

## READING LIST / WATCHING LIST

# The Future Is Behind Us

RACHEL WOLFSON SMITH

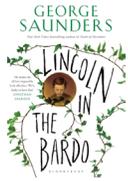
In *The Future Is Behind Us*, Rachel Wolfson Smith focuses our attention on the essential and grounding effect of beauty in nature. In portraying constructed, intricate, and imagined landscapes, Smith creates an antidote to the imbalance many of us experience as we lurch from impulse to impulse in our 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*

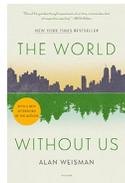
The four novels cover an entire lifespan of two girls who are smart, poor, and Neapolitan. It's the perfect frenemy story and explores how many comings-of-age women have throughout their lives.



## DUTCH FLOWER PAINTING 1600 - 1720

*Paul Taylor*

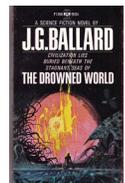
Dutch Flower Painting is inherently narrative and speaks to trade and trends of the times. While its heyday was over a century prior to the Victorians, it was influential. If you can't find the book, just look up paintings by Rachel Rysch.



## THE WORLD WITHOUT US

*Alan Weisman*

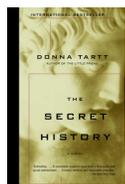
A succinct and direct imagining of how the world would implode, and then be completely fine if humans ceased to exist overnight.



## 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*

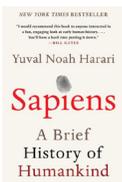
She was a botanical illustrator who adopted cyanotypes into her practice when the chemical mixture was first discovered because she felt it more honestly depicted the plants than any drawing could. She created the first photography book; a collection of her cyanotypes.



### WHAT I TALK ABOUT WHEN I TALK ABOUT RUNNING

*Haruki Murakami*

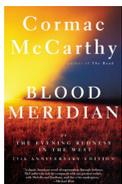
A guide to the creative process of famed novelist Haruki Murakami, which talks less about writing than the life surrounding it. It was inspired by Raymond Carver's *What I Talk About When I Talk About Love*, which traces the same circuitous route around relationships.



### SAPIENS

*Yuval Noah Harari*

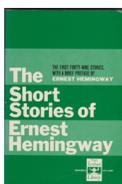
Minimizes all of humanity into patterns and shows us that we're better and worse than we like to think we are.



### 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*

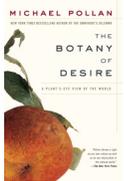
A fascinating and well researched meandering that started with political writer George Orwell's rose garden and bends through the mysteries, traditions, trends, and appropriations of roses throughout history. I like how she educates us on how their beauty motivated humanity's desire to mold them and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

