

A woman wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, a white long-sleeved shirt, and tan trousers stands on a stone step in a lush, green garden. A small dog is sitting next to her. In the background, a house with a terracotta roof is visible through the dense foliage. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

AD

TAERA
CHOWNA'S

*Secret
Garden*



← **ALMAS JANI**

INTERIOR STYLIST An independent art director and graphic designer, Jani has 20 years of experience in the publication industry with titles such as *Good Homes*, *AD* as well as *Seventeen* and *Filmfare* magazine. She styles Taera Chowna's home in Kashid for this issue's cover story (pg 76). "With interesting anecdotes of the history of the space, the home was a delight to style despite the blistering April heat."



↑ **VAIBHAV PASSI**

PHOTOGRAPHER An architectural photographer based in Chandigarh, Passi shoots Nek Chand's Rock Garden in the city for this issue (pg 66). "What stayed with me was Chand's complete devotion to the act, without any clear end goal. That sense of surrender inspired me and informed my approach."

→ **GAUTAMI REDDY**

WRITER For this issue, Reddy writes about seven young artists who have turned to the natural world for material as well as inspiration (pg 58). "In a world moving too fast, these artists show us why slowing down is necessary, and how we can imagine new ways of living and seeing in closer relation to the natural world."



→ **HARSHITA NAYYAR**

PHOTOGRAPHER AD's senior visuals editor photographs Ananda in the Himalayas for this issue (pg 32) as well as produces a series on seven young artists who draw inspiration from nature (pg 58). "Ananda has managed to create a cohesive sanctuary that pushes you to look within even when you show up for a day of work"



← **SYAM SREESYLAM**

PHOTOGRAPHER In this issue, Sreesylam shoots Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Palakkad, Kerala (pg 66). "It was a quietly compelling experience, recalling a college visit to Chandigarh's iconic Rock Garden. The Palakkad garden asserts a distinct identity, one that is deeply rooted in Kerala's context and expressive of its cultural ethos."

↑ **SAM COCHRAN**

WRITER AD's global features director, Cochran writes about Marcel Breuer's former summer house in Massachusetts (pg 34), which has been recently restored. "Seeing the place in person, I felt an instant sense of nostalgia for a Wellfleet of a bygone era—secluded, understated, analog and utterly immersed in nature."



**WHERE
THE
WILD
THINGS
ARE**

A new generation of artists is turning to nature as a teacher. Its rhythms shape how they live and work, as they stay close to trees, flowers, birds, insects, rivers and the open sky, watching, listening and resisting the pace they've been handed.

TEXT: GAUTAMI REDDY
PHOTOS: COURTESY
OF THE ARTISTS



Kumar in his Noida studio with his bronze sculpture *Garuda*, 2025.
 Left: *Between the Cracks, Nature Restores What Was Lost*, 2025.
 Below: *Fill in the Blanks*, 2022-2023.
 Bottom: *Tunnel Vision*, 2023.



DEEPAK KUMAR

Kumar arrived in Delhi as a teenager from his hometown in rural Deshrajpur, Bihar. “Construction, deforestation, highways—that’s all I remember seeing around me,” he says. The city left its mark.

At College of Art in Delhi, he began with buildings as his subject. Then his gaze shifted to what lives around them: birds, insects, wild grasses, moths. “Like migrants, even our birds are facing displacement,” Kumar says. He recalls rescuing an eagle entangled in an electric wire, its wing severed. The image stayed. It became *Garuda*, a large bronze sculpture of a free bird, now fallen.

His father was a civil engineer and the influence shows. In his collages, often made on graph paper, the city appears in fragments—buildings in black and white, while elements such as weeds, beetles, butterflies and flowers push through in colour. Many have been gathered from abandoned sites, and then studied and stored in his studio in Noida.

Kumar sees himself as a “timekeeper”, recording a transformation that unfolds daily, yet remains invisible to those who live inside it. “I hope my work engages people on an emotional level. If there is no emotion, there is no will to care.”



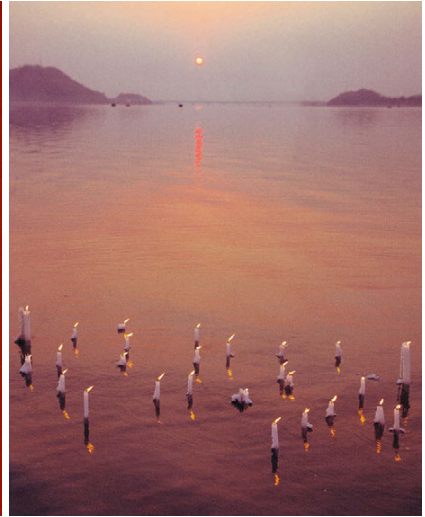
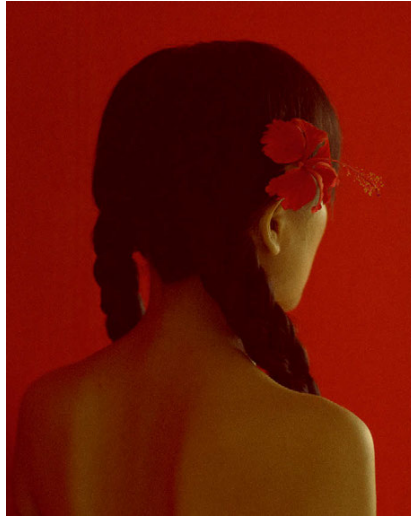
IMDAD BARBHUYAN

When Barbhuyan began art direction, they realised nature had become a backdrop. “I did not like using or staging nature. It felt forced,” they say. Over time, the human subject receded. What remained were flowers, leaves, water, earth and, at times, just them.

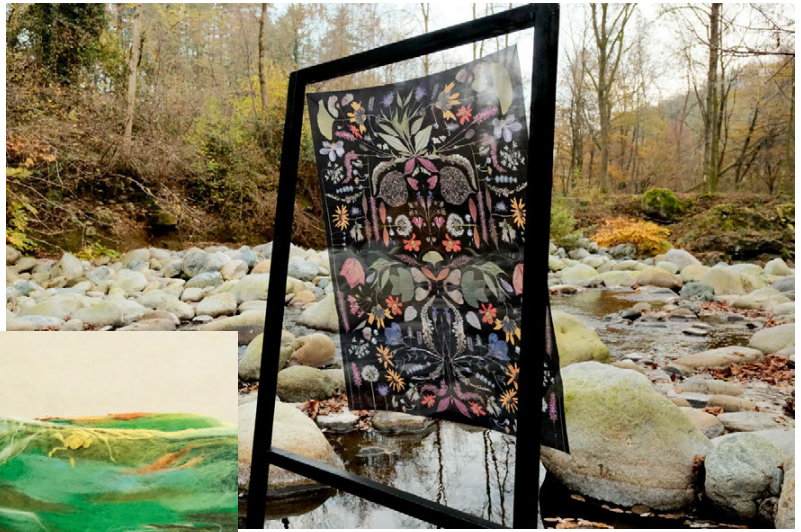
Barbhuyan remembers their childhood in Assam, in a house with a vegetable garden that their mother tended. They took over part of it to grow flowers: roses, marigolds, hibiscus. “For me, gardens are almost sacred. So are flowers. They’re how I access that part of myself.”

Now in Delhi, they return to Lodhi Garden, Sunder Nursery and Sanjay Van, with or without a camera. In their photographs, the earth begins to echo the body—its softness, its transience, its tenderness, held almost like self-portraits.

Alongside commercial work for Hermès, Jaipur Rugs and Aesop, they are building something slower. “I want to share beauty,” they emphasise, “around a table, with food, in a garden.”



Above: A family portrait, with each member holding a colocasia or elephant ear leaf, 2026. Clockwise from top right: Some of Barbhuyan's pieces. The titles are as evocative as their photographs: *Our Secret Garden*; *Prayers for Our Crumbling World*; *Stolen Magnolia from Kashmir*; *A Mother's Hand*, *Branch from an Eternal Garden*; and *Colours of Spring*.



KAANCHI CHOPRA

Chopra looks beneath the surface. Since 2023, she has foraged and scanned over 120 plant species, exposing them under X-ray machines in radiology labs.

The work began during the pandemic. After growing up in Delhi's Rani Bagh, with little access to green space, and nearly a decade in the US, she returned to farmland on the outskirts of Gurugram, where her parents had moved. "I did not have any friends, so trees and flowers became my companions," she explains.

Her fieldwork, much of it in the Aravallis, is translated into prints on fabric and installed in public spaces. In *The Earth Laughs in Flowers*, shown at Jaipur Art Week earlier this year, plants form a circular environment; gulmohar, tulsi and palaash that support pollinators; medicinal varieties such as aparajita and hibiscus; and babool and ber, used for natural dyes.

"I wanted to move away from the doom of environmentalism," she says, "and invite people in through beauty." For Chopra, looking closely becomes a way of being present.

Above and left: Plants are catalogued on paper under their scientific and indigenous names, or preserved in glass boxes. (Photos: Abhishek Daroliya). Top: Using plants, Kaanchi Chopra composes patterns that evoke the equilibrium of the natural world. (Photo: Dalia Jacobs). Top left: Chopra working on the hand-felted Conversation Chair during a residency in 2025.

Clockwise from this image: A study of a small caterpillar variety is seen in the three-set *Coral Tree Leaf Roller Study*, 2024; Nibha Sikander outside her studio, 2020 (Photo: Anuradha Pathak); details of a paper cut-out of a bird, 2022.



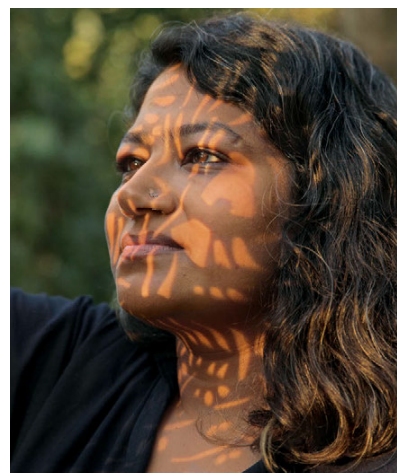
NIBHA SIKANDER

Sikander was raised in a family of naturalists. At her grandfather's mango farm near Murud-Janjira, where she spent every summer, nature came into focus. She learned to recognise birds by sound, trees by leaves, insects by form. "I knew I wanted to live nowhere but here," she says. She went on to study painting at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, then moved back there with her partner.

The place, however, has changed. Tourism grew and so did light pollution, construction, sand mining and plastic. The moths, insects and birds she grew

up with began to disappear. "I felt the urgency to archive species that may not exist in the future," she says.

What followed was a process of observing, photographing, collecting and then recreating what is lost with paper. "Paper behaves like wings or feathers. It can be delicate and rigid at the same time," she says. She builds bodies and fragments, arranging them in boxes, like a naturalist's cabinet. In her recent work, the patterns of a moth's wing expand into landscapes. What began as documentation is moving, slowly, toward abstraction.



RIYA PANWAR

Panwar grew up in the hills of Dehradun before moving to Mumbai to work as a stylist, into a world moving too fast. “Everyone was out to step on each other,” she says.

That urgency pushed her inward. It eventually took her to the Royal College of Art in London, where she now lives. “I wanted to own my work, and reconnect,” she states. That return began in nature and her practice follows that instinct. She collects stones, fruits, leaves, imprinting them with self-portraits, travel images and family archives. “My work is process-driven... I’ve exhibited fruit that decays over time.” In one piece, a photograph grows moss, requiring water and care.

More recently, she started a community called Anything, inviting people to meet in parks and experiment with making art. The name comes from something her mother says, “Kuch bhi kar rahi hai! (You’re doing anything!)”. Now it’s a method of working.



Clockwise from above: Riya Panwar in her Dehradun home, 2026; a self-portrait printed on handmade paper; a portrait of a woman on pear, 2023; polaroids from travels to Dorset and Brighton mounted on stones collected during those trips, 2024-2025.





SVABHU KOHLI

Kohli's connection to nature began early. "When I was born, my mother had a dream that I needed to be left in a forest," they say. "As if I belonged there." Today, they are based in Goa, working alongside scientists, artists, lawyers and activists.

Growing up in Delhi, they first visited Goa during college to shoot a film in its forests, exploring non-binary ways of being. "Nature teaches us diversity," they note. "I came out as queer years later, but my art knew before I did."

Their practice has since become a sustained commitment to the landscape, most visibly through Amche Mollem, a citizen movement opposing infrastructure projects cutting through protected forests in the Western Ghats. Working across murals, publications and protest, they translate legal and scientific language into visual resistance. In 2021, the cause reached the Supreme Court, stalling many projects. Drawings and citizen-led knowledge were acknowledged. "That," they say, "is the work of art."



Above: Svabhu Kohli at work on a mural in Taleigao, Goa, with St+Art India for the Serendipity Arts Festival, 2019. Top: A mural at Rajkumari Ratnavati Girls' School, Jaisalmer Gyaan Centre, blending earth and sky with living creatures and plants in a single image. Left: A diorama of surreal Mumbai wildlife is activated by turning a knob, recalling the mechanical amusements once found in local street circuses and bazaars, 2025.

VISHAL KUMAR GUPTA

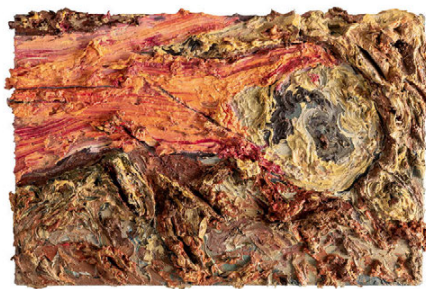
For Gupta, painting is like the body. Or a tree. "It is both physical and emotional at once," he explains.

He grew up in the company of trees, among forests, waterfalls and the low mountains near Ranchi in Jharkhand. When he moved to Santiniketan to study painting at Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati University, he found he could not stay in the studio. He had to paint outside.

"I would cycle to the forest, to the river, carrying paper, canvas, oils." The trees began to appear in his paintings. "The bark is like skin, interiors like flesh, branches unfolding into landscape."

That fragmentation remains. In *Field Notes (On the Afterlife of Trees)*, his debut show in Kolkata earlier this year, he brought together two years of looking across oil paintings, watercolour and graphite works.

"The war, the falling of trees, my own body, I can feel it," he says. The surfaces are thick. Look closely, and something unsettled moves through them. ▲



From top: Vishal Kumar Gupta at his debut exhibition, 2026. (Photo: Emami Art); a close-up and an installation view of 60 paintings from *Fragment as Still Life or Something Else!*, 2025. (Photo: Emami Art).