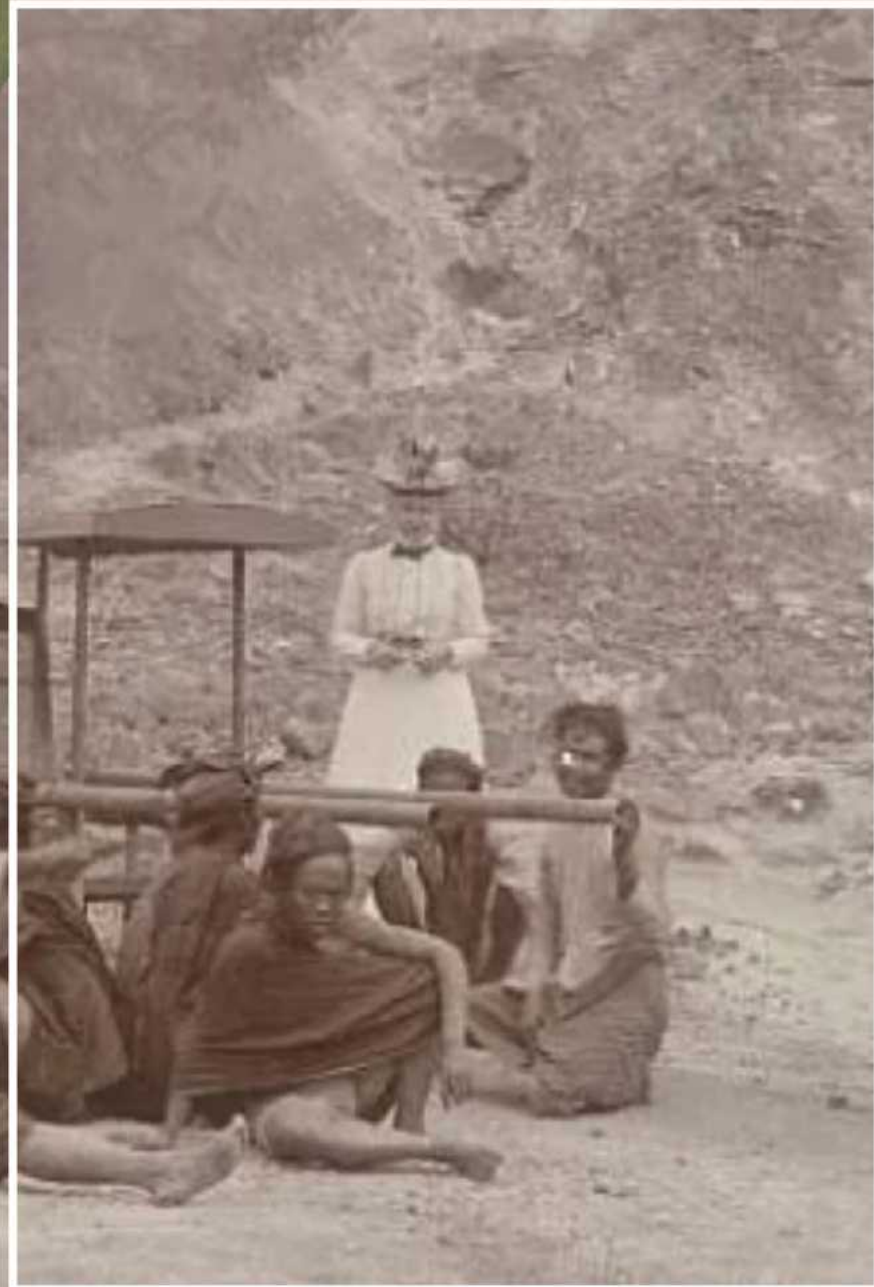


unearthing *herstory*







# *Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance*

Based on the life and works of Emilie Rosalie Saal

What happens when a person of humble origins—from a country that struggles to find presence in Europe—becomes an elite member of the colonial upper class?

*Fagàcea Imperialis*





# *Orchidelirium:*

## *An Appetite for Abundance*

Based on the life and works of Emilie Rosalie Saal


The intriguing bond between Estonia, a small nation often nestled on the outskirts, and the Netherlands, a formidable bastion of wealth, unveils a captivating narrative woven with threads of colonialism, botanical discoveries, and imperial ambitions.

Ghostly unburyings and sensuous interruptions of an altered landscape, unearth concealed decisions. Traces of others remain in the soil, leaving us a legacy that must be reckoned with.

Victimhood may be seductive. But the privilege of refusing to acknowledge the lack of empathetic and dignified treatment of others is less so.

When power shifts in a decisive way, the opportunity to gauge the balance between ego, intention and outcome becomes available.



A photograph of a yellow and brown orchid flower with a green vine against a black background. The flower has yellow petals with brown markings and a purple center. The vine is green and has several loops and curves.

Underneath the reasoning bodies  
and thinking machines of  
coloniality lies violence and the  
exploitation of a forever-altered  
nature and of peoples who yearn  
to construct a different way of  
life.

But in this process, *failure is  
inevitable*. We come to terms  
with our own histories,  
privileges and actions as  
constructs and responsibilities,  
even if thought of by others.

*Orchidelirium.*





In a patriarchal society that denied her recognition, what choices did she make to become an emancipated artist?

How much of what's been misunderstood and mistranslated have we acknowledged?

What did the colonised and Indigenous people at her service experience?

Where do we find ourselves in this romanticised machinery of amnesia?

To what extent are the Colonial Empires still actively with us?



**SAAL COLLECTION  
EXHIBITED HERE**

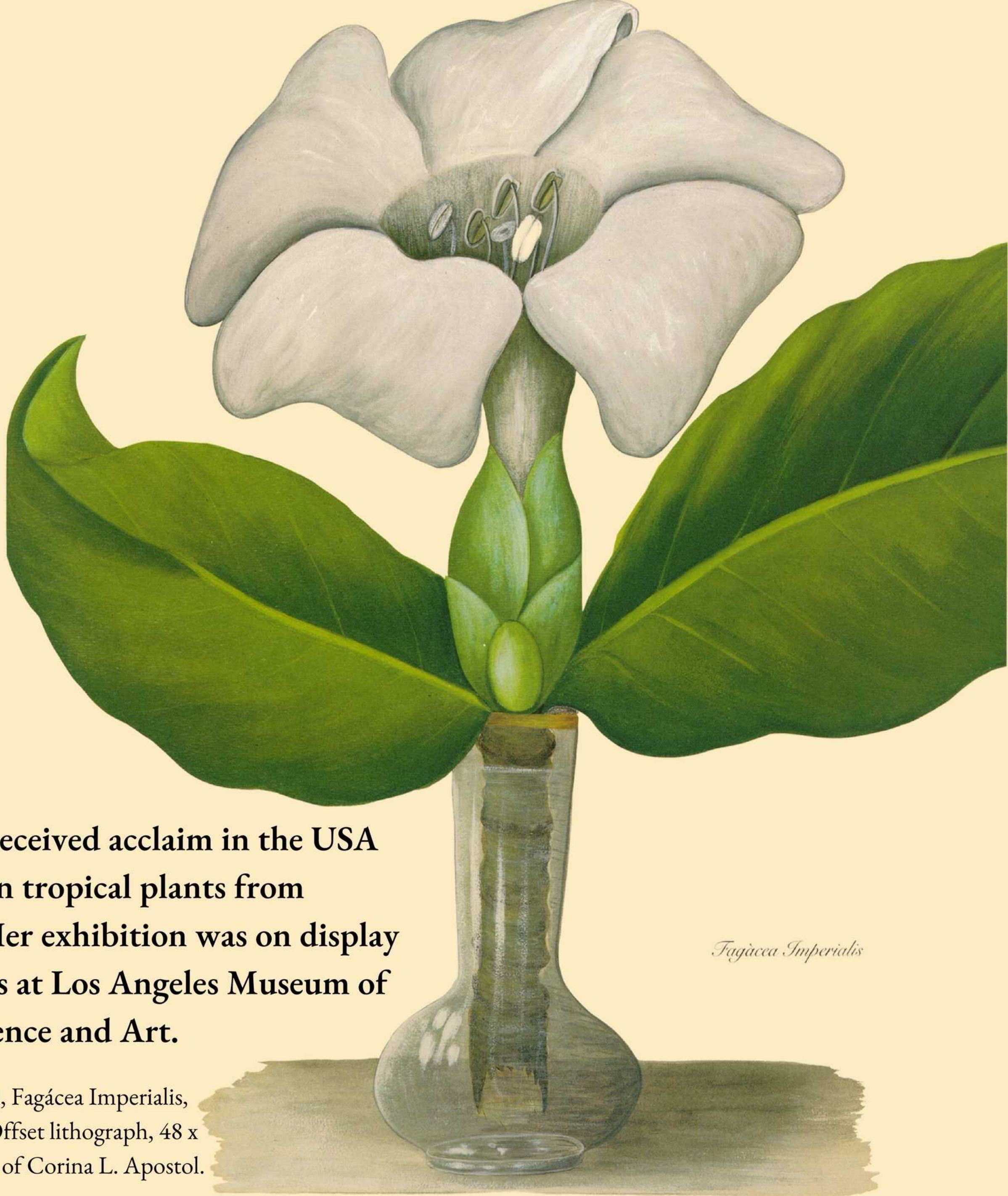
Paintings Worth \$15,000  
Shown First Time  
To Public

A beautiful collection of paintings, valued at \$15,000, is being exhibited for the first time by Mrs. E. R. Saal of Hollywood, at the Museum of Science and Art, Exposition Park.

It is a work of 20 years in the Indian Archipelago and represents some 300 and more species of tropical flowers, fruit, plants. Mrs. Saal made many trips on horse-

Mrs. E. R. Saal-Macksy and Her Paintings





**Emilie Saal received acclaim in the USA for her art on tropical plants from Indonesia. Her exhibition was on display for two years at Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art.**

*Fagácea Imperialis*

Emilie Rosalie Saal, Fagácea Imperialis, 1995, [c. 1910s]. Offset lithograph, 48 x 63.5 cm. Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.



Photographer unknown. E.R. Saal—Macksy and Her Paintings, Los Angeles Times, 1926.

Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times.

**Emilie Saal's (1871–1954) expeditions were fueled by Indonesian servants who carried her on a palaquin or joli, co-opted by the Dutch as symbols of their upper-class status. This image taken by her husband embodies the intersecting forces of patriarchy, colonization, and exploitation.**





Photographer unknown. European women in the garden with Javanese servants and gardener, photograph. Courtesy of the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures.

**Eurocentric knowledge production marginalized indigenous Indonesians, disregarding their contributions to the study of nature while exploiting their labor. This systemic erasure perpetuated epistemic injustice and cultural erasure, necessitating a critical reevaluation of dominant narratives and the restoration of indigenous voices.**





**In the era of colonization, Emilie Saal's artistic endeavors actively contributed to the process of mapping Indonesia's verdant resources, reinforcing the cycle of exploitation and the objectification of nature under colonial rule.**



*Can we see beyond the allure of colonial narratives that fetishize and exploit the nature and culture of others?*



# *Orchidelirium.*

Orchidelirium, a craze for the exotic, swept across the globe, captivating hearts and minds. This fervent obsession reflected humanity's yearning for the unfamiliar, but also raised questions about cultural appropriation and the commodification of the exotic.



**Does it reflect a genuine appreciation for the cultural significance of orchids, or does it perpetuate an exoticized narrative that fetishizes the Other?**

Photographer unknown. International Orchid Exhibition at the Royal Tropical Institute Amsterdam, 1971. Courtesy of the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures.





**Maria Feodorovna, tsarina of Russia, employed tropical flowers as diplomatic gifts, obtained through the explorations of Russian emissaries. This practice, while seemingly grand, perpetuated a narrative of exoticism, power dynamics, and resource extraction from colonized lands.**

Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna of Russia, c. 1866-1870. Courtesy of Heritage Image Partnership.



In a scene reminiscent of a bygone era, an elderly Dutch woman labors along a canal, her chest adorned with a cumbersome bustle, while she tirelessly pulls a barge laden with peat, used as a substrate for orchids.



Holland -- woman drawing canal boat, 1910 and ca.  
1915. George Grantham Bain Collection. Courtesy of  
the Library of Congress



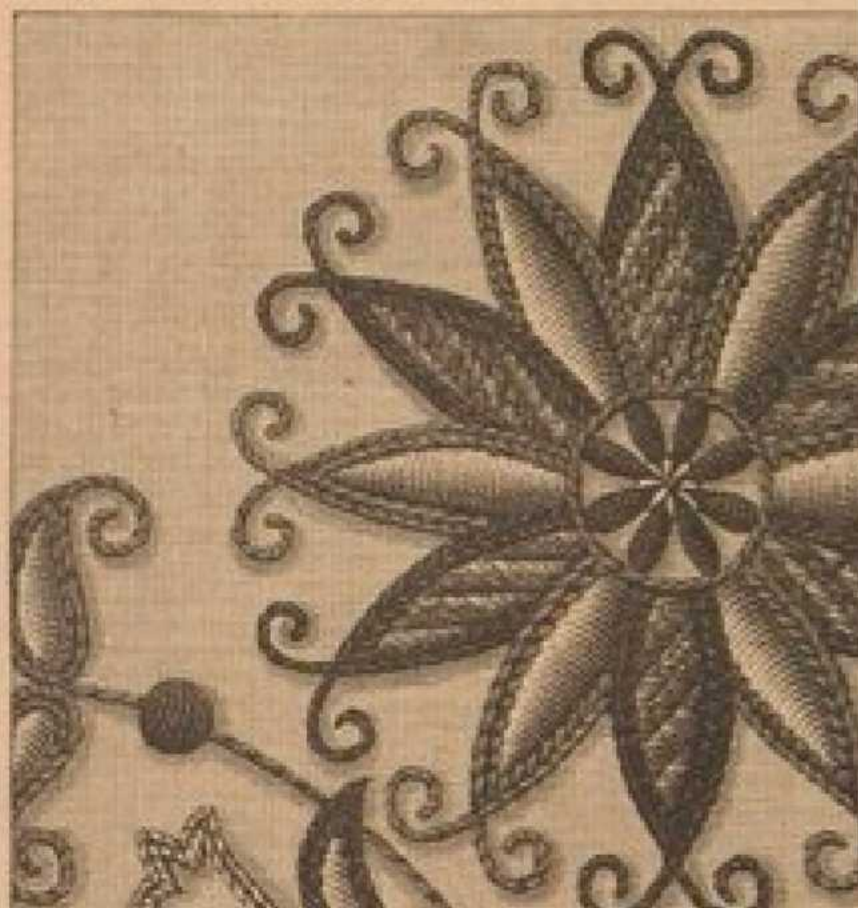
German fashion magazines circulated widely in Baltic countries during the 19th century, featuring floral patterns for clothing and decorations.

Unfortunately, this form of "woman's art" was undervalued and considered less important within the hierarchy of art forms, reflecting gender biases and perpetuating inequality.

Illustrierte Frauenzeitung: Ausgabe der Modenwelt mit Unterhaltungsblatt (Illustrated women's newspaper: fashion and entertainment edition), 1886. Courtesy of the University of Düsseldorf.



5. Bordüre Durchzug-Arbeit im Stoffstich.  
Wie entnehmen die Besitzer einer







Class at Katrini School building, Buitenzorg (Bogor),  
Indonesia, photograph, 1918.

How much of what's been  
misunderstood and mistranslated  
have we acknowledged?



The Kartini Schools, located near the Botanical Gardens in Buitenzorg (now Bogor), were institutions dedicated to assimilating indigenous Indonesian women into Dutch society. This process aimed to mold their identities according to the dominant colonial narrative, raising concerns about cultural subjugation and the erasure of indigenous traditions.





**In 2021, Estonians eagerly bought tropical orchids imported from the Netherlands at the Tallinn Botanical Garden, showcasing the fascination with exotic flora and the implications of global trade.**



Tropical orchids imported from the Netherlands on sale during “Orchid Days” at the Tallinn Botanical Garden, 2020. Photograph. Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.



Within the realm of Indonesia's First Lady, Siti Hartinah Soeharto (1923-1996), a complex narrative emerges...laden with contrasting elements.

Amidst her notable legacy, a lush garden of tropical orchids stands as a symbol of her appreciation for botanical beauty. However, its creation came at the cost of displacing communities in Jakarta, disregarding the pleas and protests of the local residents.



Siti Hartinah Soeharto (Bu Tien) in her Orchid Garden Taman Anggrek "Indonesia Permai", 1976.  
Courtesy of Taman Anggrek Indonesia.



The Kartinis of Kendeng made a powerful statement by imprinting their feet in cement in Jakarta, standing against a threatening mine that endangered their community's water and ancestral lands. Their act of resistance resonates with the ongoing struggle faced by marginalized communities fighting to protect their environment and assert their rights.



Natalie Stuart. People from North Kendeng demonstrate outside the presidential palace in Jakarta, with their feet set in cement, 2016. Courtesy of the photographer.



Neocolonial extraction of marble persists without consent. Aleta Braun mobilized Mollo women in Indonesia to weave intricate tapestries, symbolizing their resistance against mining companies and the defense of their land. This act amplified the voices of marginalized women in the fight against exploitative industries.



Leo Plunkett, Lodia Oematan of the Mollo People with the loom that she carried into Mount Mutis. Courtesy of The Gecko Project/Mongabay.



# *Orchidelirium. An Appetite for Abundance*

Based on the life and works of Emilie Rosalie Saal

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Orchidelirium 2023