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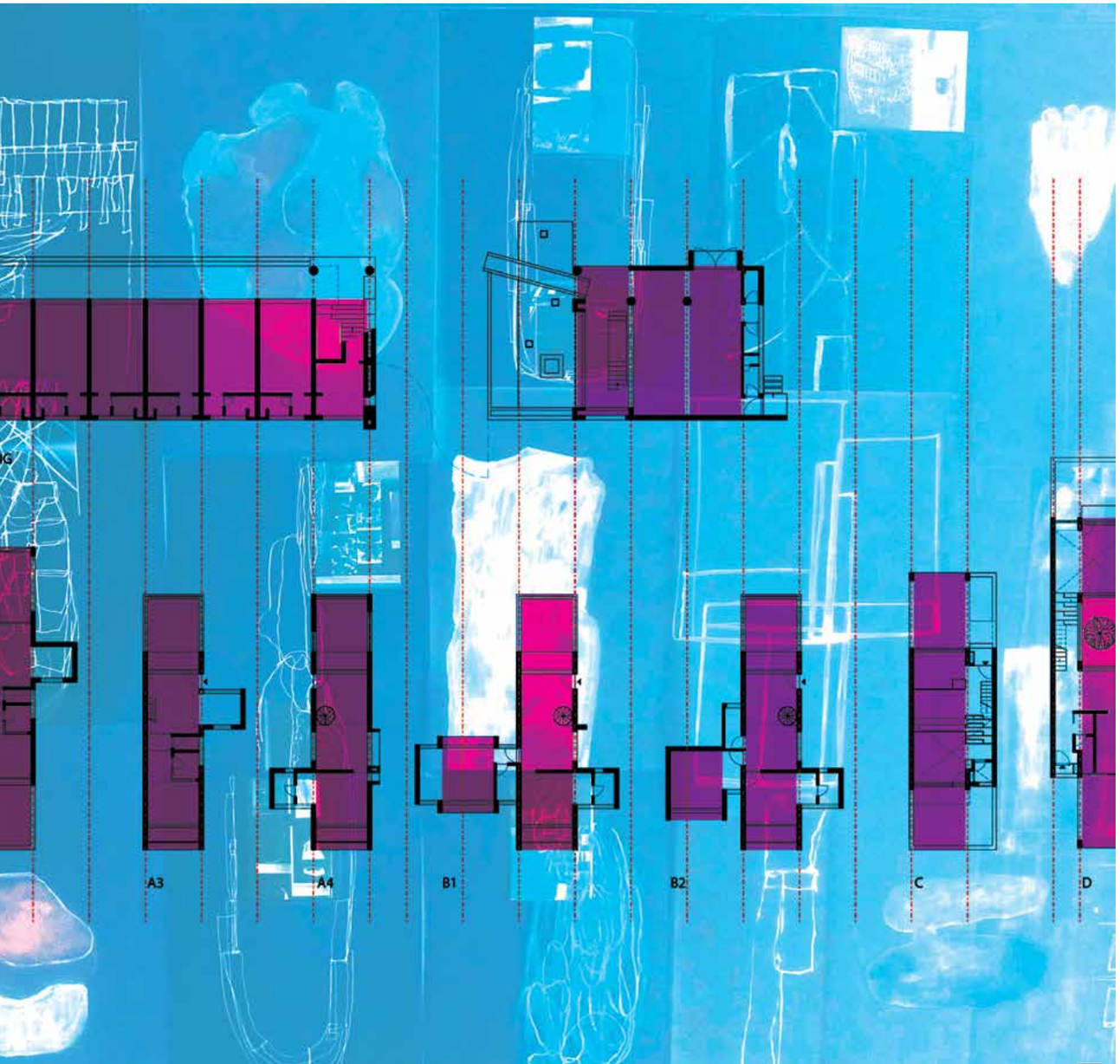

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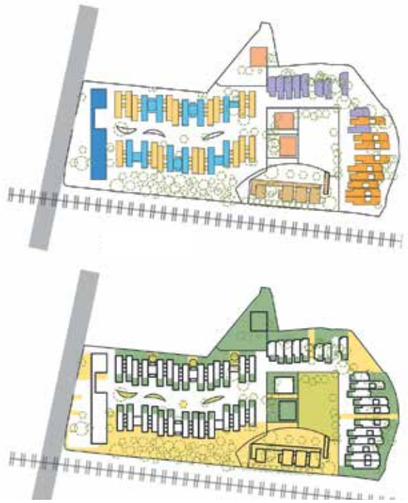
Cover: The cover continues our interest since the last issue to read the landscapes of contemporary built environments for their surreal realities. We overlap two types of drawings — the architect's technical drawing, with the artist's explorative representation. Housing is a debated area for design — as infrastructure as well as real estate. The drawings for this typology are enmeshed within the drawings developed by an artist to document zoos, archives, and natural history museums, where the scientific programme is read for its political and poetic valency



Site plans indicating the different unit types and organisation of public and private spaces; Shantivan, Nagargaon, Lonavala by S+PS Architects

IMAGINATION WITH ENGAGEMENT

Kaiwan Mehta

The anger and disgust with which I wrote the editorial last month, has in not yet faded away. In some way the disgust has only grown, but it has also provoked many thoughts, and also confirmed many fears. We appear, or at least claim, to be a culture that is bursting with creativity; we seem to be celebrating growth and success of some sort, but is this true? Are we mistaking flourish for creativity, or are we confusing material excess with creativity? Because in actuality, we are at an all-time low as far as creativity is concerned. Why do I say this? We are a culture that is divorced from imagination and engagement — imagination of many things, of life, of people, of possibilities, of freedom and responsibility, and engagement with life, with people at large, wider limits and roles of chances and opportunities, and freedom as a way of responsible humanism. Creativity is the bridge between imagination and engagement — and if these two are missing, where is creativity hanging?

Imagination and engagement are very material realities — they are the stuff of ideas as well as the world of people and places. Worldviews are thoughts that come from real experiences, and they in turn feed the way we engage with the world. Imagination is the raw material that shapes our worldviews, and imagination is our response to the world of everyday existence and interactions.

This would mean that imagination and engagement are part of everyday lives, beyond our personal atmospheres. Our daily lives extend between cosmic ideas and lives the many people and species, places and regions around us and far away from us — some we know, and some we don't, some we like, and some we don't — but the reality is we exist amongst all. Our engagement involves the tough reality of accepting and working with all of this, defining our approach, and hence shaping a politics for ourselves. The popular trend seems to be a politics of withdrawal, a politics of 'no politics'. Or a politics of convenience where we accept comfortable rhetorics that appear political but expect least imagination or engagement — in many cases, corporate social responsibility works like this with Green Architecture, or other issues like Sustainability, or Environmentalism, or even Heritage and Social Equality. Designers and architects have also chosen spaces of convenience in Sustainability or Heritage but on a larger scale withdrawn from the role of the architect as a social activist, a profession that engages with public voice and public conflict, and articulates through forms of engagement with public ideas and aspiration, as well as the realities of space and economics. In this issue we pursue to explore some of these arguments.

We often debate the nature of design as a perceived and lived artifice, but don't argue enough about the location of design in a context larger than its own limits. We have reduced Nature and the world to classification of species and objects, or studies of science and history, but Nature is the ever-present reality of struggle and life-cycles, of movement and home. As architects respond to conditions and expectations at hand, the larger politics of belonging to a world of struggle and conflict, or obsessions and fables, can never be forgotten. The ability to keep an eye on long- and short-distance viewing is the necessary sensibility of the hour. Whether it is designing a home in a crowded urban neighbourhood, or it is developing a complete housing scheme, the architect needs to be aware of the many facets and politics, and obsessions and histories that inflict our lives today. It is not easy to answer then - how does the designer, the architect play her/his role today? What would, in fact, design or shape the nature and sensibilities of that role? But it is clear that the role of the architect cannot be limited to the utilitarian function of producing built forms, or a beautician's function of decorating of people's lives.

The key task at hand is to understand the tools and trades of the architect – the material realities of buildings, and making them – within the broader realm of social behaviour and cultural negotiations. We are happy to read symbols in architectural elements and details, and go around pasting them on building surfaces and then we think a building has become contextual. No. The building, then, has only become an artifice. Buildings as well as the process of design and construction are locations of engagement — with issues of everyday life as seen in the task and process of making a building, and imagining it. A building is a site of imagination — multiple ideas jostle for homing, but few find a voice and expression — the politics of these choices is important and has to be an active debate within the design process itself. The building lives with these politics – perhaps transforming them, or rejecting them at some point. The architect is the active agent of choice-making for a building, to begin with; the building lives on through other agents later. However, the architect as a professional as well as a social being constitutes an important agency of imagination and engagement. Her/his engagement continues from building to building, and grows in different directions from building to building. In a sense, the collective of architects become a collective of ideas negotiated over buildings and constructions that occupy social and cultural space and are also themselves sites of cultural negotiations. This relationship between the individual and the collective is important – not in the way of rights in a professional body – but in a way of being bearers and responsible for social space as produced by architecture or cultural geography as produced by built fabric.

It is indeed the site for imagination and engagement to work hand in hand. Creativity can only emerge where engagement draws out imagination into material forms, textures, surfaces, symbols, and elements of design. **km**

CONFETTI

Artovert - House for artist Anita Dube, designed by Anagram Architects (Photo courtesy the architects). Anita Dube is the curator for the next Kochi-Muziris Biennale. This house design was a collaborative project between the artist and architect, exploring landscapes of home in the new periurban areas of India

THE WORLDS WITHIN... WHAT IS FOUND THERE?

An exhibition titled *A World in the City* themed around zoos and botanical gardens recently opened at the IFA Gallery in Stuttgart. The invited curator from India explored the theme and expanded it into a concept for the show in two ways – firstly, the colonial history of institutions such as world expositions, zoos, gardens and museums where these become sites for knowledge production about the world at large as we see it even today, as well as the imagination of a 'public' — the idea of a modern viewing-consuming audience; secondly – it explores our recent history of the hyper-relationship with nature through issues such as Sustainability, Veganism, nature trails, wildlife television channels, and so forth. The curator invited a set of seven works from four artists, as well as a collection of poems and essays from a poet to present in a subtle and nuanced way, the relationship that we share as humans and as a civilisation with nature, the world, and the cosmos

Kaiwan Mehta

This page: A video still from 'The Colonial Garden, Jardin Do Ultramar, Lisbon, Portugal' by Shelagh Keeley, 2016
Opposite page, from top: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was an iconic exposition held at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851; an illustration from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*; cartoon characters created embodying animals often portray traits of human beings

We are all familiar with something we call Natural History, but what would be the history of Natural History? Where I specifically would see Natural History as types of relationships that human beings and human civilisations share with nature and Nature. This relationship is akin to a world-view that people and civilisations develop and live with. We are also passing through a phase in human history where hyper-health-consciousness, Sustainability, and hyper-selective food habits such as veganism are popular and are nearly seen as natural. Our relationship with Nature is most unnatural in these circumstances. Human civilisations have moved from being one amongst equals between different species of plants and animals, to masters of domestication and domination; it is the processes of the latter that create a sense of separation between humans and nature, rather than humans being one amongst many in the natural world. Once this separation, distance, and inherent hierarchy is produced, humans have constantly tried to theorise and dramatise, and even bridge (if only as a ritual, or as an idea) this gap, this separation.

Two images come to mind, speaking of ways in which we create our worlds and draw animals into it — the cartoon characters Tom and Jerry, as well as the animation film on Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The former creates a world of home-animals, that exist within human life and a human home but clearly have a world of their own, with characteristics of human beings, yet formless and material-less — they get stretched and return to normal shape, they get beaten and come back to life, they take the shape of a container they are hammered into - it is nearly a violent cartoon yet very cute! But the primary basis of this series, is the food chain relationship between a cat and rat or mouse; the food chain gets expressed as fun enmity, playful sport, joyful teasing, and so on. *The Jungle Book* (written as a selection of short stories in English in 1894) highlights this sense of gap between humans and animals, as if it is the most universal or quintessential question; but this is a question that is narrativised in the context of 19th century industrialisation and the political colonisation of various parts of the world by Europe, but now projected often as if this is the always existing question of difference between human and animal. It is also about the food chain again, and this is in fact much more strongly expressed in the eponymous film released last year, where the Jungle is a scary and dangerous place rather than a field for song and dance. But with the food chain it also introduces a patina of ethics and morality, as the basis for the functioning of a healthy and mutually beneficial society — superimposing ideas of civilisation on the ways of the natural world.

On the other hand, animals thoroughly occupy the mythological world — from the army of Monkeys in the Indian epic *Ramayana* to the wonder-bird Simurg in the Persian epic *Shahnameh*; and you also have more modern narratives in the form of novels and stories, exploring psychology and politics – in the worlds of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, or *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. What is the role that animals play when they are brought into such engagements with the human world, through narrative and story-telling, fantasy and politics? Or one could ask what does the world of other animate beings such as animals and birds, mean to the self-imagination of humans? Plants and vegetation are the other layer in the world-view and cosmic imagination of human beings, where often these are animated through the idea of spirits or story-telling formats such as folktales. The animation of trees and other vegetation is not with the intention of finding a relationship or connection with them, but it is the imagination of possible natures/forms of life in species and beings other than humans, or species other than the (human) self. It is about making sense of life, taking along and trying to understand the world of other species, rather than reduce them to only forms and meanings human beings comprehend or see and can measure. Mythological engagement with the plant and animal world is one of conversation, where the form of the narrative as well as its aesthetic structure (poetics of form and imagination) is the mode of carrying out this conversation with beings beyond the species one identifiably belongs to. It is no chance that animal and plant forms and images contribute crucially to the visual world of pre-modern ornamentation that occupies textiles, pots, architecture, or other objects of daily use. The plant and animal worlds are always mediated through stories, either in the form of narratives such as folktales or myths, or visual narrations animated as ornaments or patterns.

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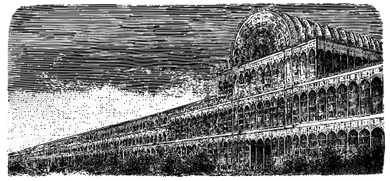
The zoo and botanical gardens emerge within the historical contexts of the Renaissance and Colonialism in Europe. Private zoos may have existed, but the collection of animals and plants within a confined environment for public consumption (even if in a limited way) is something that emerges with the way human species approach the idea of 'the world' since the Renaissance, and the processes of collecting and measuring knowledge about it. This age gives us the idea — Nature is innocent and beautiful, the virgin untouched by money or industry, but nature is also wild and hence should be domesticated, contained, and restrained, while one can continue to enjoy its 'beauty'. The 'wild' is an essential characteristic of Nature, a characteristic that human beings have not really forgotten but have decided to distance themselves from. To imagine that at one time human beings would have lived, worked, and slept close to wild and kind animals, and reptiles would have passed by them whilst some plant root poisonous enough may have been consumed in the memory of a juicy fruit one encountered a few days ago. The reality of nature is distanced from our lives. But as much as we struggle to create it in its life-like replicas — the painted romantic landscapes, the Natural History vitrines, the small mud, or wooden or plastic toy sets, or the zoo — we further reinforce the separation and distance from being part of the natural world; we once belonged to as one of them. The animals and plants now become the objects of scientific inquiry, wonder, entertainment, or at best, of educational value.

The zoo is a collection of sorts — of animals, plants, and objects, and so a miniature world is formed within its confines. Traveling and exploring the world has got human beings to encounter other human beings and cultures and spaces that are different from one's own. The anxiety as well as the excitement of encountering things new and different brings great impetus to collecting foreign objects and species, and traveling them to different contexts as objects of wonder and trophies. But collections such as those in a zoo or the museum became through the 17th to the 19th century literally libraries and studios of study. Those wishing to study human societies, or the natural world, or even design and culture, found these collections as laboratories of the world contained in one space, close to home.

Prominent expositions such as The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London held in 1851, also known for its wonderful building made of steel and glass — The Crystal Palace — developed into a complete arena of the study of materials and arts, techniques and cultures of the complete world brought to the doorstep of any Londoner. From private and royal collections to such public collections of living as well as manufactured objects, these gatherings were laboratories, as well as entertaining as they showcased a variety of foreign objects and creatures, visually drawing out the world outside of home and far and wide; these resulted in books and syllabi that taught future generations the 'ways of the world', just as the Department of Science and Arts set up in the British colonies and part of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London developed a whole system of training artists, craftsmen, and builder-architects. Technical and poetic reproductions such as sketches, watercolours, measured drawings, as well as precise documentary photography were generated from these laboratories of 'world objects' as scientific drawings and documentations that are (imagined to be) sharp and exact to 'the real', can be used as teaching and learning aids, as well as for research and theses on people, cultures, and manners of the human and natural world. Entertainment and education went hand in hand; and that continues with television that often brings sharply framed views of the world to our living rooms. The world is transported visually and available at all times for viewing pleasure as well as education in our everyday lives. Highly developed recording and photographic



This page, left, from top to bottom: Motifs of animals are often manifest in the visual world; for instance, through stories, either in the form of narratives such as folktales or myths or animated as wooden toy sets or as patterns or elements of architecture; the relationships between humans and animals, as seen in the past via mythology, indicate an intricate everyday relation with various species Opposite page, from top to bottom: images from artist Jitish Kallat's 120-part sculptural work titled 'Circa', made of pigmented cast resin, steel, and rope, on display at the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum in 2011 as an attempt to understand the relationship between architectural ornaments and large architectural fabrics, especially in politically-charged contexts such as colonialism or the contemporary moment. It also emphasised animals represented in Gothic architecture where they are constantly in a state of eating/consumption, devouring, surviving and struggling within the food chain and life cycles

instruments and devices claim to bring reality to us in sharp reproductions as close to the real as real! Techniques of reproduction from the measured drawing, to the photograph, to the televisual films – constantly bring reproductions close to realities, or at least claim to do so.
From Durer's sketches, to Karl Blossfeldt's photographs, to the capturing of the drop of milk hitting the surface of water — these images continue to amaze us for accuracy and their life-like capture of nature and reality. They amaze us! They hope to 'teach us'!
The zoo is a kind of inroad into the world of knowledge production - the way we as human beings, see the world and record it; our histories of love and prejudices; as well as our urge to capture the world in all its varieties. Collecting, documenting, and reproducing are forms through which we hope to understand the world and its varied forms of life and culture. This history of collecting, of the sciences — cultural as well as natural — needs to be explored for its techniques and technologies of operation: production and reproductions, forms of analysis, and thesis-making. Anthropology and ethnography, or architecture, as well as the politics of globalisation and development, and war over world resources is somewhere culminating from these histories of collecting and shaping knowledge about different things in the world and world-views.
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Is the zoo a ruin of the Garden-ideal? Botanical gardens often seem to belong to the 18th-19th century obsession with collecting objects from across the world, where the world is a ruin, or rather a verdant ruin — idyllic, beautiful, and yet in a state of disrepair, where the ideas of Enlightenment and Industry will recover and restore, through Colonialism and other such encounters. The Picturesque in art and landscape design built on the garden-of-ruins often; the garden where Nature and Past are contained in a sense of beauty. In this imagination the vagaries of history, the brutality of nature, as well as the strained relationship one has with history and memories of destruction as well as the untamable aspects of life are reduced to objects of beauty or trophies for exhibition. So the garden-of-ruins brings Nature and History under human control, or at least that is the idea it hopes to project.
The zoo and the garden also produce a choreography of walking and viewing, a sense of looking at things, at objects, but also being a part of them; through that moment of visit you are part of that which you watch only at a distance. The garden brings the world — of past and present, the faraway exotica, the distant and yet only imagined — to your doorstep. In a few hours of walk, you can perhaps manage to visit many different continents, as well as historical times. It also clusters knowledge; it brings together a world of objects in one campus for studies and knowledge-building. The producer of these collected worlds is in a position of authority to demand that the world and its knowledge, that history and its memories, are available at command, for study, entertainment, and education.
But to now see after a century or so, some of these botanical gardens and zoos become ruins as sites of neglect, as they may be forgotten for political reasons, or being outdated in their existing formation, produces a new condition of imagination — the idea of how time erodes places and ideas, and the ruin is real now, the new reality. It brings to realisation the nature of nature — its power to destroy and to take over a period of time. The larger sense of cosmic belonging, to time and space beyond one's lifetime, is brought to real material experience as one visits the sites of ruined gardens and exhibitions. The garden loses its choreographed beauty and becomes a forest of shrubs and vines, while cages go empty with death and decay of flesh as Time-Nature takes over. What remains then is simply the vanity of human nature — to collect, to control, to measure.
The zoo is a real condition destined to become a ruin of its own myth. It is the obsessive act of collecting to possess, to control. The obsession is the key motif in its ruin as well, when Time and Nature will obsessively take over.
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Mythology is a measure of infinite time-space imagination and continuum. Mythology collects the world as a series of symbols and metaphors, stringing them in a narrative structure, giving the metaphors visual forms and bodily extensions. It merges the worlds of imagination and exotica with the worlds of reality and everyday life. But here the human self is part of production and narrative, s/he are committed to that same world, and not separated as viewers, as audience. Mythology is a renewed measure of life, and its extended imagination incorporates the world of other beings and things, Gods and stars, every time it is recited or performed (although its basic format structure is repeated).
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As humans travelled, since the Renaissance, man has kept himself (rarely herself, historically speaking) at the centre of an external world. A world of stars and Gods, beings and creatures, plants and animals, other species and geographies — all external, outside, there to be conquered, to be measured, to be documented, to be brought home as miniatures, as collectibles, as curios, filling up cabinets of curiosities — the Wunderkammer. The city collects pieces of architecture from across the world: from London to Paris to Bombay to Cairo; details of style and ornament signify the imagined uniqueness of one place against another. Geographies and climatic conditions are seen as those 'regional curiosities' that can be measured and mapped in the material world produced, and so dividing the world as characteristic zones of uniqueness, to be subsumed within the large idea of Nature or Time — space distributed and collected, distributed as Nature, and collected as Time. What is forgotten is how migrations and confluences challenge notions of Nature-Space relationship.

The world collects itself and redistributes itself every cycle of the Sun and the Moon, Monsoon and the Solstices. The world expands in Space and contracts in Time with every migrating species. Nature is a world and civilisation of its own, not really waiting for someone to discover it. The best geographers and conservators, whether it is Alexander von Humboldt or Verrier Elwin, have been those who saw Nature as an immeasurable expanse of myths and realities that one had to be a part of, at the cost of loss and death, or encountering the true measure of life and its unpredictability at every moment, and every step.
Italio Calvino's *Invisible Cities* is a measure of the world through that which exists, but is invisible, only appearing to the discerning eye, the eye that allows the imagination of the world to subsume you. Jorge Luis Borges' *Imaginary Beings*, similar accounts of travelled places and cosmic beings, produces a narrative of characteristics rather than forms, impressions that become documentary measure. It is one thing to document forms scientifically (which means mechanically) documenting objects and their apparent and visible traits and characteristics, but what is it that sits or hides beyond the visible? The spirit of Beings, animate and inanimate, buildings and creatures, pests and ornaments both clinging to buildings — always escapes documentation. The narrative form struggles to capture that which is Invisible or Imaginary; it exists by virtue of escaping sight but sitting within imagination.
Drawings and photography dominate the world of Nature as crucial modes and processes of material and mechanical documentation. From sketches that render 'objects in their natural surroundings' to very technical drawings produced from measuring animals and other species, the pencil and paper have strongly contributed to our imagination of what the world outside us and other than us, is all about. Photography soon followed suit and brought with it an imagination of 'inherent exactitude'. The science that worked most universally in both case was Geometry — also imagined as a universal and eternal science; however, Panofsky in his text, *Three Essays on Style,* breaks this myth of geometry as a universal science that will produce the same knowledge, the same truth under all circumstances. But Geometry and Photography are both imagined as sciences of exactness and truthfulness, leading to their roles within cultures of knowledge-production and the arts through techniques of reproducibility. The way the photographs of plant specimens were created by Karl Blossfeldt become tools of imagining the geometry of plants and natural world, to be then produced within design forms in stone or cast iron or so. These photographs, one should remember, corrected any natural discrepancies in the precise geometry one wished to see in Nature.
In Ruskin's study of Gothic Architecture, sketching and drawing, it is the myriad details of plants and animals in the ornamental structure that attempt to understand the relationship of human imagination and man-made productions. Thereafter, photography was used to 'document nature' and bring forth its 'inherent science' (of geometry in this case) and was consequently used by art and design students to produce objects. These are not only interesting sets of journeys in the history of documentation and understanding of the Human-Nature relationship, but also an important aspect of aesthetics, culture, and design. A classic essay that strongly elaborates on this latter triad is Adolf Loos' essay *Ornament and Crime*, which in another way reproduces the imagination of journey that humans and their civilisation imagines/ expects to travel between Nature (primitive) and Civilisation (modernity).
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Nature today becomes a site for something as vain as 'edutainment'. Humans further distance the relationship with nature, which is a relationship of risk and struggle, the food chain and territoriality, and yet increase their urge to be voyeurs of the animal world — watch them hunt, mate, struggle, and so on, all from the cosiness of the living room. You fetishise the struggle and strife between species of different kinds in the world in adventure shows, much like nature trails and camps, or with promised wildlife or spiritual experiences that make you imagine you are 'reconnecting' with the natural world. These actually further distance you as somebody who is separate from Nature, regardless of how you may walk in the forest. The Forest devours — one kills the other and battles for survival or food; Nature is violent, vigourous, abundant, and treacherous. Nature is also the ecosystem of networks, and not just objects — it is not Noah's Ark but may be a Garden of God or a cosmic creation of multitude life forms and life patterns.
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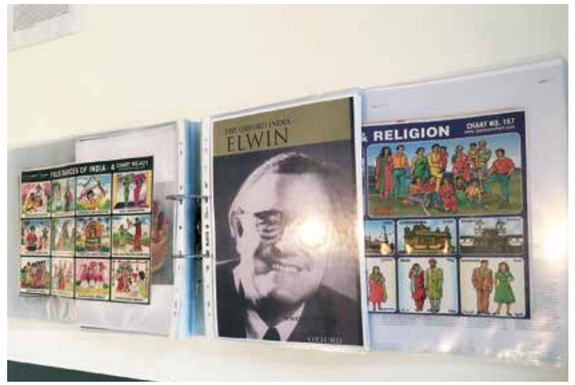
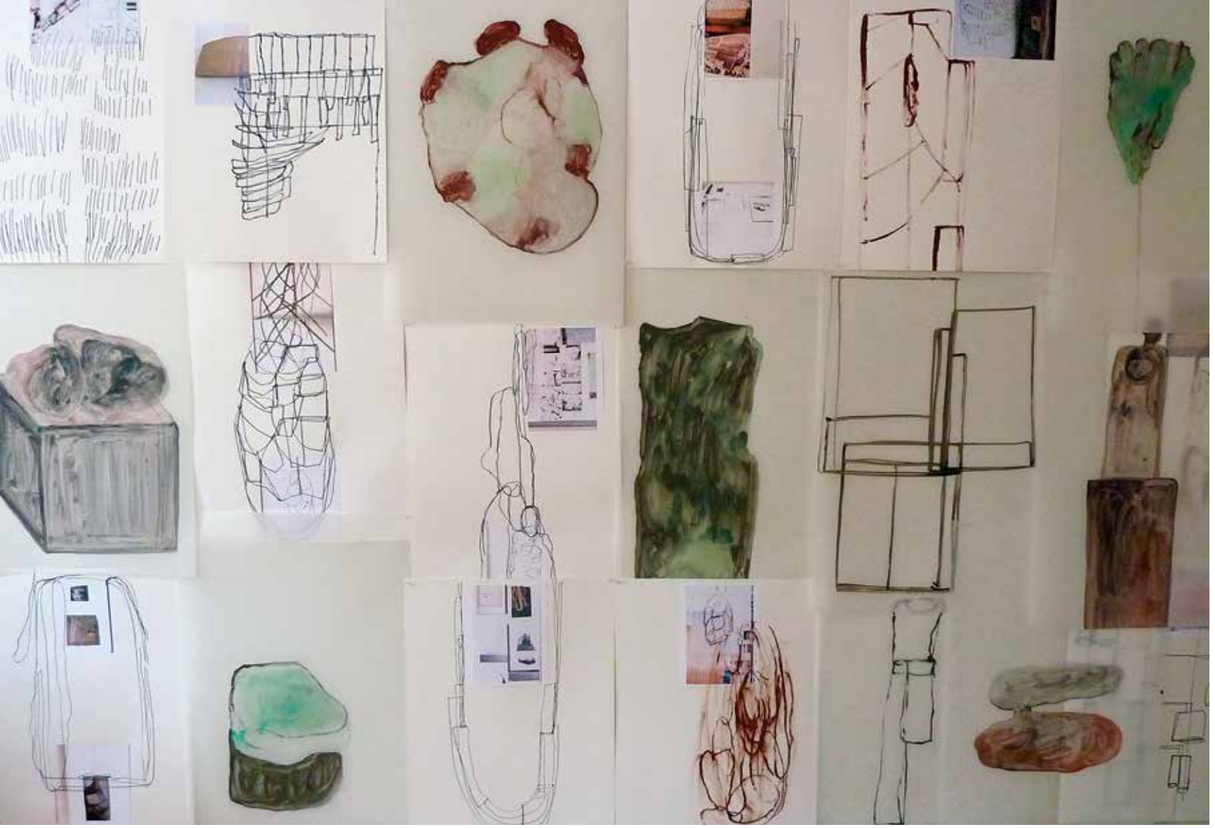
There is decay, things rot, and we today walk through ruins of times and ages past; fruits rot, and vegetation wild and crazy takes over the built environment. The zoo sleeps in its protected zones, while drawings and images capture the sense of growth and decay, death and creation. Ecosystems are lost and struggle to survive as humans do not remember any longer their sense of being on earth, but continue to crave for it. The artworks in this exhibition are a coming together, in a narrative structure, of a myriad of these themes — from collecting cosmic objects, and maps of lost time, to being still within ruins that were once picturesque gardens, and moving meditatively within devouring landscapes, or watching rotting fruits draw cosmic constellations, while sleep shapes the body with life and the wakefulness of dreams and drawings constantly recreates the invisible worlds. ◐



This page, first two rows: Different visual formats such as the 'miniature' in museums, the photogravure, and picture charts depict the classification of humans, living species, habits and so on, overlapping scientific and cultural knowledge
This page, below, and opposite page: various types of display methods used in the exhibtion, including the curator's research in the form of a 'curiosity cabinet'

The Cabinet of Curiosities: the curator's collection and research notes

The vitrine and stand, adopt the format of the Wunderkammer — the cabinet of curiosities, the mother of all ideas on collecting, classifying, and gathering the world or its aspects in the format of a bricolage in order to portray the different objects collected during the process of research for this project. The different objects indicate the variety of ways in which human societies build or imagine relationships with the world of animals and with nature. Toys and cartoon characters, fables and folktales, hero stories such as Tarzan — more popular as comics or animation series — or mythological and totemic renditions such as Ganesha (an elephant-headed god) or Hanuman (a monkey-bodied anthropomorphic demi-god), or the vehicles of gods, are various stages in human civilisation when human species have tried to make peace with their surroundings, environment, and their fear or attempt to control Nature.
The collection of animals in pairs, an indication of the heterosexual imagination as well as the reduction of all in Nature towards functional performance and structural aesthetics only. Noah's Ark, as an important flood myth, is also an early notion of collecting the whole of creation under one roof — besides its sense of pairs of animals — and to imagine that plants and animals collected as objects would easily reproduce the world.
The collection and commanding of the Natural world has always been followed by the limited imagination of classification and taxonomy – the charts used by school children whether for people or animals, festivals or history, are indication of our urge to reduce all creation into logical compartments. Today these are a good reflection to not only how we represent and hence through that imagine the world, but how must the world be seeing us? How are we represented? The Ethnographic project of civilisations is very close to the imagination of Zoos in many ways. These forms of representation and such studies, often carried out through the medium of drawings, also become references in artistic and craft projects — architecture, embroidery, watercolours for interior decoration, or painting for hobby.
The accompanying table provides a sampling of the research material collected, and discussed in the process of developing the curatorial approach and concept, responding to the thematic of the 'zoo' given to the curator.



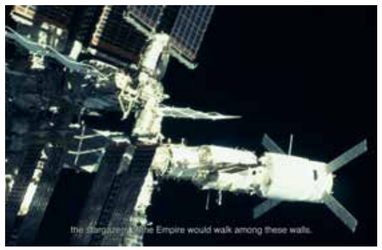
Stuttgart research notes by Shelagh Keeley (2016-17)
The mode of drawing has been an important part of human history and civilisation — whether in the arts or the sciences — forms and modes have been much debated and discussed to finally represent the world of nature and natural phenomena. The drawings here are produced through visits to, and observations of sites such as the archive, the zoo, the natural history museum, or the library — all repositories and collections of knowledge. These drawings draw out from memory and images, but they draw for you a plethora of forms — crystalline, fruit-like, amorphous, scratches, clusters, etc. These drawings oscillate between that which is scientific and that which is poetic; they commit to a very different register of human imagination than the precision of truth as science would expect, or the scale of beauty as classical art would want. They are a map of many maps, a collection of multiple drawings that need to be crawled through in order to to open up and discover hidden stories from the point of view of each viewer's understanding of representation.

This page: Video stills from 'Moving Inwards: Bone Trees & Fluid Spaces' by Sonia Mehra Chawla Opposite page: 'Stuttgart research notes' by Shelagh Keeley — collage, photographs, acrylic on mylar, and marker on paper, 2016-17. The drawings arise from a research trip to Stuttgart studying Wilhelma, the Natural History Museum in Schloss Rosenstein and the public library

'Moving Inwards: Bone Trees & Fluid Spaces' by Sonia Mehra Chawla
Sonia Mehra Chawla's video travels through the mangroves and its many waterways, as roots and shoots of the plants hang around organising a pathway through these dense ecosystems. The artist, through her research, has worked on six eco-sensitive sites in India, two of them being the mangrove ecologies in the Sundarbans in West Bengal and Pichavaram in Tamil Nadu, in eastern and southern India respectively. In this video the artist explores and brings to our attention the serene yet dense nature of this environment, which is a world of its own, yet constantly under threat. Pichavaram, about 1100 hectares in size, is the world's second largest mangrove forest accessible via 400 canals and is cut off from the mainland and hence makes for its own complex ecosystem.
The author Amitav Ghosh in his iconic novel *The Hungry Tide* also tries to unravel the difficult and delicate nature of these ecologies. The novel, set in the region of the Sundarbans, through a delicate and undefined friendship between a local and a visiting scholar explores what such landscapes and intense environmental situations mean to us all — locals and visitors, daily users and researchers. The locals are part of that ecosystem, whereas the environmentalist or the researcher is in most cases sitting outside the ecosystem, trying to enter in.
In Chawla's video, the viewer is in some way an intruder, a voyeur, until you are completely sucked into the landscape by the meditative nature of the film and its sound; at this point you ask as a viewer — where am I — am I an outsider? Can I enter every ecosystem? Who is more vulnerable — me or the ecosystem? Are we both at the mercy of our times?

This page and opposite page, below-left: Video stills from 'The Colonial Garden, Jardin Do Ultramar, Lisbon, Portugal' by Shelagh Keeley, 2016
This page top-left and opposite page, left, from top to bottom: installation views of the exhibition

"The Colonial Garden, Jardin Do Ultramar, Lisbon, Portugal' by Shelagh Keeley' (2013)
In 1940, the tropical colonial garden was integrated into the Portuguese World Exhibition and patronised by the ruling dictator Antonio de Olivera Salazar as a means to show off species of plants and humans of the colonies. Here 135 'natives' were brought from the colonies and forced to live and perform in the garden…a human zoo. I did not know this history while I filmed yet I felt haunted in the garden, and felt a strange layering of history. I only found out about this history when I returned home and did extensive research on the colonial garden through the writing of a Portugese cultural theorist at the University of Lisbon who researched at the office of the Ultramar Archives. No one I spoke to in Lisbon seemed to know this buried political history of the garden. Yet I felt this strange energy while in the garden, and visually recorded the layered traces of its past. When I returned home I recognised from the few photographs in academic research on the colonial exposition of 1940, various sites in the garden I filmed. Now everything is decayed, buried, pavilions locked up, windows whited out and boarded up. Areas in the garden and buildings are fenced off with signs of 'do not enter' and generally left to ruin. It seems they want this colonial history to disappear. My film essay slowly unravels and shows this buried layering of history which is dark and hidden with a strange beauty of its traces. It is political in a very quiet, unsettling way which unravels over time as you slowly walk through the garden.
— Shelagh Keeley



‘Forerunner’ by Sahej Rahal (2013)
The video-story is located largely in a medieval ruin in the area of Delhi about 14 kilometres from the city, and the story talks about the Pir Gayab Observatory, built in a hunting palace by Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq in the 14th century. But the narrative passes through a more contemporary building, demolished and its innards of steel and concrete visible just like an animal opened up. The video begins within the clouds and moves towards outer space orbits viewing the earth from the International Space Station, and at one point, is within the dark interior of a room with a shrouded body drawing space with light.
The video, like the Jorge Luis Borges text *On Exactitude in Science*, quotes and plays between the real and the represented, the notion of memory as history, and history as possible fiction. The astronomical imagination and related sciences in human civilisation are ways in which humans have collected the cosmic world inside their cities and buildings, and these buildings are a tryst with memory, science, and fiction… especially as they crumble or stand as ruins within overgrown vegetation. Nature takes over these buildings — sites of collecting stars, and memories, and stories. Nature takes over the very buildings that we designed to measure Nature, the World, and the Cosmos — over time. While the human body draws space with light, the human-self at the centre of all measure, all nature, and all cosmos, is trapped inside a dark room, desperately making drawings, making maps with shafts of light.

This page, top, and opposite page: Video stills from ‘Forerunner’ by Sahej Rahal, single-channel HD video, 2013
This page, right: installation photographs from the exhibition, including a reading corner created for visitors; all installation photographs by Kaiwan Mehta, and die arge lola, Kai Loges and Andreas Langen, Stuttgart; bottom: ‘The Infinite Episode’ is a series of scultures of animals in sleeping postures, in dental plaster by Jitish Kallat, 2015

This spread, top: 'Sightings Gen-Aub D28M6Y2016', a three-part lenticular photo piece by Jitish Kallat, 2016; bottom: 'The Infinite Episode' is a series of sculptures of animals in sleeping postures created in the same size in dental plaster by Jitish Kallat, 2015

A World in the City — Zoological and Botanic Gardens, *curated by Kaiwan Mehta, is on display at Institut fur Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA), Stuttgart, from 5 May to 2 July 2017. The exhibition project was produced by IFA; it was conducted and coordinated by Iris Lenz - Visual Arts Department, Head of ifa Galleries, Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (IFA).*

'The Infinite Episode' (2015) by Jitish Kallat

Eleven animals sleep next to each other, lined up in a row like on a laboratory table. They are all sleeping — is it a cosy sleep or are they close to being lifeless? If they are asleep, what are they dreaming of? What is the life of animals beyond our visibility? These animals — a swan, an elephant, a bear, and several others, are of the exact same sizes in this sculpture. They are of the same colour — the colour of the material they are made of, but each with precise details of features — fur, skin coat, or feathers — in which sense, they all sit on a white platform, like laboratory specimens ready for a scientific experiment. What this line-up of closely observed and created animal sculptures also alludes to is a tradition of object-drawing and portrait-making in art history itself. But what is most striking is how these specimens or sculptures or figures (depends on how one sees them) are of varying scales — they are of the same size in their representation here — and hence all at different scales, is something that is the reverse of what one will see in science or art. The object-hood of these sleeping figures is hence much brought up for debate, and their state of sleep further nuances the way we see these figures — animals? Science? Art? Psychology? Figure study?`

'Sightings Gen-Aub D28M6Y2016' (2016) by Jitish Kallat

Jitish Kallat, in this series, focuses very closely on decaying fruits — the decay of life and its movement closer to death; but in this process the body, its flesh, its colour, its skin, all change. He meticulously records these changes that nature brings to us. Aspect of nature — decay and change — are most difficult to capture, record, or even reverse. In this process he brings the fruit, a homely object, an object common in the history of Still Life paintings, in conversation with the larger idea of nature and cosmos — life, death, its changes and cycles.

The images — especially as large lenticular prints — then appear as if they are celestial constellations, cosmic arrangements, medieval maps of the sky, or very high-tech recordings of outer-space. The homely fruit is the site of a cosmic event. These works again at one point ask you to discuss the forms and modes of representation used in the sciences and the arts - of photography, of detailed studies through microscopic observations, as well as the struggle towards precision and truth; however the work escapes precisely through the chosen format of representation from the detail to the cosmic.

The cosmic and the galactic are also the other scales that humans have always tried to capture, contain, measure, and map — to be collected as maps — as readings, and as diagrams.

‘The Chimborazo Hillstar’ by Ruth Padel

For a week I saw no sky.
The full moon was a permanent fixture
above a city black as crêpe
where I lost myself in the swirl
of a one-way system

but each new morning she was still alive
I made it to the hospital car park –
I seemed to have paid a season ticket
on my phone, in a manner I do not remember –
as night-workers were leaving, cleaners arriving by bus

I entered the dark maze of corridor
and followed blue floor arrows, the only route I knew
to where she lay. Sometimes her eyes were closed.
Sometimes I found her forcing herself
to sip a child’s beaker of tea. She hated tea

but the coffee was worse. We were on a planet of glass
about to shatter but we laughed, I read her Emma,
she told the Bulgarian nurse
who kept urging her, pointlessly, to eat
that she preferred reality to fantasy

and talked of how she’d loved the Zoo.
The science and romance
of bringing foreign home.
The wilderness within the city,
exquisite endangered animals and plants

like vulpes zerda, little
bat-eared Fennec Fox
of Moonlight World, staking his territory
across a miniature
Sahara of white sand.

She knew she was dying. I’m on the way out
she said to nieces, grandchildren and friends,
her sisters-in-law, her last remaining brother.
The caves and valleys of her defences
seemed to change

like the shifting floral forms
of fractures, vacancies, inclusions, all the flaws
and gardens in the emerald
that give a stone its character. Her grit
faced with a moonlight world

of bedpans, emboli and manic constipation,
the morphine patch she insisted didn’t work,
an aneurism that might pop any moment,
reminded me of the Chimborazo Hillstar,
highest-breeding hummingbird

still hanging on, thanks to nectar
from orange flowers of Chuquiragua
in grasslands where it evolved. Up to the snowline
on the emerald crown of the Eastern Cordillera
and cliffs of golden Cotopaxi, Ecuador.

The writings of Ruth Padel
Text and writing have been a key form of documenting, noting, recording and representing. Ttext accounts, diaries, documents, as well as gazetteers have constantly contributed to civilisation, educational spaces, and scientific circles, entertainment descriptions and details, as well as analyses of people, objects, and places. Plants, animals, different species, sites and regions, studies and ‘discoveries’, have all been put down in text as much as in diagrams and drawings. But when is text authentic and when is it poetic, when is text representative and when is it bringing a leap of imagination? Ruth Padel as a writer works in many formats — poetry, prose, travel writing, and so forth. From animal conservation to the details of migratory patterns, from cellular developments to the crossing of forests, she accounts for a world that is human and animal, cosmic and earthly — in many ways, and all at once. The sense of poetic imagination and scientific knowledge beautifully come together, and rather weave in and out of her texts. From the conservation of energy, the encounter with Nature in life today, to the politically urgent issue of migrations — while writing on the worlds of animals and plants, Padel’s texts make us think about the many questions human societies are living through.

The above poem was especially written for the exhibition

Left: A still from ‘Saras’ by Sahej Rahal, single-channel HD video, 2012

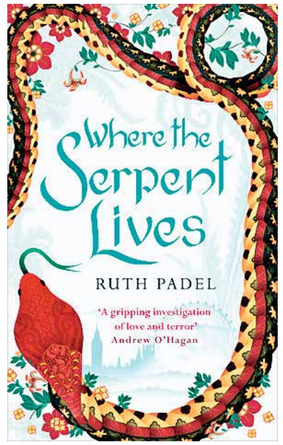
‘Saras’ (2012) by Sahej Rahal
Sahej Rahal finds a discarded Plaster of Paris (POP) torso under a flyover in Mumbai; one of the sculptures of Gods and Goddesses, or celestial beings used to decorate a large stage set during festivals such as Ganapati or Durga Puja — each an example of a ten-day-long festival where large idols are build, celebrated, worshiped, and then immersed in the sea. This idol could be the Goddess Sarawati, or so the artist assumes.

The face is unclear, but the crown and ornaments are visible, the many arms coming out of the body are broken here. The artist literally wears this hollow POP sculpture and makes it breathe, bringing the body in life-like motion. This floating object — decayed today, but surely celebrated and wonderfully colourful once, has regained life. Maybe this was an incomplete sculpture never finished, or used, but the artist draws our attention to life within inanimate objects. He separates the object out of its context — breathing, struggling maybe for life, to recover or borrow life, even if briefly — in the dark abyss of Time, and of Space.
Our tryst with the world is through this struggle of life and death; the life inside inanimate objects; imagining gods and Nature inside lifeless images; separating objects from contexts; and throwing them into the shapeless abyss of Time and History, hoping only to force new meanings and new contexts on to them.

THE STUFF OF NATURE

In the wake of heated debates on Environmentalism and Sustainability, we open up the conversation to the larger question of how we relate to nature, to the environment, and the world around us. This feature runs two parallel forms of engagement with nature — first, a brief extract from the novel *Where the Serpent Lives* by author, critic, and conservationist Ruth Padel, and second, a series of wildlife photographs by architect and environmentalist Shruti Barve. Both, in their work, engage with the environment and nature, and present this engagement in modes that combine the scientific and the aesthetic, the documentary and the poetic. We also look at these modes against historic structures such as zoos and natural history museums, as well as ethnographic museums, all of which recorded places, people, and ideas in exhibitionary formats, and transported people, animals, and contexts across locations

Ruth Padel



Where the Serpent Lives *by Ruth Padel is a novel framed by tropical wildlife and wildlife crime, for which the author visited the world’s only King Cobra Reserve in Agumbe, Karnataka. Two characters are zoologists studying the king cobra or hamadryad, or ‘Spirit of the Forest’. The book contains descriptions of Indian forests, but also of the Devon woodlands and a scene of illegal badger baiting.*

First published in Great Britain in 2010 by Little, Brown. We thank Ruth Padel and Little, Brown for allowing us to republish the beginning of the first chapter - which was also published (along with a translation in German) in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition A World in the City, *curated by Kaiwan Mehta, and produced by and at IFA, Stuttgart. Republished here with express permission from the author to coincide with a feature covering the said exhibition.*

Wednesday 9 March 2005,
Karnataka, India, 4.30 p.m.;
11.00 a.m., UK

Rainforest, in the dry season. If you had looked closely at those black zigzag lines under green bamboo, you would have seen they were not the shadows of overlapping leaves but edges between the charcoal-grey scales of her head. You could have admired the bronze shadows in each honey-flame iris, the pearl-pale ring encircling each black pupil, and maybe have seen the whole of her – a dark knot on a double-decked mound of dead bamboo leaves, high as a man’s thigh.
The only movement was a luminous ant exploring the underside of a leaf, and a few mites, like red full stops, sampling her interstitial skin.
Suddenly, far off, there was a rasping cry, a leopard calling cubs, maybe.
She part-spread her hood. She had no external ear, she would not have heard us talking beside her, but this low-frequency call hit the side of her skull, travelled from her skin into jaw muscle and quadrate bone, and flicked her inner ear. She dabbed out her tongue. The prongs, two tubes of glistening black shading to grey-pink, waved in different directions, tasting the air, decoding scents and calling them into cavities in her mouth, lined with nerve endings. To her, as to all snakes, taste and smell were one.
A small brown babbler flew to a lower branch, displacing a leaf, and her eyes were on it before it reached the ground. She was on guard. But she was very thirsty. Making a tumulus and laying thirty eggs in it is hard work.
She was young and this was her first time. Evolution had not let her down, a million years of it had been at work in her as she made the incubation chamber. Her eggs required specific heat and humidity for two months and they’d get it, no problem. She was not one degree out. But she needed water.
Afternoon light shone through the translucent flanges either side of her head and on the gold horizontal throat scales. Her throat would have seemed curiously thin and flat, like a twist of sugarpaper, if you’d looked at her from the side.
And someone was looking. A slight, bespectacled man, utterly silent, whose palms were hot and rather wet. Her heart had three chambers. He knew that, he was a biologist. His own had four and he wanted the blood to keep going safely through them all. Which it would stop doing, if it came into contact with one drop of the neurotoxin being manufactured, twenty feet away, by salivary glands in her head.
Some people call king cobras aggressive. But aggressive, Richard would tell you, is only interpretation. He’d say active defensive, himself. Anyway, each king is different.
Snakes, Richard sometimes said to his wife (she’d heard it before but she’d laugh and listen again), are like beings from outer space, a totally different intelligence. Their brains and emotions are not large or complex, but they do have them and king cobras have them in spades. Richard had watched this female frothing fallen leaves into a heap, muscling sideways like a TV cable brushing the studio floor. Female kings, he’d tell you, are the only snake to make a nest. They sit over the eggs for two months, not leaving even to eat. If they leave, humidity and temperature change. The eggs start to discolour within an hour. But this female was young; she might behave differently. She did. Dark coils flowed over each other as she unwound. Nine feet of ivory chevrons disappeared like a yanked rope into the undergrowth. She could only have left for water and Richard knew where the stream was. This was his chance. Five minutes, maybe ten. He stepped forward, putting each foot down slow, to press snappable veins of any dry leaf deep into the loam. He was thirty-seven and a field zoologist. His research permit from the chief wildlife warden allowed him to walk in the forest, measure and observe, but not remove anything, even king cobra scat.

Richard’s relations with the director of this South Indian national park were strained. The last director was devoted to the forest. Richard’s research, and the kings themselves, had flourished. ‘The new one had arrived six months ago. He resented being sent into the sticks from an office job in Mangalore, knew nothing about wildlife and at once began selling protected trees to a saw mill. Richard had agonised to see forest he had worked in for fifteen years dwindling. There are hundreds of wonderful directors in India, he emailed his wife despairingly, and they’ve sent us a tosser.
He had not pointed out that what the director had done was illegal.
‘Cutting those trees,’ he said carefully in the state language, Kannada, over the desk where he had held so many ardent conversations with the previous director, ‘destroys wild animals that depend on the trees.’
‘I am trained in forest management,‘ said the new director in English, even more carefully, in a voice like granite. ‘You are not.’ He must have phoned the forest minister at once, for someone tried cancelling Richard’s permit on the grounds that he was interfering in forest policy. That failed, so the director turned to local journalists. A paragraph in the Mangalore Times said Richard was smuggling king cobra skins. What else would an Englishman be doing in the national forest but making money? And why king cobras? All cobras are messengers from god. King cobras, those mystical, deep-forest dwellers, are doubly divine. Richard was protected by friends in the state, but how long could this go on? He was a scientist, no diplomat. He simply believed that the more we know about king cobras, the better we can protect them. And just now, knowledge meant taking precise measurements in a vacant nest.
The eggs were soft, like tennis balls. No leeches, but a few mites. More must be sucking her blood. But she’d looked OK – shiny, not anaemic. Out with the humidity gauge. Ninety per cent. Brilliant. Thermometer: 27.8. Perfect. Well done, young mum. Hurry home now.
He heard a rustle. Oh God, was she back already? No, just a tree shrew, staring from a branch. But it was definitely time to go.

Nature photography has been a key genre and typology in modern times — as much as writing and drawing in earlier historical moments — to document the life in wild, and nature. However, photography, and tele-visual programmes have brought the wild to the comfort and safety of the living room — largely transforming the sense of the wild and its visual attractiveness into a subject of entertainment or rather 'edutainment'. These forms of documentation do engage with nature in a very different way, and if not consumed only for their aesthetic pleasure, could produce the world outside for us in productive ways. What cannot, however, be forgotten is their nature as a combination of scientific observation as well as poetic imagination.
Photos Shruti Barve

This page, top: a fern leaf in the tropical forests of Kerala; bottom: the Malabar Giant Squirrel in Vyrithi, located in Kerala's Wayanad district/ photographs by Shruti Barve

Below: a photograph of a sculpture of a serpent at the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum/ photograph by Iris Lenz

The forest was utterly still, but for the thud of his still healthy heart. The leech wriggling over his shoe might be surprised in a minute by what was happening to the blood it was so keen to reach

Where a small stream leaked over the path, he saw a paw mark filling with water. Leopard, in the last fifteen minutes. You never saw leopards but they were always around. He heard human voices, ducked under bushes and saw five men. They must belong to the village inside the park. Those villagers wanted to move to a settlement, already built to their requirements, outside the park. They'd be close to schools there, and to work. But the new director had not released the funds to move them so here they stayed, decimating the wildlife.
Three carried mattocks and bags. Two had guns. All were thin: the villagers were very poor. Hunting was their traditional livelihood. It was illegal here now this was a sanctuary. The animals were supposed to be protected. But with better medicine there were more children, so fewer wild animals every year. The previous year poachers all over India had killed or maimed a hundred forest guards.
When they'd gone, Richard began slowly to straighten, but above him came a low roary growl and he froze. He was one of the few people in the world who knew what that growl was. King cobras do not hiss like other snakes: they expel air through holes in their trachea. Now he saw a hood, towering above him. Her golden throat, black-edged like a mourning card, was two feet from his nose. She must have been rearing up to see over the bushes and he'd alarmed her by standing up himself.
In that electric moment when human meets king cobra eye to eye, each is liable to confuse the other's motive. Keep still, he thought. Be very still. He knew the biology all too well. She could force into his tissues 0.7 milliliters of citron-tinged venom, enough to kill an elephant; or twenty people. Running was hopeless. He'd still be in her range six feet away and she could charge amazingly fast. No eye contact. Let her gaze. She would do what she decided. He thought of Irena. Irena in the kitchen, laughing. Irena's narrow body smooth in the dark, hair tickling his shoulder. Then, treacherously, that dark hair became red-gold curls, Oh no, not now… A face formed in front of him. Pale, perfect cheekbones he had never touched, a wide soft mouth, ringlets of tangerine hair which for twenty years he'd longed to run his fingers through. He shifted slightly, the snake growled again and his vision faded.
The forest was utterly still, but for the thud of his still healthy heart. The leech wriggling over his shoe might be surprised in a minute by what was happening to the blood it was so keen to reach.
Every snake venom is a unique cocktail of enzymes, polypeptides and glycoproteins which act on different systems of the body: nerves, breath, muscles and blood. Neurotoxin, the main component in cobra venom, would bind instantly to receptors on the surface of his muscle cells, block communication between his nerves and muscles, severing the impulses that made his muscles contract. Meanwhile, tissues round the bite would swell and necrotise, haemorrhagin would crumble his capillaries and his own blood would circulate to the rest of his body the proteins causing all this havoc.
The park did not stock king cobra antivenin, which was only made in Thailand. Anyway, he would never reach the guard post. Within minutes, those neurotoxins would stun his nervous system and slow his breathing. Paralysis would follow, as the textbooks said, very fast.
Looking down at his feet like a boy confessing to a broken rule, Richard stood immobile for what seemed a very long time. He contracted, as only a scientist or poet can, on precise names for the leaves he was looking at. He felt her eyes upon him. He was in the hands of the living god, of neurosynapses in a reptile brain.
When he looked up she was gone.

Wednesday 9 March, Primrose Hill, London, 11.30 a.m.; 5.00 p.m., India

Picturing herself as a small jungle animal peering from the shadows, Rosamund Fairfax walks out of her house into a garden.
Rosamund never asked to go through life with a zoo in her head. She has never told anybody she can only make sense of human existence by recoding it all, herself included, as animal. Not Irena, not Tyler, She shared more of her inner self with Russel when he was little than with anyone else, but she never told him either.
There is, or used to be, an outside Rosamund, warm and sparkly. But she is afraid there is something quite different inside. A wild shy unlovable animal. The Madagascan Cryptic Frog looks more like dead leaves than a lot of leaves do and Rosamund sympathises. She often feels like a pile of dead leaves herself.
She doesn't know these animals in real life. The zoo in her head is a dead zoo, placed there by her father, whom she hasn't seen for thirteen years. Father cared a lot about her mind, and her mind is where the wildlife stays. She has no idea that every move she makes, in this pewtery light of March, is being monitored from the back fence where a pregnant vixen is curled up under the brambles.
Since Rosamund and Tyler put a conservatory on the end of their kitchen, the local foxes have watched them cook and eat through a transparent wall. Foxes listen to all they do, with hearing keen as a spike through the heart.
Rosamund's nose and hands are mauve with cold. She hates gardening in gloves, she likes feeling stems and roots. She has high cheekbones and pale skin. Even at thirty-seven, in a raw wind with no make-up, she has a frail grace which makes being human seem appealing and easy. At school and college she used to be surrounded by admirers. She told jokes, she was a star on the dance floor. Now she has a husband and son but feels alone all the time and scuttles through her days on mental paths like vole runs through a field. This garden is where she feels safe.
Last year she did a course in design at the Chelsea Physic Garden. Tyler bought her the course for her birthday, slapping the brochure on the table like a winning hand at poker. 'Stop you sitting on your fanny all day,' he said, which was very unfair since it was he who stopped her working when she had Russel. But when did Tyler ever do fair?
She is proud of her diploma, the only qualification she has. She studied biology for three years at university, which pleased her biologist father, but dropped out before the fourth year which did not please Father at all. There is a story behind that, but not thinking about it helps her stay safe. Not thinking is how her solitary jungle self keeps going. She sees this as a Rusty Spotted Cat – one of Asia's smallest wild cats, Father. used to say, which slips through the undergrowth trying not to be seen by larger predators.
She hasn't done what her course was meant for and launched her own garden design business. Her design file (Costing, Axonometric Drawing, Theory) lies quilted with dust on a kitchen shelf. She tells herself she will start, soon. She did design a patio garden for friends of Tyler's but they wanted mirrors, decking and stones, Japanese style, and in Rosamund's opinion a garden is made of living things. She likes getting her hands dirty, breathing the leaves.
No one else comes here now. Russel stays in his room, Tyler lights the odd cigarette out here now he's forbidden to smoke in the house, and loves their summer parties. Yes, amazingly large, for London. Quarter of an acre, actually. So lucky.
There's an enormous mortgage somewhere. Rosamund pictures it as an exotic pet fed by Tyler in the basement and paraded in an iron collar. I'm loaded, Tyler says. I make more money than anyone I know.
He is a music promoter, specialising in girl bands. Doing shockingly well these days, he will say with a self-deprecating smile.
Tyler billowed into her life in her second year of college, seven years older than her, broad shoulders and twinkling smiles, convinced that the world came into existence for him to

Left: A pair of dragonflies shot in the summer in Matheran/ photograph by Shruti Barve

enjoy. In the lavish appreciating that is Tyler's great gift, Rosamund's Rusty Spotted self vanished as if it had never been. She felt human for the very first time. You're everything, he said, I've ever loved.

That was eighteen years ago and Rusty Spotted is back now with a vengeance. For ten years, Rosamund has slept alone in a carved walnut bed, originally their guest bed. For our fab friends, said Tyler, to cavort in when they stay. No one cavorts in it now. Rosamund has covered it in vintage Edwardian lawn and sleeps there in a nightdress that covers her completely, throat to ankle.

Today, in her mud-coloured cargo pants, mole-brown jumper and cracked waxed jacket, Rosamund blends into this chilly garden like its resident divinity. Her hair spills out under her woolly cap like gold leaf scraped into curls by a knife. Her mouth is full and wide as if made to do nothing but laugh. A cold sore has erupted on her lip.

Two flowerbeds wing away either side of the bare rose arch and a path curves onwards towards the shed, their Heidi Home, which has hearts cut in its eaves, a porch covered in brambles and one corner marbled by Bono's territorial dribbles.

This is pruning time, before the garden wakes up. But where to start? She looks at emerald leaves cascading over the fence by the house. You'd never know there are camellias in there. That jasmine is nice and green now when everything is brown, but it has to go. She advances on it with secateurs.

The vixen watches from the brambles. The woman is carrying something. Some things she carries are edible and get left on odorous heaps behind the shed. But instead she begins attacking the best thing about this territory, from the fox point of view: its cover. For ten years, an.outsize dog has prevented foxes denning here. The dog is slowing and stiffening now. Any fox could mark the tremor in the back legs. The vixen has decided to have her cubs here. The Heidi Home used to stand on solid ground. Rosamund and Tyler think it still does, but the foxes have dug a hole beneath.

Marching to the rescue of her camellias, Rosamund untwists long green whips of jasmine, which pile up round her boots. She likes pruning, you can't be a gardener without it, but she hates to hurt living cells. Snip, snip. The secateurs get into a rhythm. When did she plant this jasmine? The summer they came, fifteen years ago when she was pregnant. The first thing she planted, clumsily, not having done it since she was little. Trying to recreate the magic, the garden she grew up in.

Cutting into the hardened spaghetti of jasmine fronds she sees a demon mask looking at her, crooked and sly like the eyes she saw on her ninth birthday, the one day she went into forest with Father.

But no. This is only a funny-shaped knot. She throws it behind her and snips on.

She hadn't wanted to go into forest. The garden was what she loved as a child. She felt so alive, slipping out in early morning alone. She loved the rustly silence, tendrils dancing in the wind that came before the rains, the dreamtangle of flowers over her head, the little orange paths between islands of coarse grass, the hundreds of different shapes of leafs, bronze, red, peppermint, all kinds of green. Some two-tone with paler undersides, like sweets the cook brought from the bazaar.

In the mornings, that garden had a Light Side and Dark Side. Where the trees were close together, one path disappeared in deep black shadow and was deliciously scary. Once she had seen a mongoose there, a calm brown little presence, silent and comforting. And there was a bush covered in bees, the Buzzing Bush, which she always ran past, fast as she could.

But when Father came round the garden with her, drilling her in scientific names for butterflies and birds, expounding the anatomy of lizards, all that magic vanished. With him there, she felt two opposite uncomfortable things. She lost touch with the mystery, but she also felt threatened by a different mystery, the frightening out-of-controlness which hung round Father like a dangerous smell. To which, long ago, she had given the name of Jungle.

She snips on. Maybe she had never given Father credit for simply trying to show her things he loved. But things never were simple with Father. There was always something frightening beneath, as if all his knowing things, names, behaviour, explanations, was his way of not thinking about other more important things, unspoken. She resented the explaining, though she never dared show it.

And yet, how funny, when Russel was little she had found herself explaining things to him just as Father had to her.

Forest was Father's place. Whenever he asked her to come with him into it she hung back. But just before her ninth birthday he insisted. She was old enough now, it was a privilege. He prepared her beforehand. 'Make no sound, Rosamund. Put your feet down slowly. If in danger, freeze.'

When they got there, there was forest all round her and above, and she was so damn quiet that, following Father round a corner through bushes miles higher than she was, she came right smack face to face with a wild dog, a dhole.

She knew what it was from *The Jungle Book*. Even the tiger will turn aside for the dhole. Amber eyes stared into hers. She heard a distant whistle. Suddenly Father was beside her. 'There are more,' he whispered. 'They hunt in packs and the pack is calling. Very rare, now. We shall retreat, Rosamund. Slowly. Keep your face towards him.'

When they got home she ran to her room and refused to go into forest again, the only time she defied Father openly as a child. Father knew everything and was always right, but he made her feel that everything, she herself, was all wrong.

She's cut off most of the green leaves now. They'll grow back. Snipping on into a maze of brown, she sees something like an arrow-head in the heart of the tangle. One of Russel's toys, chucked in the air years ago, mourned briefly and forgotten? No. A tiny skeleton, neck and skull hanging, beak pointing down. And above it an old nest, a blackbird's.

The birds she grew up with, and their Latin names – Father made sure she knew those – were tropical. Some native only to South India. But when Russel was little she learned the British ones. Together they collected eggshells, feathers, nests. They had a clock that chimed in the song of different birds, a garden table for the birds themselves.

Such heaven, being the mum of a five-year-old whom it was so easy to make happy.

Rosamund peers at the skeleton. It died here and she had never known it had lived. Blackbirds did nest here once. She remembers showing Russel the parents flying in and out. This chick must have fallen head first and got caught by the very fronds the parents had chosen to protect it.

Rosamund gathers up the severed stems, drops them on the compost heap and retreats to the house.

Not quite steadily, observes the watching vixen. Rosamund usually ripples slightly when she moves, as if accompanied by a loving little wind. But her walk is jerky now and her face shiny with tears.

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This page, from top: a female Mynah bird with its young ones in the summer of Matheran; the growth of moss on rock surfaces an indication of unpolluted environment; the Nilgiri *langur* is a Lutung (a type of Old World monkey) found in the Nilgiri Hills in southern India. It is an endangered species, and features on the IUCN Red List, on account of deforestation and rampant poaching/ photographs by Shruti Barve Right, from top to bottom: images of the display units at Natural History (Mumbai) as well as Ethnography (Stuttgart) Museums

This feature is compiled by Kaiwan Mehta in context of the exhibition A World in the City: Zoological and Botanic Gardens *curated by him for IFA Stuttgart, Germany.*

Images from an Ethnographic museum and a Natural History museum are an important reminder of institutions and practices that have created our knowledge bank and, in fact, guided the way we perceive the world. Taxonomy and classification systems have organised the natural world and natural habitat for us in various compartments. When we discuss Regionalism and adhere that imagination to soil, land, and climate — as much as that may not be untrue — we forget the histories of migrations, movements, and confluences. How do zoos, natural history museums, or ethnographic exhibitions explain to us the transitory nature of life and nature, the constantly volatile nature of life production and consumption? How do we understand the historical nature of these institutions and their development through the 18th to 20th century, not simply as private collections or curiosity cabinets but rather as spaces of public consumption, education, and entertainment; their ability to be treated as science and leisure?