

Curatorial Note

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.

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