



Make/Believe

Where the wild things are is where Clare Celeste Börsch wants to be.

IN APRIL 2014, on a countryside walk outside Frankfurt, Germany, the American collage artist Clare Celeste Börsch noticed a large shrub bursting with the sound of ecstatic birds. She crept up, peered inside, and had the overwhelming sensation of entering a secret world. "I was enveloped by this enclave of birdsong, branches, leaves, and flowers," says Börsch, 38. "I said to my husband, 'I don't know how, but I'm going to make collages you can walk into. I want my artwork to feel like *that*.'"

Börsch might not have known the how, but she knew the what: her treasure trove of images—mushrooms, magnolias, and other natural wonders, most clipped from books and archives dating to the 19th century. "I had a massive collection in boxes with labels like **LIZARDS, BROWN AND GREEN**," says Börsch. She used them to assemble intricate designs on paper, but she'd never pinned them to a wall or suspended them from a ceiling with tacks and tape. Two years later—after much trial and error ("One of my first attempts collapsed with a thud at 4 a.m.")—Börsch unveiled *Intimate Immensity*, an installation made from thousands of cutouts of

flowers, crystals, animals, and insects.

The child of a U.S. diplomat, Börsch was born in Thailand and raised all over the world. "My life has sort of been a collage, which is probably why I find the art form appealing," she says. "I can put together different pieces from across the globe, such as a Brazilian butterfly and a North American flower, and create a harmonious story—like my own memories."

Since that first installation, Börsch has displayed her fantastical ecosystems at a festival in Australia, a gallery in Madrid, and a mall in Munich. ("I can take an entire show on a plane in a suitcase without paying an overweight fee," she says.) Come May, she'll start setting up a new exhibit in Malmö, Sweden, armed with images and her secret weapon: manicure scissors. The work is tedious (each piece can require up to 200 hours of cutting time) and occasionally painful (it sometimes numbs her thumb)—but totally worth it. "People say my installations remind them of being a kid in nature because they elicit a sense of wonder," the artist says. "I live for the moment when someone walks in and looks like they're 4 years old again." —**M.G.**



From top left: *Roundel*, a piece from an upcoming exhibit; Clare Celeste Börsch standing inside *The Mushroom Hunters*, 2019; the artist midassembly; a floral cluster from *Intimate Immensity*, 2016; a detail from *The Mushroom Hunters*.

ROUNDEL: CLARE CELESTE BÖRSCH; INTIMATE IMMENSITY: TREVOR GOOD; OTHERS: KOLJA RASCHKE