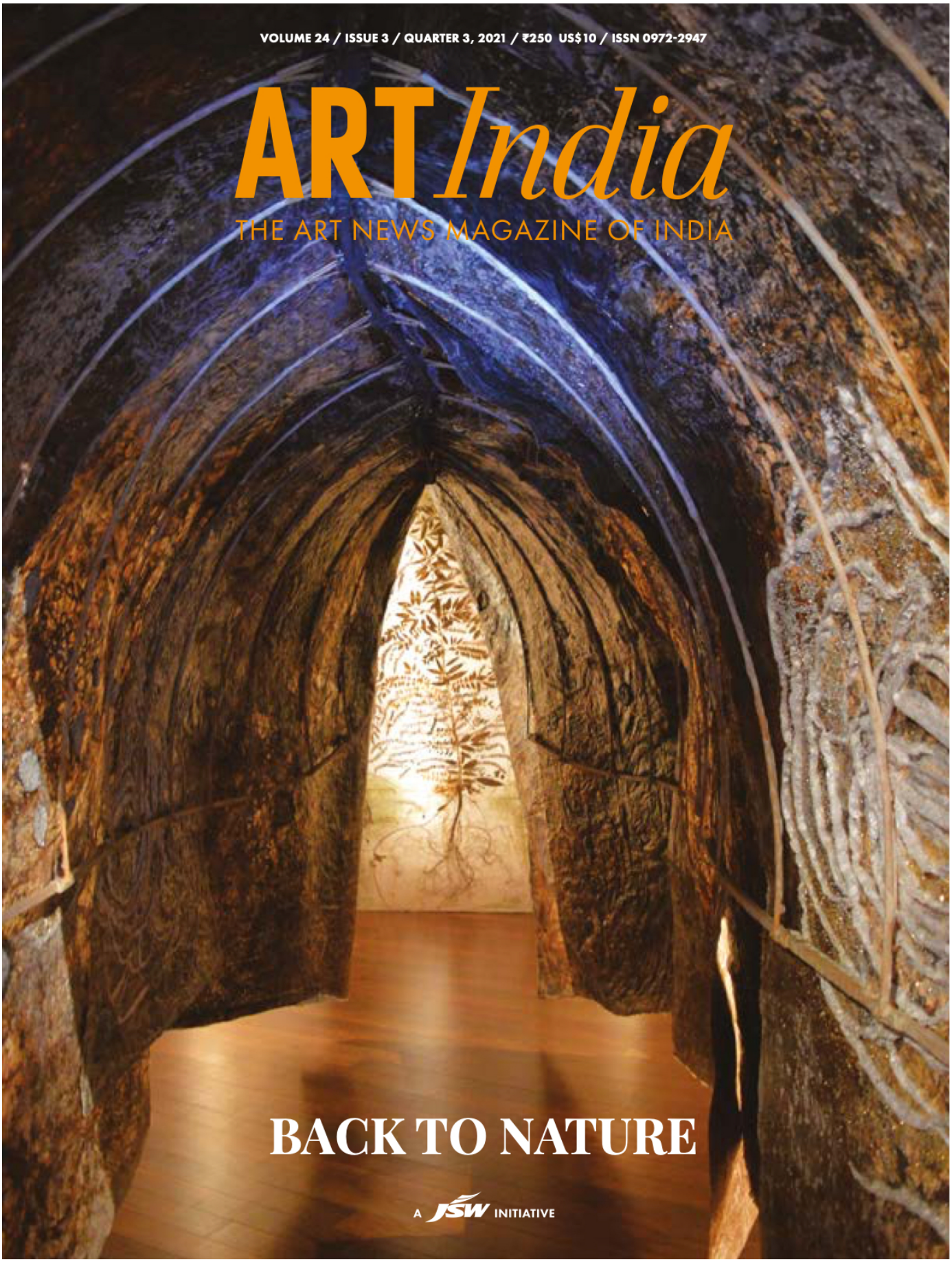
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# ART India

THE ART NEWS MAGAZINE OF INDIA



## BACK TO NATURE

A JSW INITIATIVE

# Editorial



In our collective imagination, the natural world has held the promise of continuous abundance. It has inspired paradisiacal visions, yes, but it has also been experienced as hierarchical, and red in tooth and claw.

In the face of the technological revolutions of the last couple of centuries, the contest between the natural world and the human world has progressively intensified. The urban dystopia is the toxic location where the present has been anchored for several years. How do we belong to these dangerous times, this catastrophic age, as propagators and inheritors of crises that include the Global Climate Change and the Coronavirus Pandemic?

And what anxieties do we carry as we look towards nature as a sanctuary for repair, a haven for recuperation? How complicated is our relationship with its contrary enthusiasms? How do we acknowledge both its fragilities and its overwhelming capacities – its power to damage, its potential to heal? In the issue this time, we trace the engagement of artists and writers with this idea, especially over the course of the last ten months that have threatened to diminish us in unforeseen ways. Caught between nostalgia and a sense of disquiet, what kind of critical convalescence is possible for us as masked victims of self-isolation?

More than 25 of our leading artists and art writers dwell on these questions in the *Special Feature*. When interior landscapes and the terrains around us leak into each other, they allow for an unpredictable circulation of expressive intensities – Atul Dodiya, Rashid Rana, Sheba Chhachhi, Roobina Karode and Iranna GR explore these new intersectional topographies while Sudarshan Shetty, Madhvi Subrahmanian, Neha Choksi, Savia Mahajan and David de Souza delve into the schism that exists between that which is manifest and that which is invisible in propositions of naturalness – love, permanence, desolation, regeneration, appearance, reality and their illusions are delicately probed and weighed in their work. In diverse capacities, Jayashree Chakravarty, Atul Bhalla, Bharti Kher, Ravi Agarwal, Shubigi Rao, Aradhana Seth, Vibha Galhotra and Suhasini Kejriwal respond to the cataclysmic intimations of the Anthropocene – the pressures of escalating environmental destruction, widening social disparity and what can well be called, collapsing human systems. And finally, the protocols of negotiating and adapting to the natural world and the insistent inter-dependencies that we are part of, feature in presentations by Manisha Parekh, Manisha Gera Baswani, Subodh Kerkar, Sandhya Bordewekar, Shweta Bhattad, Sukhdev Rathod, Rohini Devasher and Benitha Perciyal.

In the *International Review*, Arshiya Mansoor Lokhandwala discusses how the Yokohama Triennale curated by the Raqs Media Collective addresses issues of global distress and empathy. Among the reviews, Meera Menezes considers Reena Saini Kallat's exploration of partitioned rivers as Sandhya Bordewekar files a report on Sarasija Subramanian and Astha Patel's investigation of the many betrayals of nature.

In an Exclusive, we share excerpts from Amitav Ghosh's latest book that tells a cautionary tale about respecting boundaries and controlling excess. At its heart is an exploration of the ecologies of greed, desire and atonement. The spell cast by Ghosh's verse is complemented by the transfixing artwork by Salman Toor.

We carry Jayashree Chakravarty's immersive *Earth as Haven* on the cover. Created out of a wide range of materials, the robust, womb-like installation carries lush overlapping images of organic forms – as a shrine to nature and its mysteries, the work offers an assurance of cross-species rehabilitation that is inter-relational.

Gleaning information and insight even as you explore a theme make for the abiding joys of editing a volume. We enjoyed rustling up this issue; hope you enjoy partaking of it.

Warm regards,

Abhay Sardesai

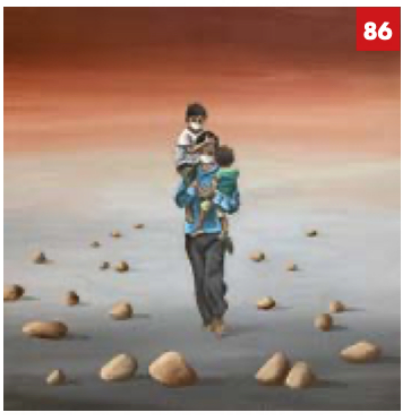
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**Reena Saini Kallat**. *River Drawings*. Gouache, charcoal, graphite, nails and electric wires on laser cut and embossed Arches paper. 44" x 32". 2020. Image courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte.




**Sarika Mehta**. *On the Way*. Oil on canvas. 12" x 12". 2020. Image courtesy of Gallery White.

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**Ketaki Sarpotdar**. From the series *Bravo!! 1 & 2*. Etching. 18.7"x 22.4". 2018. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

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**Jayashree Chakravarty**. *Earth as Haven: Under the Canopy of Love*. Cotton, fabric, Nepali paper, tissue paper, jute, dry leaves, tea stains, clay, synthetic glue, acrylic colour, sequins, glass and wooden beads, and steel rods. 2017. Curated by Roobina Karode. At Musee Guimet, Paris. Collection of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), New Delhi. Image courtesy of KNMA, New Delhi, and Akar Prakar, Kolkata. © Jayashree Chakravarty.

SPECIAL FEATURE

# DE-ANTHROPIZING THE NON-HUMAN

RAVI AGARWAL





Is it possible to free the non-human ('nature') from the anthropogenic gaze? We live in a multi-species world. Genetically, humans are not isolated beings, but have co-evolved, and co-host many other beings, such as virus, bacteria and fungi in symbiotic relationships, equal to the cells in our biological bodies. Yet, the world we have constructed and inhabit has been an outcome solely of the human imagination of which humans are at the centre. Our systems of justice, politics or of representation exclude all that is non-human or accept it only on our terms. What does not conform is excluded or eliminated.

Natural History Museums are a good example of these exclusions. They created myths by 'othering' non-humans and putting them on display, categorized and classified. Large animals are on prominent display as trophies, sometimes hanging off ceilings, while smaller or less 'likeable' ones are hidden or non-existent. They are an outcome of an era of scientific enlightenment, where taxidermy was the favoured technique. They were collected (trapped or killed) from around the world, inevitably with the help of 'locals' and transported in slave run ships from the colonies, to be housed for display in collections and museums. Here, all signs of their origins, relationships with local ecologies or cultures is erased. No mention is made of the violence with which they were extracted from their environments. They are also depicted in typical dioramas (such as the 'family' of lions in the image). Natural sciences as a pursuit of knowledge became an important justification for the ongoing colonization and conquest of nature.

Human society is caught up in its hierarchical power structures. What is considered less important is less visible. Human labour is hidden while the goods and objects it produces are prominent. If human labour is unseen, the non-human world is even more so. Some animals too are relegated to being labouring bodies, as industrial beings. Those that are not, either become invisible or are conserved as 'charismatic' species, like big cats or mammals.

How can we move from a human-centred world to a multi-species one? As a start, by recognizing that it is *one*; and an entangled one at that. More challenging though is to find ways to reconfigure our political, social and justice systems which ought to grant agency to the non-human.

**Ravi Agarwal**. *Lion 'Family' (Natural History Series)*. Pigment ink print. 30" x 20". 2018-ongoing. Image courtesy of the artist.