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INTO THE NATURE

of Creatures and Wilderness

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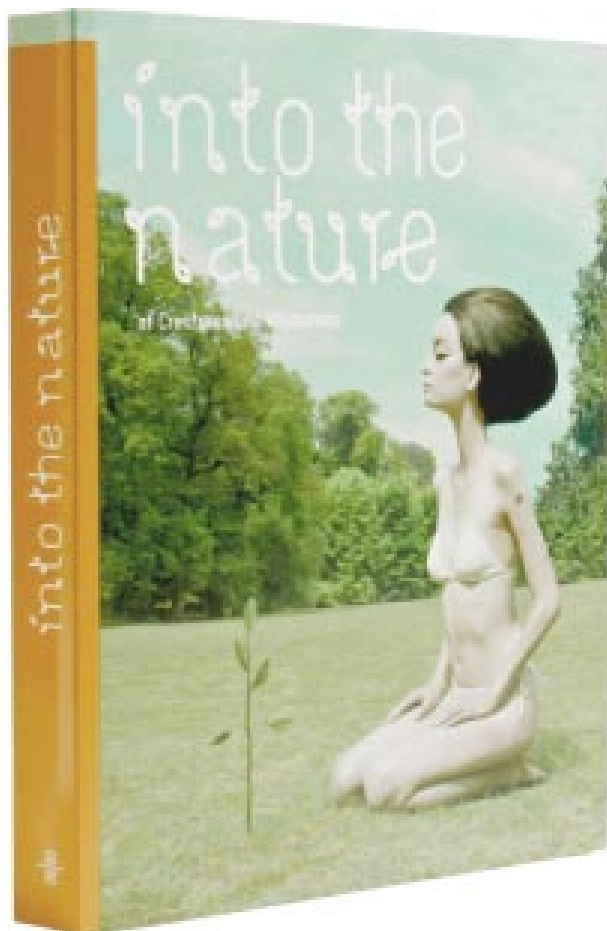
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A young generation of designers, illustrators and artists are taking nature as a starting point and bestowing upon it great importance. Into the Nature takes you on a visual exploration through nature and how it's perceived, portrayed and visualized in the contemporary visual arts of the twenty-first century. It presents an evolutionary vision of nature from Romanticism to Art Brut; flora and fauna are reinvented through ravishing imagery ranging from classical and analogue approaches to cutting edge graphic design, illustration, photography and 3D installations.

Into the Nature takes you on a visual exploration through nature and how it is being perceived, portrayed and visualized in the contemporary visual arts of the twenty first century. From romanticism to art brut, flora and fauna are reinvented through ravishing imagery ranging from classical and analog approaches to cutting edge graphic design, illustration, photography, objects and 3D installations. Blending various mediums and materials, classic and new alike, it presents us with a (r)evolutionary vision of nature.



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Naturalism

by Cathy Larqué

Collecting, listing, describing, classifying, making collections.

Putting under glass, in a herbarium, stuffing.

I go to the Natural History Museum, the zoo, the Winter Garden, I go to the vivarium, the aquarium, the reptile house.

Getting in touch with Nature can sometimes take place within a limited framework and a system based on control. In this protected area every possible chance event has been considered – in order to prevent it happening. Safety reigns.

Moreover, the physical barriers multiply and at the same time attempt to melt into the landscape. The infrastructure makes great use of the transparency of a window or the frailness of a barrier rope. The desire to reconstruct the 'natural milieu' is a sort of obsessive game. Its primary aim is to create the illusion of an open and living environment.

It's the road to appreciating the grandeur of nature and is taken to extremes. We work away at reconstituting mammoths, we organise excursions to feed sharks, we explore safari parks from inside our own cars.

Who is the captive, who the laboratory rat? Who is being studied?

Deceiving barriers, you are both transparent and all-powerful. Danger is your trump card, the human mind your chosen territory.



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Civilisation

by Cathy Larqué

Hayao Miyazaki's *Castle in the Sky* is a reflection of the contemporary fantasy of an ideal city. Stamped by nostalgia and poetically futuristic, his vision depicts a Nature that generates civilisation and protects it. Detached from its terrestrial chains, the city, nestling in the hollow of a shelter oak, floats in the skies among thick clouds.

"Let's live hidden to live happily"

For a while at least: beyond a certain point the human presence becomes *persona non grata*. Of the inhabitants of Laputa only a tomb remains; their rare descendants were exiled to Earth a long time ago.

A Nature that has reasserted its rights is evidence of a fall, a collapse. It recalls the idleness of the Roman Empire, the lust of Sodom and Gomorrah, a tactical error, reinforced sometimes by divine punishment. Eve bites the apple and it's Atlantis that sinks beneath the waves.

One day ambitious and bright, some societies are then swallowed up, taken over by the wild world. Elsewhere, artificial islands are constructed to satisfy the insatiable needs of fast-growing populations. The puppet show goes on. Caught in a vicious circle, the puppet and the puppeteer change roles in a scenario that involves renewal and extravagance.



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Manipulated

by Cathy Larqué

January 2006. A BBC Hong Kong news headline: Scientists Announce the Birth of Three Phosphorescent Pigs. Inseminated with jellyfish DNA at the embryo stage, they shine with extraordinary luminosity after dark. The researchers point out that these 'guinea-pigs' are not the first examples of creating fluorescence by means of genetic engineering, but they are the most successful so far.

It is certainly sometimes frightening to read of the achievements of genetic engineering, but we have to admit to enjoying sometimes as well. Nature is a vast field for experimentation and conquests, a veritable inspiration. Today we are prey to frenetic functionalism, and Nature is no exception to the rule. Fashion victims, rejoice! Up to now refractory pythons have had to be cut up to make a handbag; but soon it will be possible to breed snakes and crocodiles in the shape of a bag or a pair of court shoes. The human capacity for endless invention is fascinating. Given full rein, and rejecting the demands of the ecologists, it is leading to a parallel and mutant Nature. Here comes X-Nature.



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Ornament

by Cathy Larqué

Sometimes love of nature goes through a process of mental appropriation. Our power to create reproduces a Nature that suits our own tastes and desires. So that it shall match an overall effect, we “arrange it” in good taste. But this can bring about the most inappropriate alterations: surprisingly, the so-called “natural” pose of a hunting trophy reveals an expressive element in the animal kingdom. The enormous skill of the taxidermist who can make a cougar look sad or give a wild boar a friendly smile! Nature, considered as decoration, makes it possible to include original material in a fabricated environment; but, although the use of natural ornament implies an action that is by definition under control, it brings in an element of the unpredictable. It often develops under its own laws, goes beyond the limits.

To use Nature as decoration is to express some fantasy and creativity; and it also lends a gentle touch of chance to an environment dimly stuffed with objects. Contrary to expectation, nature can be synonymous with boldness. In an escape from an exaggeratedly restrained austerity, it subtly undermines the surrounding rationality by giving rein to a little extravagance.



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Graphic

by Cathy Larqué

In the landscape overloaded with visual information, the ecology of the sign acts as an escape route. Using elements taken from Nature, draughtsmanship borrows its flexible curves and takes from its abundance and eccentricity. Like a wolf on the fold, drawing sweeps down on the letters.

Within, a jungle of contrasting colours that takes no account of any kind of restraint. Manichean, shade and light compete in their intensity. The flat colours allow of no realism whatsoever, black and white create abstraction. A form of Darwinian selection is at work, the separate forces crowd in. Line is their witness. It highlights detail and settles the disputes.

From the height of the forest canopy technology rules. It reinterprets this environment in accordance with the codes of its software. Nature is the tool that introduces poetry and frankness. From infinite repeatability is born continuous evolution. The endless cycle leads to renewal.



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Abstraction

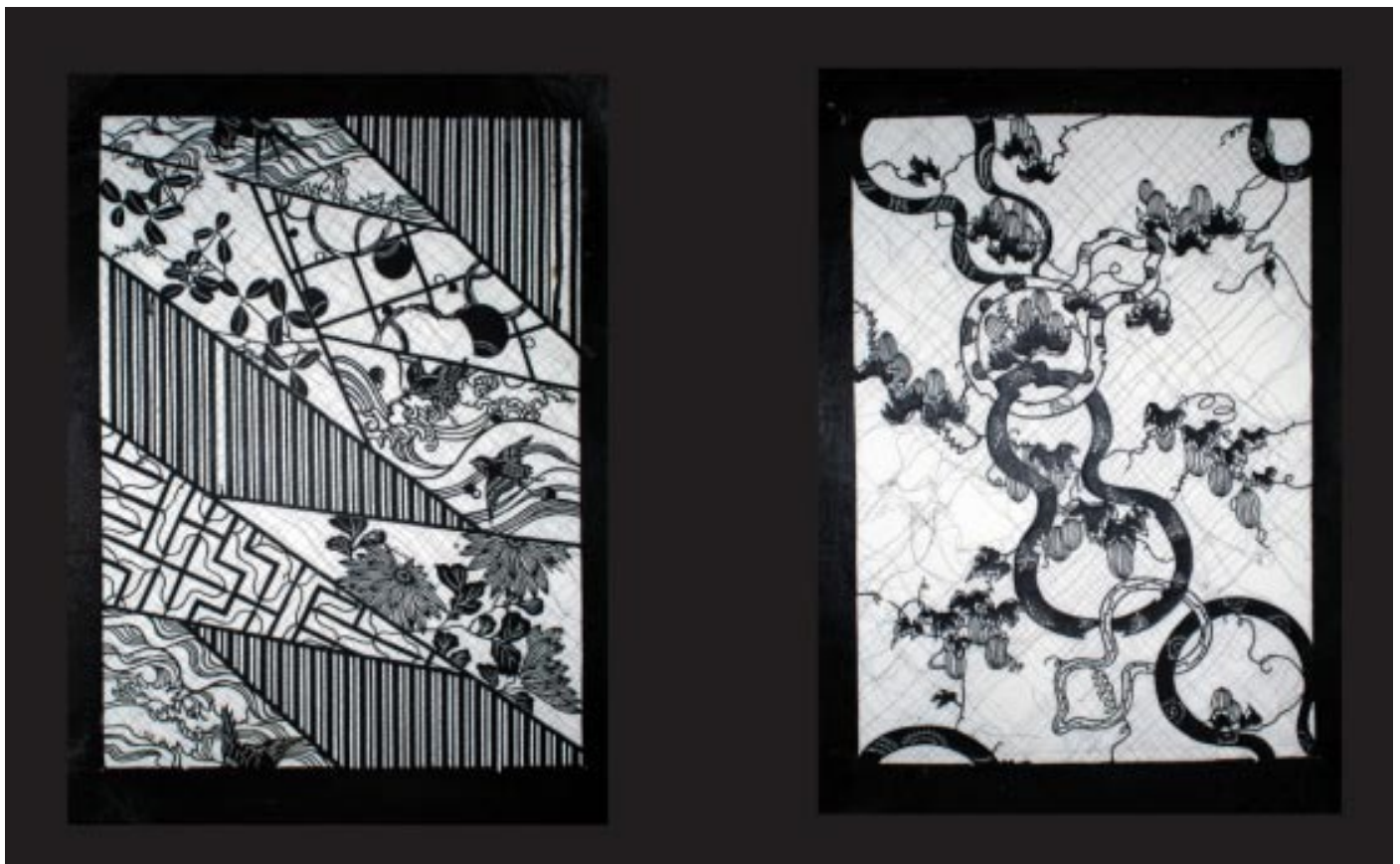
by Cathy Larqué

Fruit micro-ceramides, active fruit concentrate, phyto-aromatic, beta-hydroxyacide, essential oils and natural plant extract, natural enzymes... Industrial chemistry has its own rich poetry. Advertisements compare scientific details as they guarantee eternal youth. Our mental idea of Nature drowns in this technological jargon and becomes abstract. We have a vague sense that Nature is infinitely small, concentrated, that it has changed into an extract.

Thus, exploitation of nature consists above all not in revealing its raw state, but in making it quite unidentifiable. Nature is an idea absorbed into a vast and sophisticated system of intangibility taken to extremes.

Nevertheless, although immediate and physical recognition of natural matter becomes impossible, it is, however, given a value. To caricature: the more the ingredients of a product are obscured, the more credible its effectiveness becomes. The collective mind has been so conditioned that it has a blind confidence in technology.

However, one day the evidence will have to be faced: although Nature can today be used in its tiniest particles, it works treacherously. No technology can work against time, which is as inelastic as ageing skin.



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Imitation

by Cathy Larqué

“What a beautiful day! The lawn shines a bright green, the fountain clicks softly. The neighbours are organising a party in their garden for their youngest daughter’s birthday. I take advantage of the noise of their preparations to slip quietly into my car. I am alone on the road, which is prettily bordered by plane trees and palms. The sun beats down on the countryside and dazzles me a little. I drive slowly along the empty street. Ah! There’s the farm. The farmer’s wife comes to greet me as I park in the yard. Calves, cows, pigs, chickens – what a lot of animals! I notice one of them has a leg missing! ‘It wasn’t me’, says the farmer’s wife. ‘I lent it to one of my friends and he gave it back like that. I was annoyed, but it doesn’t hurt him.’ I then pick up the milk and eggs. I’ve been asked to bake a cake for the party. On the return journey I stop at the orchard. The apples are round and red, but I would prefer a fine pineapple. The sun is at its zenith, time to return. At the steering wheel of my car I whistle cheerfully. Oh, I’m not going forward any more! Something has lifted me into the air... There I am lying on the path to my house. What a mess there is all of a sudden. The neighbours are upside down, the trees and gardens all mixed up. The sun has gone out and it’s so dark now... however, I should get used to it: life is both glorious and unpredictable in the wonderful world of Playmobil.”



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Threat

by Cathy Larqué

“Let us walk in the wood
While the wolf is not there.
If he were there,
He would eat us.
But as he's not there,
He won't eat us.”

Stories for children take place in a universe borrowed from Nature. So, Hansel and Gretel and Pinocchio venture into the forest or go to sea only to meet with trials. The moral tales associate an unknown and attractive Nature with labyrinthine danger. In this metasphere the woods are thorny, the animals voracious and wild (they can also speak!), evil magicians prey on innocent children.

This vision of Nature as hiding a parallel world acts as a warning. At once fascinating and diabolical, it is created to inspire anxiety. “If you don't behave yourself, I'll leave you here”.

Age-old superstitions and beliefs ooze from the undergrowth and bring in their train the fantastic procession of dark forces and spirits. This Nature gives expression to disturbance and the unspeakable. It is a drawer for corpses in which shame and regrets are carefully hidden away. Beware, whoever opens Pandora's box!

