

Sahej Rahal

Mythmachine

Audio Description Script

(Louise Ainsley)

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Entering the exhibition

The space is dimly lit. Three large screens that stretch from floor to ceiling project a restless landscape where strange creatures roam. The music is created by the creatures movements on the screens.

Two screens meet in the bottom left corner of the gallery. The bottom right corner is dark and then a third screen glows on the right-hand wall.

The all-encompassing large screens create a sense of being in the middle of the biome rather than merely observing it.

Sahej envisages the exhibition to be all one art room, rather than a series of individual pieces of work.

The floor is covered in dark blue carpet. Three large sculptures on slightly raised plinths are set in front of each screen. The plinths are a burnt-orange colour. Painted black the sculptures become silhouettes against the screens and their shapes naturally fit into the strange projected world. The sculptures add to the sense of being inside the biome.

When moving around the exhibition be aware that there is a collection of bean bags scattered across the central floor area. These offer a comfortable place to sit inside the biome.

To the right of the entrance, wooden benches, painted the same burnt orange as the plinths, have been built against the corner walls, offering another resting area.

Directly to the left of the entrance the top wall runs across to an open doorway that leads to a second room in the exhibition.

As you enter this gallery printed across the middle of the wall on the left is a written introduction to the exhibition. Large white words on forest green.

Comic Books

On either side of the introductory words, hang two wooden racks. Here comic books, produced for the exhibition, are displayed with the words 'Please return after use'.

The comic books are full of Sahej's printed black and white drawings. Some pages tell stories, white words on black.

The books offer possible interpretations of the stories conjured up by the exhibition.

Second Gallery

This gallery is narrower, about a half of the width of the first gallery. It has a painted burnt-orange floor and six tall plinths of the same colour, three along each wall, with a small sculpture on each.

The plinths are placed 2 meters apart and lead down to a huge black and white mystical picture that covers the bottom wall.

The picture has been designed using images from Sahej's comic book drawings.

Entrance Gallery

AI screens

Standing by the entrance, light falls from the three large screens that fill both side walls and the wall facing us. On the screens multi-limbed creatures roam a wild, windswept landscape. A strange biome of weird trees and swaying undergrowth.

The creatures have a black body that is made up of rectangular segments that stick out from the main body reminiscent of a stag beetle's armour. They have no distinct head. They scuttle through the space sometimes like a spider or a crab, at other times stretching up tall on their long legs.

As they explore the biome their bodies spin constantly in motion, following where their legs lead.

The creatures' bodies emit sparkles of white as if surrounded by a magical electric charge. Beneath the skin lurks a red core that flashes through the black exterior at times as they move.

The creatures on the left and right screens are similar but have developed differently.

They move on sturdy crab-like legs that appear as a single pointed shiny claw. The one on the left has four legs, the other has three.

Sometimes they cavort and play, bouncing up and down as if on a trampoline and rolling head over heels. Sometimes they will dip below the surface of the earth, popping quickly into an empty space below where tree roots and rocks hang down beneath the sandy earth, before returning to the upper Biome.

Sporadically, a collection of velvet black cubes explode from their backs and flow upwards like seeds dispersing in the wind.

The creature on the bottom wall moves delicately around on eight squid-like tentacles. As the tentacles flick across its body to turn left or right, its body rolls over following their direction.

The tentacles melt and shift as it explores the biome. It does not expel cubes from its body as the other two do.

It spends its time moving between the rugged landscape and a small mangrove tree. The tree has dangling roots that echo the creature's own limbs.

When there are loud sounds picked up by the microphones the tentacled creature can be seen to stretch its arms up into the tree.

The Biome

The biome in which the creatures exist envelops us as we are surrounded inside the three screens.

A blustery wind sweeps over sandy earth. Patches of dense undergrowth have sprouted from the soil. Yellow, lime-green and black ferns grow together in wide circles, their fronds waving with the breeze.

Green, broom-like, shrubs with clusters of small leaves along each branch and red-leaved bushes cover the ground, swooping and swaying like grasses.

Plants with rounded green-leaves, cling to the earth on suckered roots like seaweed clinging to rocks.

Many trees are dotted across the wide landscape.

Tall, thin palms with narrow fern-like branches recalling the pre-historic trees of the dinosaurs.

Thick tree trunks covered in dense patches of weird, polyp growths.

Immense mushroom trees with round cap mushrooms extending in segments reaching to the sky.

Wide trunked mushrooms in dense clusters layered thickly with long tendrils hanging down to the ground.

Skinny trees with branches of wiry fir fronds. They have mangrove roots that sprout from the trunk and hang down like legs.

The trees in the distance disappear back into a yellow mist.

Interactivity

Images on the screens are generated by Artificial Intelligence. A thin microphone hangs down on a wire beside each screen and any sound picked up will influence the movement of each creature. In turn the movements of the creatures influence the music.

Sahej describes this gallery as a 'sensorium'. Here you are invited to play with sounds to influence the movements of the creatures on the screens and so alter the music generated by them.

The Three Large sculptures

The sculptures in the entrance gallery loom large. Silhouetted against the screens their shapes naturally fit into the strange projected world. They echo the forms of the creatures on the screen.

The sculptures have been constructed especially for the exhibition in Baltic's loading bay and workshop.

They are built on an armature and then filled out with a material from Baltic's scraps that folds and bubbles leaving a rough surface. The surface has been painted black.

The sculptures dark limbs and bodies contrast with the rich burnt-orange colour of the low wide plinths they stand on.

At about 30 centimetres high, five or six sides are cut around each plinth which are shaped to accommodate the physical bulk of the sculptures.

The plinths orange colour correlates with the sandy soil of the landscape on the screens, and this adds to the feeling that the

sculptures are a part of the biome. This also adds to the sense of our being inside the biome too.

1

Moving around the gallery in a clockwise direction the first sculpture by the left-hand wall is shaped like a tree trunk.

Its base is like a thick foot with wrinkled folds. The torso stretches up from the foot, its rough skin folding and bending with the shape as it curves slightly forwards before it narrows near the top then swells into a globe.

The folds and rough surface have a polished sheen. With imagination it is possible to make out what may be an ear or an eye on the bulbous head, but nothing is truly discernible.

The sculpture suggests the form of a large tree trunk that features on this first screen, but also echoes the form of the creature as it stretches up beside the tree.

From across the gallery the curve of the sculpture and the globe of the head resemble a figure leaning slightly forward as it walks.

2

The next sculpture stands at the bottom right corner beside the far screen. This sculpture is as tall as a young giraffe, about 4 metres high. Its head is at the top of the screen.

The creature stands on three legs. It leans back slightly with its two forelegs planted straight out in front and pushing its weight onto a third leg at the back. The front legs are straight with triangular slabs that protrude and suggest a fetlock or a knee. The long front legs resonate with the long delicate tentacles of the creature on the bottom screen.

The slender back leg travels straight up until it meets a hock-like mass. It then angles sharply towards the shoulders and chest where the front legs meet.

A long thin neck rises from the shoulders where the back leg joins up. The neck leans back following the same angle as the forelegs.

The neck stretches up for about 1 meter and then a second section launches forwards from a joint in the first section, for about half a meter. On top, a somewhat reptilian, rectangular slab head tilts upwards.

3

The third sculpture is by the right-hand screen. Its form is squatter than the other sculptures. Its head and body are about the size of a brown bear.

It has three legs and a thick triangular body. The triangle is long at the bottom with a point at the top in the middle. It has two legs at the front and one at the back.

The back leg pushes straight up supporting the back end of the creature. It has a large, pointed foot, shaped like a rudder. This echoes the crab-like legs of the creatures on screen.

Its body runs up from the back leg to a bulbous head that is placed on the top point of the triangle. The head has a broad triangular nose that sticks out at the front. Its shoulders run down under its head from a very short neck.

The body tilts forward from the back leg and the line of the creature's belly runs down into the left leg which extends forward and plants into the ground at the front. This foot is also pointed.

Its other foreleg splays out to the side for balance.

Bean bags

A collection of bean bags has been made especially for the exhibition. Their curved shapes and muted brown and green colours echo the natural forms in the projected world on the screens.

The bean bags offer a place to comfortably linger inside the projected world.

The Second Gallery

Six small 3D printed sculptures

Please note the sculptures in this space which you can interact with have high magnetic fields. Pacemakers and other similar implanted devices may be affected.

The floor of the gallery is painted burnt-orange and there are six plinths of the same colour, three along each wall, with a small sculpture on each. The side walls are dark green.

The plinths are placed 2 meters apart and lead down to the bottom wall where a striking black and white design covers the wall.

The sculptures have been created using 3D printing. Once printed the sculptures are layered with a black conductive paint.

There is a metal button on the top of each plinth, at the front. Pressing the button creates a magnetic wave and the sculptures will produce sounds when they are touched.

You are encouraged to experiment with the sounds created by touching the sculptures.

Exploring the sculptures by moving through the gallery in a clockwise direction...

The plinths on the left-hand wall get gradually higher starting at about waist height.

1 The first sculpture has three legs. One long leg supports the body on two shorter legs. On top is a rounded and pointed finial like you might find on a domed tower or on an antique helmet.

The metal button is on the left.

2 This sculpture is a creature with 8 tentacles. Its upper body is made up of rectangular slabs like the creatures on screen in the biome.

The metal button is on the right.

3 The third sculpture on this side is a tripod with chunky legs and a muscular body.

The metal button is on the left.

Moving across to the other side of the gallery...

4 the fourth sculpture has three legs and stands like a tripod.

A mass fills the space between the legs. Its rough surface is full of bumps and fissures.

The metal button is on the right.

5 The next plinth along is the tallest.

This sculpture is more like a portrait head. Inside the mass of the structure a face emerges with a firm mouth, nose, and eyes.

The metal button is on the right.

6 This sculpture has three legs. Its lower legs are smooth with chunky thighs above the knee.

The torso of the sculpture bows forwards with a rounded and pointed finial at its head.

The metal button is on the left.

Wallpaper

The black and white illustration on the bottom wall celebrates the myth and magic of Sahej's work.

It was designed by incorporating images from Sahej's previous drawings, some are incorporated in the comic book as well. The design has been printed onto flock wallpaper which has been hung and covers the wall.

The background is made up of a huge black sky full of tiny stars. Nearer, larger stars and planets cluster together in their own solar systems.

At the top, in the middle, is an alignment of a large full moon with two crescent moons, one on either side.

The tips of the crescents point outwards in a mirror image of each other.

Underneath the huge sky there is a strip of barren land at the bottom of the picture. Tall stone ruins are sinking into desert sands. A grand tower with an onion dome and high city walls lie abandoned.

The buildings stand in the distance, filling the horizon. Slabs of stone lie strewn on the dusty ground.

In the foreground, a pair of hands erupt from the floor of the desert. Pushing through the sand, they conjure an explosion of fire that licks up towards the sky in a ball of flames. The hands are wrinkled, and the palms and gnarled fingers have flown open to release the fire ball.

The explosion has conjured up two figures who are poised at the ends of long clouds of smoke that are shaped like branches. The branches push into the middle of the picture, from the left and right.

The apparitions hover above, and to each side, of the fire ball. Strands of curling smoke wrap around each other to form the branches, with curved sprigs that jut out at the ends.

On the right is a sorcerer or mantrik, who squats on top of the cloud. He wears a heavy cloak that flows out behind him with a hood draped over his head.

His face is covered with a long mask that hangs down from the tip of his nose. Above his mask he has a lean face with slender eyebrows over his sharp eyes. His skin is smooth with a slightly furrowed brow.

The sorcerer wears kaftan robes and a buttoned waistcoat tucked inside his cloak. His legs and feet curl outwards and are bound with cloth that ends with a twist at his toes.

His left-hand pokes out from a thick draped sleeve and he holds up a club-like stick with a heavy round stone wrapped and tied at the top.

On the right hand-side the Sorcerer has two arms. His right arms are bare and muscled. His lower arm grips another club-stick, and his upper arm points across to the other figure with a long finger. He wears rings on his fingers and thumbs.

The figure on the opposite branch on the right is a gnome-like creature. He leans on his branch with his left arm and holds onto a leg with the other hand. his head tilts around to glance at the sorcerer.

He has thick wild hair that sweeps back from his large face like a lion's mane. His skin is lumpy and droops in loose jowls from his cheekbones. He has bulging eyes and a large, hooked nose with a downward turned mouth that depresses his chin.

His chubby body is covered in sagging flesh, and he is dressed in a thin draped tunic that hangs down behind him. His bare legs and feet poke out from under his tunic.

Below this figure, on the ground, there prowls a monstrous figure who strides across the city walls as if they were steppingstones.

The figure's white form stands out against the dark sky. The creature is crouched over and strides across the stone ruins on large, pointed feet.

What might have been a head has melded with its back and what could be malformed wings protrude from where its shoulders would be.