Fia Backström & Pradeep Dalal

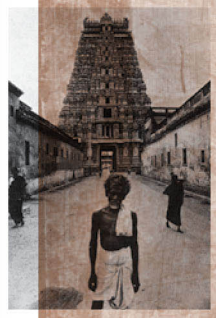
Photography in the Sensorium

KNOWING

Pradeep Dalal

I have returned to India to visit and document many historic architectural and archaeological sites—in part to understand a history that I had ignored and misunderstood as a student, and in part to deepen and intensify the experience of looking and thinking. Perhaps I also needed a ballast to ideas and images I've experienced at a long distance and in a cooler, more remote manner of research in books, libraries, and museums in the West, eager to get at something that the writer Arvind Krishna Mehrotra calls "the nature of the multilingual imagination and the invisible web of connections that lies beneath a literature, the stories that are hidden behind the stories we read."[1]

A college friend in Ahmedabad grew up in Srirangam. She described the fourteenth-century temple town and showed me historical maps. A few years later, in 1986, I probably saw other plans, drawings, and photographs of the town in the landmark exhibition *Vistāra: The Architecture of India* in Mumbai. The exhibition was organized by the architect Charles Correa, for whom I went to work that same year. At that time, I was indifferent to traditional Indian architecture. Yet something lodged in my mind—perhaps the geometry of the seven concentric enclosures that make up the city plan, or I may have been drawn to its more than seven-hundred-year-long history. Many years later, when I read the *Vistāra* catalogue carefully, I learned that Srirangam was conceived as a cosmic mandala, a representation of the universe. Correa and his coauthors say that "all motion is directed inward" and that the "geometry becomes more and more precise as one gets closer to the sacred centre."[2] I was drawn to the powerful diagrammatic quality of the city plan.



Gopuram in Srirangam. From *Vistāra: The Architecture of India. Catalogue of the Exhibition*, ed. Carmen Kagal (Bombay: Festival of India, 1986)

To visit Srirangam, I flew from New York to Mumbai, a distance of more than eight thousand miles, and then across the breadth of India from Mumbai on the west coast to Chennai on the east coast, about 850 miles, and then I switched to a smaller plane to go to the town of

Tiruchirappalli in the western part of the state of Tamil Nadu, a distance of about two hundred miles. Srirangam is just across the river from Trichy, a short six-mile auto rickshaw ride. I visited the temple precincts and did the pradakshina and the ritual prayer rites. I photographed the striking gopurams, the temple walls, and the water tanks for bathing. After photographing the temple towns Thanjavur and Kanchipuram, I was already familiar with the general form and typology of southern temples.

Fia Backström

In 2018 I was invited to exhibit in the garden of Thielska Galleriet, a museum located on an island on the outskirts of Stockholm. The Jugendstil building, erected in 1908 for Ernest Thiel, houses the banker, venture capitalist, and patron's collection of Swedish National Romantic paintings. The palace's construction dovetailed with the formation of the Swedish welfare state. Having grown up with its founding values of social and economic equality, I was able to excavate some of the troubled origin histories of the welfare state by way of this site.

Can ideas be generated through on-site sensory experiences and by handling historic materials?

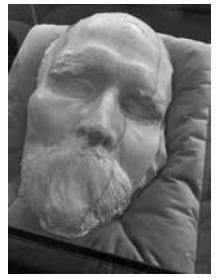
For the work that came to be titled *Facing Her Land—Notes from Elsewhere* (2019), I visited the museum's archive, where I was given permission to hold in my hands letters from male authors and artists from the social circle that congregated around Thiel and the palace. These artists belonged to the Konstnärsförbundet (Artists' Association), which was founded in protest against the Academy of Fine Arts and whose National Romantic work Thiel collected. I touched their swirly Art Nouveau letterheads and ink residue, while gleaning stories and details about their personal lives and various intellectual entanglements, each of which was tainted by privilege and the misogyny of the time. The letters often opened with commission and acquisition proposals to Thiel, interwoven with exchanges on techniques and material costs, only to end up in pleas for his support.

The rustic penmanship of painter Carl Larsson accords with his picturesque, nationalist, folkloric watercolors of domestic interiors, inhabited by his blonde children. These pastoral idealizations, which were staged by his underrecognized wife, artist Karin Bergöö Larsson, now serve as templates for Swedish interior decorating; even Ikea takes cues. In his letter, Larsson expresses his condolences to Thiel for the passing, from a heroin overdose, of Thiel's younger wife Signe, who had been the muse of many and the center of the artists' group.

Letter from Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche to Ernst Thiel, July 24, 1912, in the archive of Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm

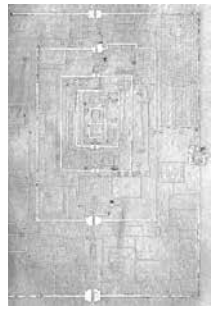
Also in the archive are mail chess games between Thiel and Hjalmar Söderberg, whose novels I devoured as a teen. In a moving, slightly flirtatious letter to Signe, Söderberg describes how as a child he spoke to invisible friends, one of them named Signe. He saw this practice as training for a writer to live with his characters. Söderberg allegedly committed his wife, author Märta Abenius, to an asylum because she was "tedious," diagnosed with suffering from "erotic insanity." It's unclear whether Söderberg's polite but dismissive replies to Thiel's requests for feedback on his translation of Nietzsche's book *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) owed to its poor quality, a competitive refusal, his own ignorance, or a disagreement with the ideas of the book.

Thiel, who greatly admired Nietzsche's notion of the *Übermensch*, initiated correspondence with Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. I don't read German, but judging from the length and frequency


Friedrich Nietzsche's death mask, 1900, at Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm

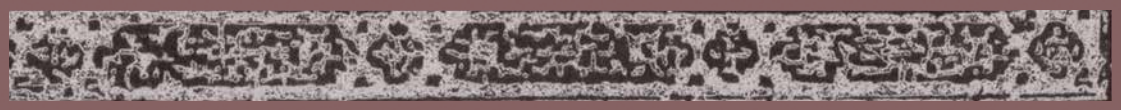
of their letters, the exchange was lively. Her hand is disciplined, with eerily perfect, tightly aligned letters. Förster-Nietzsche's cousin Max Oehler's name recurs in her letters. Oehler, who would later popularize the Nazis' interpretation of Nietzsche's work, is rumored to be the biological father of Thiel's only son with Signe. Förster-Nietzsche's public commitment to Nazism coincided with Thiel's economic hardships in the 1920s. The exchange ebbed, and Thiel, who was Jewish, tucked news clippings of Nazi events into the envelopes he had received from her, perhaps as commentary. As a major donor to the funding of the Nietzsche Archive, Thiel received the philosopher's death mask. The mask now occupies the top floor in the palace, with its majestic view over Stockholm's archipelago, a popular motif among the National Romantic painters.

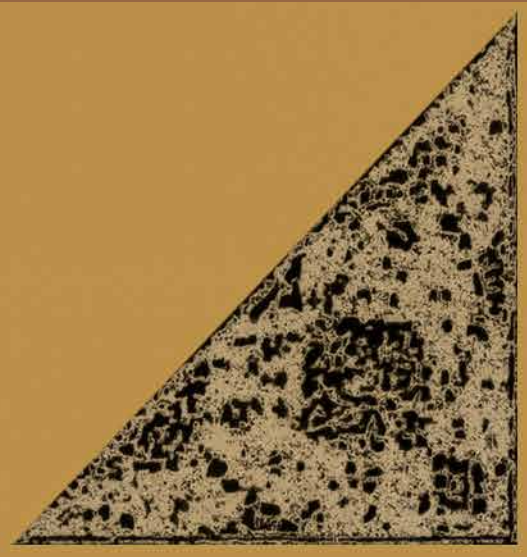
From early childhood visits to the museum, I have vague memories of the mask. Having seen several death masks some years prior in the Princeton University death mask collection, I am now struck by the details of Nietzsche's. Cast just after death, it evidences his bushy eyebrows, sunken cheeks, clearly visible pores, and beard, covering part of his mouth, which had been stuffed with a cloth to enable the casting. The mask is indexical, like lens-based photography, grasping at an ephemeral moment but also one as unimageable as that of so many large-scale climate catastrophes.


Plan of Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, Srirangam. From James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, ed. James Burgess and R. Phené Spiers (London: J. Murray, 1910)

On my first visit to Srirangam in 2001, I stumbled on a tiny garden outside the temple walls. I was drawn to its casually decrepit, forlorn, and unkempt quality, so different from the highly choreographed and strictly ritualized order of the temple precincts. A radio played old film songs in a small gazebo. This reminded me of childhood visits to a similar gazebo in Matheran, a hill station near Mumbai, to listen to the evening news with my father. The park was an overlooked oasis, with people napping on benches, chatting in small groups, and taking walks. The trees and bushes were dusty, untrimmed, and overgrown. I went in the late afternoons and spent hours sitting, walking, and observing. I had limited exchanges with the people in the park, because I did not speak Tamil and they did not speak Hindi, Gujarati, or English.

I did not photograph there on my first two visits, which were a dozen years apart. On my third visit, in 2013, I photographed the cascading light at dusk but could not capture the intense bodily sensation of sitting under trees filled with thousands of cacophonous birds in pitch-black darkness. The lights were switched on and off at regular intervals, perhaps to save electricity. A group of images I made in the park alternate between daylight and night views. There is a statue of Queen Victoria in this park, celebrating the proclamation that made her empress of India in 1877. At that time, the British introduced the Indian penal code, which contained the notorious Section 377 making sexual activities "against the order of nature" illegal. After 150 years, it was finally overturned in 2018. I wonder about this order of nature. Who decides what belongs to nature and what falls outside of it? What is unnatural? Is there a universally shared understanding of nature? A sourness persists. Bitter nature. Bitter Nature.





In Sweden, nature is accessible for everyone through the law *allemansrätten*, which can be translated as "everyman's right" or "freedom to roam." This collective caring for nature is an expression of the country's welfare-state values. But as for many other Western settler colonial states, extractive mining and hydropower provided the wealth that supported the Swedish welfare state. Thiel, a second-generation immigrant and risk capitalist, invested in Gällivare Mining Company in the village of Svappavaara. Such mining not only scarred the landscape depicted on Thiel's paintings but also displaced the indigenous Sámi population.

Descending the stairs of the palace from the death mask is a sculpture in Swedish granite titled *Lappen*, a derogatory word for Sámi, by National Romantic sculptor Christian Eriksson of a Sámi man in traditional garments. Eriksson's busts were displayed at the popular 1919 exhibition *The Exhibit of Swedish People-Types*, which resulted in the creation of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology, another episode in a long history of indigenous oppression. The exhibition was publicly supported by some of the artists and writers connected to Thiel. During World War II, northern iron-ore mines provided weapons to the Third Reich, while Thiel's daughter Signe Henschen, as part of a feminist network, brought Jewish refugees to safety in Sweden.

Exhibition view of *The Exhibit of Swedish People-Types* at the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, 1919

In the archive, I found sloppily written letters with large inkblots from Thiel's good friend Verner von Heidenstam, the aristocratic nationalist poet who wrote the poem "Sweden" (1896), originally included in the poetry cycle *A People*, as a contribution to a competition for the national anthem. Several works in Thielska Galleriet depict the common fantasy of northern Sweden as an untouched, pure nature, with wilderness becoming a construct for the purpose of establishing a nationalistic, white narrative of a people, which came in handy for future tourism.

Displayed in a small annex gallery at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2017 were superbly painted eighteenth-century nature studies by Zain al-Din and Bhawani Das that struck a powerful chord. Previously I had paid little attention to Company paintings, to use a term that describes the work of Indian painters commissioned by officials from the East India Company. I found their view of India to be picturesque and absolutely unlike my own experience of these landscapes, monuments, and people. But I went back to this gallery repeatedly and pored over books and images online in collections and surveys of Company paintings. I cannot say what the initial attraction was. It could have been the superb and obsessive detail—the museum provided magnifying glasses for close observation. It could have been the airy, spacious compositions—lots of blank space and off-kilter, uncentered compositions. It could have been the hyperrealistic depictions—leaves folded over, some withered broken branches, whiskers on a bird's beak. It could have been the subtle, infinitely nuanced shadings of color—rose, lilac, mauve, blue-gray petal shades and leaves in a full spectrum of greens, yellow green to deep green to blue green. It might simply have been the larger scale and familiar proportions—30 by 40 inches—a scale at which I have printed many of my own photographs.

My obsession with these paintings took hold, and I slowly made my way to the precursors of these artists, especially the magnificent paintings of flora and fauna made by Ustad Mansur for the Mughal court in the early seventeenth century. I learned that Mansur was also a great illuminator, who exquisitely decorated the borders of manuscripts with lyrical and intricate patterns of vines, flowers, birds, and beasts. I looked at reproductions of Mughal paintings in books in my library at home and then visited actual paintings by Mansur and other Mughal artists, such as Govardhan and Manohar, at the Metropolitan Museum.

At the Thielska Galleriet, I was particularly drawn to three paintings of waterscapes, and I photographed them in detail with my iPhone. The water scenes are composed from above with the ground tilted upward to create a flattened image space. Though slightly akin to "objective" land-survey photographs taken for administrative purposes, these compositions were framed with a possessive, seductive, consumerist gaze. Gustaf Fjaestad's *Hoarfrost on Ice* (1907), depicting a snow-covered bay in northern Sweden that no longer receives so much snow, reminded me of news images of receding glaciers with clear edges between water and snow. Another painting, *Flowing Water* (1906), also by Fjaestad, shows a snow-covered riverbed with distorted reflections of trees in rippling water. It looks digitally rendered, lacking outlines for the eye to follow. Instead, my eye wandered across the canvas, noticing the paint soaked into the surface. Bruno Liljefors's *Evening, Wild Eiders* (1901) is composed like a close-up photograph of common indigenous, "Swedish" birds dipping their beaks into undulating water. I looked up the scientific name for "eider ducks," *Somateria*, which comes from the ancient Greek words for "body": *soma* and *materia*.

Detail of Bruno Liljefors's *Evening, Wild Eiders*, 1901

The interference patterns in the paintings made me think of trying to photograph moving water and of Berenice Abbott's beautifully perfected experiments photographing wave interference and diffraction patterns for 1950s high-school physics textbooks. Unlike the painters' ideologically based idealizations, Abbott's photographs function as both description and evidential record. I was reminded of a table in theorist Karen Barad's book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) that juxtaposes the concepts of reflection and diffraction. Without attempting unqualified hermeneutics, Barad seems to say that diffraction allows for knowing as a material practice—that is, for a feminist "entangled mattering" as a way of seeing the world without absolute borders. Diffraction can be an inclusive form of multiperspectival perception—including nonhuman agents, and differences emerging from within—that works in opposition to the logic of reflection, of objective accurate representations that separate subjects from objects.

What if sight is not the primary sense through which to understand the world?

The multiple perspectives of diffraction connect to the book that Thiel translated: Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* points to the unmooring of the Judeo-Christian foundation of moral values, making way for ethical relativism. The Nazis instrumentalized this nihilism—which has now reemerged in the rise of neofascist energies that lack care for other humans, other species, and the planet. Revisiting the marginalia in my copy of the book,

I now connect the perspectival nature of truth with the photographic framing of the paintings and, in turn, with positionality in photography—that which reveals the physical position of the photographer and works against any idea of a neutral vantage point.

I saw Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg condemn politicians and corporate CEOs of the Western world for their lackadaisical response to planetary destruction and wondered what form an ethics of the future could now take. I noticed how voices of indigenous young female environmental activists, with their specific relation to the land, were drowned in the media landscape, girls like Māori India Logan-Riley or Rayanne Cristine Máximo Franca from the Amazon. Why were people only listening to the white girl? I also saw Greta attacked online by extreme right-wing men, those for saving "Swedish" values for the Swedes. I thought of the sculpture *Old Man and Girl* (1906) by Gustav Vigeland in Thielska Galleriet's garden. The old man looks menacing as his hand reaches out for the throat of the little girl, silencing her. Any proposal for a future ethics might need to come from more than one voice, perhaps a choir of girls.

How does the work find its place in dominant and minoritarian conversations?

I often make copies of articles to read on subway rides and long flights. I refer to photocopies of architectural drawings—plans, sections, and elevations—when I visit sites. I copy travel guides, articles, and essays. These are stapled and transported in clear plastic file folders. Mostly they live in unwieldy piles in my apartment. I have made photocopies of my photographs, scanned them, and made photographs from the scans. I like the displacements of the image.

I made copies of some Mughal manuscript pages, especially the *'unwan* compositions of calligraphy framed with elaborate borders, on tracing paper and found myself drawn to the geometrical elements—asymmetrical rhythmic placements of rectangular and triangular shapes filigreed with obsessive floral patterns. I also photocopied some of these pages, so as to blur and soften the fussy detail and to remove the seductive color. I wanted to see what a lo-fi, graphite-gray image of the original gold and jewel-like paintings would look like. I noticed how the rectilinear elements, the crisp geometry of lines could effortlessly hold within it organic, foliate plant forms. This bringing together of abstraction and nature was matter-of-fact for these artists, and that was a revelation.

Pradeep Dalal, *Natural History L Study #2 (brown/yellow)*, 2019. Etching, 11 × 7 ½ in.

I then made modest prints by inking etched copper plates, marveling at how the mottled vegetal pattern registered in shallow relief on fine art paper. As I scanned these prints and printed the photographs, another kind of image emerged, one with a condensation of detail, less delicate and stranger than the original. I also mixed etching inks and was struck by how the colors of my prints, the rich umber and ocher browns and pale yellows, translated into digital photographs. I selected five images in which I had separated each of the border elements from a fourteenth-century manuscript by Mir 'Ali and centered them—an extraction and distillation—to see how the smallest marginal units of composition might hold their own.

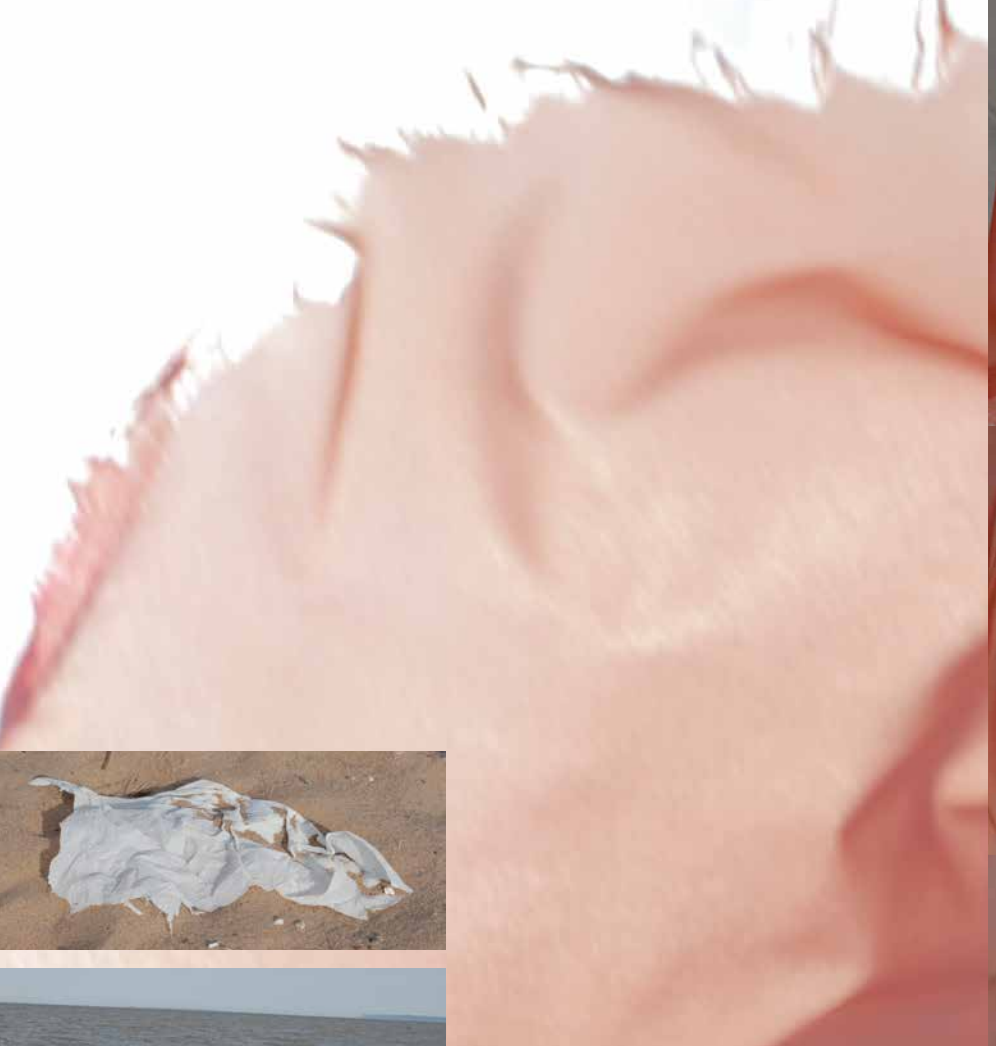
I imagined myself in the landscapes of the Swedish paintings and decided to drive to Fresh Kills on Staten Island, once the world's largest landfill and now transformed into a recreational wild park. The area had the highest percentage of Trump voters (72 percent) in New York State in 2016. I walked down Cedar Grove Beach to photograph, not sure what I was looking for, moving to understand. For the ephemera that I produced for the project, I wrote: "It is half past four in the afternoon. The sun is warm. I look at the horizon dividing the Atlantic Ocean from the sky, a slightly bulging line indicating the sphere we inhabit. I lie down on the beach. I touch the warm sand and let it seep between my fingers. I listen to the waves hitting the shore. There is plastic debris everywhere that has blown ashore from last year's storms, notes from elsewhere. I lie very still to feel the breeze touch my face. I hear birds circling above me in the sky. I open my eyes and see more and more birds excitedly gathering above my body, noisy seagulls, but also what looks like predatory birds. I raise my head slightly to look at the foam forming from the water that moves in from the ocean. I see tiny dots in the distance, tankers hovering like unconnected bodies. I think to myself that I don't want to be hit by bird poop, so I move my arms slightly and the birds immediately scatter. A living corpse sifting sand on the beach, set in a community in a flood zone, devastated and scattered after Hurricane Sandy in 2012." In 2016, in response to community demand, fifty-five houses here were part of the first climate-related state-subsidized real-estate auction.

Treading across a ruin of debris, I encounter a corporeal-looking brown foam lump, eroded by the salt water. On the edge between land and water, a colossal black foam roll shaped like a reclining body staked out its space on the liminal land between a nature that was and a nature that will become. This ghostly landscape is far away yet so close to home, haunting our present to remind us of a past by carrying its scars. Emission exhaust, ghostly gaseous clouds, are memories of extraction, leaving permanent, perceptible traces. "No wall, no impenetrable, hard border can prevent plastic pollution penetration. No single organism can withstand or shore up against it." A worn, pale-reddish flag on a pole caught my eye, looking much like a vulnerable body held up by the wind. Framing it as a navigation pole against the ships on the horizon, I circled my body closer and closer around it in an attempt to photograph its shape, which was being re-created at every moment by the prosthetics of air. During this act of approximation, of recording its shape, I noticed the torn edges, leaving the sensuous movement and the lived degradation to coexist.

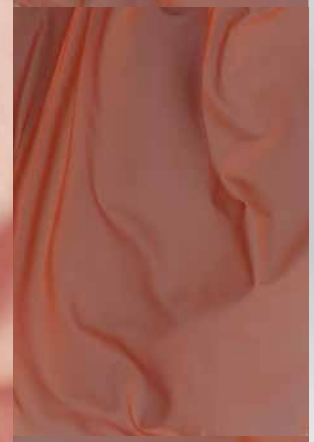
Can everyday observations and overlooked activities lead to valuable source material?

Art historian Mildred Archer explains that

> Mughal artists, in fact, could render natural history subjects with great sensitivity. By patiently applying layer upon layer of brilliant body colour and burnishing between each layer, a firm eggshell-like surface was built up. The finest of brushes was then used and, in this way, a delicate yet wiry line was drawn across the surface. By this means, the artists could reproduce the lustre of a feather, the roughness of an animal's coat, the velvet texture of a petal, or the tough and leathery surface of a leaf with a delicacy and precision which almost justifies the phrase of the pioneering Indian art historian [Ananda Kentish] Coomaraswamy,









How can the modestly local and familial connect to larger political and cultural forces?

"passionate delineation." Such paintings, however, did not suit British natural historians. They considered them too elaborate, decorative and expensive—the delight of the connoisseur rather than raw material for the scientist. The pictures, they felt, took too long to produce, and too much attention was paid to decorative borders and backgrounds. Specimens were not observed with sufficient detail, while accuracy was at times subordinated to the demands of art. What the natural historian needed was a clear and competent drawing, which would depict accurately every detail of the specimen and give enlarged details of particular parts of plants or animals.[3]

As some of these paintings are also available on museum websites as high-resolution scans, I spent lots of time looking at them. Most important, I could enlarge the image and pay close attention to the immense skill of these painters to capture the tripartite pattern of feathers on the wing of a bird, the densely patterned scales of a Bengal river fish, and the fur and veining on the wings of a fruit bat. I wondered why these natural history drawings and paintings by Mughal painters were considered insufficiently observed and hence not properly scientific. I wondered about the dismissal of these paintings as ornamental and decorative in comparison to modern scientific illustrations in the West.

Most of these extraordinary paintings are unsigned and hence have long been unattributed, primarily known only by their patrons. The works by Zain al-Din, Bhawani Das, and Ram Das were known only as the Impey album, as these artists were employed by the chief justice of Bengal, Sir Elijah Impey, and his wife, Lady Mary Impey. It is only recently that scholars and museums have begun to share additional information on authorship. The original Impey album had 326 paintings, primarily by these three artists. A few months ago, I saw one painting by Zain al-Din for sale as part of Asia Week in New York, and it was priced at more than $650,000. I do not know if any works by these three artists are in collections in museums in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, or elsewhere. I have never seen them. And at these prices they are probably out of reach of government-run museums in India.

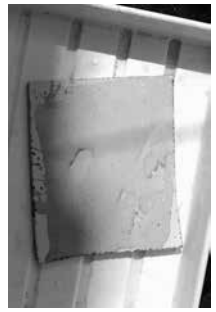
HANDLING

I am thinking about how photography is commonly used as proof—that is, for rationalizing and explaining—and how it could become a pathway for emotionally based understandings. As a daily practice, I collect news images from the Internet for reference, research, or material for future work—images illustrating abstract concepts like "extreme right wing" or "climate crises," which have the purpose of communicating collective affect, such as grief. I am reminded of the water in the three paintings that I photographed in the Thiel collection and of the water surrounding the island on which the museum is located, as well as around Staten Island. I am thinking about the fluidity of the toxic release found in the oceans, moving across borders, melting glaciers and hurricanes.

How are the contested politics and histories of photographic technologies and supports addressed?

News footage based in military technology that attempts full-area surveys usually provides the only publicly available indexical images of large-scale disasters: aerial, satellite, and drone surveillance images provide information for a specific purpose and are generated by an administrative gaze focusing on area inspection for damage measurement. That's a very different gaze than one that perceives affect. On-site documentation, on the other hand, is often left to untrained regular citizens, whose framing decisions are likely conventional and indifferent to questions around the constitution of an image, such as positionality, much less questions of whether such events can even be imaged.

I stopped photographing for many years and only worked with appropriated images because of the difficulty I had with photographing people. Now I try to push into that difficulty around representation through presence and process. For my Thielska project, I selected a set of four formally similar images shot from above of destructive events. Two of the images were of floodings and hurricanes that geographically correlated with the origin of two of the girl activists I had read about: ten-year-old Ridhima Pandey from northern India, who after the 2013 flooding in Uttarakhand that displaced more than seven hundred thousand people, sued the Indian state for failing to care for nature; and Marinel Ubaldo, who at sixteen lived through Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 in the Philippines. Another image is of a release, in an unformed shape, of the afterdamp from a mining dam collapse in Brumadinho, Brazil, in 2019—an image I chose in order to connect climate change with extraction. Last, there is a close-up from my walk on Staten Island. The textures articulated in the macro- and microscale scapes became the connective tissue between the images. Cataclysmic climate disasters are ungraspable, and so are aerial and microscopic images. In both cases, the image space tends to flatten to the point of obstructing legibility. The aerial shot fosters a sense of a vast flattened space that does not end with the edge of the image. I was looking at Eliot Porter's work to see how information in nature surfaces from patterns in an almost spiritual way. My interest in flatness partly results from a concern for how image and information coalesce in his work.



Failed salt print, 2019

I wanted to hold the downloaded images of the destroyed sites, to dissect their constitution and touch their layers. What is it to know through the hands rather than through the eyes, to make the process visible and carry meaning through these gestures? I wanted to ground the images' digital existence in a material process; analog, seeping, leaking, bleeding, porous borders, in contrast to the digital hard stop, the binary on-off impermeable wall. I read about how analog and digital processes are bound within each other in nature and in the body. I was thinking about the unformed, blotchy inkblot spills—like toxins that don't abide by borders or the rectangle—in Heidenstam's letters and about blood spots from menstruation, about how I am entering menopause at the same time as the climate-activist girls are entering their reproductive, bleeding life. The oceans led me away from distancing, electronic, computational processes into wet, polluting, photographic chemistry and nineteenth-century alternative processes. I was interested in printing outdoors, with the weather, using the sun, whose rays lack an ethical compass, generating both life and hurricanes.

How could informational textures become more tactile through the photographic process? How can meaning come out of a connection to

Can displacing, dissecting, and reassembling the image process open the work up?

a historical process? I spent time looking at work by European Surrealist photographers, and their responses to fascism and World War II. I particularly looked at Raoul Ubac's paraglyph printing method—paraglyph as a sign for an in-between. There are multiple digital methods to pull apart and dissect an image into layers: color channels, black-and-white points, curves, ad infinitum. On vinyl, I began by printing digital positive and negative layers of the images and overlaid them, slightly displaced, to create an optically embossed, seemingly raised, wandering outline. I wasn't interested in hitting the registration; handling and touching the pigment on the vinyl surfaces took priority over image fidelity. I was improvising the movement of the slippery film transparencies, letting the dismembered image become again on the new support. Crouched down on the ground, I tried out the flimsy scaffolding of the image in different configurations, caressing the surface of the warm, sunlit transparencies. My hands were translating the digital bits into the logic of film; laboring through the analog steps to slow the construction of the image; paying attention to this shift between digital space and analog wet chemistry and the different ways that information is processed.

I wanted to see if my images could both gesture to an inner emotional feeling and record the direct reality of the garden in Srirangam. For poet and scholar A. K. Ramanujan, there is a flow between interior forms and exterior ones. He cites a central pair of terms in Tamil poetry, *akam* and *puram*, which signify interior and exterior. These two words carry a set of concentric meanings according to context, which he outlines as follows:

AKAM		PURAM
interior	——	exterior
heart, mind	——	body surfaces and extremities (back, side, arms)
self	——	others
kin	——	non-kin
house, family	——	house yard, field
inland, settlement	——	areas far from dense human habitation (jungle, desert)
earth	——	farthest ocean[4]

I had been thinking of sequencing according to a morphological logic as a way to counter the dark serial logic of photography. Morphology as a branch of biology studying formalist historical relationships between living organisms or as linguistic studies of temporal structural changes between meaning-bearing units of words. A set of word-image organisms in organic relationships with each other, a visual shape recurring in the next image but of something else, flipping a negative to a positive shape and back again to express that. I was reading about how the art historian and theorist Aby Warburg sequenced through movement and emotion: MOVEMENT—*mouvere*, *émouvoir*, *emou*, *emote*, *emit* while seeing in motion; EMOTION—as in movement of materials.

Instead of taking pictures with a tripod, I use surrogates, both in my surroundings—walls, plinths, steps, benches, gates—and also with my own body—hands, forearm, knees, thighs, shoulder, and torso.

There were some photographs of the tree canopy in the park in Srirangam that I had written off as unusable because they were blurred. Yet when I looked at them several years later, I found that the bits of night sky looked like raining shards of glass. These white light bars linked up visually with the little brighter-white rectangles of streetlamps in the park. I am not sure if I had trained my camera upward to follow the deafening but thrilling birdcalls, but the experience of sitting under the swarm of noisy birds in pitch dark was sensational and uncannily outside the body, a brief feeling of being one with a transcendent continuum of nature.

I was surprised that I photographed the nondescript concrete benches splattered with bird droppings. I was perhaps drawn to the simple stepped cubic forms of the benches and plinths. I may have also had in mind images of people sleeping on the benches or eating food or sitting alone or companionably in small, friendly groups. The plain cement seems solid and in the photographs appears strangely contiguous materially with the leaf-strewn ground and the pillars of the fence. I had wanted these bench images in a sequence, as though one were walking by, to thereby give a sense of the scale and space of the garden. In installing the images, however, I encouraged a looser and less ordered encounter.

The life of the digital image is light and floating. How can it be anchored?

The bower-like green canopy over the statue of Queen Victoria, and especially the circular halolike shape above her head, was what had caught my eye. I noticed the withered marigold garland around the queen's neck but not the black-painted hair and cape covering her head, which made her seem like a sari-clad Indian person. I photographed her in profile and from the back but not from the front. The stepped plinth on which the statue stands is similar to that of the benches and plinths elsewhere in the garden, except better tended with plaster and paint. I did not realize then that the statue and the park were paid for by local traders.

Layout plan for the installation of Pradeep Dalal's *Srirangam* series at EFA Project Space, New York, 2019

My photographs of the garden were mostly without people. I have casually collected old photographs and often incorporate them into my own projects. I included one found photograph with two male figures, which are a bit spectral, ghostlike, especially in an inverted image. I really liked the image itself—the dark bodies wearing bright white clothing (the shirt and lungi are very particular to southern India) and the texture of the foliage on the sloping hill. One person is facing the camera and the other is in profile. I liked the geometry of that. It became a kind of fulcrum image in the installation, one that made sense to the movement and everything else that is implied in the other images. The benches in the photographs are empty, but the viewer animates them.

I arranged the images to echo my experience of walking in the park—meandering, crisscrossing, circling. I was trying to avoid a hierarchy and loosely mixed photographic genres: black-and-white bench images, more abstract gray-green leaf-shard images, images of the statue canopied in bright green. The sequences help build an

experience through the gallery space, one that allows the viewer to imagine and reconstruct the space of the park.

I experimented with gum arabic, which was not very interesting for the project, as the coloring is an outcome of an intentional subjective choice rather than of the chemical process itself. I tried platinum prints and Van Dyke prints, but the brownish image was difficult to stabilize. The process of making salt prints was the most interesting, as the color results were spectral, from purplish brown to greenish blue. Because of the lack of color control, William Henry Fox Talbot understood these prints in his book *Pencil of Nature* (1844–46) as originals; photography at that point seemed closer to a natural process than it would in its later archival and industrial uses. Most of my salt prints failed—the image either never showed up or was washed off as the water to develop them touched the surface. The photosensitive silver nitrate is in fact hazardous. I accidentally splashed it on my forehead, which then became a photosensitive surface, and a dark, amorphous, cloudlike shape bloomed. I had to keep out of the sun to stop it from developing into a burn. As I washed off the chemicals in the bathtub with my hands, I wanted the visceral sensuality of this process to be a part of the work, to show the desire involved in the touching of the process.

Cyanotype, the least toxic process, needs only two chemicals: ferric ammonium citrate, used as a food additive and for contrast in medical imaging, and potassium ferricyanide, which renders the well-known subaqueous tone in several photographic processes. Cyanotype belongs to a history of nature depiction, most notably Anna Atkins's contact prints for *Cyanotypes of British and Foreign Ferns* (1853). Because Atkins was unable to duplicate an image, the wilting of the ferns was unintentionally registered through the contact printing of the edition. I have several ferns that are fragile, needing constant care, yet ferns are prehistoric witnesses of global extinctions and climate changes. Instead of branching out into smaller and smaller arteries, their very structure defies hierarchical, taxonomic logic. Their leaves are organized horizontally; all parts have concurrent access to water. I once visited the botanist Carl von Linné's teaching garden in Uppsala, near Stockholm, where the plants were organized according to their sexual systems. The plants, with their stamens and pistils, were lined up as if morphing into each other. Ferns, whose pansexual reproductive system, via spores, were a mystery to Linné. He left them for a bed devoted to plants whose reproductive system he was unable to classify. Linné was the founder of the taxonomic system, a precursor to any Western classificatory system, including photographic seriality.

Fern *(Osmunda regalis, Kosmopolit L., XIV, Safsa)* from the Linnaeus Garden of Uppsala, Sweden, 2019

I was reluctant to use cyanotype because of its rich blues, which seemed too hopeful and overdetermined. I wanted to drain the hope from the color to metaphorically replicate Western practices of industrial extraction. The idealized nature depicted in the museum was rendered impure by industrial processes from the moment of its creation. I found that the tone could be muted into brownish gray if I dyed the print with tea tannins or bleached it with ammonium. Ammonium is used to purify water supplies and is corrosive, causing burning of the respiratory tract, which can result in lung damage, even death. I mistakenly smelled the ammonium, which produced pain in my lungs, and I fell backward as it went up my nose into my brain.

Pradeep Dalal, *Natural History Circle Study #1 (Orissa)*, 2019. Etching, 5 ¾ × 4 ½ in.

Artist Anni Albers uses the word *matière*, which refers to the surface appearance of material, such as grain, roughness, smoothness, dullness, and gloss—qualities of appearance that can be observed by touch and hence are not concerned with lightness or darkness. She says that "*matière* is mainly non-functional, non-utilitarian, and like color it cannot be experienced intellectually. It has to be approached, just like color, nonanalytically, receptively."[5] Squeezing, smearing, mixing, and applying etching inks in shades like burnt umber, Indian yellow, and carbon black was a visceral jolt to my sensibilities, after I had spent years of adjusting the color balance between cyan, magenta, and yellow in Photoshop. I found myself on heightened alert to colors and the words used to describe them. I started to learn about the botanical sources for pigments. The following list, compiled carefully by a British publication more than a hundred years ago, was a start.

Some indigenous Indian dyes listed in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 1917:
Harsinghar (brilliant yellow)
Naspal (very good shades varying from yellow to full brown)
Safflower or Kusum (beautiful shades of red, varying from full crimson to the most delicate pink)
Majith (maroon and Bordeaux shades)
Patang or Sapan Wood (brilliant shades of red, crimson, and purple)
Kachnar (dull red to black)
Peepul (good pink)
Akhrot (valuable brown dye)[6]

How can a longer-term and more intimate relationship with the image be built?

Before printing, I left the plastic transparencies outdoors to transform, to cook, to become the ruinous component of the work. Artist and playwright August Strindberg, who was involved in an infamous feud with Heidenstam over his escapist, upper-class nationalism and who claimed instead the value of realist, working-class literature, placed chemically laden copper plates outdoors to provoke alchemical processes in collaboration with the elements of the sky, calling the results *Celestographs*, or sky writings. Because Strindberg allowed nature and the passage of time to take over the material process, the blotchy plates became impossible to classify as painting, sculpture, or photography. Resistance can take place when one lets alternate organic processes seep into the work.

I wanted to print on recycled wood panels, which I had grounded with visible gestural brushstrokes. I had intended to print outdoors in the park but quickly realized I was not going to be able to print on-site; there is no access to dark spaces to prepare the panels nor to water to develop them. The process is also unstable and weather dependent. I printed and bleached the panels in my garden instead, the sun marking my local meridian. After leaving the soaked panels outside to weather, I photographed and printed them on Forex plastic, which is durable like the debris on Staten Island. The prints reentered the digital realm, with their sensorially stymied materiality that now allowed for new natural processes to affect their surfaces over time.

Pradeep Dalal, *Natural History (Mansur 4)*, 2018. Archival inkjet print, 18 ½ × 27 in.

Rubbing his palm to test the burr on the surface of an etched copper plate last year, my teacher at the Manhattan Graphics Workshop, Vijay Kumar, demonstrated a supremely attenuated sense of touch. The learning curve in etching was very steep for me. It has been more than fifteen years since I developed film and printed my gelatin silver photographs. Since then I have worked digitally, on computers, monitors, and scanners. I have worked quite intensely and intimately with a scanner, using my fingers, palms, knuckles, and arms to grab, place, hold, nudge, jog, sweep, and shake the different components of photomontage. The moments of discordant friction between the separate bits of the montage and the moments when the seams dissolve, when the juxtaposed bits come together, are equally desirable.

However, in making the images of the manuscript borders, I was keen to push the procedure away from the flatbed of the scanner. I kept nudging the process along, step after step: make a photograph, print it, make a photocopy of it, heat transfer the image onto a copper plate, ink the plate, run it through an etching press, and print on wet paper. I liked the relief-like indentation and the three-dimensionality of the image and the way the ink sits on the paper. I liked the vibrancy of the pigments and the immense possibilities for transforming color by mixing etching inks and oil. The softness of the image and the diffused edges of lines were the opposite of what I would look for in printing a photograph. Another form of clarity. But then another displacement. With a desire to go back to the satisfying machine-made image and away from the handmade, I scanned the print and reworked it digitally, matching and approximating the pigment hues in Photoshop and outputting it as an inkjet print.

The prints, which are quite modest in size and unframed, were hung with just tiny nails in the top corners. I wanted them to move a little with the air in the gallery at the EFA Project Space. You can come very close to the images and take in the richly colored surfaces, the soft patterns of the foliage, and perhaps instinctively want to touch the paper.

Model for 3D print of Fia Backström's *Marinel Ubaldo, 21, Philippines*, 2019

In response to Nietzsche's death mask and its complicated patriarchical history, I created masks of three of the girl activists' faces, Greta Thunberg, Ridhima Pandey, and Marinel Ubaldo. I was interested in exploring how 3D modeling could be a photographic portraiture process. I gathered images of their faces from the Internet for the modeling process, approaching the moving lines of a dimensional face as an approximation of an outline in constant motion. White (with its assumed neutrality) was not an option for printing variable skin tones. Green was too symbolically heavy-handed and seemed a mockery, turning their faces into aliens. I opted for gray, turning the heads into ghostlike presences. The modeling material, PLA, is corn based and biodegradable. A mistake generated by horizontally orienting the print created a topographically layered skin texture reminiscent of a landscape.

I installed the images on the ground, imbuing the actual site with pointers to a set of additional sites. I refused the classic totalizing horizontal landscape format which was so prevalent in the paintings in the museum. The images were printed in a democratic one-by-one-meter square to avoid an up or down orientation. The format was a reminder that the images, like swatches or samples, are outtakes from a larger scenario and from an infinite series of events. They are fragments from elsewhere. The processing had made these images hard to decipher, no longer available for fast reading. One had to crouch close to the ground to sense them. A picturesque vista was not on offer, only flat, nonperspectival views.

Immediately after I placed the images, a group of eiders approached and walked over them, appreciating them with their feet, perhaps drawn to the semiglossy surface of the nonrecyclable plastic. I once saw a group of visually impaired visitors allowed to touch Brancusi sculptures in a museum where I worked. I came in early to touch the sculpture with my own palms. I still touch work in museums to have this intimate relation.

Can the installation stage a rich experiential encounter and deepen the underlying ideas of the work?

Appropriating the display of Nietzsche's seemed a strange choice for my masks of living young women. Walking in the garden, I imagined instead how the girls might become witnesses if they were looking down at the viewer from the trees. I fastened them high up around the trunks, like tree huggers, where they actively engaged the site; viewers would be forced to move their bodies across the horizon: crouching down for the prints and tilting their heads upward to see the masks of the girls, who became like tree spirits or hovering like the mythical creatures *älvor*.

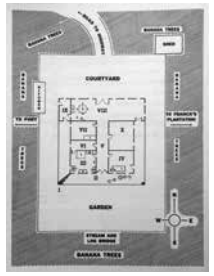
NAMING

Pagoda tree or champa or khadchampo or frangipani? There are more than thirty names for the tree in a variety of Indian languages and about six in English: goalanchi, lal gulancha, lal gorur champa, lal katchampa, dalana phul, gorur champa, khadchampo, gobur champa, lal gulchin, lal golanchi, khair champa, belchampaka, devagangile, gosampige, kadusampige, arali, vellachampakam, khairchapha, bhuruchapha, golochi, kutokampa, gulchin, devagangalu, kshira champa, ilattalari, kallimandarai, perungalli, arhataganneru, nurvarahalu, gosampige, sampai, temple tree, red jasmine tree, red frangipani, crimson temple tree, dead man's flower, life tree.

What is the tonal register between a photograph and an accompanying text?

Writing as in grasping, not finding. To circle around something instead of naming or categorizing, an approximation of an articulation, like photographing something that would not let itself be photographed. The faded flag. Searching for a tone of voice for some of my writing that was to be printed in the piece of ephemera I produced for the exhibition, I recalled the letters in Thiel's archive, as well as a booklet of his own poetry, which I found in the museum. I also looked at his contemporary and friend Verner von Heidenstam's disturbingly nationalistic poems. A narrative of the walk on Staten Island began to emerge, in a serene, sincere voice, akin to the abysmal, dusk-gray tone of the visual work. I remembered reading Alain Robbe-Grillet's somnambulistic novel *La Jalousie* (1957), set in the domestic surroundings of an African plantation, in which Robbe-Grillet describes in great detail the tension of an imperceptible unraveling threat, collapsing the sexualized sensorial experience of the heat with the


FACING HER LAND - NOTES FROM ELSEWHERE



Map from Calder Publishing's 1997 edition of Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Jalousie* (*Jealousy*, 1957)

controlled fear and anxiety generated from white colonial guilt. In my writing, I mimicked this slow apprehensive tempo of impending doom, trying to match every word to each perception. The attention to sensory detail was compensation for the failed photographic representation of the faded red flag in motion. In Robbe-Grillet's book, there is a diagram that maps the movement of the characters between the main house and the yard. My ephemera included maps of Staten Island and the museum garden, overlaying the movement of the museum visitors over my own.

Ephemera allows for a durational engagement with the ideas of an exhibition that extends beyond the site itself and might become more intimate in a domestic setting. To replicate the photographic process—continuing the water metaphor—for the ephemera, we used a matte paper with a smooth texture that felt soaked in ink to the touch yet would be printable on both sides. Instead of gray paper, I experimented digitally with gray tones, choosing costlier color printing to use a warm orange on one side and a blue-purple on the other as a heat-and-water metaphor. For texture, I overlaid semitransparent images from Staten Island and an aerial image of the dam collapse in Brazil. I had looked intensely at my screen while making precise, minute color shifts, but in the printer's proofs the difference was almost indiscernible. Only a slowed viewing of the printed piece would reveal the difference. A square lacking orientation, it took its format from the photographs, with a vegetative Art Nouveau font meandering across the page and connecting to the decorative style of the museum.

A few years ago, I saw a superb exhibition of paintings and objects from the Deccan region in India at the Metropolitan Museum. I saw

'Unwan from Mir 'Ali Haravi's Shah Jahan Album, 1630–40

paintings attributed to the Bodleian Painter and then another set of miniatures attributed to the Paris Painter and yet another series by the Dublin Painter. These were all sixteenth- or seventeenth-century paintings in the Mughal miniature style. A first thought was that these might be English, French, and Irish painters who had made their work in the Islamic style for their courts and rulers. I was taken aback to learn how wrong I was. The Bodleian Painter was a name assigned by historian Mark Zebrowski to describe an artist whose most famous painting is preserved in the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library. Scholars now think that Ali Riza, an artist active from about 1600 to 1650 in Bijapur, India, is the Bodleian Painter. Similarly, the paintings attributed to the Paris Painter are so assigned because some of the works by this painter are at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. And the Dublin Painter was named thus because his paintings are in the collection of the Chester Beatty in Dublin. However, works by the Dublin Painter are also in the collection of the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin.

Similarly, many Islamic and Mughal albums of paintings are known not by the patrons whose ateliers in India produced them, such as those of the emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, but primarily by where and by whom the albums were acquired: the Berlin Album, Gulshan Album, Leningrad Album, Wantage Album, Kevorkian Album, St. Petersburg Album, the Windsor *Shahnama*.

This kind of naming appears practical and obvious; however, it is yet another level of reattribution, a staking of ownership and

control. A vast quantity of Indian artistic heritage is today in the West—the finest and most in-depth collections are in England, the United States, Denmark, and Switzerland. The collections in the museums in New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai are painfully modest in comparison.

How can photographs be contextualized, such as through titling, footnoting, interviews, essays, and spoken-word?

An image by itself is bare. I think about its social life, from its inception, how it materializes, is repurposed and travels through the world to how it ends up, alongside the life of people who touch and are touched by it. The image holds all these material events or happenings, and can allow for their existence and legibility. Through presence—say, through voice, a moving body, or a text that brushes up against them in the form of a poem, a factual text, or a caption—images come alive. While the larger ideas of the image might not be possible to record in a minimal caption, the title can reanchor a found, floating digital image to the site and date of its becoming, the material choices of its production and the traces of its circulation: the caption as found online, including the image agency that owns the copyright of the image. The caption, like the image, is an approximation; there is no one essential combination of image and word but an imperfect one suggested through a collective that encompasses its own incompleteness.

I have tried to be particular and specific in titling my work. I always name the places I photograph: Srirangam, Bhopal, Rajgir, Bidar, Lothal, and Delhi, for example. I have made projects around ancient sites, including one more than thirty-five hundred years old, and this naming allows me an entry into an elastic sense of time. I want to attach myself to little bits of this very deep history.

I met Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier while teaching at Bard College. She had begun her book *Whereas* (2017), in which she redirects the language of the US government's Native American Apology Resolution of 2010. I asked to reprint two of her diagrammatic poems that respond to the square as a delineation of the surveyed and stolen land on the page. Another poem, the minimalist epic narrative cycle *Ædnan* (2018), whose title means "land," "earth," and "ground," by Sámi poet Linnea Axelsson moved me deeply. Written in Swedish, the sparse words leave massive white space on the printed page and on the broad spine of the tome, recalling the vast white expanses of the north, where earth and sky merge—a much different kind of landscape depiction than the grandiose painting gestures in the museum. I requested permission to reprint a few sections that describe the exploitation of mountains and rivers from the perspective of an intergenerational Sámi family rather than from the sanctioned view of the progressive Swedish welfare state. The poem offers an emotional landscape, reinvented as "wilderness" and mapped with Swedish geographic names that erase the original language and the history of the land, the patriarchal lineages of mining and naming. Whose depiction of the land gets to count?

The pronoun *I* is an unfortunate pronoun, it makes a false assumption that an I, an erect vertical line, is a kind of individual that is not made up

Excerpt from the printed matter for *Facing her land—Notes from elsewhere*, 2019. Digital print, 19 11/16 × 19 11/16 in.

of others. I always had an aversion to this pronoun, as I sense how the borders between us become fluid as language moves from one person to the next and travels within me to form our collective selves through ideas and contexts. A polyvocality—a web of voices—is woven into the work via voice and citation in the printed piece.

In addition to the poems and the longer written text about the walk, I juxtaposed additional forms of language: descriptive text on the historical, economic, and social vectors informing the site; countering quotes from the girl activists of various backgrounds; and my own poetic notations that gave presence to the process of making. One of these notations is an ode to the sun—the source of life and of printing the photographs, global witness and aid to catastrophes, healer and heater, all in one. Printed in Swedish are also the lyrics to the popular song "Änglamark" (Angel Land, 1971). A protest against a governmental decision to expand hydropower in Sweden, the song was written by the troubadour Evert Taube to save the river Vindelälven, the lower part of which is known as *Vyöddaleiednuo* and the upper as *Viddulejiennuo* in one Sámi language. The river winds its way through Sápmi (the region where the Sámi live, stretching across Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia). *Vindel* etymologically stems from "meandering," while *älv* derives from the German *Elbe* (river). An *älva*, moreover, is a young, female, humanlike creature in Norse mythology who is always found in a group, often dancing at dawn or at dusk in the woods. The *älvor* are sexualized motifs in the National Romantic tradition, but in folklore they are also connected to the *mara*, a supernatural entity that tortures those sleeping by sitting on their chests and provoking deep anxiety.

Does the work need a narrator? Can language embody and ground the image?

Here is the writer Amitav Ghosh on the relationship of naming and language and culture in placing one firmly in the world:

> I was in my teens when I read [V. S.] Naipaul's essay on how, in the Trinidad of his youth, the flowers of the Caribbean were rendered invisible by the unseen daffodils of textbook English poets. That essay sparked so powerful a jolt of recognition that the moment has stayed with me ever since. As a child, while reading "The Mutiny on the Bounty" I'd been fascinated by the word "frangipani" which seemed to me to be redolent of all that was mysterious, desirable and secret. Then one day I discovered that the gnarled old branches by my window belonged to none other than a "frangipani" tree: I'd been staring at them for years. My response was neither shock nor disappointment: it was rather a sudden awareness of the anomalousness of my own place in the world. This was not an awareness I had ever seen reflected in anything I'd read—until I came across Naipaul's essay.[7]

A similar estrangement was caused by the primacy of the English language in my education and experience and the insidious way it superseded my mother tongue, Gujarati, and the other languages I learned in school, Hindi and Marathi. Facility with English was a ticket to get ahead in the world and a means to become part of the larger Western world. But it blocked the ease of access and profound connection to my own culture and traditions. It took me a long time to figure out

Can the social and the collective be activated in the work?

that learning about the world, including my own, through English carried with it an indelible stain of Western superiority. It would take a great deal of effort to begin to see exceptional sophistication, beauty, and complexity in Indian art, architecture, and language for myself.

In an entry in his diary, the twentieth-century Bengali artist Somnath Hore describes being "surrounded by the clamour of various sparrows, shaliks, bulbulis." In another entry, he says that "the dalim tree is full of birds."[8] When I speak of my experience in the garden in Srirangam, I do not have this intimate and fluent knowledge of trees and birds. I cannot name the trees under which I was sitting nor identify the birds in the trees besides noticing crows and parrots. I grew up in Mumbai with limited exposure to nature. In another entry in his diary, Hore describes "white blossoms everywhere—togor, gulancha, jui, rajnigandha, madhugandha, beli. At the back, the dalim tree is ablaze, its flowers dancing in their ghagras of red shalu." He knows the local names of the flowers in Hindi and Bengali. Could the red shalu perhaps be a reference to the red cloth draped in mausoleums? Had Hore read a novel by the Bengali writer Syed Waliullah titled *Lal Shalu* (1948), which in a later English translation is called *Tree without Roots*? I am envious of his ease in observing, describing and taking pleasure in the natural world. And the effortless flow between his mother tongue, Bengali, and the national language, Hindi, and English.

It is impossible for me to bypass the language frame of English. However, Ramanujan offers another path. He says that while "English has distorted our traditions, it has also made us look at our traditions. . . . This whole question of colonial distortion has been formulated in English. It requires a dialog with English. English has been the other through which we have returned to ourselves. . . . English has made us self-critical and made us critical of English itself."[9]

Notes

1. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, *Partial Recall: Essays on Literature and Literary History* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011), 1.
2. Carmen Kagal, ed., *Vistāra: The Architecture of India. Catalogue of the Exhibition* (Bombay: Festival of India, 1986), 48–49.
3. Mildred Archer, *Natural History Drawings in the India Office Library* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), 57.
4. A. K. Ramanujan, "Where Mirrors Are Windows," in *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, ed. Vinay Dhawadker (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10.
5. Anni Albers, "Tactile Sensibility," in *On Weaving* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1965), 63.
6. "A List of Botanical Sources of Coloured Pigments, Used for Making Dyes," in *Oxford Readings in Indian Art*, ed. B. N. Goswamy and Vrinda Agrawal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 181–83.
7. Amitav Ghosh, "Naipaul and the Nobel" (2001), www.amitavghosh.com/essays/naipaul.html.
8. Somnath Hore, *Until the Rain: Fragments from an Artist's Life*, trans. Sunandini Banerjee (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2008), 4, 13.
9. A. K. Ramanujan, "Interview with A. L. Becker and Keith Taylor, 1989," in *A. K. Ramanujan Uncollected Poems and Prose*, ed. Molly Daniels-Ramanujan and Keith Harrison (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79.

PAGES 4–5:
All works by Pradeep Dalal

Illuminator (Mir Ali_A_cobalt), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Illuminator (Mir Ali_D_carmine), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Illuminator (Mir Ali_B_umber), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Illuminator (Mir Ali_E_ochre), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Illuminator (Mir Ali_C_yellow), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Srirangam (portraits), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 9 5⁄16 in.

Srirangam (QV 1 back), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Srirangam (QV 3 profile), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

PAGES 10–11:
All images: Fia Backström, from the project *Facing her land—Notes from elsewhere*, 2019

Photographs from walk on Cedar Grove Beach, Staten Island, May 15, 2019

3D model for *Ridhima Pandey, 10, India*, 2019. 11 × 8 × 4 ¾ in.

Greta Thunberg, 16, Sweden, 2019. 3D PLA print, 11 ¼ × 7 11⁄16 × 4 ¼ in.

Forehead injury from silver nitrate, May 3, 2019

PAGES 16–17:
All works by Pradeep Dalal

Srirangam (plinth 1), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Srirangam (plinth 2), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Srirangam (plinth 3), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 12 × 18 in.

Srirangam (cascade 1H), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 6 × 9 in.

Srirangam (cascade 2H), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 6 × 9 in.

Srirangam (cascade 1S), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 6 × 6 in.

Srirangam (cascade 2S), 2019. Archival inkjet print, 6 × 6 in.

Background: Source map of Srirangam, plan of Srirangam temple, Sri Ranganathaswamy, Srirangam. Tiruchirapalli. From James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, ed. James Burgess and R. Phené Spiers, 1910

PAGES 22–23:
All images: Fia Backström, from the project *Facing her land—Notes from elsewhere*, 2019

Documentation of installation at Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm

Destruction by typhoon Haiyan in Tanauan, Philippines November 14, 2013 (MNS photo), 2019. Pigment print on Forex, 39 ⅜ × 39 ⅜ in.

Cedar Grove Beach, Staten Island, May 15, 2019, 2019. Pigment print on Forex, 39 ⅜ × 39 ⅜ in.

Flood waters during major floods in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand in 2013 (Reuters), 2019. Pigment print on Forex, 39 ⅜ × 39 ⅜ in.

Aerial view of dam collapse in Brumadinho, Brazil, January 25, 2019 (Reuters), 2019. Pigment print on Forex, 39 ⅜ × 39 ⅜ in.

Facing her land—Notes from elsewhere, 2019. Digital print, 19 11⁄16 × 19 11⁄16 in.

Marinel Ubaldo, 21, Philippines, 2019. 3D PLA print, 12 ⅞ × 9 ⅞ × 3 ¾ in.

FIA BACKSTRÖM is a Swedish artist and writer based in New York. Representing Sweden at the Venice Biennale in 2011, Backström has exhibited her work internationally at venues including Centre Pompidou, Paris (2019); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2010, 2019); Greater New York, MoMA PS1 (2016); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010); Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008); and Serpentine Gallery, London (2007). She has written for *Artforum* and *North Drive Press*, and a book of her writings, *COOP A-script*, was published in 2016. Backström received the Bernard Heidsieck—Centre Pompidou Literary Prize in 2018. She is an assistant professor at Cooper Union and from 2015 to 2020 cochaired with Pradeep Dalal the Photography Department in the MFA program at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York.

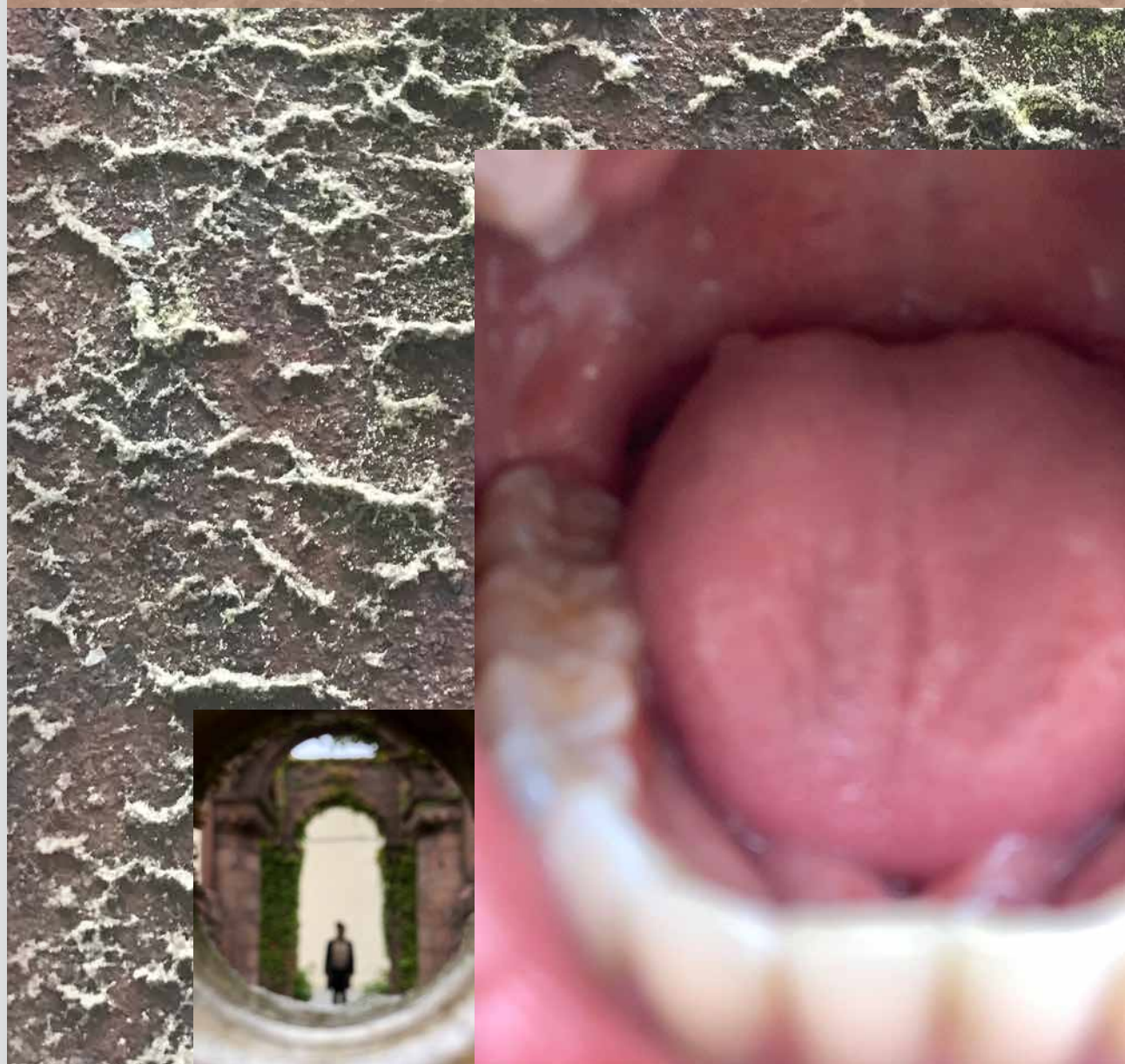
PRADEEP DALAL is a Mumbai-born artist and writer based in New York. His work has been shown at EFA Project Space, New York (2019); Callicoon Fine Arts, New York (2017); Sala Diaz, San Antonio, Texas (2017); and Murray Guy, New York (2011); among other venues. His photographs have been included in publications such as *Blind Spot*, *Cabinet*, and *Grey Room*. His artist book *Bhopal, MP* (2017) was excerpted in *Chandigarh Is in India* (2016), and his essay "A Bifocal Frame of Reference" was published in *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design* (2013). With Fia Backström, Dalal cochaired the Photography Department in the MFA program at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, from 2015 to 2020. He was a visiting assistant professor in Pratt Institute's MFA Program from 2010 to 2014, and he has taught at Cooper Union, New York; and the International Center of Photography, New York.

The following pages include material from participants in the workshop Some Proposed Strategies on How to Situate Images by Building Context beyond Representational Pointers, at Pratt Institute on October 11, 2019, in the context of the symposium TEACHING PHOTOGRAPHS. The participants had responded to the following prompts:

1. (15 minutes) Become conscious of your body, position and attitude as you photograph. Work together two to three persons. Assist and communicate with each other while shooting, try unfamiliar body positions to photograph from, collaborate to support each other in positions that are untenable for one person. Forget about the technically good image! Be bold and try out several variations of extreme body positions. The experience is what is important. Photograph from the point of view of an animal or of vegetation: insect or tree; from an object's perspective: a stone or a house; from an embodied emotion: fear, anger, joy.
2. (10 minutes) Look through the photographs on your phone that you just shot. Put the phone away, then write about your experience photographing from the memory of your body sensations. Describe the process of making. Describe the images from your retinal memory of them. You can home in on specifics that you remember, or describe what became less clear or fuzzy. You can write about compositional details. You can shift between the personal and the larger social context. The writing form is free, it can be stream of consciousness, poetic, fact-based, etc. Write as subjectively as possible, using associative processes.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in this workshop. The photographs on these three pages were taken by Eugenia D'Ambrosio, Russell Barsanti, Masha Kouznetsova, Stephanie Espinoza, and Daiqing Zhu.

—Fia Backström and Pradeep Dalal



P P I

PPI#2 originated in fall 2019 with TEACHING PHOTOGRAPHS, a symposium that Shannon Ebner and Sara Greenberger Rafferty co-organized. Participants in the symposium were invited to respond to pedagogical questions including: How do photographs teach? How do photographs perform? How are photographs made? Fia Backström and Pradeep Dalal led a workshop that highlighted aspects of both their respective artistic practices and educational methodologies as co-chairs of the Photography Department in the MFA program at Bard College from 2015 to 2020. The two artists developed material from that workshop into this coauthored text—interweaving their own voices as artists and educators engaged in the study of images and asking questions from the reader about what it might mean to *know*, *handle*, and *name* photographs, privileging not only sight and seeing but also the full range of bodily senses.

Pounds Per Image (PPI) is published annually through the Pratt Photography Imprint (PPI). Each issue is a book signature, and together they will constitute a full book after six issues. By commissioning artists, writers, curators, and other voices in the polyvocal field to produce original material about photography, Pounds Per Image (PPI) endeavors to make contributions to the discursive field beyond the walls of Pratt Institute.

POUNDS PER IMAGE

This series is edited and published through the Pratt Photography Imprint (PPI), led by Shannon Ebner, chairperson of the Photography Department, School of Art, Pratt Institute. This issue is co-initiated with Sara Greenberger Rafferty, director of graduate studies in the Photography Department, on the occasion of the symposium that Ebner and Rafferty co-organized in the fall of 2019 called TEACHING PHOTOGRAPHS.

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