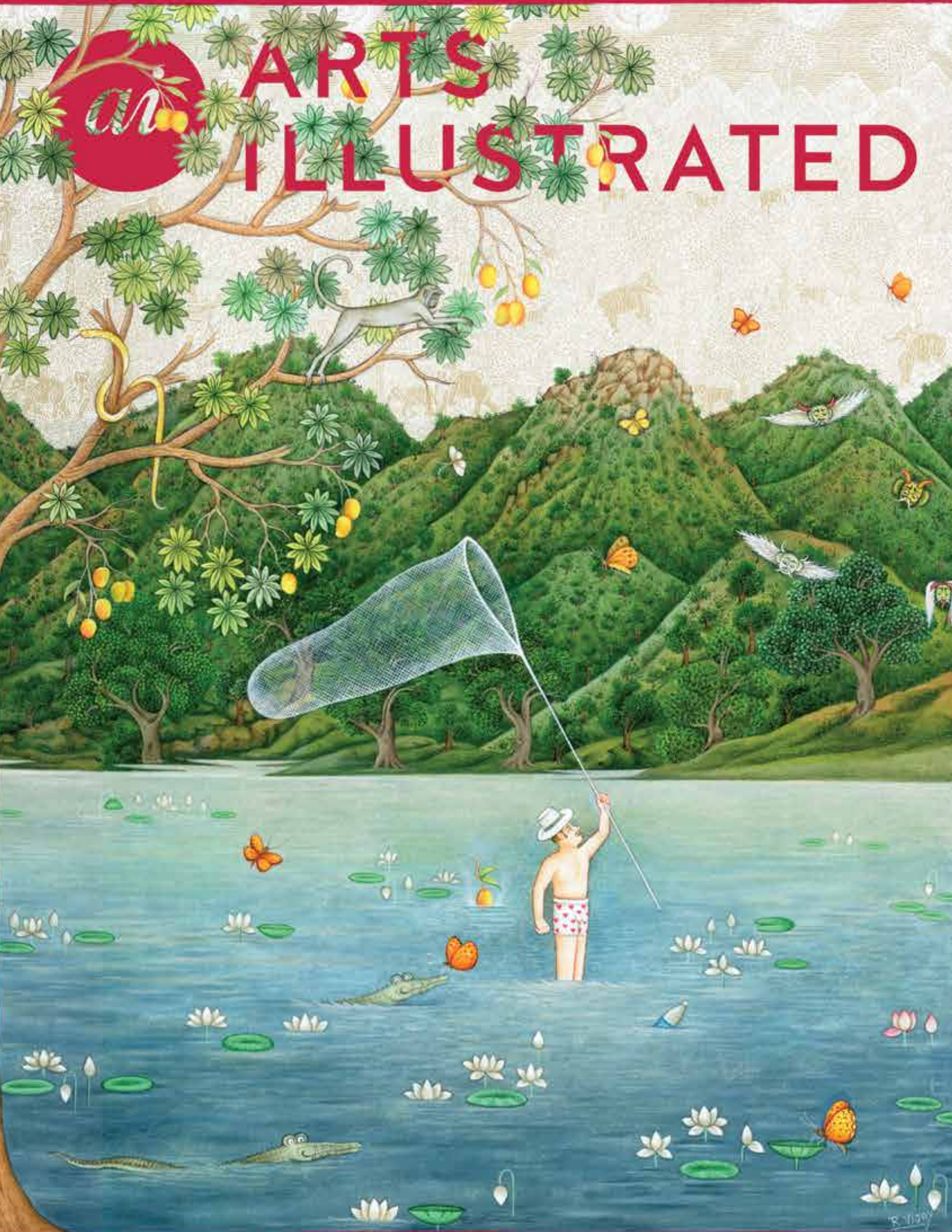


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Printing

Srikals Graphics Pvt. Ltd.
No. 5, Balaji Nagar, 1st Street,
Ekkaduthangal, Chennai - 600097

Distributed by

I B H Books & Magazines
Distributors Ltd.

Special Thanks

Birwa Qureshi
Gouri Vemula
Kanchan Chander
Megan Rooney
Neena Naishadh
Pallavi Paul
Parvathi Nayar
Rachna Toshniwal
Ritu Kamath
Sandhya Prabhat
Sunanda Khajuria
Takashi Kuribayashi
Tarana Sawhney
Tarini Sethi & Anant Ahuja
Waswo X. Waswo
Yannick Cormier

Special Acknowledgements

Art Heritage Gallery, New Delhi
Art Houz Gallery, Chennai
Cincinnati Art Museum
Crow, New Delhi
Crraft of Art
Eli Klein Gallery, New York
Emami Group, Kolkata
Fitz & Co, New York and Los Angeles
Flint PR, New Delhi
Gallery Espace, New Delhi
Hauser & Wirth, New York
India Art Fair, New Delhi
Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi
Kochi Biennale Foundation
Kolkata Centre for Creativity
Louvre Abu Dhabi
Miaja Gallery, Singapore
Project 88, Mumbai
Sutton PR, London
The Irregulars Art Fair, New Delhi
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Publisher's note

The realms of imagination that surround us give us unexpected glimpses of otherworldliness, often sandwiched between the moments of ordinariness. This world is delicious because it allows you free interpretation; but it is also tricky because, once discovered, it follows you around like a shadow.

This issue of Arts Illustrated, we take on the big, squishy, shape-shifting word – Fantasy. We look at artists who have this capacity to not only clearly see and feel the pulsating throb of reality around them but also have the ability to look deeper, look beyond, to see and feel the steady thrum of magic. Not the magic of fairytales, but that of thought, dialogue and expression wrapped in a cloak of flamboyance.

Vincent Adaikalraj



Editor's note

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, an American fantasy sitcom called *Out of this World* would become my first conscious brush with fantasy. I remember watching sporadic episodes as a child, utterly fascinated with the half-human-half-alien protagonist, Evie (later, *WALL.E*'s 'Ee-vah' would bring back strong memories), who could freeze time on earth. *Small Wonder*'s 'Vicky' suddenly paled in comparison. Magic was accessible and did not have to be a robot (even if only half human), and that became such an indelible part of an internal reality that I couldn't un-magic it away. Something in the fabric of the world changed; a broken needle that had to be cast away but could be replaced with a shinier, more malleable version. If we chose to. Much later, I would discover the *Lord of the Rings* – and then, of course, there would be no looking back.

This act of choice is what sets the world of fantasy apart. It isn't forcing you to believe or even benignly accept. It simply exists by virtue of its ability to remain, to float, like a lost petal content to settle anywhere. And, for me, that sense of magic which defines this space isn't so much about spells and wizards, but about the relatability of it all, filled with the hope that we invest in an eyelash carrying a wish.

We found that all our stories this issue were conscious acts of choice by the artist(e)s to enter realms of the absurd, the theatrical, the glamorous, the glitzy, the ordinary, and the narrative patterns we are constantly seeing and unseeing. Sometimes the results are surprising, almost giddily so, and sometimes introspective, like a neglected switch that is suddenly found and switched on. It is also about beauty, this issue, of a kind that leaves you breathless while holding your hand.

Would I still be just as mesmerised by Evie and her time-freezing superpower, and ignore the messy politics of gender and identity that it had, that I can now see? Maybe not. But does that take the idea of the fantastic away? Also, maybe not, because, there is always Tolkien. And then, this issue.



Praveena Shivram
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Cover Artist



A Day of Possibilities, Gouache on wasli, 2018

Sometimes our work is dismissed as simply 'whimsical', but a closer look with a bit of thought always reveals a deeper meaning. In the work titled *A Day of Possibilities* that we made for the cover of this issue of *Arts Illustrated*, our oft-seen 'Everyman' (wearing a white fedora) 'fishes' for butterflies, knee-deep in a lake. He is oblivious to the practical need to catch fish, his mind probably filled with the desire for knowledge and specimens for evidence. Is he hoping for the fragility of a precious butterfly? Or does he seek the horned demons with white wings? A falling mango has nearly missed him, a viper is in the tree, and two crocodiles are dangerously near. It is a day of possibilities, and yet our protagonist is fixed upon only one of them. It is as if a self-imposed tunnel vision has left him almost sightless, to his own immediate dangers and a plethora of opportunities.

And, yet, there is peace in this image, too. Perhaps our fedora-man knows fully well what he is doing. As we ourselves are merely spectators, viewing this scene with our own perceptions. The lush mountains recede into a puzzled sky, a jungle-sky that hints at myths and archetypes and consciousness that extends beyond our own time, place and understanding. The *sadhu*, who is in a way a mirror to the protagonist, seems to have it all figured out. He balances the universe on his fingertip. But we are left really not knowing the reality. Has the *sadhu* truly found enlightenment, or does he only imagine it so? After all, the ball he holds can only be a partial universe. Meanwhile, our protagonist perseveres: be his way of knowing foolhardy, or patiently wise.



Waswo X. Waswo

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