# INTRODUCTION: OF MOBILITY AND BELONGING

Fritha Langerman

In 1849, Sir Richard Owen, then the Hunterian Professor and conservator of the Hunterian Museum in the Royal College of Surgeons of England, dissected a male Indian rhinoceros. This animal had originally been purchased as an exhibit by the Zoological Society of London in 1834. He was to produce a monograph in 1852 with fourteen accompanying lithographs, which would serve as a core reference for over a century.[1] During this examination, he identified "a small compact yellow glandular body attached to the thyroid at the point where the vein emerged,"[2] a discovery that became known as the parathyroid glands. Also referred to as the pedal scent glands, these are found only in the Indian and Javan species of rhinoceros – *Rhinoceros unicornis* and *Rhinoceros sondaicus*. Territorial animals, rhinos of these species exude a thick secretion from these glands almost continuously, using it to mark their trail and communicate with other rhinos in the area. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the many pachyderms extracted from India and shipped via Africa to Europe would have stained their wooden aquatic enclosures with this secretion – both laying an unanswerable trace and trying to interpret their mobile surroundings so very far from home.

The pedal glands introduce the rhinoceros' narrative as one of loss and belonging; of finding home and being found homes; of death, transportation and mobility. The movement of megafauna around the globe has been a symbol of political power and influence for centuries. This includes the many African animals that made their way to ancient Rome, the giraffe presented by the Sultan of Egypt to Lorenzo de' Medici in 1487 as a diplomatic gesture, the giraffe gifted to Charles X in 1827 that famously walked a spectacular 900 km across France and the numerous rhinos that toured European centres between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. As much as these animals were exotic curiosities, they were equally symbols of dominion over nature. In all cases, the passage of rhinos was a demonstration of imperial authority and a testament to the control that these powers wielded – not only over animals but over these powers' colonies and human subjects. This spirit was no less apparent in the many natural history expeditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which amassed vast collections of dead specimens, as well as collections of living ones to populate the growing number of zoos.

In 2018 I produced an exhibition that reflected on these issues. For the past eight years, *FREIGHTED: 500 years of rhinoceros collection and display*, has perambulated between venues in South Africa and Europe. The project was precipitated by my participation in an exhibition that in 2015 celebrated 500 years of Dürer's image of the rhino. I found the narrative of Ganda, the Indian rhinoceros, compelling and saddening. That this animal was shipped as a diplomatic gift from India to King Manuel in Lisbon and was regifted to the Pope before drowning in the Mediterranean seemed symbolic of the perilous bounty of empire, a theme that resonated for the next 500 years in the collection of animals for museums, zoos, game hunting and poaching. Ganda represents the thousands of specimens that have left the Indian subcontinent, Africa and Southeast Asia for American and European collections since. With this in mind, I conceived a project that imagined a reversal

The London Zoological Society acquired its first Indian rhinoceros in 1834. When this animal died fifteen years later, its dissection, performed by anatomist Richard Owen, led to the discovery of the pedal or parathyroid glands on which much endocrinal research is based. The original organ, measuring 30×14×8 cm, is preserved at the Hunterian Museum.

– a rhinoceros making its way back from Lisbon and Europe to its place of origin. However, this would be a specimen of absence: a travelling museum in the spirit of early travelling animal exhibits, but with the main attraction existing only as a surrogate, a reproduction. As a proxy animal, *FREIGHTED* consists of two wooden crates that together match the size used to transport a living rhinoceros. These crates are lined with cases containing images and objects that replicate collections and archives as simulations. The contents of the cases draw attention to the practices that are anchored to specific historical moments and ideologies, yet which continue to resonate in the present. They reference a broad history of colonial representation and interconnected practices within and beyond animal exhibition and display. In this way the rhinoceros is situated as a player with a wide cultural significance.

The exhibition opened at the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town in November 2018, from where it travelled by ship to the National Museum of Natural History and Science in Lisbon and then by road to major centres in Europe. It has been shown at the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Madrid; the Leipzig Natural History Museum; the Royal Belgium Institute of Natural Sciences, Brussels; Antwerp University; Opel Zoo, Kronberg; Prague Zoo and the Natural History Museum, Vienna in July 2025. Unlike the many animals that could never follow their pedal secretions home, the exhibit will embark on a final voyage – a journey of repatriation. From 2026 onward, it will be on permanent display at the Ditsong National Museum of Natural History in Pretoria, South Africa. This marks a symbolic act of return.

In recognition of the end of eight years of travel, this book brings together some of the key themes of the exhibition, featuring contributions from authors who have been influential to the project or whose work connects to the passages of the rhinoceros. A 'paper cabinet', it is part serious scholarship, part curiosity and part a collection of tangled narratives. This introduction connects all the multiple intentions and disparate elements through loosely bound threads – quires that are punctured but not fully stitched. It is a delicate amalgam.

Pippa Skotnes, Annie Antonites and Siyakha Mguni provide the oldest references to the rhinoceros in this collection.

Antonites, an archaeozoologist, writes of the genetic divergence of rhinoceros species following their migration from Eurasia to Africa 16 million year ago, using the fossil record to trace these evolutionary changes. Mguni, an archaeologist, examines early depictions of rhinoceros in Africa, from the rock art of the Tsodilo Hills in Botswana to the mythologies of the |xam in the Northern Cape, South Africa. Skotnes writes of the extraordinary paintings of rhinos on the Chauvet Cave and connects their secluded, processional spectacle to the themes of this exhibition.

Classicist Kathleen Coleman's essay reveals how the exhibition of exotic animals in the Roman Empire served as a demonstration of power, reinforced through the circulation of the image of the rhino on first-century coins. At the inauguration of the Roman Colosseum in 81 CE by Emperor Titus, 9 000 animals were slaughtered, including 30 elephants and an African rhinoceros. After the fall of Rome, rhinos disappeared from Europe for centuries, however – until in 1515 the *Nossa Senhora da Ajuda* set sail from Goa for Lisbon, laden with a cargo of spices and a single pachyderm in its hull. Serving as both cargo and ballast, this two-ton creature endured a 120-day journey below deck, rounding the Horn of Africa on a southerly course past the Cape of Good Hope to arrive in Lisbon on 20 May 1515. Traversing the globe from India, around southern Africa to Portugal, the route of the rhino measured the limits of control by the European nation – the rhino's passage actualising the extent of the map. Mobility is simultaneously a loss and a gain, and over 500 years of colonial exploitation have tipped the scales of possession heavily in favour of Western nations.

The spread of Dürer's image of Ganda is an extension of this mobility. Scholars widely agree that it is unlikely Dürer ever saw the creature before producing one of the most iconic and widely published images of the natural world in 1515. His initial drawing was based on a sketch and description by an unknown Nuremberg artist, yet his woodcut was reproduced throughout Europe for hundreds of years, some canonical examples being Conrad Gessner's 1551 *Historia animalium* and Edward Topsell's 1607 *The history of four-footed beasts*. Far from the political diplomacy that first gifted Ganda as a living beast, the rhinoceros' presence endured through its image, functioning as a form of diplomatic exchange through circulation and reproduction. In archival terms, a 'diplomatic transcription' is the attempt to reproduce a source document as closely as possible. While typically applied to historical documents, the international dissemination of Dürer's image became an exercise in this etymological form of the word for centuries to come. Similarly, *FREIGHTED* seeks to reproduce the absent rhino as closely as possible, and this conceptual impetus was informed by Dürer's use of the word *abconderfet* in the textual banner of the print. Susan Dackerman, in her essay, 'Dürer's indexical fantasy: the rhinoceros and printmaking' (from her 2011 book *Prints and the pursuit of knowledge*, reproduced in this book), identifies *abconderfet* – as taken from the Latin *imago contrafacta*, meaning an accurate copy of an absent original – as a copy that bears witness. In the early modern period, images were increasingly deployed as evidence, bridging scientific inquiry and imaginative speculation. Prints in this context gained authority as evidence and verification of 'fact', shaping perceptions of the unknown. Through the concept of *imago contrafacta*, prints became more than mere reproductions; they were visual documents that authenticated knowledge. The *contrafactum*,[3] or *abconterfeit* in German, stood as a genuine proxy of a prototype – both a faithful representation and a substitute. Texts often accompanied such images, providing empirical evidence of the context in which the image was made and reinforcing the image as testimony to an event and the print as a witness of history. By employing *abconderfet*, Dürer's print asserts reliable and direct visual testimony of the veracity of the (absent) creature's appearance, yet at the same time denotes a faithful copy; a copy either of a reproduction or an experience. In the process of production and reproduction of this print, a chain of images emerged as *imago contrafacta*, visual records that bore witnesses to an unseen form.

As a printmaker working with relief processes myself, Dürer's image has been an enduring part of my visual world. *FREIGHTED* draws on this history of printmaking and reproduction – particularly poignant in the current context, where the rhinoceros, threatened by extinction, risks becoming a digital image only. The work highlights these

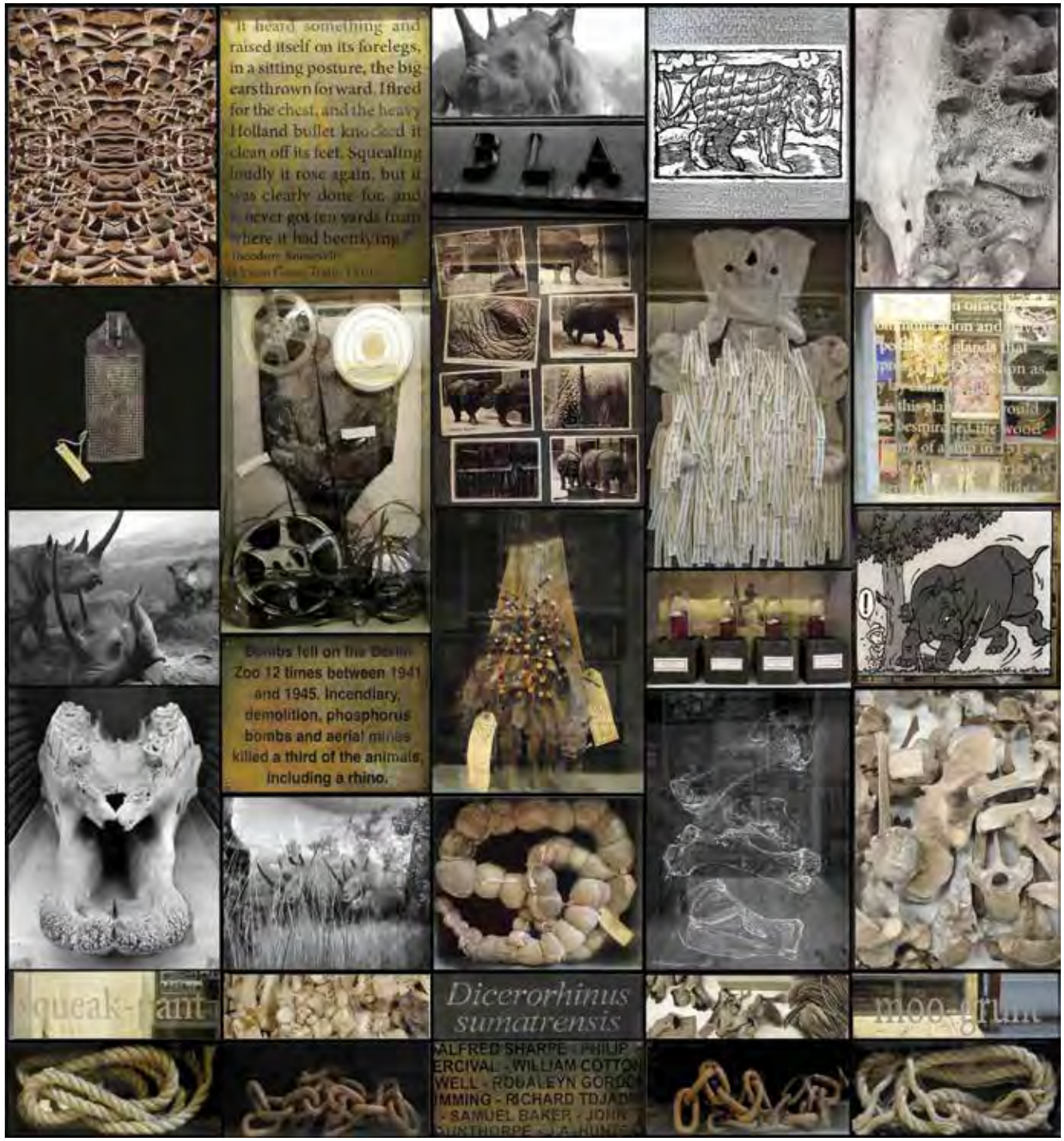
potential lacunae, presenting the rhinoceros in fragments. The interior of the crates become *contrafacta* of 500 years of rhinoceros exhibition and display. Lined with shallow cabinets containing objects, images and videos, the work assumes an encyclopaedic form. Yet there are no 'authentic' objects from collections – everything is reproduced or replicated, creating an analogical reference to the absent rhinoceros and various extinction narratives. Prints have been remade, study skins, labels and documents meticulously copied, teeth and bones manufactured. The exhibition functions as an inventory and an impossible and futile attempt to collect long lists. While the fragment has become a mode of contemporary art practice, set in opposition to the entirety of the Enlightenment list, in this exhibition the list itself becomes a fragment. It stands both as a reflection on museum practice and the museum experience itself, questioning the very acts of collection and display. The Rhino Resource Centre, under the editorship of Kees Rookmaaker, has amassed the definitive encyclopaedic collection of everything that is known about rhinoceroses (http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/). A vast compendium of images, journal articles, books and news items, the website has been enormously generative and invaluable to my project. For this paper cabinet, Rookmaaker penned 'Burchell, Teeth, Rhinoceros', an essay linking William Burchell's taxonomic identification of *Ceratotherium simum* in 1817 to the current demise of the subspecies, *Ceratotherium simum cottoni.*

The composition of Dürer's print serves as a reminder of the image as a construction. The rhino's body is tightly cropped within the frame, its scale exaggerated by its proximity to the edges. This compressed perspective emphasises the constricted space, and the frame becomes both a window and a tool of control, establishing a measured distance between viewer and subject. In later representations derived from Dürer's print, ropes and chains become ubiquitous and, tethered and tamed, the rhino operates as both prisoner and sacrifice, both a celebratory and commemorative figure. A transitional animal, it moves between continents, caught between spectacle and subjugation.

Ganda was followed by many other Indian rhinoceroses, among them Abada, the Madrid Rhinoceros, kept by Philip II of Spain in the 1580s, and – perhaps the most imaged rhino of all time – Clara. Known as the Dutch Rhinoceros, she arrived in Rotterdam from West Bengal with her manager, Douwe Mout van der Meer, and moved between European cities as a touring event between 1741 and 1758. *FREIGHTED* follows much of her route. Curator Gijs van der Ham staged an exhibition about Clara at the Rijks Museum in 2022, and his contribution to this cabinet draws on the sad story of her as a spectacle. Accompanying my surrogate rhinoceros on its voyages to natural history museums, universities and zoos, I have increasingly felt like Clara's keeper, or perhaps showman P.T. Barnum, as I perform with the travelling attraction. But unlike Clara, this rhinoceros is neither a living nor dead specimen. Instead, it exists in a state of suspended animation, a physical manifestation of an imagined referent.

During the centuries in which the rhinoceros was absent from Europe – between the imperial powers of Rome and those of Portugal and Spain – it acquired the status of an imaginary beast, an object of invention. Associated with the unicorn of medieval bestiaries, it symbolised both sin and ferocity: a creature that could only be subdued by virgins but ultimately tamed by divine power. Dürer's fantastical interpretation of the rhino reinforced these perceptions. With its second dorsal horn and exaggerated folds of skin, his rendering positioned the animal somewhere between armoury and beast, between reality and invention. Though imaginative, the image gained evidentiary status through sheer circulation, gaining validity and veracity as a reliable rendering over the next 300 years. As Susan Dackerman writes of Dürer's engraving, "the image embodies and enacts the pervasive tension between nascent developments in empirical investigation of subjects from nature and the emergence of artistic practices that articulate the nature of representation itself."[4] His print occupied a liminal space between invention, imagination and observation. Historian Catherine Kovesi explores the interplay between myth, reality and imagination in her contribution, which examines Marco Polo's 1292 description in his travels in Sumatra, where he encountered what he described as a hairy unicorn with a thorned tongue. She argues that this fabrication was shaped by long-entrenched unicorn lore – beliefs so resilient they resisted empirical evidence to the contrary for centuries. This elusive creature and the mystical properties attributed to its


Iziko South African Museum. Photograph: Fritha Langerman


It heard something and
raised itself on its forelegs,
in a sitting posture, the big
ears thrown forward. I fired
for the chest, and the heavy
Holland bullet knocked it
clean off its feet. Squealing
loudly it rose again, but it
was clearly done for, and
it never got ten yards from
where it had been lying.
Bombs fell on the Berlin
Zoo 12 times between 1941
and 1945. Incendiary,
demolition, phosphorus
bombs and aerial mines
killed a third of the animals,
including a rhino.
Dicerorhinus
sumatrensis
ALFRED SHARPE - PHILIP
ERCIVAL - WILLIAM COTTON
WELL - ROUALEYN GORDO
IMMING - RICHARD TDJAD
- SAMUEL BAKER - JOHN
DUNTHORPE - J.A. HUNT

horn have clear parallels with contemporary perceptions of the rhinoceros, particularly in relation to its exploitation. Kovesi, an authority on luxury and consumption in the early modern world, expands on these themes in *Luxury's fragile frontier: the rhinoceros and Venice*, a book that also includes poems by Ronna Bloom. These two poems, reproduced in this paper cabinet, speak to the delicate and complex relationship between humans and the rhino – and what we imagine them to be.

Inasmuch as the exhibition *FREIGHTED* evokes a cabinet, it is equally a book – one that mirrors the museum itself. Conrad Gessner's Renaissance work, *Historiae animalium* (1551), was the first encyclopaedic attempt to list and chronicle all known animals, yet it included mythological creatures such as the basilisk and monoceros (unicorn). The rhinoceros appears in its pages, illustrated with an image derived from Dürer's famous print. Gessner's book was a hybrid of scholarship and imagination – an unprecedented synthesis of cultural and mythological interpretations with detailed naturalistic observations. *FREIGHTED* follows this encyclopaedic model, drawing from diverse references and associations of the rhinoceros across time and geographies, weaving together history, myth and representation.

Books prefigured museums as spaces of natural history collection. John Jonston's *Natural history of quadruped*s (1657), considered the first book of 'natural history', was the first book to link 'natural' with 'history', omitting allegory in favour of anatomical and descriptive terms. Many canonical natural history texts followed, including Comte de Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* (1749–1804) and Linnaeus' *Systemae naturae* (1735–1768). These books proposed structures for the natural world, organising it within the geometries of the page. Their binary, recto-verso format prefigured the museum as a method of natural collection and collation, with the printed book serving as a template through which nature was classified and compared. The two crates in the exhibition evoke the pages of an open book, with the viewer walking the spine. Mirroring this exhibition, the book's structure echoes the aspect ratio of the crates. *FREIGHTED: a paper cabinet*, is neither a work of natural history nor a catalogue, but rather a work in which the animal is considered as a cultural phenomenon – an artefact of human enterprise. Curator Nina Liebenberg is a maker of connections, and she uses set of steel-rimmed rhino feet in the National Finnish Hunting Museum as the starting point for a web of related inferences in her contribution, 'MM 4672:2-5'. As such, her curation stands as a complement to *FREIGHTED* as a collection.

Not only does *FREIGHTED* draw attention to forms of acquisition and collection, it also interrogates the representational practices of display, both in zoos and museums. Encased within glass tombs and choreographed in arrangements that best depict the human taxonomy of species, the view of the natural world within museums is one of tidy containment. 'Natural history' is both a practice and a concept: of labelling, collecting, naming – all underpinned by an implied progression in time, a linearity or naturalisation of the past. Yet there is an implicit contradiction in these terms. The study of nature is positioned as an empirical, objective endeavour, but it is simultaneously historicised and absorbed into cultural discourse. Just as Renaissance curiosity collections served as instruments of power, asserting dominance through object wealth, the display of natural history within colonial museums remains inseparable from the ideological imperatives that shaped and continue to shape the collection and organisation of nature[5] and the place of humans within it.

These systems of display, which privilege authoritative classification, reinforce narratives of human progress and mastery over the environment. Through exhibition practices, the epistemic values of institutions are made visible, and it is these iconographic structures that must be reimagined if natural history museums are to transcend their colonial and imperialist origins – origins laden with biases and prejudices. *FREIGHTED* functions as a travelling museum that both resembles and confounds these programmes of display. Each panel is densely packed with objects and images, forming an interconnected yet non-linear assemblage. Each case serves as a page, further linking to a website where extended associations unfold.

As an artist-curator, many of my past exhibitions have considered the visual vocabulary of speciation, particularly how it manifests in institutional museum spaces. *FREIGHTED* similarly works as an act of insiderism, simultaneously mimicking the ark, early museums and curiosity cabinets while critiquing

the very museum practices that gave rise to their specimen collections. During my research for the exhibition, I visited numerous museums in America and Europe, examining both their public collections and those in deep storage. I was fortunate to gain access to the collections of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington. Many of these collections were assembled during early twentieth-century expeditions, including the Lang and Chapin American Museum Congo expeditions (1909–1915) and the Smithsonian-Roosevelt expeditions (1909–1910) to central and east Africa. These artefacts find their way into the *FREIGHTED* cabinets and the website, both as reproduced objects and images, as well as through photographs of the dioramas and cabinets in these institutions. The dioramas in the Hall of African Mammals at AMNH, created by Carl Akeley in 1950, have become iconic representations of an Edenic vision of nature within museum environments, demonstrating a view of nature that is seemingly untainted by human cultural imprint. Yet while these displays present an illusion of untouched wilderness, they are cultural constructions and products of ideology as much as of science. Natural history museums are not neutral spaces; they are deeply embedded within cultural and historical narratives, shaping and reinforcing particular ways of seeing the natural world.

Ironically, the very rhino specimens that were hunted, shipped to the Western world and placed on display in museums have become the targets of a second wave of looting. In the early 2000s, organised crime syndicates began targeting museums, violently removing horns from taxidermied collections. Museum curators Denise Hamerton and Bongani Ndhlovu discuss a colonial-era specimen in the South African Museum collection that fell victim to such theft – an object that now forms part of the *FREIGHTED* exhibition. Meanwhile, Catarina Teixeira and David Waterhouse articulate the challenges of rhino horn replication and mount restoration at the Lisbon Museum, the first European institution to have hosted *FREIGHTED*.

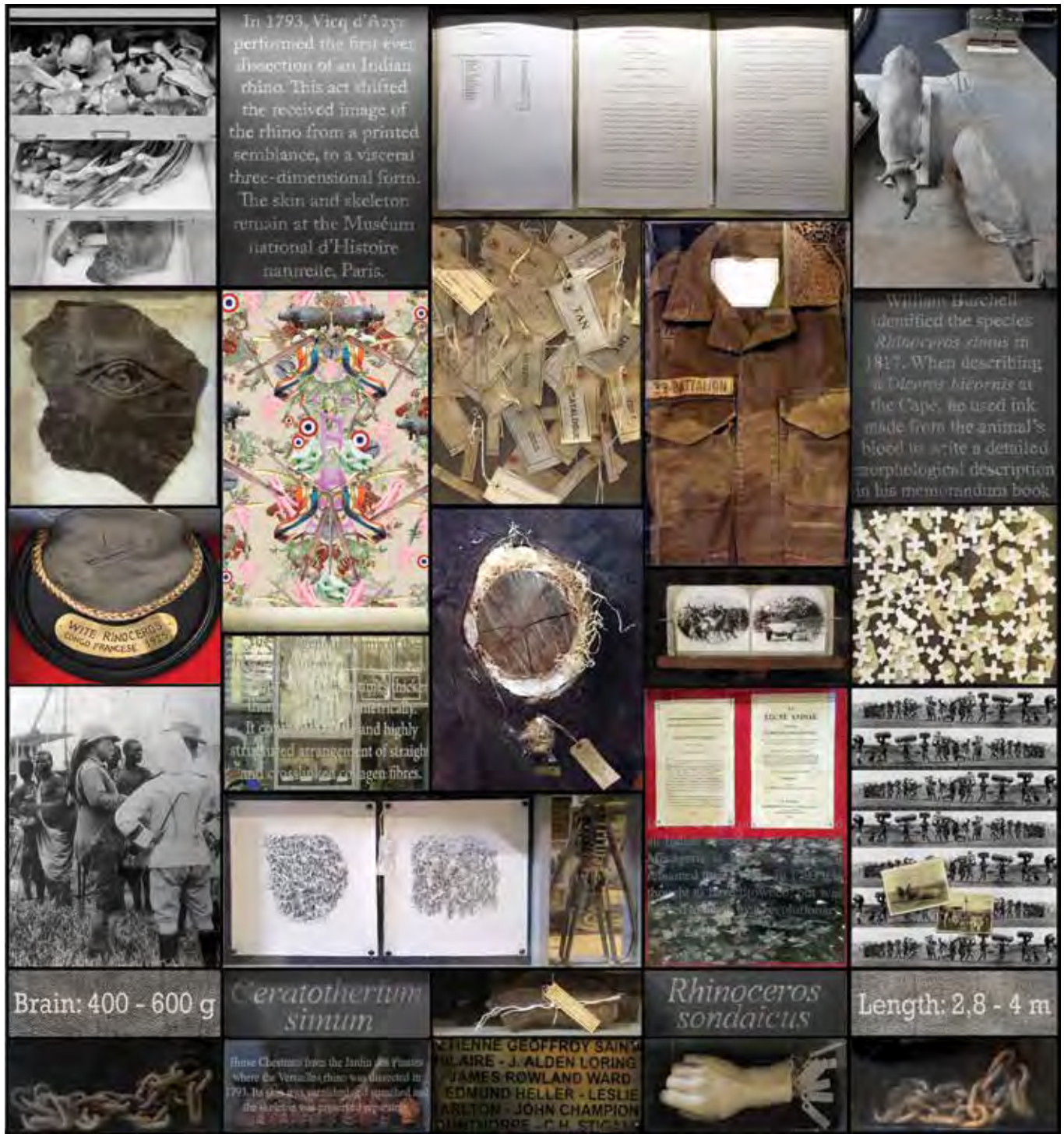
Between Roman times and the end of the twentieth century, more than 2 500 rhinos were kept in confinement.[6] The use of crates in *FREIGHTED* emphasises both the mobility and restriction of these rhinos, underscoring the paradox of captivity. Art historian James Elkins has contributed a short essay, 'Afternoon with zoo people' to this collection. His recent novel, *Weak in comparison to dreams*, follows the character Samuel Emmer as he visits zoos across Europe and America, tracing the repetitive, stereotypical movements of captive animals. This text documents a meeting of zoo rhino experts, exposing some of the absurd contradictions of animal husbandry and conservation.

Outside of museums and zoos, only a scattering of people have ever been in close proximity to a rhinoceros, either alive or dead. Most interactions with wild animals are mediated in some way, and, for many, a soft toy version of the rhino may be the closest material encounter they have. In his essay 'Why look at animals', John Berger argues that our lived connection to animals is eroding, replaced by mediated experiences – through images, video and other media – that shape our understanding of them. He calls this form of looking "compensatory,"[7] suggesting that zoos are "monuments to the impossibility of such encounters."[8] In her book *Extinction narratives*, Ursula Heise writes that "Nature in the sense of a domain apart from human intention and agency no longer exists", and that human intervention means that there is nothing outside of human impact.[9] Animals in zoos and museum dioramas are presented as real and as authentic experiences, yet these are ultimately simulations tailored to meet our expectations of what this experience should be. Visitors' views are directed through bars and through glass, creating a carefully orchestrated spectacle. *FREIGHTED* inverts the relation between viewer and specimen: the viewer is invited into the vitrine, becoming an actor within the enclosed space. By so doing, the work underscores our complicity in framing other species as objects of spectacle.

Heise reminds us that the loss of biodiversity and the perception of endangered species are cultural issues.[10] and that an implicit hierarchy, shaped by aesthetics, economics and ideology, determines which species are valued, mourned or cared for as others are rendered invisible. She describes an "extinction taxonomy" in which species falling outside certain classifications go unnoticed.[11] Most extinctions are thought to have occurred during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,


"The ball entered some-
where near her heart. On
receiving this shot she
reeled about, torrents of
blood streamed from her
mouth and wounds and
rolling over she expired, as
rhinoceroses invariably do,
uttering a shrill screaming
sound while in the agonies
of death"
National Museum of
Natural History in New Delhi.
The specimens, including
Mohan the Rhinoceros, were
preserved in highly
combustible chemicals and
were all destroyed.
hic-throb
mmwonk
CARL HAGENBECK - JIM
HERLAND - FREDERIC CUVI
THEODORE ROOSEVELT -
RBERT LANG - CARL AKELE
SAR A. MEARNS - ARTHUR
ERNAY - JAMES P. CHAPIN


*Abconderfet*, a word taken from the Latin *imago contrafacta*, is inscribed in Dürer's 1515 print. Meaning an accurate copy of an absent original, it is a reproduction that bears witness to an unseen form.
Jean-Baptiste Oudry's 1749 enormous painting of Clara the 'Dutch' rhinoceros was testimony to Enlightenment empiricism. It attended in detail to physiology, mass, and accurate texture, while also presenting the animal as alert and sensitive .
The Morning Post.
The Daily Telegraph
The Evening News
Height: 1,3 - 1,9 m
*Diceros bicornis*
*Rhinoceros unicornis*
Mass: 800 - 2300 kg


In 1793, Vicq d'Azyr performed the first ever dissection of an Indian rhino. This act shifted the received image of the rhino from a printed semblance, to a visceral three-dimensional form. The skin and skeleton remain at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris.
William Burchell identified the species *Rhinoceros simus* in 1817. When describing *Diceros bicornis* at the Cape, he used ink made from the animal's blood to write a detailed morphological description in his memorandum book.
WITE RINOCEROS
CONGO FRANCESE
Brain: 400 - 600 g
Ceratotherium simum
Rhinoceros sondaicus
Length: 2,8 - 4 m

and it is estimated that between 10 000 and 100 000 species vanish each year. For uncharismatic microfauna, most losses go unnoticed, so that "for every species listed as endangered or extinct at least a hundred more will probably disappear unrecorded."[12] The idea of extinction is a longing, an experience of an absence for something rarely known intimately. It is the sense of losing the potential proximity to a species otherwise only known through secondary means. Heise also discusses the "aura of the last", wherein rarity is coupled with value. The rhinoceros does not typically conjure thoughts of intimacy. A solitary animal with an impenetrable hide and notorious bad temper, it is, despite the abundance of soft toys that populate supermarket shelves, not easily anthropomorhised into cuddly companions. Nevertheless, along with pandas and polar bears, they have become emblematic 'megafauna' and flagship species for extinction, symbolising the tragedy and mourning that accompany such loss. In this sense, the rhino stands as a headstone, an immovable block of granite that marks the end of life.

The rhino speaks to the losses of thousands of unseen and less-seen species. In his *Flight ways,* Thom van Dooren notes that extinction stories focusing on the "last of a kind" often centre on individual animals, and typically those in captivity. This perspective can erase the complex entanglements that define an animal's life beyond human contexts, reducing it to a mere specimen. Moreover, extinction is a gradual process of loss and violence that unfolds over time, rather than a single, isolated event.[13] Van Dooren's book surfaces narratives that implicate people in the "webs of entanglement in which living beings emerge, are held in the world, and eventually die. Life and death do not take place in isolation from others; they are thoroughly relational affairs for fleshy, mortal creatures."[14]

The death of the last male northern white rhino, Sudan, in 2018 rendered this subspecies functionally extinct. His final moments, captured in a poignant photograph with wildlife ranger Zachariah Mutai at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya, resonated widely, and this individual rhino was mourned throughout the world. The images conveyed a quiet tenderness between the two and the witnessing of the passing of 'the last of its kind' evoked a deep personal empathy for the loss of an entire lineage. With Sudan's passing, the northern white rhino joins species like the quagga, passenger pigeon and mammoth, now subjects of ambitious de-extinction efforts aimed at reversing biodiversity loss. In this era of the sixth mass extinction, zoos and museums find themselves in an uneasy position: while human activity has driven species to the precipice, these institutions are now central to their survival. This paradox, where captivity becomes a tool for conservation, raises difficult ethical questions, and the violence of captivity runs parallel to the violence of extinction.[15] Zoos have taken on an urgent role in captive breeding programmes, safeguarding the last genetic remnants of vanishing species. By reinvigorating DNA and using surrogates, scientists breathe life into absent species that would otherwise be lost forever. Ruth Appeltant works on a pioneering programme that uses stem cell technology to fertilise surrogate rhinos in the hope of reviving the northern white rhino. Her contribution to this collection highlights this intervention and offers a fragile but profound hope for the future.

This book is an assemblage. It mirrors what the rhino has become: an imagined collection of disparate parts, understood through multiple disciplinary lenses, fragmented and disassembled. Like the pedal gland secretion, the rhino has left traces across cultures, histories and geographies. More than 500 years after Dürer created his print of Ganda, the rhino is now imperilled. With some species functionally extinct, fewer than 50 Javan and Sumatran rhinos remaining, only 4 000 Indian rhinos left and the African black rhino population at 6 000, the notion of an image as testament is all the more poignant. It is not impossible that in the foreseeable future, Dürer's rhino will be no more fantastical than the many tourist snapshots taken in game parks today. In the truest sense of *abconderfet*, these digital renderings will bear witness to an absent original, providing evidence of something that, outside of museum collections, no longer exists. Peter Anderson's poems serve as the bookends of this publication and as an elegy of sorts. This is an elegy of an absent species – the ending foreseen – marking the final expirational breath of the last of its kind.

[1] Owen, R. 1852. On the anatomy of the Indian rhinoceros (Rh unicornis, L.). *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London* 4(2): 31–58

[2] Cave 1962: 686

[3] Peter Parshall (1993: 555–6) writes of how this translated visually into a division between invention and objective recording. The term *contrafactum* was introduced as an image as a bearer of fact – a "class of representation that came to be determined by function … for images reporting specific events, and for portrayals of both natural and preternatural phenomena."

[4] Dackerman 2011: 165

[5] See Bennett 1995, 2004; Foucault 2002

[6] Rookmaaker, 1998

[7] Berger 2009: 35

[8] Berger 2009: 30

[9] Heise 2016: 8

[10] Heise 2016

[11] According to science historian Geoffrey Bowler.

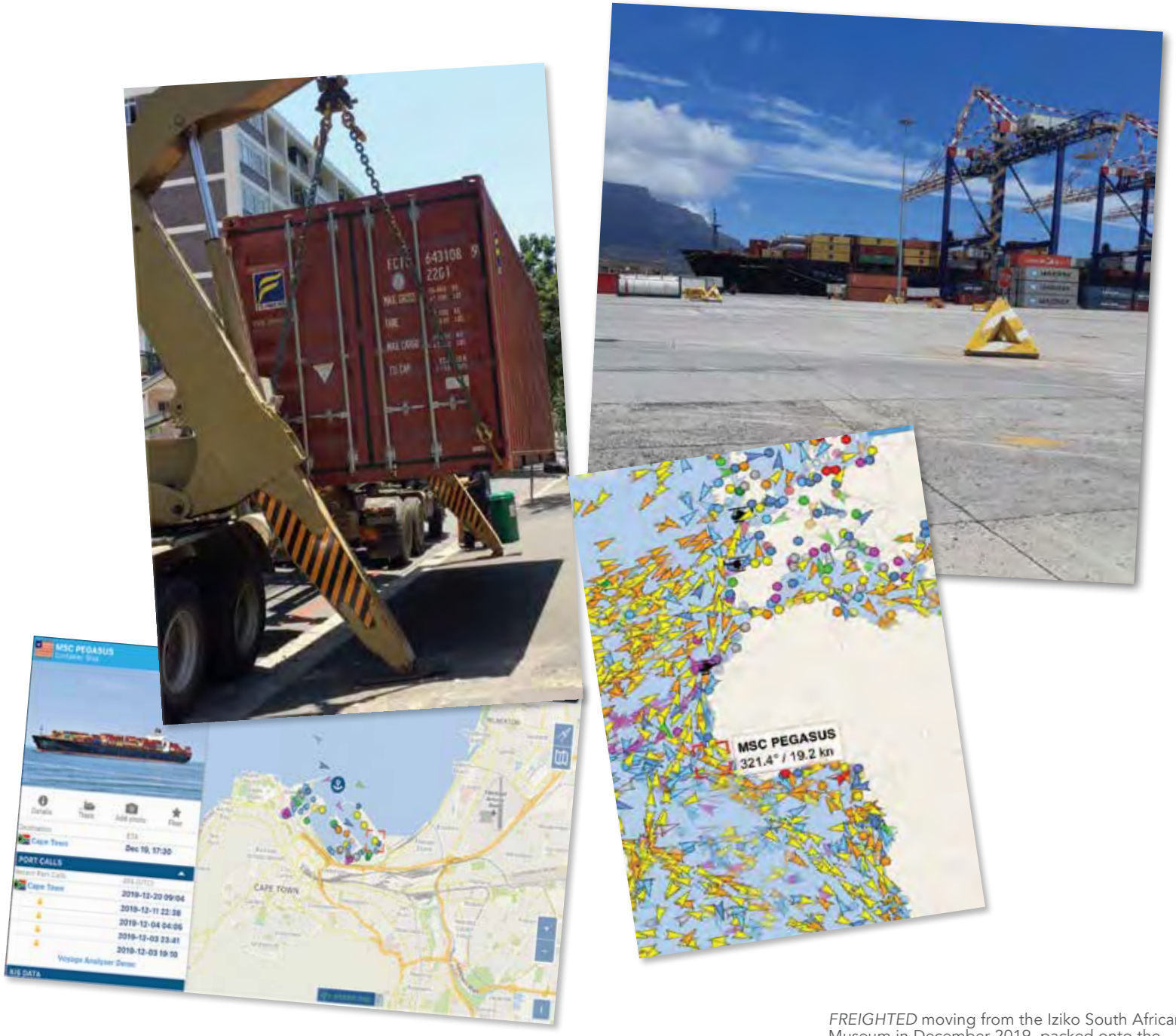
[12] Wilcox 1988: ix

[13] Van Dooren, 2014: 11–12

[14] Van Dooren 2014: 4

[15] Van Dooren 2014: 116


FRAGILE
FRAGILE




*FREIGHTED* moving from the Iziko South African Museum in December 2019, packed onto the container ship *MSC Pegasus* in Cape Town harbour, and sailing to Sines in Portugal in January 2020.

Photograph: Fritha Langerman