paint cacti. I thought it would be interesting to place the softness of Jiangnan peach blossoms alongside the toughness of wild Mediterranean cacti.

But what truly moved me in the end were the wild flowers — the unnamed and easily overlooked ones.

Their brief flowering seasons, and these tiny lives growing in cracks between rocks and in the cold wind, made me realise that strength does not have to be monumental, nor expressed through thorns.

Wild flowers look fragile, yet they possess remarkable resilience. They do not resist their surroundings. Instead, they find their own ways to grow within limitations. They do not try to become the centre of the landscape, nor do they demand to be seen. But if you are willing to stop and look carefully, you will discover how much variation, richness and vitality they contain.

Perhaps what wild flowers have truly taught me is another way of understanding strength. It is not resistance. It is not proving something. It is simply growing quietly, at your own pace.

Marie Benoit:

The peach blossom paintings “form a space the viewer can enter”, while the wild flowers “remain with the object itself”. How do you think these two ways of seeing reflect different moments in your life?

Yang Tang:

During the ten days when I painted the peach

blossoms, the series moved from a single blossom, to a branch, to a tree, to an entire peach orchard, and finally to a person losing herself among the blossoms. On the surface, it was a change of space. In reality, it was also a change in my own thoughts and emotions.

Those works were unstable, constantly changing and full of emotion. The peach blossoms seemed to be the subject of the paintings, but they were also a portrait of myself — someone who was constantly exploring and questioning. At that time, I believed that the most important thing in art was self-expression.

After 2022, I stopped painting for a while and began to read. Gradually, I realised that instead of constantly expressing myself, I wanted to understand what this “self” really was. Later I came to feel that the answer might not lie in endless self-expression, but in the process of observing the world.

The wild flower series marks my return to painting after three years. By then, I was no longer so eager to express myself. I was no longer in a hurry to turn the world into my language. Instead, I tried to listen to what it had to say.

During the peach blossom period, I always wanted to create a world. During the wild flower period, I became more willing to enter a world that already existed.

Marie Benoit:

You record the exact place and date of each flower. Do these notes form a kind of diary for you – a map of your time in Malta perhaps?

Yang Tang:

It is not a diary. I simply want to record these encounters. To me, each flower is not just a species with a Latin name. It is itself. It is this particular flower, in this particular place, at this particular moment.

Later, I realised that recording the place and date has another meaning. Everything has its season. Flowers bloom one after another, each according to its own rhythm. Recording the date is also a way of recording the rhythm of flowering.

There are always a few flowers that bloom ahead of their season, or stay a little longer than the others. Perhaps plants are like people. Most follow their own seasons. But there are always a few that begin earlier.

Marie Benoit:

Working digitally allowed the images to be printed and shared more freely. How has this shift in medium changed your understanding of what an artwork is, or how it lives in the world?

Yang Tang:

I did not choose to paint wild flowers on an iPad because I wanted them to spread more easily. At first, it was simply because digital painting allowed me to work more deeply without taking up much physical space. Only later did I realise that this medium suited the spirit of the project.

Wild flowers do not belong to anyone. They grow along roadsides, on cliffs, in valleys and in fields. Anyone who is willing to stop can see them. I hope the wild flowers I paint can keep this openness.

For this series, what matters more to me is not uniqueness, but whether more people can see them. Wild flowers already belong to everyone.

Digital painting simply allows me to share them in a way that feels true to this project.

Marie Benoit:

You sent postcards to people around the world, and you hosted an online drawing activity. What did you learn from watching other people look at flowers – perhaps for the first time?

Yang Tang:

From the moment I painted my first wild flower, I began sharing these drawings on my Chinese social media. At first, almost nobody paid attention. But gradually, more and more people started leaving comments.

After I painted the white rocket flower, a classmate in the United States wrote to me. He said he could feel an undercurrent of life and strength in the painting and asked whether I could let him have it. I sent him the original file and told him to print it himself. He was delighted, and I was very happy too.

Later, I started a small project called Wild Flower Drift, sending postcards of Malta's wild flowers to friends around the world, together with my good wishes.

Another project grew out of these flowers in an unexpected way. A painting school in China invited me to teach an online course on Mediterranean wild flowers. During that month, more than eighty participants created over two thousand paintings. I shared the flowers I had encountered in Malta, and encouraged everyone to look at the wild flowers around them.

One person said: "I have been visiting the Tang Mausoleum for twenty years. This is the first time

I noticed how many wild flowers grow there."

Perhaps, during that month, we were not simply learning how to paint flowers. We were learning to look.

Marie Benoit:

Your next exhibition Two Springs spans 10,000 km and five years. If you look back at the person you were in Tangqi, China and the person you are now in Malta, what has changed most deeply?

Yang Tang:

The deepest change is that I no longer place art at the centre of my life in the way I used to. I care more about life itself.

I am not sure whether painting wild flowers changed my life, or whether life itself changed the way I look at wild flowers. Art and life have never been separate for me.

Five years ago, I was always thinking about how to paint better, how to find my own language, and how to create works with a stronger personal style. Today, I still love art, but I feel that art is not separate from life. Reading, walking, growing vegetables, talking with people, or watching a flower slowly open — these things are already precious.

Art is no longer a way for me to prove myself. It has become a way to understand life and participate in it. I have also become more willing to accept that some answers take time to appear. If Two Springs records anything, I think it records not only two springs, but also the change in my relationship with art.

Marie Benoit:

What do you hope visitors carry with them when they leave the exhibition – not as an idea, but as a sensation?

Yang Tang:

I hope they will take home a postcard of a wild flower. I will prepare many free postcards and invite anyone who likes them to take one away.

As for the feeling, I hope that when people leave, they carry a quiet sense of unfamiliarity. As if they had just seen a world they had always known, but never truly noticed.

Perhaps the next time they come across a small flower by the roadside, on a hillside, or outside their door, they will pause and take a second look.

