

CANVAS

GALLERY

David Alesworth

Hortus Nocte

The Dark Garden

24th January - 2nd February 2023

Hortus Nocte (The Dark Garden)

The work of this dark garden alludes to many things, like so many plants curated within the heterotopia of a simple garden their bond exists in the mind of the gardener and in this case it is mine. I have both travelled and dwelled, experiencing the garden through the lens of another culture and it is simultaneously geologic, post-colonial, anthropogenic and aspirational. It is in microcosm our collective environmental crisis and an ever present reminder of the angst of these dark times. However the dark garden is not all negativity, rather it is about balance and change. I see it as an eclipse in the reign of natural fecundity that is this earth, a dimming of the biosphere as the planet heats up and late capitalism eats everything it encounters. In the work Hortus Nocte, 2022 the large Persianate hand-knotted rug has been systematically embroidered, so removing or shrouding all the floral elements with black wool embroidery. They are still there, the carpet is essentially unchanged and their colours peek at the edges of these interventions. It appears as an eclipse of the metaphysical *Charbagh* alluded to in the underlying text (and weave) of the carpet below; and there is the implication of this phenomena's temporary nature. The dark garden also draws upon the northern European seasonal garden of my current lived experience so different from the many gardens I have made over several decades in Pakistan. Gardening continues to be my research activity and the balance to my studio time. The *Sambucus nigra* var. black lace (the black Elder) that features in some of these works grows right outside my studio in Bristol, these plants are currently just a few skeletal sticks and it is hard to imagine that spring will bring their return to full form and opulent lacey black foliage.

I suggest there is a *terroir* of art as there is for certain other products of the living earth for as an artist I draw upon the land to understand where I am as much through the natural environment as through the human culture it hosts. Culture, I believe has always grown out from the living ground. As in a garden, I hope to make works of multi-layered complexity that continue to reveal themselves over many seasons. Coal and clay in the installation "Original Sin" 2022, draw upon my experience at the Pioneer Residency in Khushab, 2018 which lies at the beginning of this new mineral trajectory in my thinking. It was the plants and every scale of life (diatomaceous chalks) that sequestered the excess atmospheric carbon in the Carboniferous era and allowed the explosion of biodiversity that followed upon a cooling earth. Coal lies at the beginning of the industrial age, the age of steam-power, but is still a huge contributor to our collective global carbon deficit. Palimpsests in many forms flow through these works, whether they be of archival texts, culturally specific textiles or P. J. Redoute's exquisite botanical illustrations, here undone, so that they may be read again.

These all relate to the garden, for the man-made garden is always a palimpsest of nature and culture of man and place. I recently encountered some of Anwar Shemza's botanical cyanotypes from the 1970's and have alluded to these in my own way, for Shemza is never far from my mind. I continue to collaborate with other artists, something that has always been a significant part of my practice of the past forty years. Adnan Madani whose positing of *Terra Nullius* in relation to my 'Carless Mapping' textile work of 2020 led to my conception of Hortus Nocte (the textile work of 2022). Adnan has contributed a text here that responds to and extends some of the ideas around these current works and I look forward to our many future collaborations. Malcom Hutchinson has also collaborated and facilitated the short video work we made one freezing April morning this year in Somerset, crossing icy streams and a muddy field to gain access to the evergreen Mistletoe which is such a feature of the culture and mythology of this part of England, as I write this on the Winter solstice of 2022. *Viscum album*, (video) revisits my work of the same title in "Extra Ordinary" curated by Rashid Rana at Canvas Gallery in 2013.

David Chalmers Alesworth
Bristol
Somerset
Dec. 21st 2022

'I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self-evident, 'that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living': that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it'.

Thomas Jefferson

Everyone knows that gardeners are terrorists and colonists. The colonisation consists in the enclosure of land, in removing the possibility of use for the common good, and then replacing the very notion of common good with an aesthetic experience: this, the gardener says, is a good we can all enjoy, the beauty of a well-laid border, the cultivation of an exotic plant, the creation of a hybrid tea rose, the engineering of sweeter fruit, the insistence on an ancient varietal. But do not disturb this order, this delicate balance, for anything as vulgar as living, sheltering, shitting or pissing: find another place to sleep, hold it in, do not trespass, and when invited do not overstay your welcome.

The Emperor Babar loved gardens. Some of the most vivid passages of the *Babarnama* describe the trees, plants and fruit he encounters in his itinerant, marauding career. The man who makes a tower of the skulls of his infidel enemies, is also alive to how different woods burn, to their distinct smells and smoke and sound. He compares the grapes of one place he has murderously invaded with those of another. He surveys, from his carpet in his military encampment, patches of land that might be suitable for planting certain trees, at the same time as he takes note of possible points of attack and defence: the terrain of destruction and the tender, tended earth mixing with each other in the slice of vision from the opening of a war tent.

The garden came before the plantation. If we still live, as Harney and Moten insist, in the European plantocracy that yoked millions of black bodies to a foreign land – then perhaps we still live in an age of the garden; except the garden, like the plantation, is now elsewhere (and perhaps everywhere). As an ordering of desire which is also the erasure of lines of desire, of secret paths, it imposes the city and its boulevards on us, as true forms of nature. Not nature as wilderness, to be sure, not even as an autonomous and self-tending ecology, but as a transcendental or divine order knowable to man.

Man as *homo hortulanus*: God as the divine gardener. The gardener as curator of the earth. In the New Testament, when Christ returns, risen after crucifixion, Mary Magdalene first encounters him in a garden and mistakes him for a gardener. What is taking place in this act and scene of misrecognition? Is it in fact a deeper insight, a momentary blurring of time and space that allows her to see – and us through her – that we are responsible for the earth as its guardians, that our flourishing is its flourishing, that we who are made in God's image must tend to God's land given to us in trust. Untended, the earth is savage and recalcitrant, and its inhabitants are infidels who must make way for those with the art and technology of reproducing Eden.

Everyone knows artists are colonisers and terrorists. Art now moves in advance of the invasion, where it once accompanied it. It is not a question of this 'Western' art replacing another from elsewhere, it is a question of the word art itself, the coming together of the man of art and the man of taste in murderous collusion. Balzac's fictional artist Frenhofer works on his painting of the most desired of models for years. When his friends finally see the canvas it is a swirl of lines and colours with just the contours of a foot discernible to show for all this time spent straining to look and reproduce the body in front of him. Cezanne and Picasso were greatly impressed by this tragic story, this allegory of truth: after all, isn't their art a question of a struggle with recalcitrant, obstinate, infidel matter, to form it into a deeper reality even at the cost of its vanishing?

Gardens, and modern art, have always been erasures and wars, and their real joys and pleasures are delicate and sensory and spiritual and bloodthirsty all at the same time. They are erasing, and at war, with an outside they themselves produce as a wilderness. This outside, in turn – wilderness, nature, the animal, the more-than-human, unruly matter – does not hesitate to erase us and invade our encampments. Everyone knows that nature is a terrorist.

Dr. Adnan Madani
December 2022



Title: 'Hortus Nocte' The Dark Garden

Medium: Dyed Sheep's Wool Embroidery, Restored Kashan Carpet (Textile Intervention)

Size: 76 x 116 Inches

Year: 2022



'Hortus Nocte' The Dark Garden - detail I



'Hortus Nocte' The Dark Garden - detail II



Title: 'Black Rosa' small

Medium: Acrylic Painting on Giclée Print with Mixed Media

Size: 18 x 14 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Brassica Nigra' Black Mustard Seed
Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper
Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP
Size: 20 x 20 Inches
Year: 2022



Title: 'Coal House Fire-II'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP

Size: 20 x 20 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Dark Rosa Cinnamomea'

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 23 x 17 Inches

Year: 2022

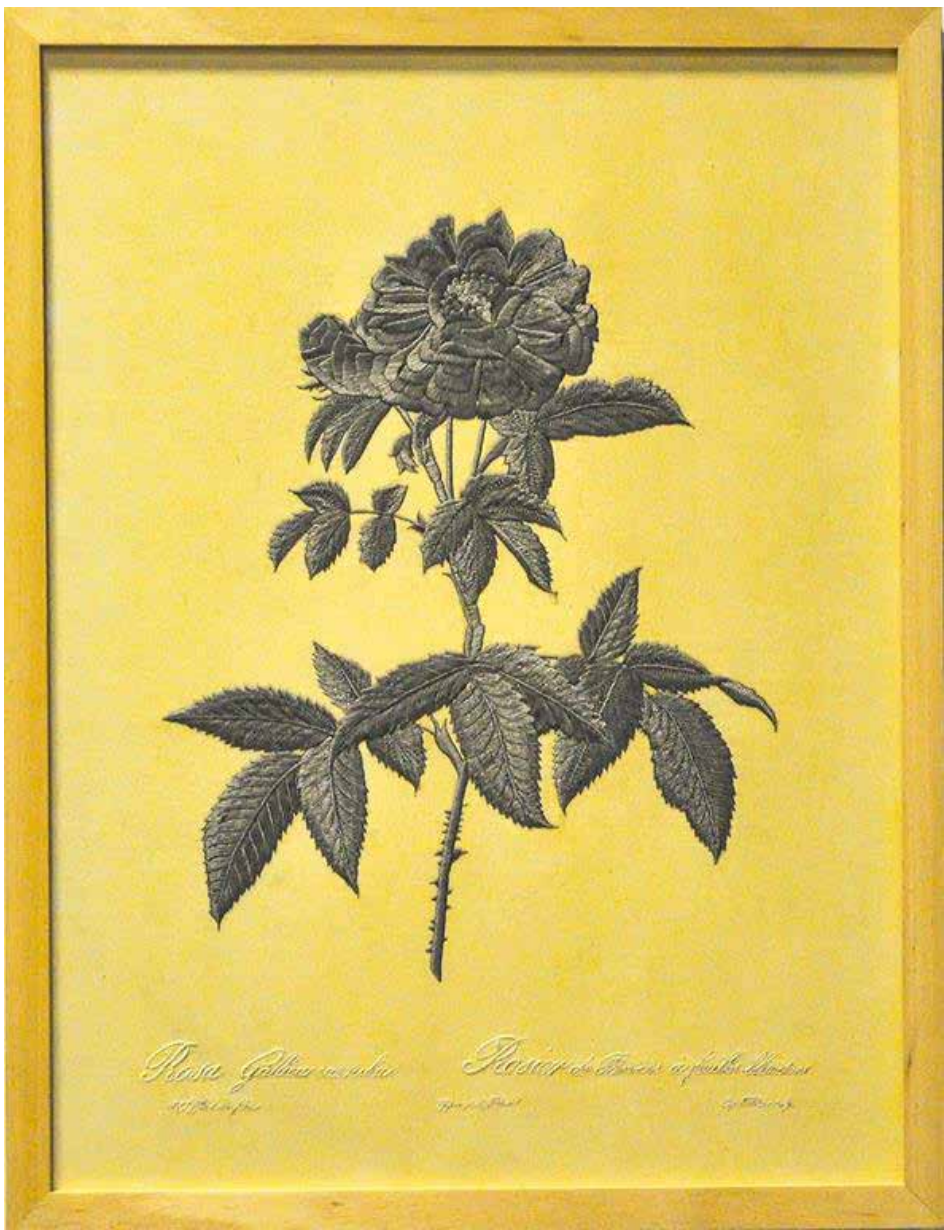


Title: 'Dark Rosa Inermis'

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 23 x 17 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Dark Rosa Glauca' grey

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 24 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022

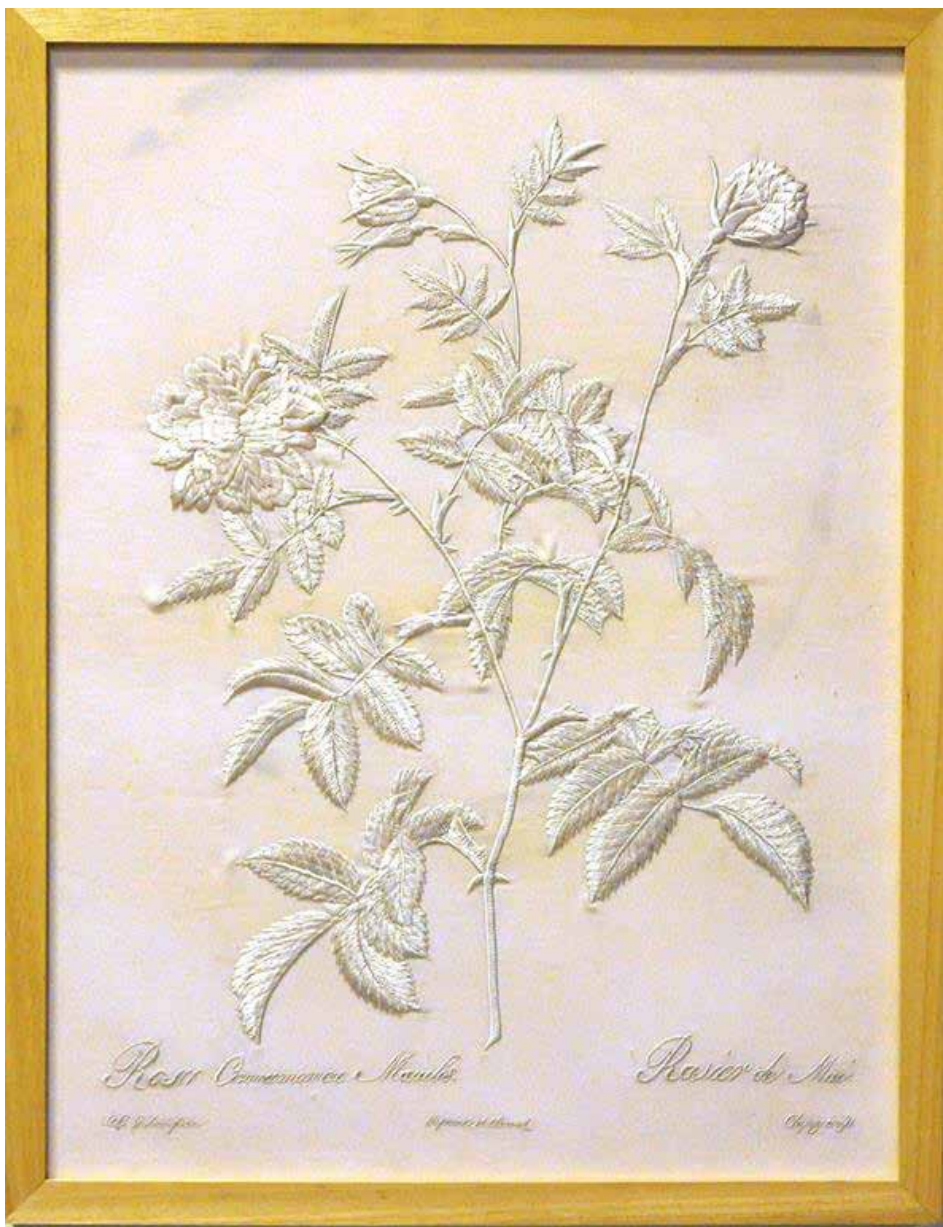


Title: 'Dark Rosa Sulfurea' white

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 24 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022

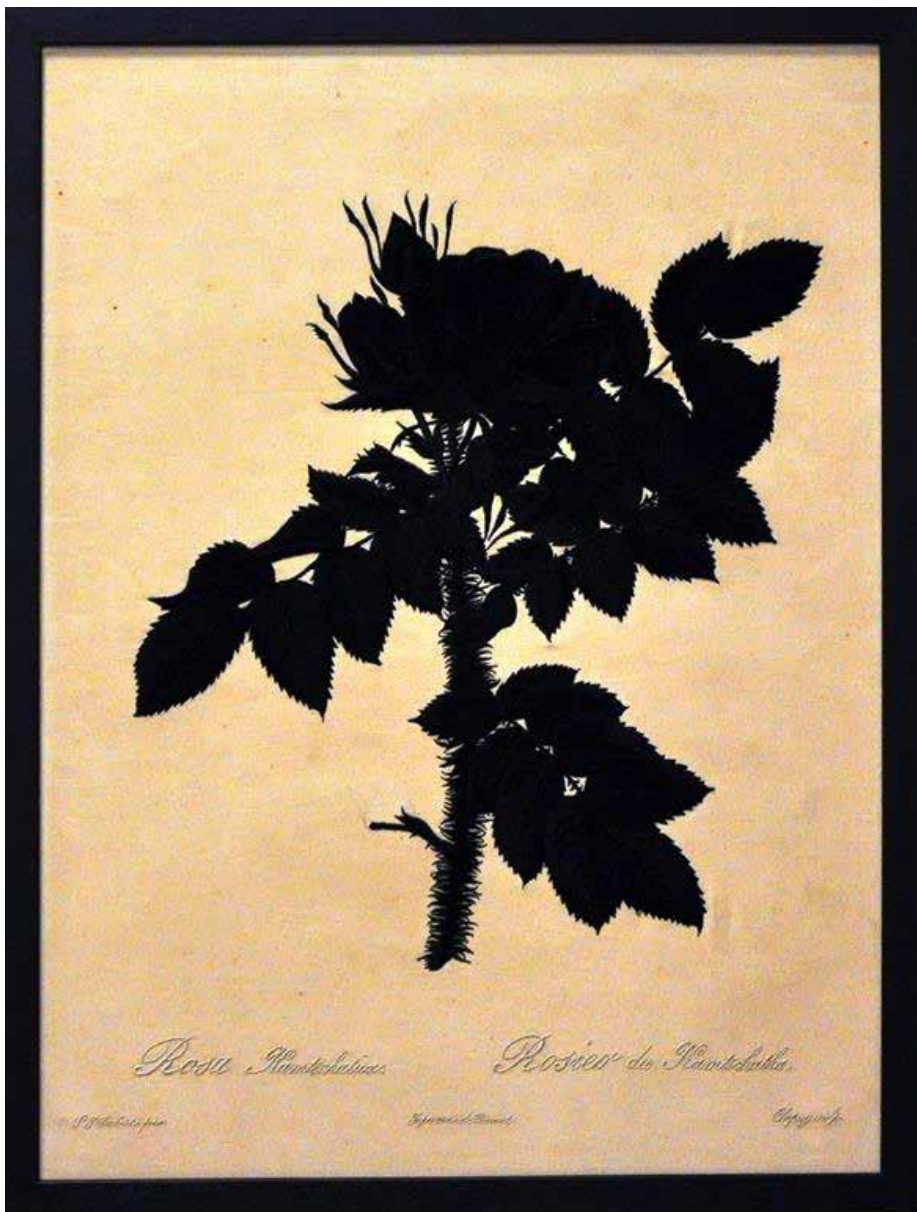


Title: 'Dark Rosa Cinnamomea' white

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 24 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Dark Rosa Kamtchatica'

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 24 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022

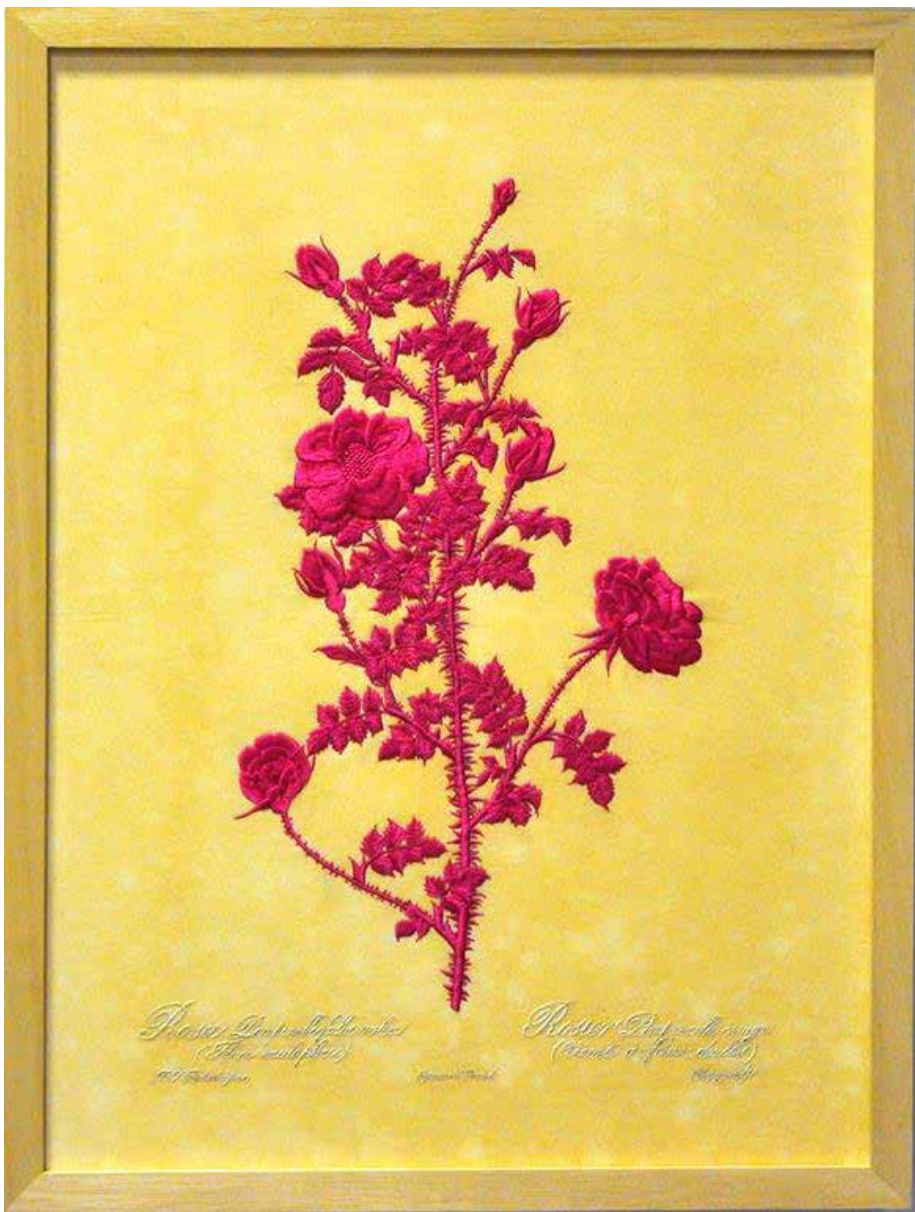


Title: 'Dark Rosa Indica'

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 23 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Dark Rosa Pimpinellifolia' pink

Medium: Archival Textile Print on Satin Cotton with Cotton Embroidery

Size: 24 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Hortensia Erased'

Medium: Acrylic Painting on Giclee Print with Mixed Media

Size: 21 x 16 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Phormium Tenax'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP

Size: 34 x 24 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Passiflora Verso - II'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper, Erased

Size: 26 x 23 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Redoute Gentian, Verso'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper, Erased

Size: 30 x 23 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Rosa Gallica, Black' large

Medium: Acrylic Painting on Giclée Print with Mixed Media

Size: 30 x 23 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Rosa Redutea, Black' large
Medium: Acrylic Painting on Giclée Print with Mixed Media
Size: 30 x 23 Inches
Year: 2022



Title: 'Rosa Gallica, Black' small

Medium: Acrylic Painting on Giclée Print with Mixed Media

Size: 18 x 14 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Rosa Sub-Rosa, Pimpinellifolia' large

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper, Erased

Size: 30 x 23 Inches

Year: 2021



Title: 'Rosa Roseate'

Medium: Acrylic Painting on Giclée Print with Mixed Media

Size: 18 x 14 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Sub Ananas' large

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper, Erased

Size: 24 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Sub Musa Paradisiaca'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper, Erased

Size: 30 x 23 Inches

Year: 2022

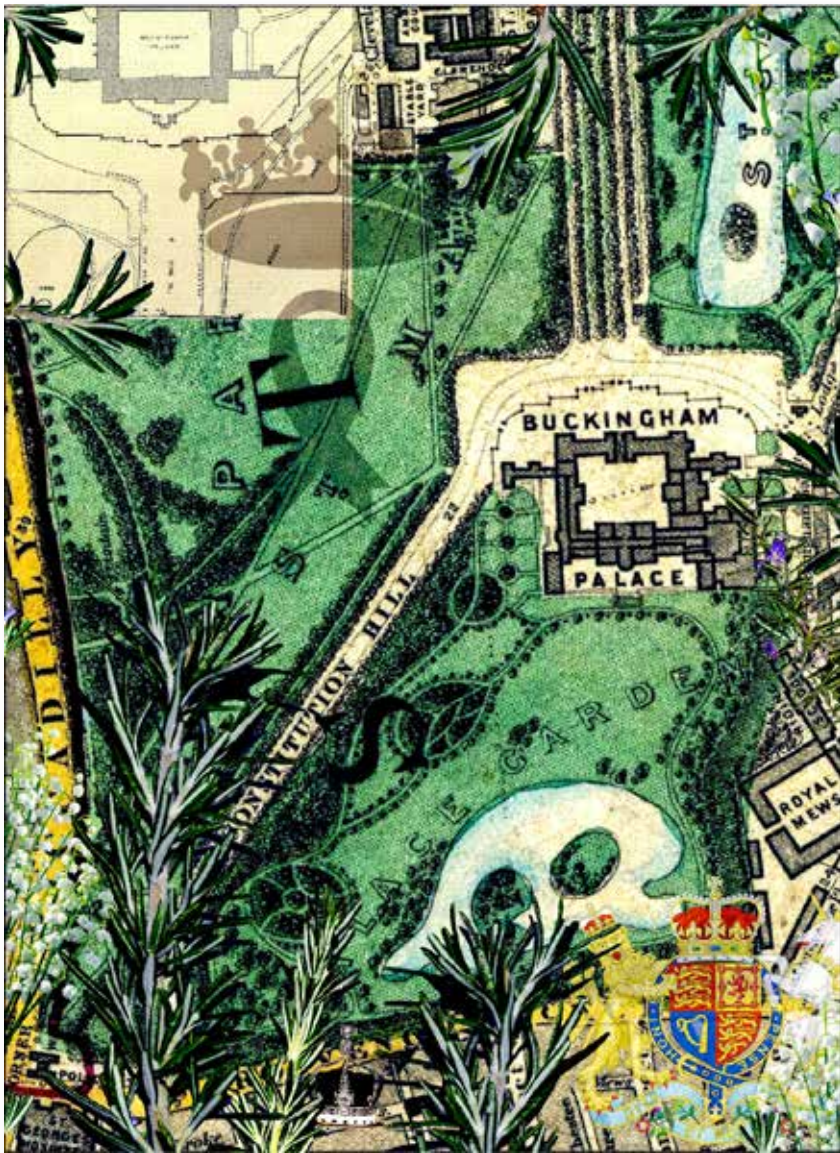


Title: 'Sub-Polianthes Tuberosa'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper, Erased

Size: 17 x 13 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'The Dead Queen's Garden'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP

Size: 20 x 16 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Wordsworth, Rosa Canina 1896'

(Gardening the Archive)

Medium: Giclee Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP

Size: 20 x 16 Inches

Year: 2022



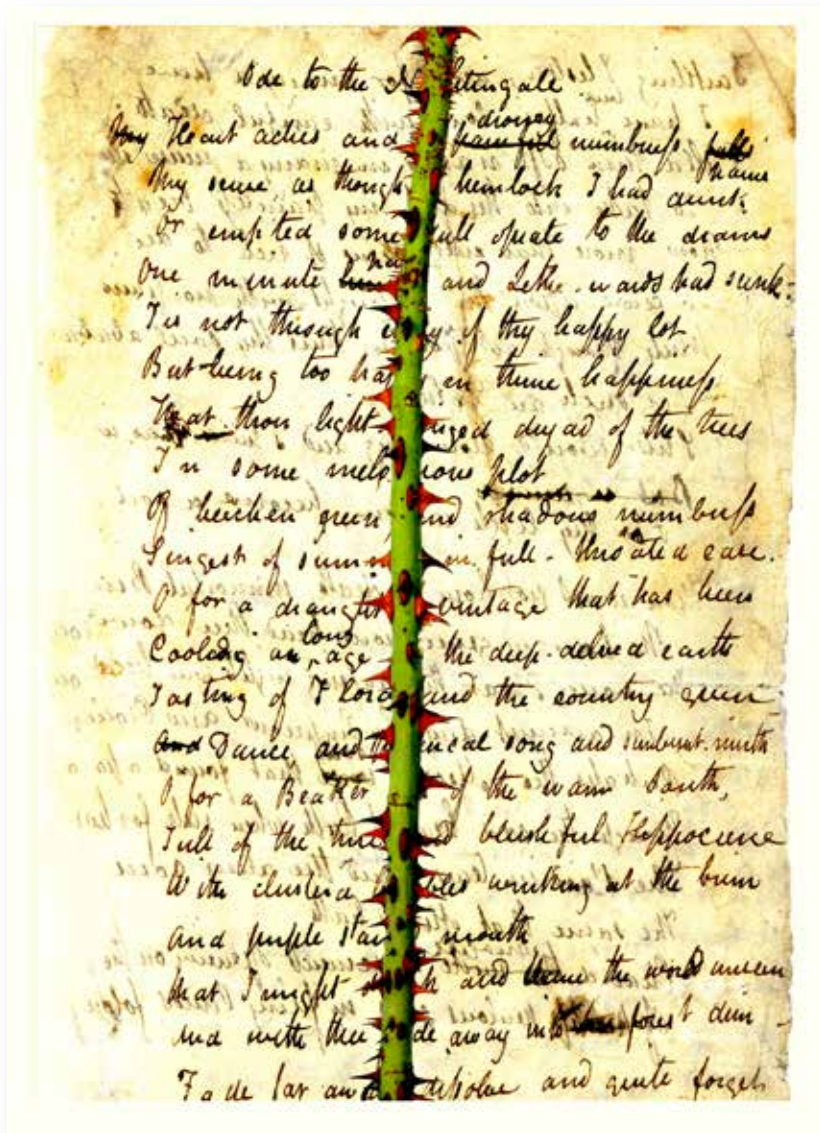
Title: 'Linnean Society, Hebe 1881'
(Gardening the Archive)

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP

Size: 20 x 16 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Ode to a Nightingale, J. Keats 1819'

(Gardening the Archive)

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP

Size: 20 x 16 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Ode to a Nightingale, Keats Geranium Sanguineum'
(Gardening the Archive)

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 AP

Size: 20 x 16 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Paradise Erased, Isfahan 17C Charbagh'

Medium: Giclée Print on Archival 315 GSM Cotton Paper, Paper Carving

Size: 15 x 18 Inches

Year: 2022



Title: 'Original Sin'

Medium: Bisque Porcelain Flowers with Coal, Floor Based Installation

Size: Variable

Year: 2022



Title: 'Viscum album, Mistletoe'
(Collaboration with Malcolm Hutchenson)
Medium: Video Projection 1.30 Minutes Looped
Size: Variable
Year: 2022

Profile

David Alesworth is a sculptor, photographer and researcher of garden histories, working between Pakistan and the United Kingdom. He is former Head of Sculpture, IVSAA (1991-2002), and Professor, BFA + MAADS at SVAD, BNU, Lahore (2006-2015). Over the past decade his work has been organised around an expanded vision of the garden as 'global forest' of which we are all part. The garden is his key metaphor with which to question humanity's culturally specific relationships with the natural world and to better understand the notion of nature as a social problem. His own hybrid identity as a Pakistani National of white British ethnicity informs many aspects of his practice. He is a member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, and a Stanley Picker Fellowship award holder. In 2016, he was shortlisted for the V&A Jameel Prize.

Alesworth's recent exhibitions include "Patterns of the Past: Weaving and heritage in Pakistani Art", Grosvenor, London, Sept. 2021, Asia Triennial Manchester (Postcard project) Oct. 2021, "Flight" (2021) collaboration with Tim Southall, Koel Gallery, Karachi, "The Carless Mapping", Canvas Gallery, Karachi (2020) 'In Free Fall' (2020) collaboration with Huma Mulji, Sarah Rhys, Carol Laidler, Eilis Kirby, COG, Bristol, 'Artistic Innovation and Collective Practice: Karachi in the 1990's and Beyond' (2019) Sharjah Art Foundation (Very Very Sweet Madina, Karachi in the 90's) "Lie of the Land" the inaugural show at the MK Gallery, Milton Keynes (Feb. 2019) and "The Glory of the Garden" (Jan. 2019) solo showing at Koel Gallery, Karachi. The Lahore Biennale (2018), Karachi Biennale (2017), Jameel Prize exhibition/s at the Pera Museum, Istanbul, (2016) the Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju, Korea (2017) and the A. Kasteyev State Museum of Arts, Almaty, Kazakhstan (2018). Other shows include Taqseem, Koel Gallery, Karachi (2017); The Missing One, OCA, Oslo (2016), How We Mark the Land, Gandhara-Art-Space, Karachi (2016); Hopes of Paradise, Grosvenor Gallery, London (2016); The Architecture of Life, BAMPFA, Berkeley University, California (2016); Dhaka Art Summit (2016); 8th Berlin Biennale, Berlin (2014) and "The Garden of Ideas" Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, inaugural show, curated by Sharmini Pereira (2014-15).

David currently lives in Bristol and is a studio holder at Spike Island

www.davidalesworth.com

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Alesworth

<https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-10/gardening-archive>

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EDUCATION

- 2010 MFA New Media Arts, Transart Institute, Berlin, Germany
1981 Picker Fellowship Sculpture, Kingston University, London
1980 BA(Hons.) Sculpture Wimbledon School of Art, London

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

- 2023-24 'Entangled Histories: South Asian miniatures and their influence' Hammad Nasar Curator, MK Gallery, UK

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 The Carless Mapping, Canvas Gallery, Karachi
2020 The Museum of Miscellaneous Things, St. Annes, BRICKS, Bristol
2020 Sewyourself with Eleyana Knops COG, Bristol
2019 The Glory of the Garden Koel Gallery, Karachi
2019 Very Very Sweet Madina, Karachi in the 90's, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE
2011 The Garden of Babel, Rhotas-2 Gallery, Lahore

SELECTED RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 Patterns of the Past: Weaving and Heritage in Pakistani Art, Grosvenor, London, Sept.
2021 Flight collaboration with Tim Southall, Koel Gallery, Karachi
2020 In Free Fall collaboration with Huma Mulji, Sarah Rhys, Carol Laidler, Ellis Kirby, COG, Bristol
2019 Artistic Innovation and Collective Practice: Karachi in the 1990's and Beyond Sharjah Art Foundation
2019 The Lie of the Land MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, UK
2018 The Lahore Biennale, with Carol Laidler, Lahore, Pakistan
2017 Witness, Karachi Biennale, Karachi, Pakistan
2016 Jameel Prize Exhibition, Pera Museum, Istanbul,
2017 Histories Lost Ganges Gallery, Kolkata, India
2017 Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju, Korea
2018 Jameel Prize Exhibition A. Kasteyev State Museum of Arts, Almaty, Kazakhstan
2017 Taqseem Koel Gallery, Karachi
2016 The Missing One OCA, Oslo
2016 How We Mark the Land Gandhara-Art-Space, Karachi
2016 Hopes of Paradise Grosvenor Gallery, London
2016 The Architecture of Life BAMPFA, Berkeley University, California, USA
2016 Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh
2015 The Garden of Ideas, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada
2015 The Age of Wonder, Lahore Literature Festival, Pakistan
2014 Sir Harry Bartle Frere's Mausoleum, garden intervention with Adeela Suleman, Frere Hall, Karachi
2014 8th Berlin Biennale Berlin, Germany
2013 Objects as Locus of Hybridity and Hybrid Making V.C.U. Doha, Qatar
2013 A Beautiful Life Sining Makiling Gallery, University of the Philippines, Los Banos
2013 Crossing Over Gallery Latitude-28, New Delhi, India
2012 A Beautiful Life, travelling show The Pier-2 Art District, Taiwan, (2012) Creative
2011 Hinkley, South Hill Park. Bracknell (2011)
2012 The Divided Self Sought Foundation, Philadelphia, USA
2011 Lines of Control British Council, London, UK
2010 Turbulent Waters: Critical Portraits of a Shifting Identity Cairo Video Festival

SELECTED TEACHING AND RELATED EXPERIENCE

- VL MA Curatorial Program, Goldsmiths College, London, UK
VL BFA Portsmouth University
VL BFA Bristol school Art
VL BFA Plymouth College of Art
Mentor, Rising Arts Agency, Bristol, UK
Adjunct Faculty, SVAD, BNU, Lahore
Associate Professor, School of Visual Art and Design, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan (2006-2015)
Member, Academic Council and Board of Studies, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2018 Residency, Pioneer Cement Factory, Khushaab, Pakistan
2017 Whitechapel Art Gallery Public Programme participation, London, UK
2017 Landscape Now Conference, Paul Mellon Centre, London, UK
2017 Paul Mellon Centre, London Public Lectures Programme
2016 Invasive Species, ongoing walking collaboration with Dr. Adnan Madani
2015 Earth Walking, Devon coastal path with artists and Earth Systems Scientists from Exeter University, UK
2009 Horticultural Consultant to Aga Khan Cultural Services, Pakistan

SELECTED WORKS IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- United Kingdoms, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto
Hyde Park Kashan, 1862 Fundación AMA, Santiago, Chile
Garden Palimpsest, collection of HH Sh. Zayed bin Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi
Very Very Sweet Medina Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
Various works, Pakistan National Council of the Arts Collection, Islamabad
Art Caravan Karachi Metropolitan Council, Karachi
Heart Mahal, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan
Aviation Fuel Tanker collaboration, Fukuoka, Japan

SELECTED RECENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2021 The Architectural Review, Feb. - on Gardens "Lawrence Gardens" featured
The Carless Mapping, Art Now, Pakistan
2021 Nature as Archive, Dawn, Jovina Alvares, Dec. 27th
2020 The Garden of Archives, The News on Sunday, Quddus Mirza
2019 A walk in the fictional Garden, Jan. The News, Karachi, Quddus Mirza
Glory of the Garden, Art Now, Nimra Khan
Kingdom Class order The Friday Times, Dr Adnan Madani
The Lie of the Land exhibition catalogue, Fay Blanchard, Gerrie van Noord and Anthony Spira. MK Gallery
2018 Landscape Now, British Art Studies: -10, Paul Mellon Centre, in conversation with Hammad Nasar
The Garden of Delight, Dawn, Jan. Salwat Ali
Eastern Carpets in David Chalmers Alesworth's Art, Ekin Kakan
International Journal of Art and Art History, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 46-58 ISSN: 2374-2321 (Print) Lahore Biennale Catalogue, LBF-01, Ayesha Jatoti, Lahore Biennale Foundation
2017 Karachi Biennale Catalogue, Niilofer Farrukh, KBF
2016 The Architecture of Life, catalogue, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive Jameel Prize-4, exhibition catalogue. Pera Museum, Hamad Nasar. Ed. Tim Stanley and Salma Tuqan
2015 The Eye Still Seeks: Pakistani Contemporary Art. Hashmi, Salima, Khosla, Martand (Authors) David Alesworth Textile Interventions on Carpets: Dr Virginia Whiles, Bengal Foundation
2014 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, exhibition Catalogue, Juan A. Gaitán

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