



Two Gnomes with Blue Flower 1967 (73 x 68 cm) NE 03  
mineral pigment on paper © Gerhard Reisch Stiftung

### **From the Realm of Elemental Beings**

A portfolio of pictures with commentaries  
by Gerhard Reisch (1899 - 1975)

The Gerhard Reisch Foundation in Germany has recently published a portfolio containing individual high quality A4 reproductions of 36 pictures of elemental beings and landscapes by Gerhard Reisch. On the reverse of each picture are commentaries in German with English translation. Gerhard Reisch wrote about some of the pictures. For every picture there is an excellent commentary full of useful information by Prof. Dr. Agr. habil. Klaus Dörter of Halle (Saale) Germany (1922 - 2012), who immersed himself in the Work of Gerhard Reisch for many years. There is an excellent Foreword by the trustees of the Foundation and a sensitive introduction by Torben Maiwald.

The portfolio includes some verses by Gerhard Reisch and his own description as to how he went about painting his pictures. These, together with a short account of his life, form the contents of a booklet (A4 100 pages) which accompanies the portfolio. The commentaries are printed on the reverse of each picture as well as with larger print in the booklet. All comes wrapped in a light protective case. The Foundation should be congratulated on an excellent production and also for the fluent translation.

This portfolio becomes available at an opportune time. More and more people in various parts of the world are becoming increasingly concerned about the situation in regard to our planet. Throughout the world, over specialisation and modern farming methods have impoverished the soil and spread pollution. Many areas of modern research have led to serious problems across the whole of the natural world. The greatest danger is that the remedies for what has gone wrong will not be adequate if we, mankind, cannot rediscover the cosmic reality that the influence of sun, moon, planets and stars, spiritual powers and elemental beings, all play a part in maintaining the natural life on earth. Mankind has such an important role to play. Yet, whilst it is not fashionable today to speak of elemental beings, we know from tradition that there was a time when mankind acknowledged such beings. They appear, for example, in a wealth of folk tales, in medieval art and in many cultural traditions all over the world.

This portfolio can become an aid for awakening to those beings and their activities. The relevance of all this becomes more apparent and will be better understood when reading the commentaries in the portfolio.

As a young man, Gerhard Reisch's encounter with Rudolf Steiner changed the way he looked at the world and his own artistic impulse. He studied Rudolf Steiner's teachings and practised meditation. Over time he developed a new way of painting (a combination of veiling and pastel techniques using mineral pigments on paper) which included depictions of the elemental beings as a way to aid inner reflection and meditation that can give rise to access to, and appreciation of, these realms, that are otherwise hidden to our normal consciousness.

Gerhard Reisch indicated that elemental beings can be reluctant to be observed and painted. What he did was to steep himself in the experiences of nature in such a way that as he became more sensitive to the atmosphere in a place where he was, he gradually became aware that he was not alone. He then 'apprehended', rather than saw, the elemental beings, and was able to envisage them and so include them in his landscape paintings. Gerhard Reisch said that he did not consider his paintings to be 'works of art', but many will see from this portfolio that they certainly are very artistic creations.

Anyone who obtains a copy of the portfolio would do well to first simply enjoy looking at the pictures, with their wonderful nuances of colour, whilst foregoing any critical assessment at that stage. The next step should be to go through the booklet referred to above and read the commentaries, whilst looking at the relevant pictures.

In order to bring about in oneself a state of mind and soul which makes it possible to begin to develop an awareness of the presence of elemental beings, we have also to seek out suitable natural haunts where it is

possible to appreciate the mood of a place. It can also prove to be beneficial if one can work with colour, such as by drawing or painting nature, sketching plants, animals, trees and landscapes.

I would like now to share some personal observations in connection with Gerhard Reisch and elemental beings. Many years ago in Germany, I met a lady with whom I became friends. She had long been an admirer of the Work of Gerhard Reisch. She had attended group meetings which he had held and had heard him speak. She told me a great deal about Gerhard Reisch and his Work and showed me some of the publications he had prepared especially for members of these groups; for he had conducted many study groups engaged with esoteric material.

As you can read in the portfolio's biographical essay, Gerhard Reisch spent his last years in Freiburg im Breisgau, in the south-west of Germany, close to the Black Forest. When I visited my friend in Freiburg, where she also lived at the time, she told me about his widow AnneGret Reisch, who was working with a group of friends devoted to making her husband's work better known. Early in the 1980s it came about that an old friend of Gerhard Reisch, an anthroposophist in Freiburg, needed to move into a care home of the elderly; and he had invited AnneGret to move into his house with the pictures, on the understanding that interested people could visit and view the original paintings. So my friend took me to meet AnneGret Reisch, who kindly showed me many of wonderful pictures. I was particularly impressed with his paintings of the elemental beings.

I cannot claim to be clairvoyant, but during my life, from time to time, I have had a number of very moving experiences; which I would call 'threshold experiences'. Several of these are connected with nature, and they occurred always when I was on my own walking in the country, often in isolated places such as hills, heaths, woods and by the sea. What I think also heightened my state of awareness was the fact that I had worked intensively with colour. For example, I had studied and worked with Goethe's colour theory, using such techniques as watercolour or pastel or 'wet on wet' (water colour applied to wet paper), to portray natural things, minerals, plants and so on. I had also read a great many European folk tales which feature nature beings. Gradually I became much more conscious of colour and form in nature during my walks; and so I often had very interesting, quite profound, experiences. I have always felt a certain reverence and wonder for nature, and it is this mood that helps to open the soul to nature's creative realm. I never needed to be convinced by arguments or persuasion of the existence of elemental beings, these hidden helpers in nature, and was always open-minded to whatever impressions came to meet me.

It seems that elemental beings will only achieve fulfilment of their destinies through the participation of mankind. That is to say, through our maturing awareness of their existence. Our coming to recognise their activities in nature and her beauty, and the expression of our gratitude for their creative work in what manifests in the landscape and in the food that feeds us, is, of itself, greatly nourishing for these beings.

An important message is contained in one of the verses in the portfolio by Gerhard Reisch. It directs our attention to the specific role that we humans have to fulfil in connection with the elemental beings. They need to make contact with our higher being, the essential human 'I'. When this happens, such contact brings light to their darkness and they can drink it in. When we rejoice in nature, our positive thoughts and feelings feed and develop these beings.

The high standard of the art of Gerhard Reisch and the illuminating commentaries in this portfolio, should encourage many people to think seriously about the elementals and what we, mankind, need to do to encourage them in their work. To overcome many of the ills that face the planet it is necessary that we overcome the purely materialistic outlook, with its one-sided concentration on economic and market values, and return to an awareness of the spiritual in nature, in the cosmos, in ourselves.

*Peter Heathfield*

*About the author:*

*Born 1923 UK. A former librarian at Rudolf Steiner House, London. Familiar with the Work of Gerhard Reisch for c. 33 years. Editor for the English translation of "A Book of the Dead" by Gerhard Reisch published 2005. In April 2006 Peter Heathfield walked several kilometres to join AnneGret Reisch (1926 - 2006) for her 80th birthday celebration with the exhibition of original pictures by Gerhard Reisch entitled "Bridges of Colour" near Lake Constance, Germany ... as a surprise! He is currently living in Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK.*