

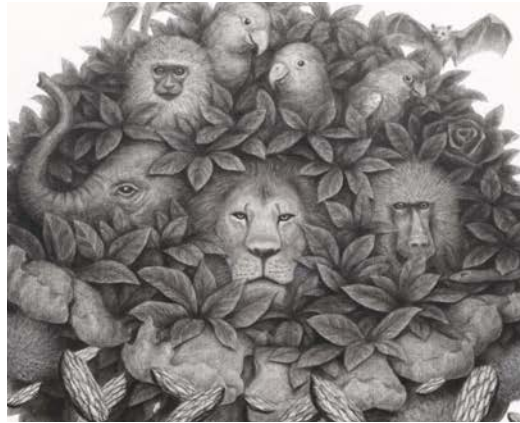
Henry Lee

B. 1981, Singapore

Isle of Baobab

2021

Charcoal, Pencil and Acrylic on Canvas
H 76.2 x 101.4 cm



African baobab (*Adansonia digitata*)

*An apocalyptic scenario set in the future, when most of the world's species have died as a result of climate change: the baobab flower, imagined as an ark that offers protection and sustenance to animals taking refuge from the ravages of urban development and climate change. In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's literary classic *The Little Prince*, baobab seeds and shoots, resembling rosebushes, seen as the scourge of asteroid dwellings when left to grow unimpeded, are actively rooted out so as to prevent smaller asteroids from being destroyed by unchecked "infestations" of these giant trees. In the French tradition of gardening and cultivation as essential activities to stave off chaos and disorder, the little prince acts as a vigilant steward of his planet, but learns later on his interplanetary travels that baobabs could be valued where they do not endanger the existence of a planet, such as on Earth. Nestled among the leaves of the baobab ark are references to the beloved rose he so nurtured and tended to, and the snake who promises to return him home with a poisoned bite. An extremely hardy and massive slow-growing tree adapted to hot arid environments, the baobab is one of the longest living trees in the world, with its components almost all edible and useful. But in recent years, this tree of life, an important water resource during dry seasons, has been mysteriously dying off all over Africa. That the vast plains of Africa, unlike the tiny asteroids of the little prince's home world, might eventually become incapable of sustaining the baobab, is sobering indeed.*