

Retelling Invisible Cities

A 2 day workshop by :
Artist, Carlijn Kingma
and architect,
Thomas Steigenga
from the Netherlands.

In collaboration with
Prof. Alka Hingorani and
inspired by the work of
Italo Calvino.

Hosted in IDC IIT Bombay
25 - 26 January, 2020

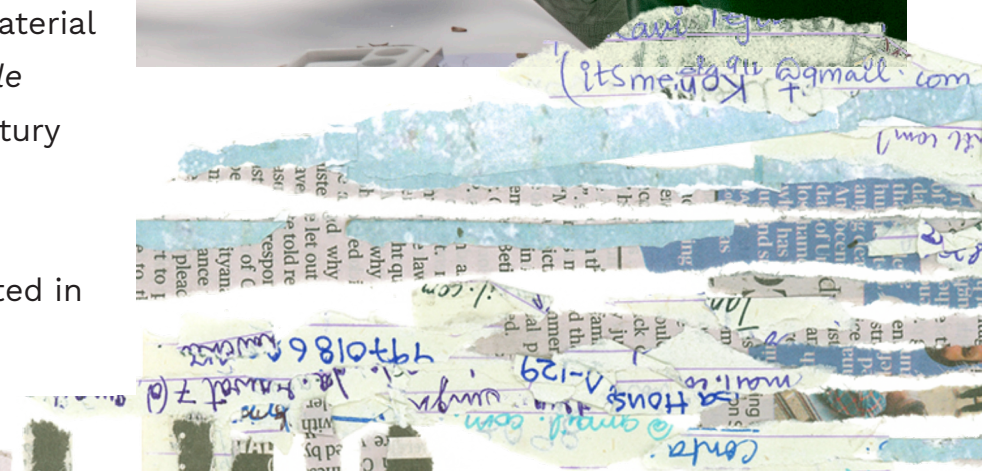






This drawing and storytelling workshop of a single weekend sought to bring to visual life the imagined and imaginative conversations of Marco Polo, the legendary traveler, and Kublai Khan, the 13th century emperor of the Mongolian empire, as

told in Italo Calvino's brilliant material and metaphoric chimera, *Invisible Cities*. Written almost half a century ago, it comes alive in every new reading, and as it did in the astounding mural that was created in a single Sunday.



*'I speak and speak,' Marco says,
'but the listener retains only the
words he is expecting...It is not
the voice that commands the
story: it is the ear.'*

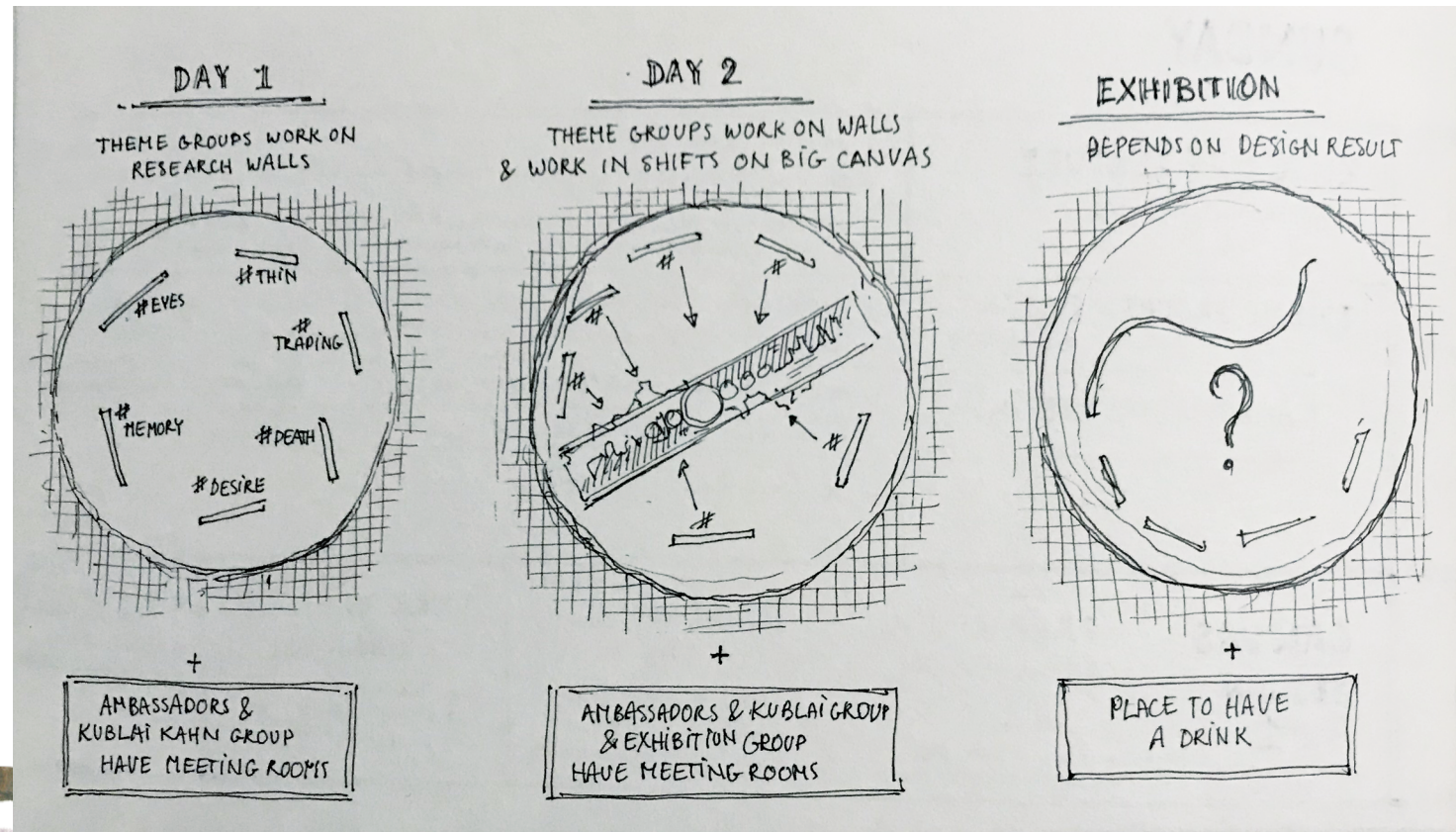




The 8-foot-long piece is at once a palimpsest of Marco and Kublai's verbal jousting as it is of the many heads and hands the students brought to it in their drawing of imagined cityscapes. Perhaps Edgar Allen Poe was right about this, after all: Invisible things are the only realities.

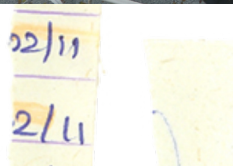


As Kublai Khan says, "At times I feel your voice is reaching me from far away, while I am prisoner of a gaudy and unlivable present, where all forms of human society have reached an extreme of their cycle and there is no imagining what new forms they may assume. And I hear, from your voice, the invisible reasons which make cities live, through which perhaps, once dead, they will come to life again."

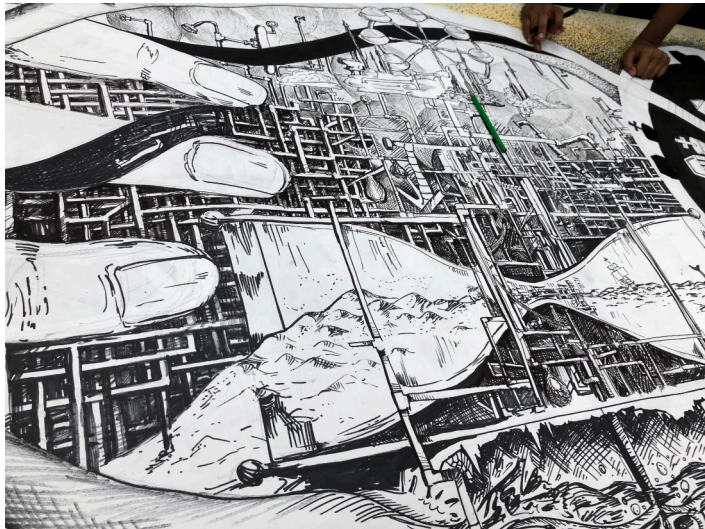




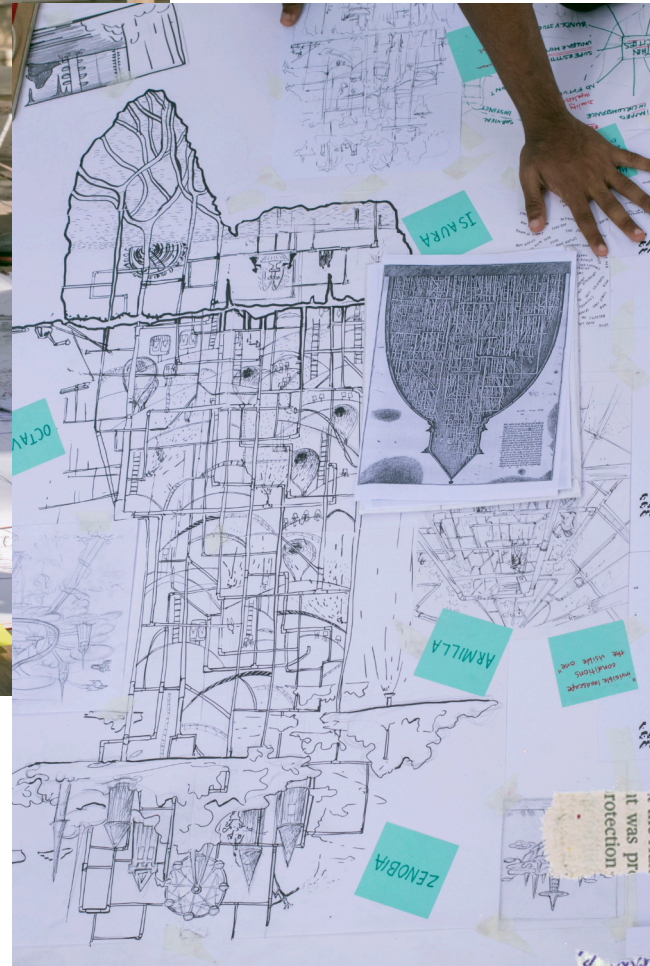
The Great Khan owns an atlas whose drawings depict the terrestrial globe all at once and continent by continent, the borders of the most distant realms, the ships' routes, the coastlines, the maps of the most illustrious metropolises and of the most opulent ports.



“He leafs through the maps before Marco Polo’s eyes to put his knowledge to the test,” Calvino tells us. And Marco meets it with soaring imagination and vivid, wonderful description.



Each city has its special quality, and each telling its own particular paradoxes, its sequences nested one within another, its various conundrums that seduce us to confuse cities with words, and words with things and cities again.



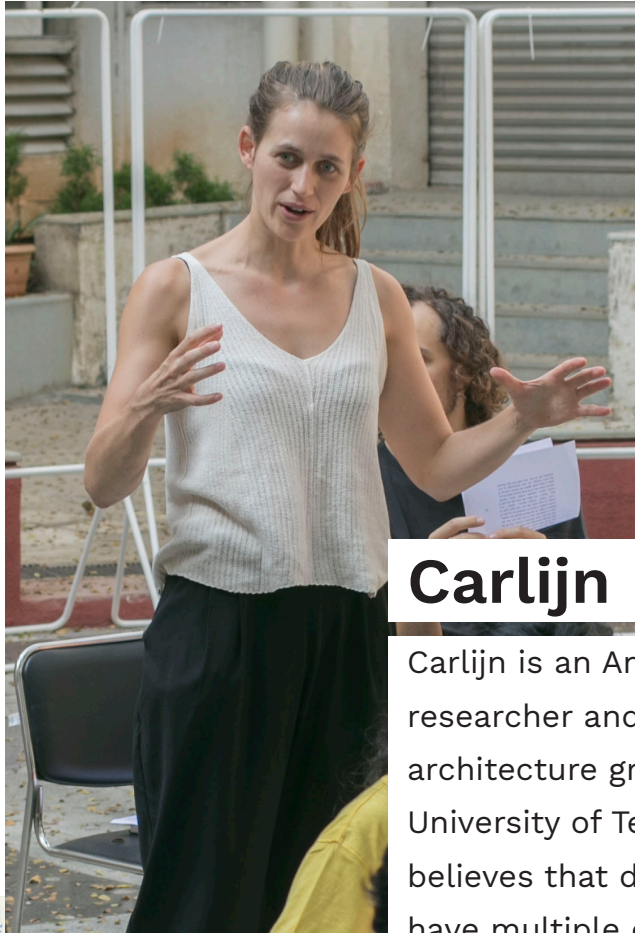
Cities like Zenobia, which stands on high pilings, with platforms and balconies, “...linked by ladders and hanging sidewalks,” and remembered as a happy city by those that live there, or as Raissa, where people “wring their hands as they walk in the streets,” and “at every moment there is a child in a window who laughs,” so that it seems as if “there runs an invisible thread that binds one living being to another for a moment, then unravels, then is stretched again ...so that at every second the unhappy city contains [within it] a happy city unaware of its own existence.”



This picturesque, picaresque imagination is what feeds the hesitant hands and curious gaze of our artists – the group of students from IDC and away – who created finally a mural of such vibrant complexity and urgent detail as to begin another imagined conversation with Kublai Khan.



About the Facilitators

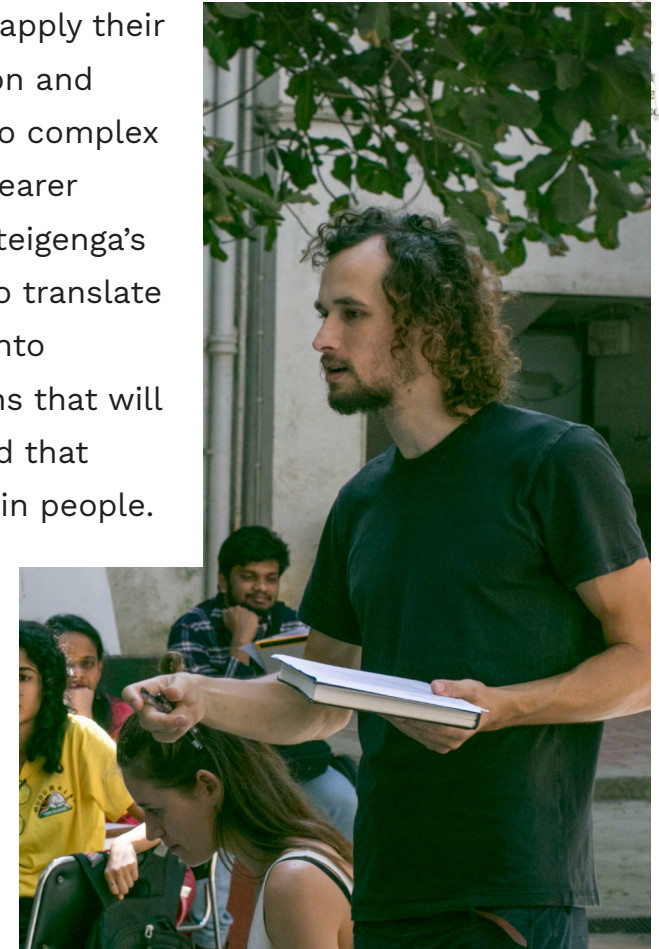


Carlijn Kingma

Carlijn is an Amsterdam based researcher and artist. An architecture graduate from Delft University of Technology, Carlijn believes that drawings and stories have multiple dimensions, mapping social, political and power structures around us. These fictional worlds become alternative maps to the real world and help us navigate our way home maybe, or to each other, or to the Beautiful Isles of Nowhere via Happy St. Elsewhere.

Thomas Steigenga

Coming from a background that covers engineering, co-creation, and experience design, Thomas likes to draw links between seemingly unrelated fields to find novel and creative solutions. He invites people into this process to apply their collective imagination and analytical strength to complex topics to create a clearer narrative. Thomas Steigenga's primary mission is to translate cutting-edge ideas into concrete action plans that will help us build a world that brings out the good in people.





Alka Hingorani

Alka teaches at IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay. She studied at UC Berkeley, and her training is in architecture, photography, design, and history of art. Her many interests come together in her work: on art and identity (see *Making Faces: Self and Image Creation in a Himalayan Valley*, University of Hawai'i Press), storytelling as academic practice (see learnthroughstories.org), and pedagogy that reimagines the world, marrying the whimsy of Italo Calvino with the hope of John Muir, who said, "...the world, though made, is yet being made."

Participants

Aarcha Suresh	Raaghav Laxman
Anirvina Karnala	Rajiv Sarkar
Anjali Singh	Rhea Rane
Arnesh Kundu	Rishabh Kumar
Deblina Pandit	Rounak Sengupta
Indrani Ghosh	Safiya Shaikh
Jeremy Iype	Sandeep Kumar
Jessica Saggu	Saumya Oberoi
Jinal Sangoi	Shubham Sant
Lara Agrawal	Shubhankar Bhingare
Lungshai Leisan	Shuvam Bharti
Mayura Datar	Sneha Paradeshi
Mohak Gulati	Umesh Wagh
Navaneeth Pantham	Yohan Kuriyan
Nayana Vaccharajani	
Padmasree M M	
Paramita Sen Mazumdar	

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Prof. Uday Athavankar
Rishabh Dahiya
Safiya Shaikh
Samarth Bhagwat
Umesh Wagh



*Invisible things are the
only realities; invisible
things alone are the
things that shall remain.*

– William Godwin



See how efficient it still is