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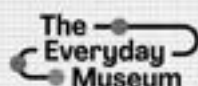
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manifesting the forest

Education Resource suitable for ages 13 and above

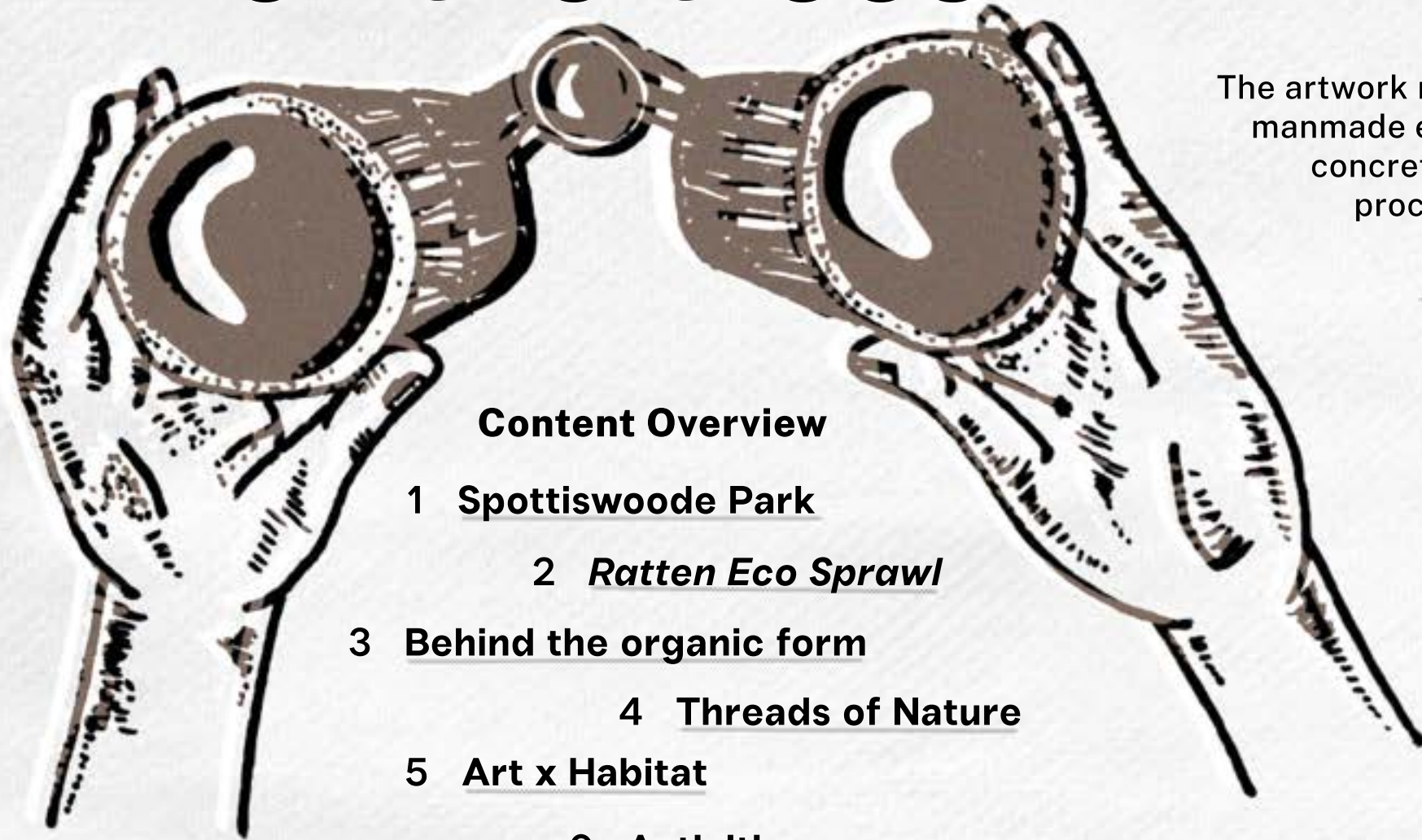
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A Public Art Initiative by



seeing the forest for the trees



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Rattan Eco Sprawl: Manifesting the Forest resides in the lush greenery of a quiet spot in Tanjong Pagar neighbourhood. Constructed primarily from rattan, its **wavy forms** weave in elements from the natural world, including mountains and mounds where insects dwell. Such formations have also inspired sacred monuments like the **Angkor Wat in Cambodia**. Live plants encroach on the work's exterior while a glimpse into the interior with its lowered ceilings and narrowed passageways, **suggests care**, not just for plants and species that inhabit it, but also **for the mind**.

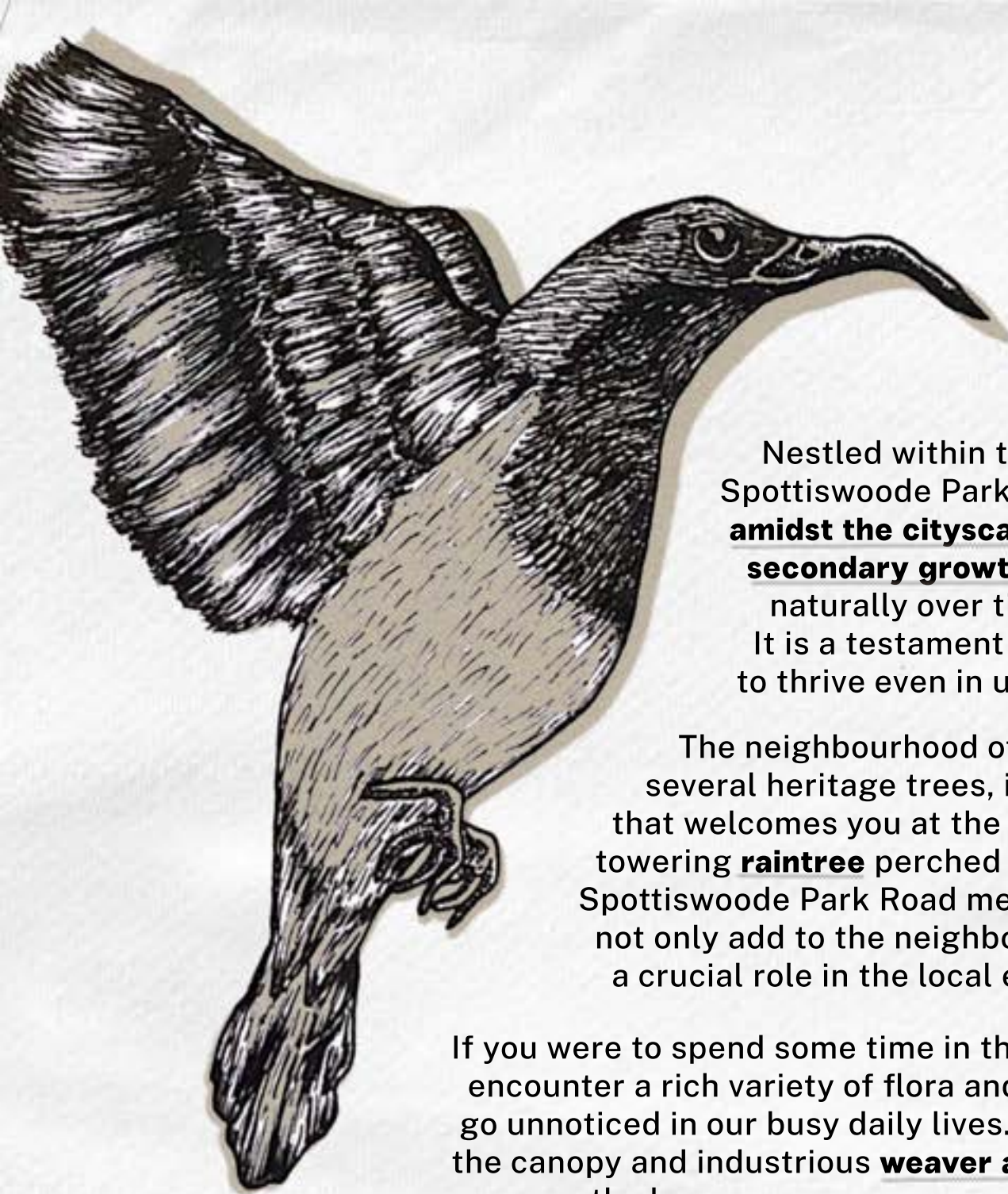
The artwork represents the same jostle between natural and manmade elements in the area: tree roots push their way through concrete pavements, destabilising fences and bollards in the process, as if nature is attempting to **reclaim its territory**.

Rattan Eco Sprawl acknowledges the fragile, intertwined relationship that we **share with nature**, driving a collaborative need to bring old and new knowledge together for a sustainable future.

Zen Teh is an artist and educator interested in the **interdisciplinary studies of nature and human behaviour**. Her art practice spans across photography, sculpture and installation art.

As a research-based artist, Zen has initiated numerous collaborative projects with artists, art professionals and scientists over the years to investigate the impact of **rapid urban development in Southeast Asia**.

With ***Rattan Eco Sprawl***, Zen continues her work with veteran Cambodian rattan and wood artisans, an ecologist, an architect, and not forgetting the nonhuman residents of the Spottiswoode Park forest to bring this artwork to life!



spottiswoode park

tanjong pagar

Nestled within the eclectic **Tanjong Pagar neighbourhood**, Spottiswoode Park offers a rare glimpse of nature **amidst the cityscape**. This unique green space is a **secondary growth forest**, which means it has generated naturally over time following human activity. It is a testament to **nature's resilience** and ability to thrive even in urban settings.

The neighbourhood of Spottiswoode Park is home to several heritage trees, including a majestic **bodhi tree** that welcomes you at the entrance of the forest, and a towering **raintree** perched at the top of the slope where Spottiswoode Park Road meets Everton Road. These trees not only add to the neighbourhood's charm, but also play a crucial role in the local ecosystem.

If you were to spend some time in the forest, you would encounter a rich variety of flora and fauna that often go unnoticed in our busy daily lives. **Sunbirds** flit through the canopy and industrious **weaver ants** work tirelessly among the leaves.

As part of Zen's artwork **Rattan Eco Sprawl**, selected plant species are incorporated into the artwork, referencing and contributing to the existing ecology. This blend of nature and art creates a unique experience that we will delve into in the following pages.

Beyond its natural beauty, Spottiswoode Park serves as a **living classroom**, offering countless opportunities to learn about Singapore's biodiversity, conservation efforts, and the importance of preserving urban green spaces.





**enter the gateway of
*rattan eco sprawl***

Learn more about artist Zen Teh and Rattan Eco Sprawl with this guide. We will explore how we can understand more about our world through art, and how art can get us to **think more deeply about our environment.**

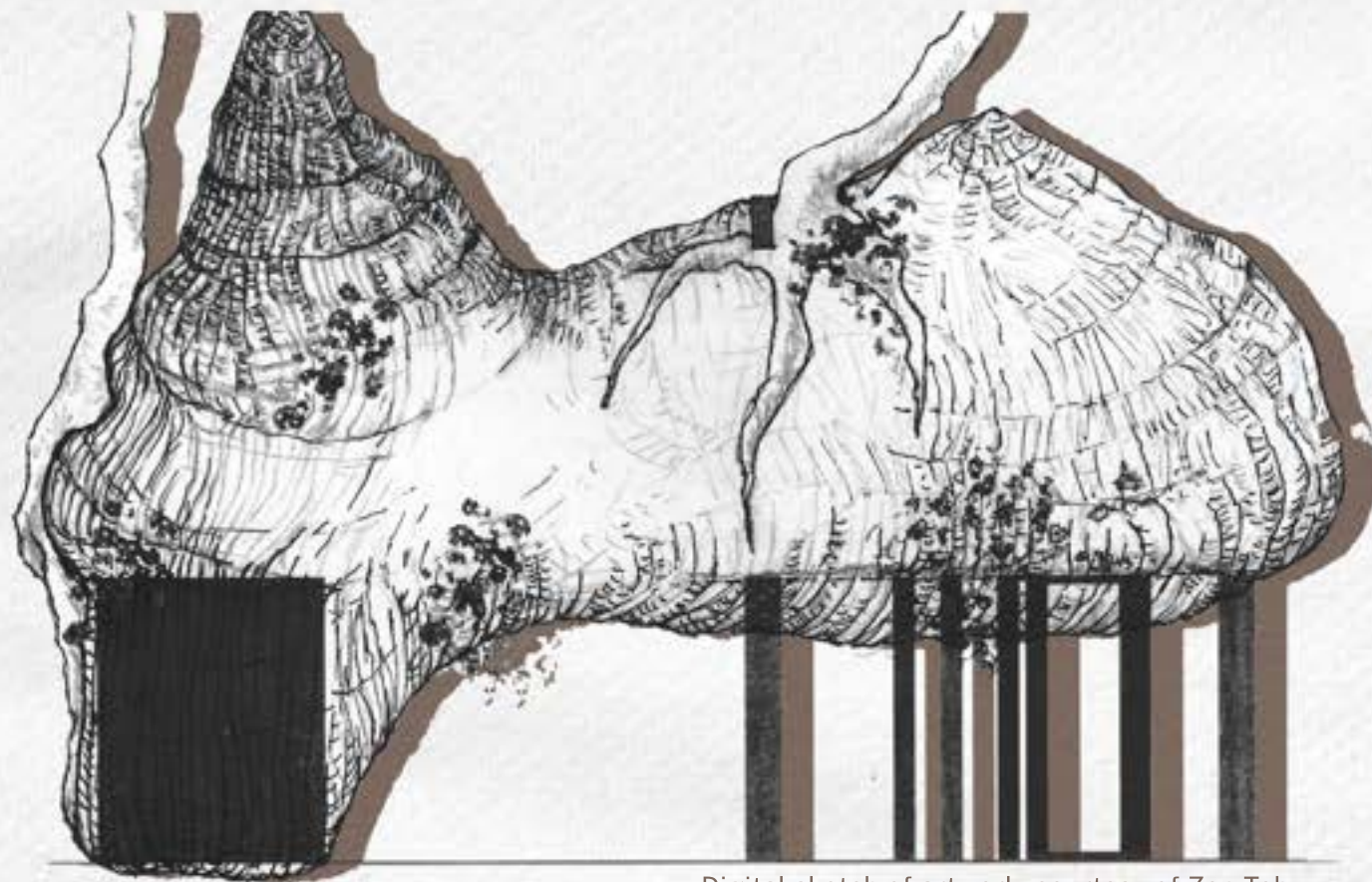
Consider these questions before we begin:

1. How would you describe your relationship with nature?
2. When was the last time you visited a forest in Singapore?
3. Why is it important to care for our green spaces?

is it a bird? is it a plane?

Behind the organic form of *Rattan Eco Sprawl*

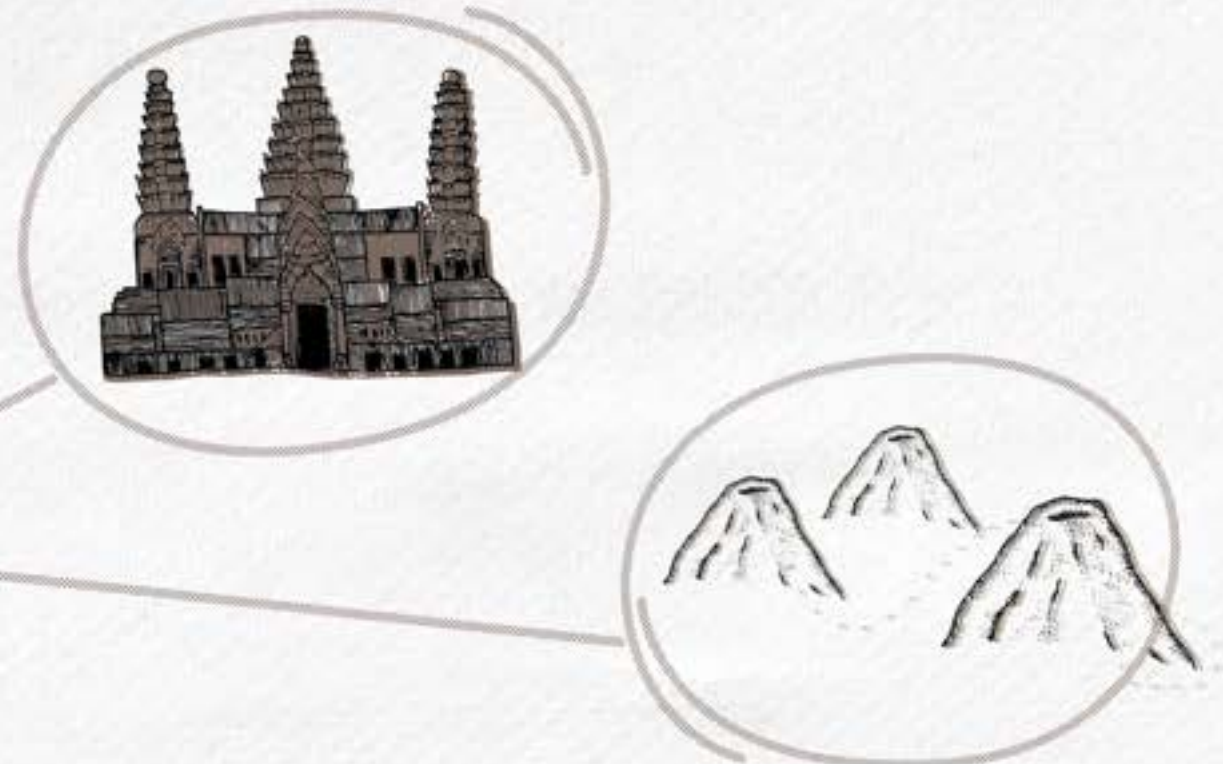
Take a closer look at the shape of the artwork, what does it remind you of?



Digital sketch of artwork, courtesy of Zen Teh

Its title – *Rattan Eco Sprawl* – might give you a hint as to why the artwork is structured this way. Zen wanted to create an organic, wavy form to mimic the act of “**sprawling**” or **spreading**. Embodying the natural and often random patterns of how flora grows in a forest, the gaps between the weaved rattan allow for plants to grow and **intertwine themselves with the artwork**. Eventually, the artwork is meant to assimilate into the environment, to fully adapt and **be one with** its surroundings.

We are familiar with the **curved shapes** of our **everyday landscapes**, regardless of whether they are as big as mountains, or as small as mounds where insects dwell. Yet, it is likely that we may have taken them for granted in our daily hustle and bustle. *Rattan Eco Sprawl* highlights these observations of the environment and bring them **to the fore once more**.



The artwork also highlights the “spread” of **rattan trade and craft**. Rattan can be found in the tropical areas in Southeast Asia, such as **Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia**, where rattan-producing communities keep this important knowledge and cultural tradition alive. People living in these regions have found ways to **establish sustainable rattan management practices** to protect this precious resource, while also living in harmony with the forest.

However, rattan craft is **no longer** as popular nor sustainable as before. *Rattan Eco Sprawl* aims to highlight the importance of **preserving such cultural knowledge**, as well as the **protection of our forests**.



threads of nature



“Rattan” comes from the Malay word **rotan**, the local name for “**climbing palms.**” In Cambodia, **phdao** is a common Khmer name for “rattan”. There are many dualities to rattan — it is tough, yet malleable and adaptable; it is lightweight, but strong and durable; its stem may be narrow, but it can grow as long as 500 feet (around 150 metres)!

“Rattan” is an umbrella term for **over 600 palm species**, and around 20% of them are economically important to rattan-producing countries in Southeast Asia. They have been used to make wickerwork furniture, baskets, canes, woven mats and other handicrafts.

Yet, rattan plants are severely threatened by **uncontrollable harvesting and deforestation.**

They are also known as **monocots**, which means that they are plants that do not exhibit secondary growth. In creating the artwork, Zen’s collaborators in Cambodia applied these sustainable practices when harvesting the rattan:

1. They first determined the **age and length** of the rattan, younger plants **would not** be harvested to ensure their longevity.
2. They harvested **only 60%** of the crops using traditional methods.
3. The rattan cane was **cut between 20–70cm above the roots** to ensure that they would continue to grow.
4. Harvesters trekked **almost five kilometres** into the forest before harvesting rattan. This was to ensure that the rest of the forest — including other plant species — was not disturbed.

While we may only be familiar with the end products of rattan, it is important to note the **tremendous labour and care** put into the process!





Fig. 1.1 **Tetracera Indica**

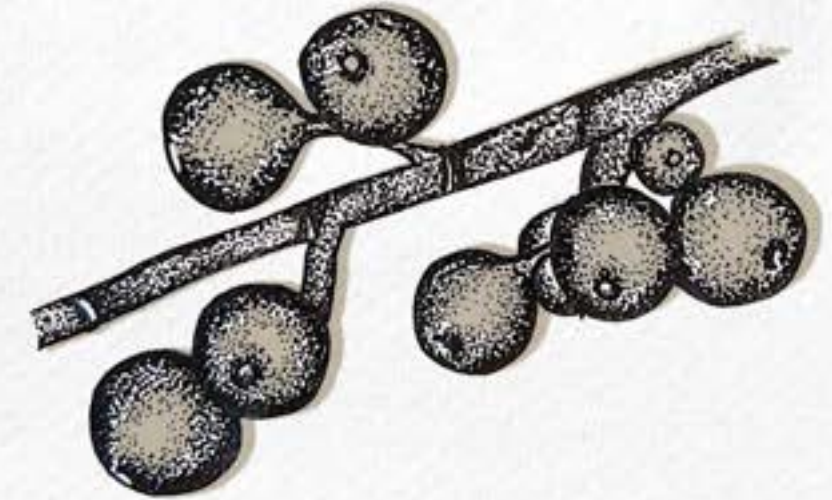
Common name: Mempelas, Akar Mempelas, Tetracera

Characteristics: Native woody climber, attractive reddish young leaves and flowers

Fig. 1.2 **Ficus Heteropleura Blume**

Common name: Sandy-leaved Fig

Characteristics: Native climber/shrub, bright orange fruit



art x habitat

Rattan Eco Sprawl is intended as a gateway between wildlife and humans. Artist Zen will be growing several plant species to wrap, intertwine and creep around along the artwork to mark it as an entrance to other worlds.

Here are some of the plant species that were considered for their **ability to thrive** and **grow quickly under sunlight!**

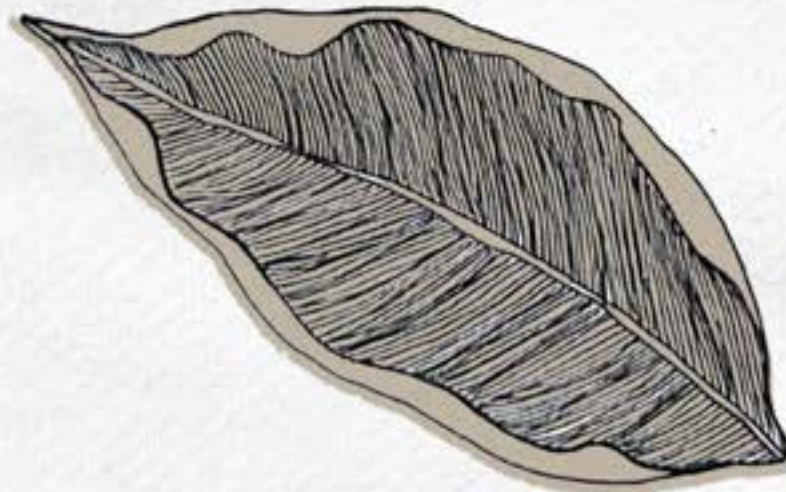


Fig. 1.5 **Ficus Benjamina**

Common name: Weeping Fig, Malayan Banyan

Characteristics: Strangling fig tree, cryptogenic (unknown) origin
Keystone species that provide important food sources all year round for wildlife i.e. birds and bats



Fig. 1.4 **Melastoma Malabathricum**

Common name: Common Senduduk, Singapore Rhododendron

Characteristics: Native shrub, attractive pink/purple flowers, butterfly host plant, food source for animals

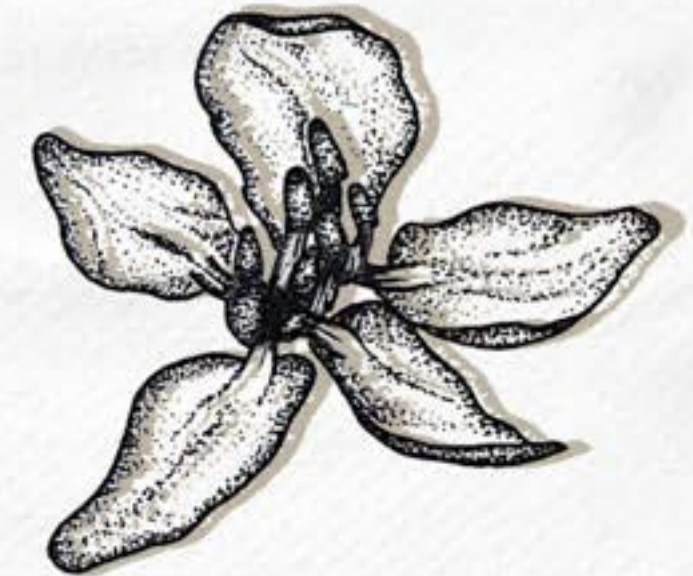


Fig. 1.3 **Tristellateia Australasiae**

Common name: Galphimia Vine, Australian Gold Vine

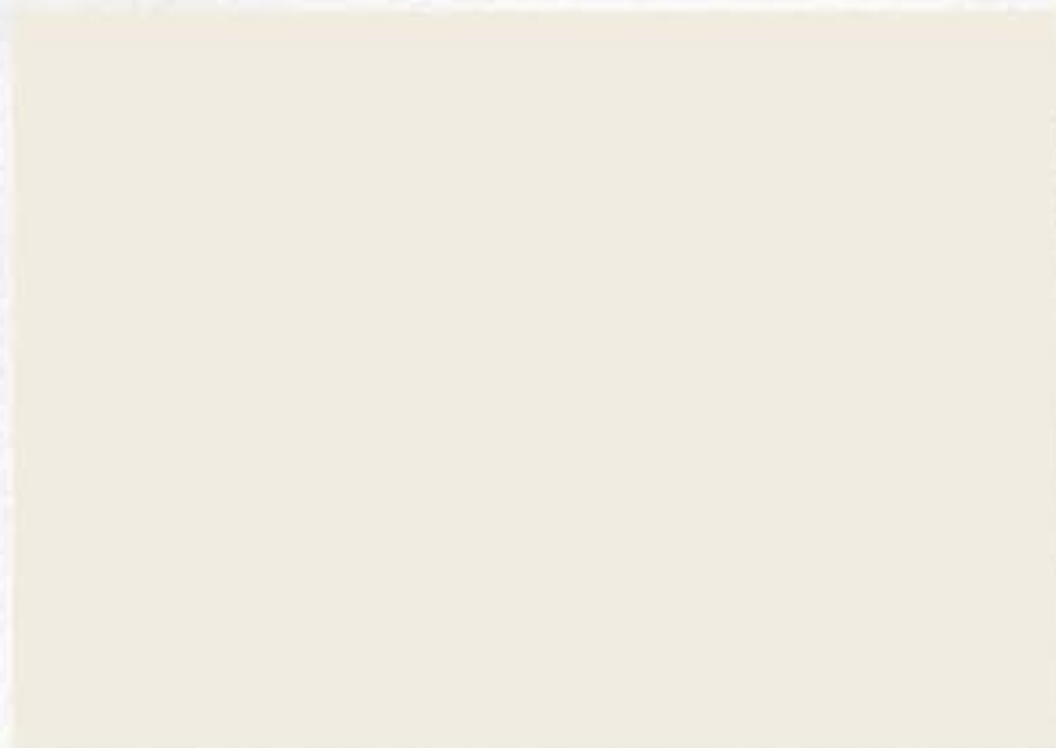
Characteristics: Native woody climber, butterfly food plant, attractive yellow flowers

After learning more about the process of *Rattan Eco Sprawl*, try your hand at these activities!

rattan hunt!



Take a **walk around your neighbourhood** and see if you can **spot rattan** in your surroundings. You might notice it used in **chairs or baskets** sold at a local shop, or perhaps **woven into a bag or bracelet** on the arms of passersby. **Snap a picture** or **make a mental note**, and then try sketching out the **shapes and patterns** you observed. Challenge yourself to find this versatile material in **at least three** different forms!



flora/fauna log

Imagine you are a bioecologist who is conducting a **taxonomic¹ study** on Spottiswoode Park. Spend some time on site and **explore the forest**.

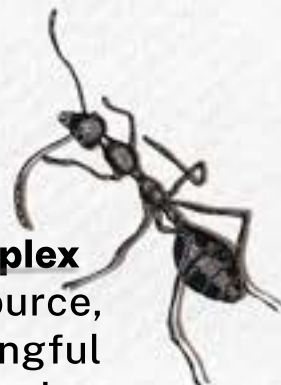
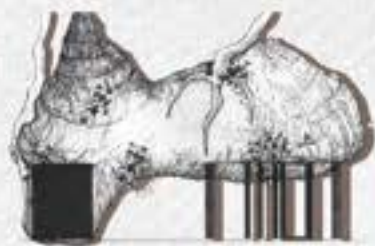
How many species of plants and animals can you find? You may use applications such as **Plant Net** or even **image search on Google** to help you identify their names. **Write them down** below and try your best to **draw the key characteristics** of the plant or animal.

You have just created your own flora/fauna log!

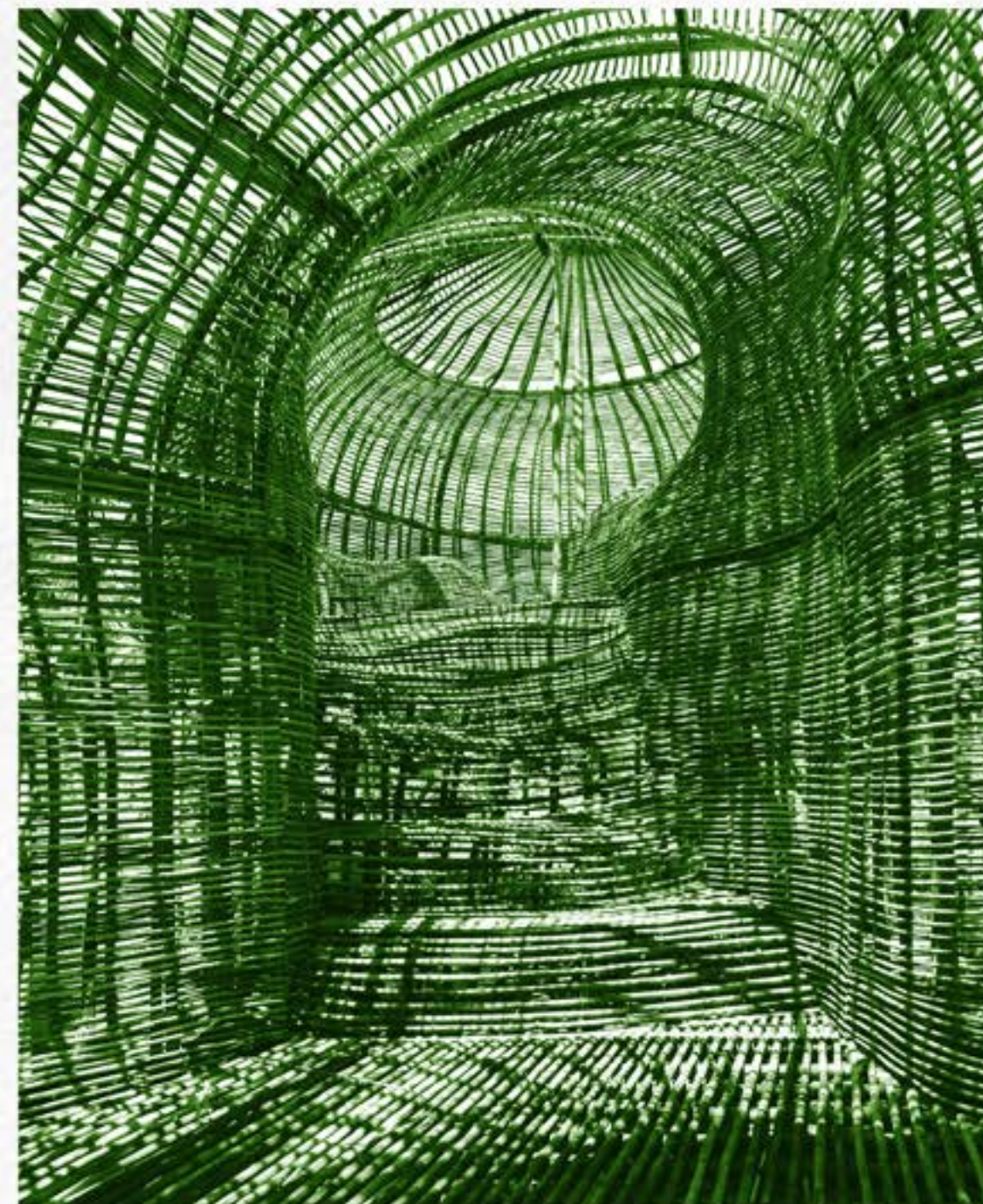
my flora/fauna log



1 – A system for naming and organising things, especially plants and animals, into groups that have similar qualities.



Our relationship with our surroundings is **complex** and **ever-evolving**. Through this education resource, we hope ***Rattan Eco Sprawl*** has inspired meaningful reflection on how we **engage with the land** and **each other**. By considering the **impact of our actions** on both the environment and our communities (including the wildlife that live among us), we can foster **deeper thinking** about creating a more **sustainable future** and how that might look like for **all of us!**



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