

The illustrations create a space where imagination and reality converge rather than exclude each other. Antique clothing, watercolor technique, and intimate genre scenes form a timeless realm in which the past becomes a source of warmth rather than nostalgia, and everyday life regains its dignity. The world of the mice does not idealize perfection but celebrates care, repetitive daily tasks, closeness, and gentleness. In this way, Šulin's animals exist as tiny fragments from an invisible book that can be read with a touch of fairy-tale wonder. Within them is captured a sense of awe and the elusive, fragile fragments of beauty that exist in a world where small creatures walk upright, care for one another, and live in perfect harmony. The artist creates a space where simple, everyday life is elevated into a magical ritual, where silence subtly tells stories and imagination gently marks every brushstroke. If we allow ourselves to look closely enough, even the smallest world can be whole. In this capacity for attentive, compassionate viewing, one of the quietest yet most enduring powers of art is revealed.

– Nina Šardi

## BIOGRAPHY

In 2008, Nina Šulin graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor. In 2014, she earned her master's degree in Stage Design, specializing in Costume Design, at the Academy of Theater, Radio, Film, and Television, University of Ljubljana. She has held more than 30 solo exhibitions and participated in several notable group exhibitions with Natalija R. Črnčec. She works as a costume designer, illustrator, set designer, puppet maker, mentor for art, conceptual, and puppet-making workshops, and teacher of visual arts.

Nina Šulin

A WORLD FULL OF SMALL MIRACLES

17 December 2025–17 January 2026

artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor

Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; closed Sundays, Mondays, and holidays.



Website

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Illustration embodies and reveals a powerful capacity for transformation, reinforcing its role as an autonomous visual expression within contemporary artistic practice – ranging from a documentary tool to the free visual poetics of the author, and from a marginal genre to a central medium of visual perception and thought. Historically, illustration was regarded as a supporting medium, bound to text and assigned a didactic or narrative function. Its development extends from ritual prehistory, through the allegorical Middle Ages, illuminated manuscripts, the scientific precision of the early modern period, and literary expressiveness, to contemporary plurality, in which illustration exists with the freedom of multiple meanings and functions. In the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, illustration evolved from a primarily documentary and scientific tool into a field that transcended the status and function of a mere supplement to text. Precise graphic analyses of nature – emerging from botanical atlases, zoological monographs, geological diagrams, and similar sources – gradually initiated subtle shifts toward understanding illustration not only as an auxiliary instrument of empirical description, but as an independent manifestation of an aesthetic gaze. With the growing interdisciplinary interweaving of graphic art, design, painting, printmaking, and bookbinding, illustration surpassed the status of applied art and claimed its place within the spectrum of autonomous visual art practices.

Šulin's artistic oeuvre presents a comprehensive, carefully conceived visual landscape, where a series of watercolor animal illustrations forms an expansive, internally coherent world. Her art establishes its own narrative structure, with visual storytelling grounded in thoughtful composition and the conveyance of meaning through color and line. Equally significant are the gestural expressiveness of the figures' faces and the articulation of space, which provide context and subtly shape the atmosphere and emotional tone of each scene.

A continuous pictorial universe unfolds, where motifs of little mice, their living spaces, everyday tasks, and quiet moments of domesticity establish a rhythmic, almost topographical structure. This world gradually reveals itself through variations in viewpoint, detail, clothing, posture, bodily form, color, object, space, perspective, and atmosphere. Watercolor illustration, with its transparency, gentle layering, and sensitive balance between control and spontaneity, enables a subtle construction of space and light. Color glazes are applied in thin, transparent layers that preserve the luminous openness of the paper as an active bearer of light. The tonal structure remains restrained, contrasts are softly balanced, and forms emerge through delicate tonal transitions and fine chromatic variations without sharp shadows. Šulin uses the qualities of the medium in its classical, refined form, where soft tonal transitions, softened edges, a restrained color palette, and the deliberate preservation of empty spaces create a sense of airiness and fragility. In this way, watercolor complements the work's poetic content, as its ephemerality resonates with the world of small beings – a world in which the everyday is quiet yet meaningful, and where wonder does not proclaim itself but reveals itself in the smallest details.

Particular attention is given to detail – the textures of clothing, small objects, plant life, and the architectural elements of living spaces. These details are not merely decorative but serve narrative and atmospheric functions, inviting the viewer into contemplative observation and a slow reading of the image. Especially striking are the scenes of sleep, in which mice rest in teacups surrounded by cushions or outdoors on small blankets and pillows. These scenes emphasize the scale of the world of small beings and introduce an element of intimacy. Sleep, as a universal state of vulnerability and trust, becomes a visual motif that transcends narrative and approaches a meditative image. The teacup, typically an object of ritualized wakefulness and social gathering, is transformed into a refuge – a micro-architectural space of rest and domestic comfort.

The artist's style is characterized by exceptional sensitivity to the microcosm, allowing images to remain open as expressive moments and fragments of quiet duration. The images are not tied to a specific literary source; instead, they create their own world and meaning. This is a painterly expression situated at the intersection of narrative, visual poetics, and the contemplative image. Although her illustrations may initially seem nostalgic, they are technically highly reflective. They deliberately avoid spectacular effects, building visual credibility through consistency, repetition, and quiet virtuosity.

An important development in her artistic practice is the consistent individualization of each mouse, which the artist achieves by assigning specific objects and activities. These objects are not incidental props but serve as iconographic attributes, comparable to the tradition of allegorical and portrait painting, where objects function as key indicators of identity, status, role, or inner character. In this context, the mice are not anonymous inhabitants of a mouse world but recognizable personalities with their own inclinations, rhythms, and inner lives.

A paintbrush held in a mouse's paw may signify a painter, the act of painting, creativity, or a reflection on the artistic process within the oeuvre. A dandelion, clover, leaves, or a small flower can establish a connection to nature and the cyclical rhythm of growth. These mice serve as quiet observers of the world, gatherers, or guardians of seasonal rhythms. Literary material and newspapers suggest a contemplative, reflective disposition and a relationship to knowledge, stories, and time, while a wooden spoon or woven basket evokes care for the home, nourishment, and communal dynamics. Objects thus operate in parallel with clothing. Like garments, props extend the figure beyond its physical appearance. Together, they form a visual grammar of character, in which clothing speaks of time, taste, and aesthetic order, while objects speak of activity, habit, and inner inclination. In this way, the artist establishes a map of quiet characterization that requires no words, as the viewer recognizes the figures through motifs and objects, as well as through subtle differences in gesture, posture, clothing, and ornamentation.

We are in a period when everyday practices – such as drinking tea, reading, manual tasks, and caring for the home – are being visually articulated and established as carriers of symbolic meaning. The actions performed by the mice are universally recognizable, almost archetypal. These activities do not belong to a specific historical moment, but rather to the rhythm of human existence itself.

The motif of mice as central protagonists, dressed in antique garments with a possible Victorian inflection, can be read as a conscious layering of temporality that goes beyond a purely aesthetic choice. It is an interplay of anthropomorphism, historical costume, and scenes of everyday life, which together generate a rich and multilayered visual narrative. Clothing functions as a cultural marker of order, ritual, and bourgeois intimacy. The artist, who is also a costume designer, transfers costume references onto mice, beings traditionally positioned at the margins of

visibility and significance. In doing so, a subtle shift in the hierarchy of values occurs: the small, overlooked, and fragile become bearers of culture, history, and aesthetic dignity. The mice are not merely illustrative figures but fully realized protagonists of a microcosmic world.

The prominent costume design in the oeuvre further enhances its artistic value. The artist treats clothing not as mere surface decoration but as a bearer of meaning. The meticulous depiction of patterns, fabrics, lace, ornamentation, scarves, and small accessories in fine detail reflects an understanding of clothing as an extension of the body and as an element of visual language. Antique Victorian dress situates this timeless everydayness within a specific cultural context, offering the viewer an aesthetic distance that, through this very distance, enables contemplation. The scenes are not realistically contemporary but are slightly removed, like a memory or an idealized image of life in which slowness, attentiveness, and manual labor still held a central place and were respected.

The motif of the apron, which recurs in the mice's sartorial iconography, is one of the quietest yet most conceptually rich costume elements in the oeuvre. At first glance, it appears modest, almost inconspicuous, yet this very restraint carries profound meaning. The apron signifies propriety, self-discipline, and readiness for work, while also serving as a garment that separates and protects clean inner clothing from the world of tasks. It marks the boundary between body and labor, between the individual and their role or activity, while remaining historically and symbolically closely linked to work, care, and protection, and at the same time establishing a connection to the intimate, inner space of the home. In a historical context, the apron was not merely a functional garment but a marker of role. It was worn by homemakers, craftswomen, gardeners, seamstresses, servants, cooks, and makers – women whose labor took place in the background yet was essential to the functioning of everyday life. When the artist transfers this element into the world of mice, the apron is freed from hierarchical connotations and becomes a sign of the dignity of labor itself. Each mouse who wears it exists in a state of care – for the space, for others, and for the moment itself. Here, the apron is not a burden but a protective envelope that enables action without the loss of gentleness.

The diversity of costumes also enables subtle social differentiation within the world of the mice. Variations in cut, color, material, pattern, and accessories signal the roles, temperament, or lifestyle of individual protagonists. This approach expands the possibilities of visual narration, with clothing serving as an equally valid narrative device in a world where past and present coexist rather than exclude each other. The artist does not idealize the past but distills its symbolic layers into a universally understandable visual language. The mice are not heroes but caretakers of everyday life. Their clothing and bodies reflect a life that is both simple and deeply considered. In this way, mice in antique garments belong to neither one time nor another, but to a timeless imaginative space where the small rituals of daily life are elevated into carriers of meaning, beauty, and quiet narrative depth.

The essence of beauty and meaning lies not in grand gestures, but in attention. The world the artist creates through her illustrated animals, their clothing, objects, and daily rituals teaches the viewer to look slowly and perceive sensitively. In the world of the mice, individuality emerges not from standing out, but from the harmonious coexistence of differences. Each mouse has its own task and gentle particularity, yet none dominates another. Their world remains balanced precisely because of the diversity of small roles. In this way, the artist's universe does not offer escapism, but an ethical stance: an invitation to respect the small, the vulnerable, and the often overlooked.