Inheritors Of Earth

Curated By Premjish Achari

Participants:

Arunkumar HG
Ben Goldfarb
Bhimanshu Pandel
Gaurav Patil
Hemangini Maharaul
Ishita Chakraborty
Jayita Barai
Maksud Ali Mondal
Manir Mrittik
Manuel Mata
Minam Apang
Radhika Agarwala
Ravi Agarwal
Samit Das
Sujith SN
Sweety Chakma
Sandeep TK
Valay Gada

Shared Ecologies

Curatorial Note

Premjish Achari

This exhibition invites you into the intimate, complex and deeply relational world that has always existed alongside ours, that of the life of plants. We rarely pause long enough to be aware of their realities, yet they generate the air we breathe, the ground we walk on and are often the protagonists of stories we tell about place and time.

The title echoes writer Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's story *Bhumiyude Avakashikal* (1977) in Malayalam, which imagines flora, fauna and humans as equal co-custodians of the planet, each with a rightful claim to the earth. This philosophy of shared inheritance underpins the exhibition. Its ethical focus is also informed by the life and writings of Kallen (Kandal) Pokkudan, ecological activist who planted thousands of mangrove saplings across Kerala, intricately intertwining his own chequered personal history and experiences as a Dalit with the fragile life of the mangrove forests. His example shows that intimacy with plants is not a romantic escape from the world, but a way of inhabiting it more justly.

Aesthetic encounters in this exhibition open possibilities for unlearning the transactional relations through which we usually approach the plant world. Here, expressions of botanical life, their seasonal changes and their quiet endurance become

ways of learning to inhabit the world differently. *Inheritors of Earth* proposes that plant life is not a passive backdrop to human experience, but a parallel, entangled world whose rhythms and narratives have an abiding claim on our imagination.

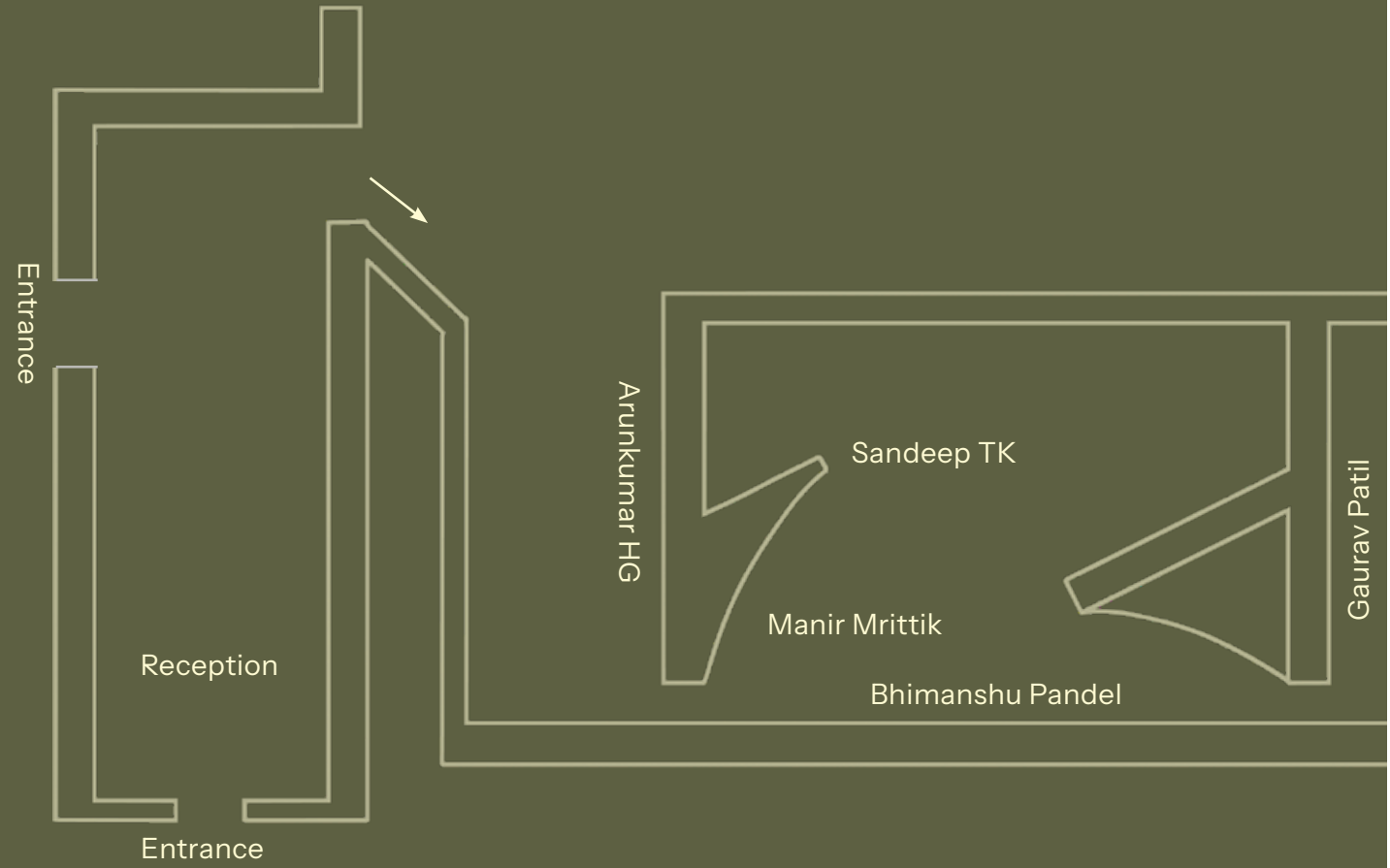
Across the exhibition, you will encounter paintings, photographs, installations, drawings and videos that reveal a vegetal world of extraordinary interiority. We will see growth and decay, witness rootedness as a form of memory and resilience. Rather than simply depicting plants, the artists dwell with them, observing their temporalities and allowing these rhythms to enter the texture of their work.

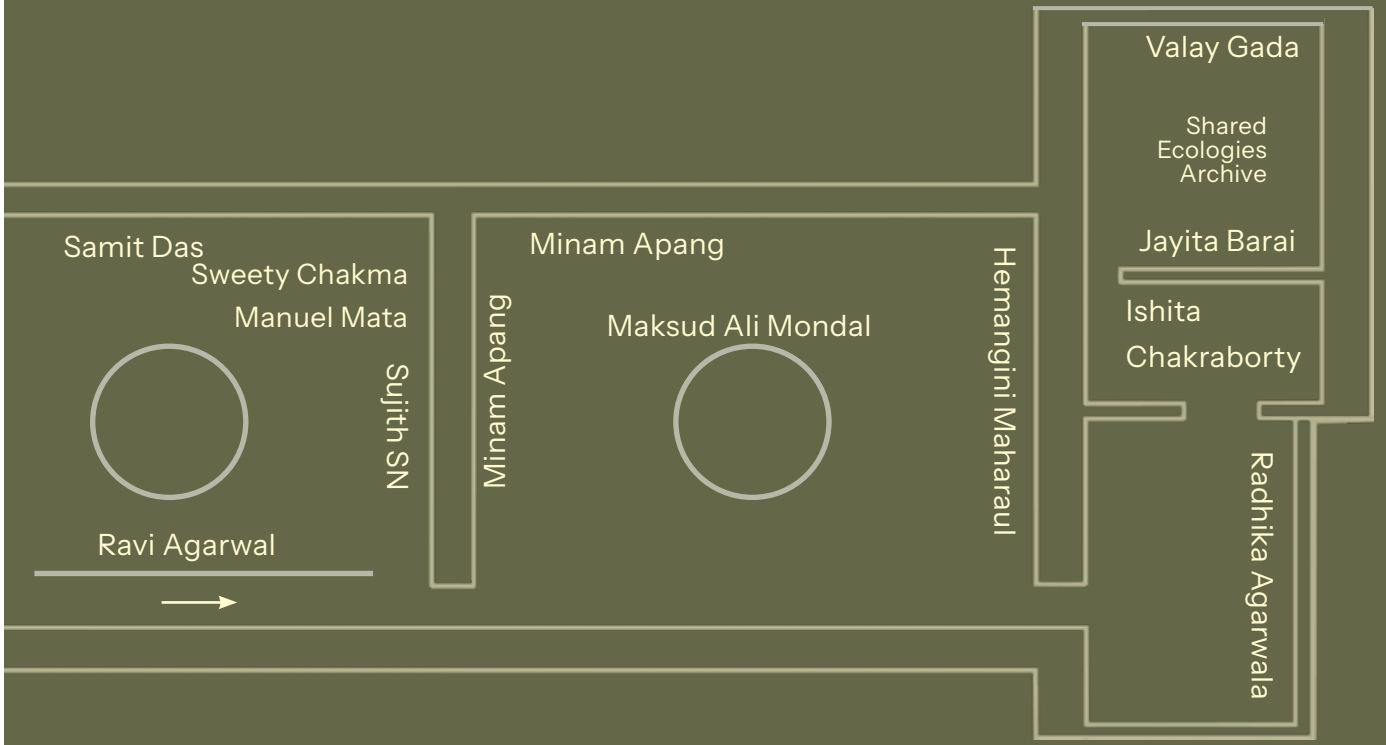
These practices help us develop what we call a *phytosensitive* approach. This involves encountering, not merely representing, plants. Artists in this exhibition work with displaced organic matter and hybrid forms, attending to how plants carry histories of weather, rupture and movement. They trace the journeys of crops borne along the routes of the colonial empire, charting botanical migrations to create new vocabularies for belonging, exile and persistence. Their work also gestures towards the rarely recognised group of lower-caste physicians, illustrators and knowledge-keepers who collaborated in early botanical compendia.

Together, these practices bring a patient, meditative sensibility to the act of looking at vegetal life, holding plant worlds within the register of collective memory. In asking us to look with plants rather than merely at them, the exhibition reconfigures imagination itself towards coexistence, humility, and shared inheritance.

Ruminations

Every herbarium begins with an absence.
Not the flower but the world that allowed it to become one.


Entrance
Reception
Entrance
Arunkumar HG
Sandeep TK
Manir Mrittik
Bhimanshu Pandel
Gaurav Patil


Valay Gada
Shared Ecologies Archive
Jayita Barai
Ishita Chakraborty
Radhika Agarwala
Hemangini Maharaul
Minam Apang
Maksud Ali Mondal
Minam Apang
Samit Das
Sweety Chakma
Manuel Mata
Sujith SN
Ravi Agarwal

Arunkumar HG

'Vulnerable Guardians (series), 2023,',
Digital prints on Gamuchas,
31.5 x 64 inches.

Arunkumar HG

'Vulnerable Guardians (series), 2023,',
Digital prints on Gamuchas,
31.5 x 64 inches.

Under the Order of Things

Premjish Achari

The histories of art, science, and botany have taught us to look past plants even if they were subjects of study to be painted, catalogued, and named. Art history has mostly treated botanical life as backdrop or symbolic element. To illustrate, trees have decorated the background of a landscape, illuminating the mood of the subject, whereas flowers have represented life and fertility. Meanwhile, botanical and scientific histories viewed plants as specimens, resources, and data.

This alignment of plant life with resources, and the failure to acknowledge them as living beings with complex relations to land, labour, caste and community, is inherent in its history. Therefore, it becomes all the more important to examine the colonial survey of South Asia as they brought together an interdisciplinary field of engagement integrating science, politics, economics, and medicine, while overlooking the contributions of visual arts and the indigenous knowledge that made these projects possible. Botanical drawings from this period show an unusual convergence of art and science, yet the artists and local healers who identified, collected and cared for these plants were rarely named. Figures like Itty Achudan, whose empirical knowledge of plants shaped major studies, entered the record only partially. In contrast, the plants were fixed into taxonomies that separated them from the social worlds they sustained, leaving significant gaps in our knowledge

systems. They tell us how plants were classified, traded or aestheticised, but not how they were experienced, or how they participated in more-than-human histories of place, caste and survival. They rarely foreground plant agency or subjectivity; they fail to imagine vegetal life beyond utility, symbol, and specimen.

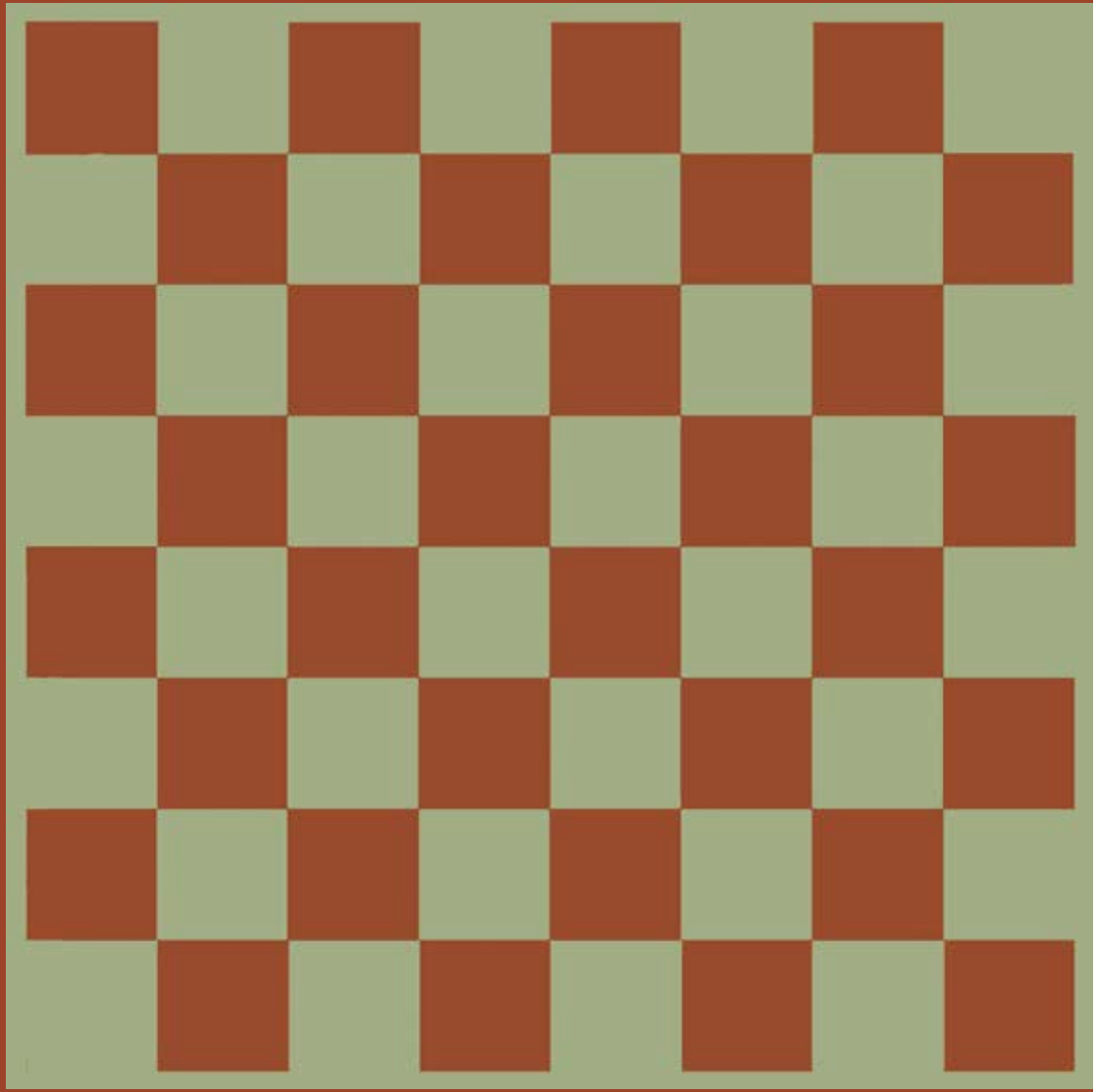
This exhibition lingers precisely in those gaps. It asks how we might re-read art historical and botanical archives from the vantage point of plant life, and how phytosensitive practices today can make visible the relations, solidarities and knowledge that these earlier histories left out.

Sandeep TK

'Colorized scene from Kadal Paranjath or As Told By the Sea, 2026, film.'
Screenplay and direction: Sandeep TK. Cinematography: Sheethal NS, Vyshakh Thaliyil. Editor: Noufai Salih. Sound: Nandagopan P. UPM: Savinay Shivadas. Courtesy of the Artist.

Checkers

Remove the perforated game pieces from the accompanying page to play.



A stem lifted from its weather. Soil falls away. Pollinators disappear. Fungal exchanges, tidal rhythms, the labour of those who knew where it grew—excluded. Against the immaculate field of the specimen sheet, relation becomes contamination. What remains appears complete because everything sustaining it is removed.

The colonial specimen established a way of seeing that made the living world available for administration and extraction, training the eye to mistake isolation for knowledge.

A durable inheritance.

We celebrate plant intelligence, search for vegetal communication, ask if forests can teach computation, architecture, robotics, governance. Yet the demand persists. Plants must still earn their place performing resemblance or utility.

Manir Mrittik

'Breathing Woods, 2026',
Driftwood,
10 x 17 x 18 inches.

Manir Mrittik

'Infinite Light 6, 2023',
Print on Bamboo paper,
11.25 x 16.5 inches.

Find the Words

O	H	P	L	K	R	O	O	T	P	S	K	A	Z	M	A	L	D	V	X
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Perhaps, vegetal passivity marks a failure of perception rather than an absence of action. Sessility does not announce withdrawal from the world. It names another fidelity to it.

Street trees become amenities. Weeds? Administrative failures. Houseplants condense ecologies into decorative compliance. Even care reproduces possession when relation demands legibility.

Gaurav Patil

'Pre-Monsoon Drift 2026',
Digital photograph,
23.4 x 33.1 inches.

The Garden of Tomorrow

Abbas A Malakar

Plants are food, medicine, backdrops to selfies, indoor decorations, and road dividers. They are things for use and often abused.

We have an extraordinarily long list of why each plant is useful to us. We widely value plants for what they give us. There is frequently a transaction without acknowledgement or reciprocity. We only know our end and that is satisfactory for us.

Typically, the vocabulary we use to speak about plants is organised around human categories of value and use: invasive when it defies our expectations, productive when it yields measurable results. These terms do not describe plants as they exist—only as they exist for us. We have corrupted and enslaved the arboreal world for this very purpose. Enslavement through naming and instrumentalization is the essence of our perception of them.

How they occupy this world, and how their lives interact in their environments largely becomes relevant only in the knowledge contributing to our domination over this planet.

What plants are cannot be answered through a lens designed to diminish their agency. Their existence does not require our brand of validation measured in functionality, consumption, and profitability.

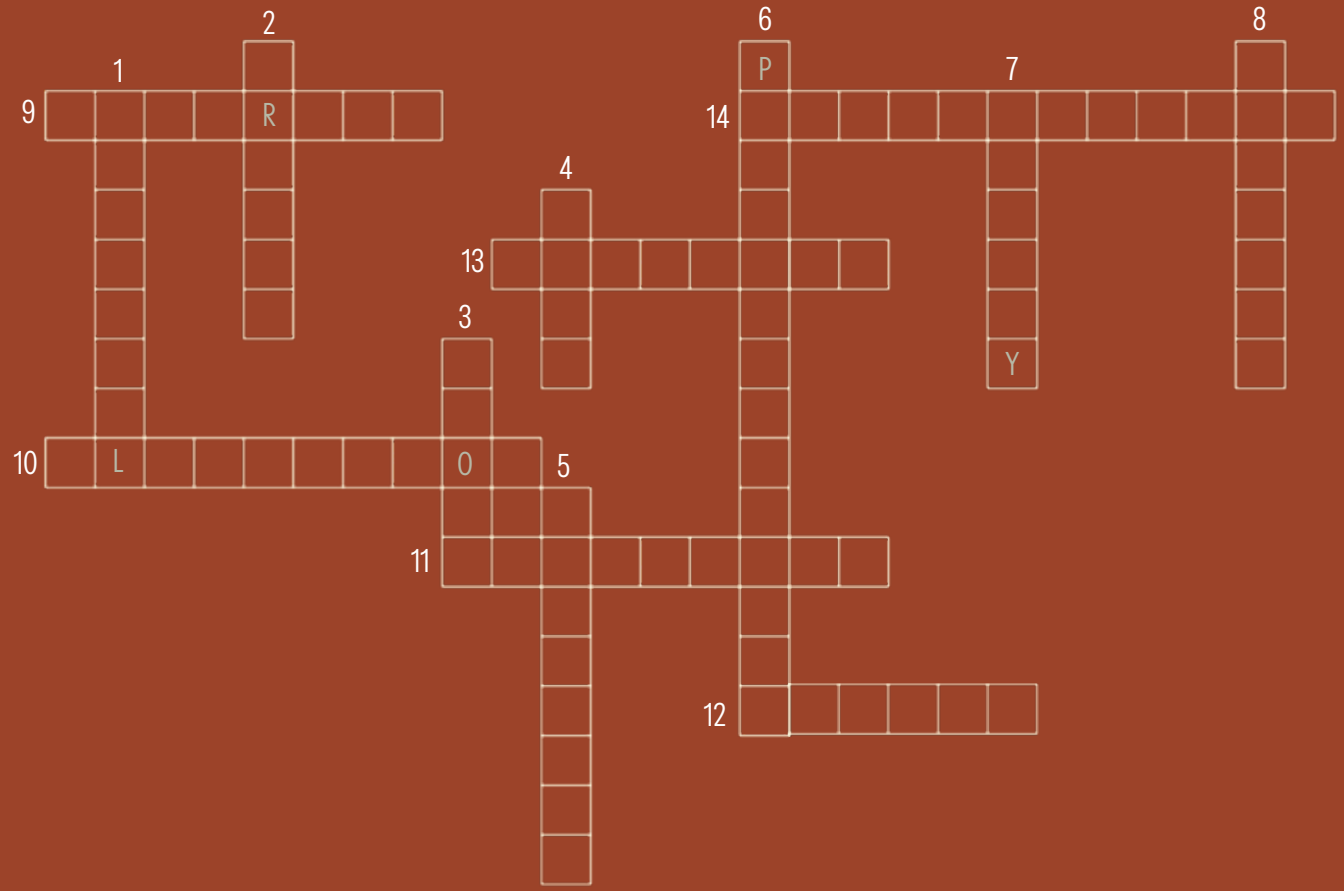
Now is a time for reorientation. Not through romanticism or spectacle, but through an alternative gaze seeking intimate engagement.

Artists here are not representing plants so much as creating conditions in which plant processes become perceptible to us. Their works are a recognition that the life and logic of a plant, while different from our own, is no less valid. They seek to position plants within principles of kinship and reverence such that their sustained presence constitutes a form of wisdom.

Think alongside us. Acknowledge their agency. Look beyond the anthropocentric need to subjugate and subvert the arboreal realm. Let us find ways to listen to plants and to look at them for what they are.

Sujith SN

'Untitled Triptych, 2026',
Tempera on Paper,
11 x 16 inches.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Clue Vertical:

1. of, relating to, or resembling a tree
2. a natural subdivision of a plant stem
3. a planting of fruit trees, nut trees, or sugar maples
4. The plant's kitchen
5. a young plant grown from seed
6. A chemical process using sunlight
7. the uppermost spreading branchy layer of a forest
8. a planting of fruit trees, nut trees, or sugar maples

Clue Horizontal:

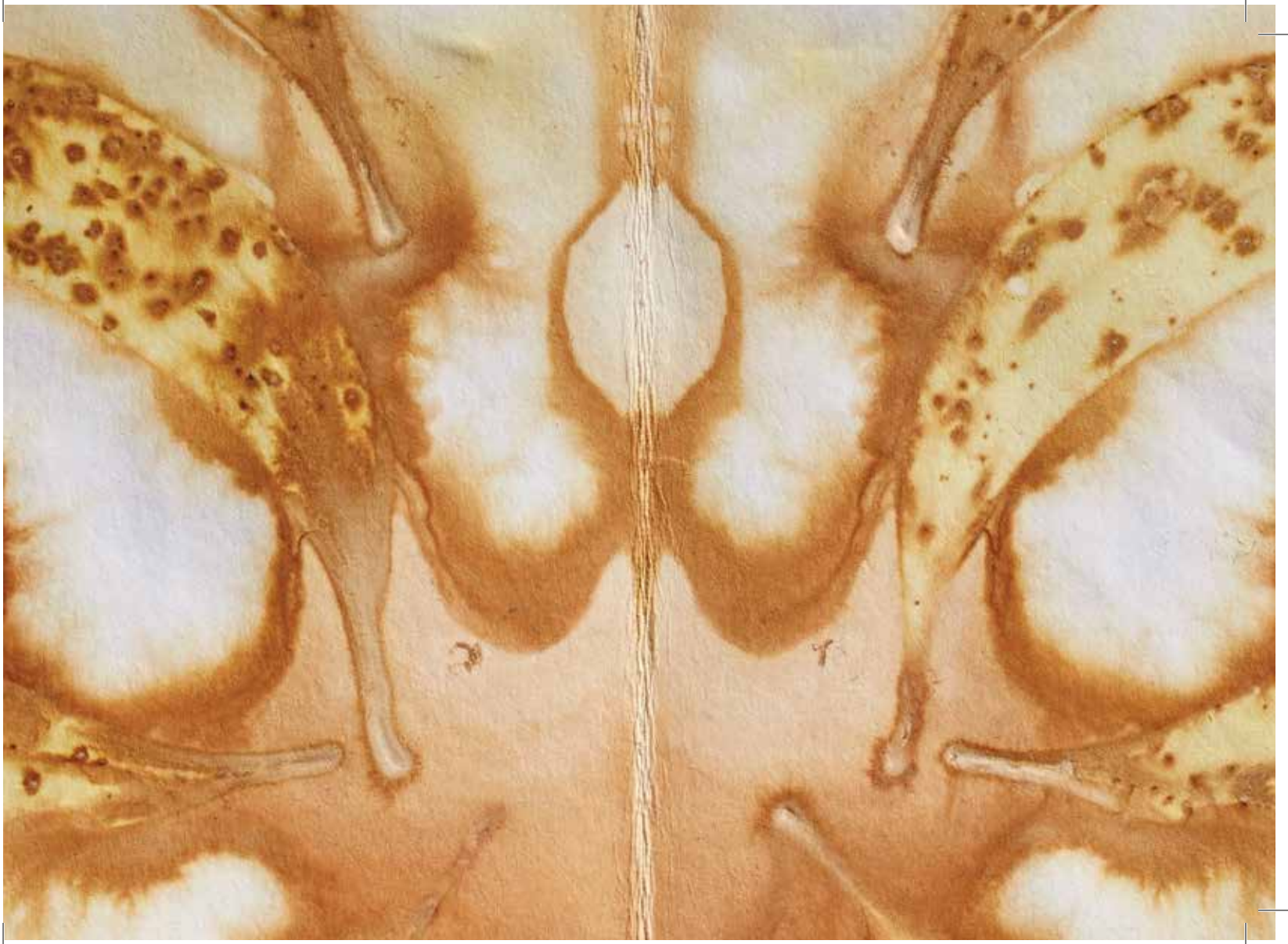
9. tropical maritime trees or shrubs that send out many prop roots and form dense masses, mostly in coastal regions
10. a usually large group of plants under cultivation
11. Trees that have green foliage all year round
12. to grow or spring
13. Resembling a tree in form
14. the science and art of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants

Minam Apang

'Spectre of War VIII, 2025',
Charcoal on paper,
54 x 60 inches.

Hemangini Maharaul

'Self Portrait 19, 2025',
botanical print(klecksograph) of eucalyptus leaves on paper,
Location Found: Shimoga, Sahyadri
[FOREIGN FLORA OF INDIA]
14 x 5.5 inches.



A Forest on the Horizon

Abbas A Malakar

There have been visions of a post-human utopia where civilization embraces new arboreal landscapes: a lush green harmony and magical union with plants. Here scientific knowledge is not primary, rather it is the mysterious magic and intrinsic kinship with the arboreal which seeks to position the forest as divinity.

Replace ‘magic’ with ‘empathy’ and ‘divinity’ with reverence and that is a future worth striving for.

To reach this phase of coexistence do we then advocate for plants to encroach, take over, and reclaim? To assign such actions rooted in human practices to plants is to spread our corruption.

Utopic images, whether in animations, films, or novels, always bring together a world of humans and plants in a relationship. Positives and negatives of which are dependent on how well humanity deals with the arboreal. The power of either care or destruction, typically rests with the human, solely for our benefit. Even in our most generous imaginations, we imbue them with anthropogenic emotion.

This exhibition is an action to break this anthropocentric bubble.

The tomorrow worth working toward is not one in which plants serve us better. It is one in which we grow quiet enough to look, listen, and understand their modes of being, outside the realm of our influence. Irrespective of our existence. How the lives of plants will evolve and unfold may confound even the most intelligent of our species.

Will we see this future? A future where a utopia does not function through anthropic design, but an arboreal reimagination. Not a garden, but a forest. A future where we do not have to throw away science but can integrate a core of empathy so that we do not engage through exploitation and extraction.

What awaits us beyond that threshold, whether we hallucinate or actively hope for such a future, should be one that is essentially and intricately relational: a collaborative unification for a sovereign inheritance.

Ishita Chakraborty

'Where The Wild Things Roam 35, Cotton, 2026',
Acrylic and colour pencil on Jute pasted on cotton Chappa Saree fabric,
47.2 x 31.5 inches.

Ishita Chakraborty

'Where The Wild Things Roam 35, Cotton (Back), 2026',
Acrylic and colour pencil on Jute pasted on cotton Chappa Saree fabric,
47.2 x 31.5 inches.

A Closer Looking

Artworks in this exhibition are not just visible, they are multisensory. Take your time. Relax and look. See if you can answer some of the following questions.

Who created the vulnerable guardians series?

If you could color Manir Mrittik's photographs with one colour, what colour would you use?

Where can you see an axe?

What do you feel when you see Sujith SN's painting?

Which of Manuel Mata's interviews is about flowers?

Which artwork has a dog in it?

What is the first word that comes to your mind when you see Hemangini Maharaul's artworks?

Who has used ‘dried bark’ in their artwork?

Listen to the soundscape around you. Who created them?

What do you think Ishita Chakraborty’s paintings are about?

Where can you find an unique connection between Radhika Agarwala and Maksud Ali Mondal’s artworks?

Draw a tree based on what you have seen in this show. This tree can be real, fictional, or from one of the artworks in the exhibition.

QR Info: Upload your drawing to the KNMA website and get a gift. You will also have the chance to win a special prize if you get selected from this week's best drawings.

Crossword Keys:

Key Vertical:

Arboreal
Branch
Grove
Leaf
Seedling
Photosynthesis
Canopy
Orchard

Key Horizontal:

Mangrove
Plantation
Evergreen
Sprout
Dendroid
Horticulture

Find the words Keys:

Root,
Hedge,
Fungus,
Spore,
Fern,
Flower

Carry uncertainty beyond the museum.

Leave, suspicious of the ease with which the eye separates figure from ground.

Leave, wondering whether the tree before you has been encountered at all or merely recognized through an inheritance older than memory.

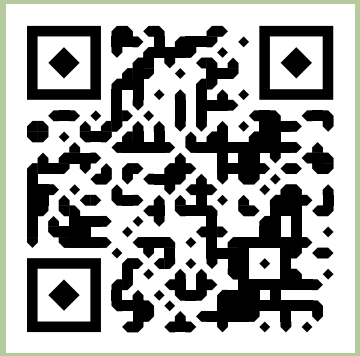
Leave, with no final apprehension of the living world.

Only the slow relinquishment of mastery.

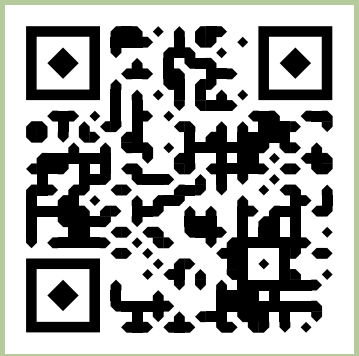
Then, perhaps, there is another way of standing within it.

Begin again tomorrow.

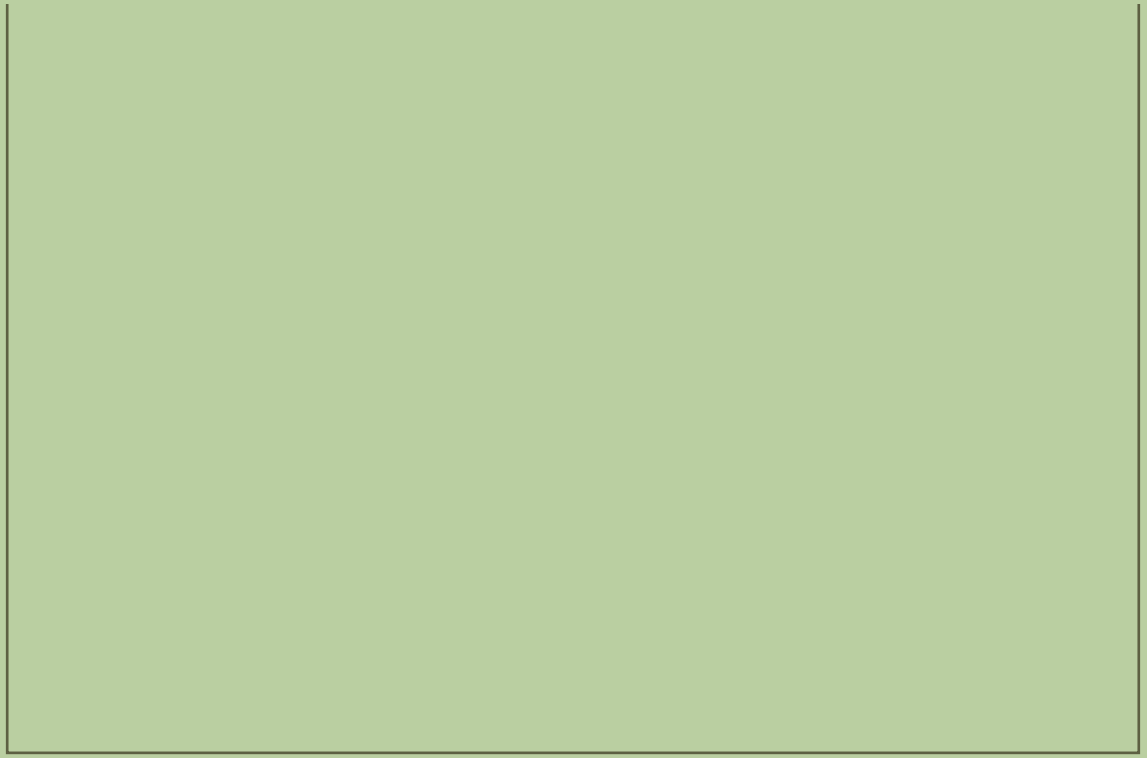
Angel Peters



Curious about an artwork? Start with a question and let the AI museum companion guide you to discover more.



Find more information about the exhibition and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art on our webpage at our website. We look forward to having you back soon.



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