

READING LIST / WATCHING LIST

The Future Is Behind Us

RACHEL WOLFSON SMITH

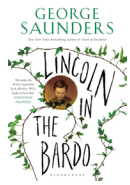
In *The Future Is Behind Us*, Rachel Wolfson Smith focuses our attention on the essential and grounding effect of beauty in nature. In portraying constructed, intricate, and imagined landscapes, Smith creates an antidote to the imbalance many of us experience as we lurch from impulse to impulse in our tech-laden, consumer-driven, modern existence. Her reading list below includes inspirations and points of thinking that influenced the exhibition.



EMMA and PERSUASION

Jane Austen

She wrote in the Georgian period, just prior to Victoria's reign, but reading Austen became part of my research. The recent movie renditions are great too (both by female directors): *Emma* x Autumn de Wilde, 2020, and *Persuasion* x Carrie Cracknell, 2022.



LINCOLN IN THE BARDO

George Saunders

In a book like no other, we encounter a narrative made of a hundred different viewpoints and opinions and find our own truth in them. A scene toward the end was influential in the imagining of hands within the vines of the drawing *Caregivers*.



NEAPOLITAN NOVELS

Elena Ferrante

My Brilliant Friend, The Story of a New Name, Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay, The Story of a Lost Child

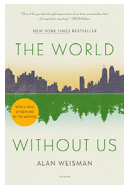
The four novels cover an entire lifespan of two girls who are smart, poor, and Neapolitan. It's the perfect frenemy story and explores how many comings-of-age women have throughout their lives.



DUTCH FLOWER PAINTING 1600 - 1720

Paul Taylor

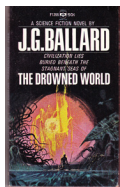
Dutch Flower Painting is inherently narrative and speaks to trade and trends of the times. While its heyday was over a century prior to the Victorians, it was influential. If you can't find the book, just look up paintings by Rachel Rysch.



THE WORLD WITHOUT US

Alan Weisman

A succinct and direct imagining of how the world would implode, and then be completely fine if humans ceased to exist overnight.



THE DROWNED WORLD

J.G. Ballard

In truth the writing was hard to get past, but the imaginings of people living in the aftermath of an ecosystem that we'd thoroughly destroyed was incredible and so imaginative. It somehow brings the future in line with the scale of the plants and reptiles of prehistoric times, and with a subtle James Bond flare.



SECRET HISTORY

Donna Tartt

Probably my favorite of the books where a female author narrates a male protagonist. The novel brings us back to youth, college, obsessions with subjects and being part of a group and being an outsider to it at the same time. A beautiful Greek tragedy, set on the most idyllic New England campus, its characters are all out of touch with reality. It's great in hard copy but it's fun to listen to Tartt narrate the audiobook. If you like *The Secret History* try the podcast *Once Upon a Time at Bennington College* which studies its origins.

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LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I MEAN

Joan Didion

She's the master of weaving the micro into the macro, and in her last collection of short stories I especially loved 'Why I Write' which states what's obvious to creators - that if we'd known the answers to any of our questions we wouldn't have had to make our art to figure them out.



THE ARCHITECTURE OF HAPPINESS

Alain de Botton

This book was a delight, and touched on the happiness that beautiful design can elicit in our souls while reminding us that it isn't actually a cure all. Braided within are wit, humor, and the psychology behind why we seek beauty and order in our living spaces in the first place.



THE MEMORY POLICE

Yoko Ogawa

I'm a big fan in general of the way Japanese novels tend to blend the internal worlds of their characters together with the nature and environments that surround them. This one has Orwellian hints of 1984 mind-control, but the way it's done is so special and visual and pulls at the reader's broader memories and senses. I love this book.



BLUE PRINTS

Anna Atkins

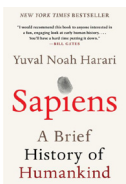
She was a botanical illustrator who adopted cyanotypes into her practice when the chemical mixture was first discovered because she felt it more honestly depicted the plants than any drawing could. She created the first photography book; a collection of her cyanotypes.



WHAT I TALK ABOUT WHEN I TALK ABOUT RUNNING

Haruki Murakami

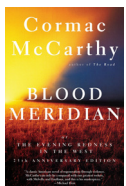
A guide to the creative process of famed novelist Haruki Murakami, which talks less about writing than the life surrounding it. It was inspired by Raymond Carver's *What I Talk About When I Talk About Love*, which traces the same circuitous route around relationships.



SAPIENS

Yuval Noah Harari

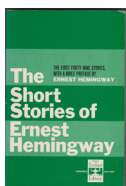
Minimizes all of humanity into patterns and shows us that we're better and worse than we like to think we are.



BLOOD MERIDIAN

Cormac McCarthy

The darkest and most symbolic book about humanity. It has stayed with me like few books have.



THE SHORT STORIES OF ERNEST HEMMINGWAY VOLUME I

Ernest Hemingway

An experience of human nature reflected in gender roles and primal safaris.

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ORWELL'S ROSES

Rebecca Solnit

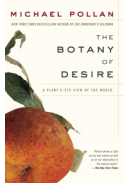
A fascinating and well researched meandering that started with political writer George Orwell's rose garden and bends through the mysteries, traditions, trends, and appropriations of roses throughout history. I like how she educates us on how their beauty motivated humanity's desire to mold them and the global landscape.



LEISURE AND TOURISM LANDSCAPES: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIES

Cara Aitchinson, Nicola E. Macleod, and Stephen J. Shaw

Written as a textbook for landscape architects it was my primer on the fascinating way landscapes have changed over time through human whims, industrial needs, and changing standards of beauty. The gender divisions within the landscape were of particular interest.

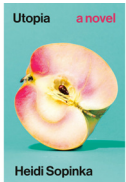


THE BOTANY OF DESIRE

Michael Pollan

This book links four fundamental human desires - sweetness, beauty, intoxication, and control - with the plants that satisfy them: the apple, tulip, marijuana, and potato. Through the stories of these plants we see how humans have molded nature to satisfy their yearnings.

WHAT I'LL READ NEXT



UTOPIA

Heidi Sopinka

I loved her *Dictionary of Animal Languages* and can't wait to read her newest novel.

WATCHING LIST

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HER

Spike Jonze

A man takes his Operating System to experience idyllic scenery with him when he wants to take their relationship to the next level.



BLADE RUNNER 2049

Denis Villeneuve

Symbols of Eve and the new life she begets are illustrated with a construction of Eden, and the last tree and flower in the robotic future.



EX MACHINA

Alex Garland

A robot enters our world, passing through a fern filled Eden en route to an ominous future.



SOYLENT GREEN

Richard Fleischer

In people's last moments on earth in a dystopian wasteland they are surrounded by visions of unadulterated flora and fauna.



MARIE ANTOINETTE

Sofia Coppola

A young queen in an era of excess feels like the rockstars and socialites of modern day. Set in the century prior to the Victorian era, it still embodied the decorative obsessions of the wistful and unfulfilled.



EMMA

Autumn de Wilde

The women in this film look like little cakes, and there is no inch of them untouched by decoration. The reappropriating of nature into their peacocking is clearly connected, but especially so in certain scenes - for instance when Emma's curly tendrils look like they've been plucked from the flowers of the Chestnut tree behind her.



ANNIHILATION

Alex Garland

A creative and dark imagining where nature has reached its limit and takes back its authority. It's based on a book trilogy by Jeff VanderMeer, but IMO Annihilation is the best of the three.



IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

Wong Kar-wai

In the aftermath of being cheated on, our protagonists slowly develop feelings for each other. Instead of verbalizing her emotions, our heroine is wrapped in dresses that express them for her. Sometimes blending into rooms, other times with people, I especially love the scenes where her floral dress camouflages her loneliness within the plants on the wallpaper and outside her open window.

Victorian Era Shorts www.intofilm.org/news-and-views/articles/victorian-archive

Learn more about The Future Is Behind Us at womenandtheirwork.org/current/rachel-wolfson-smith/