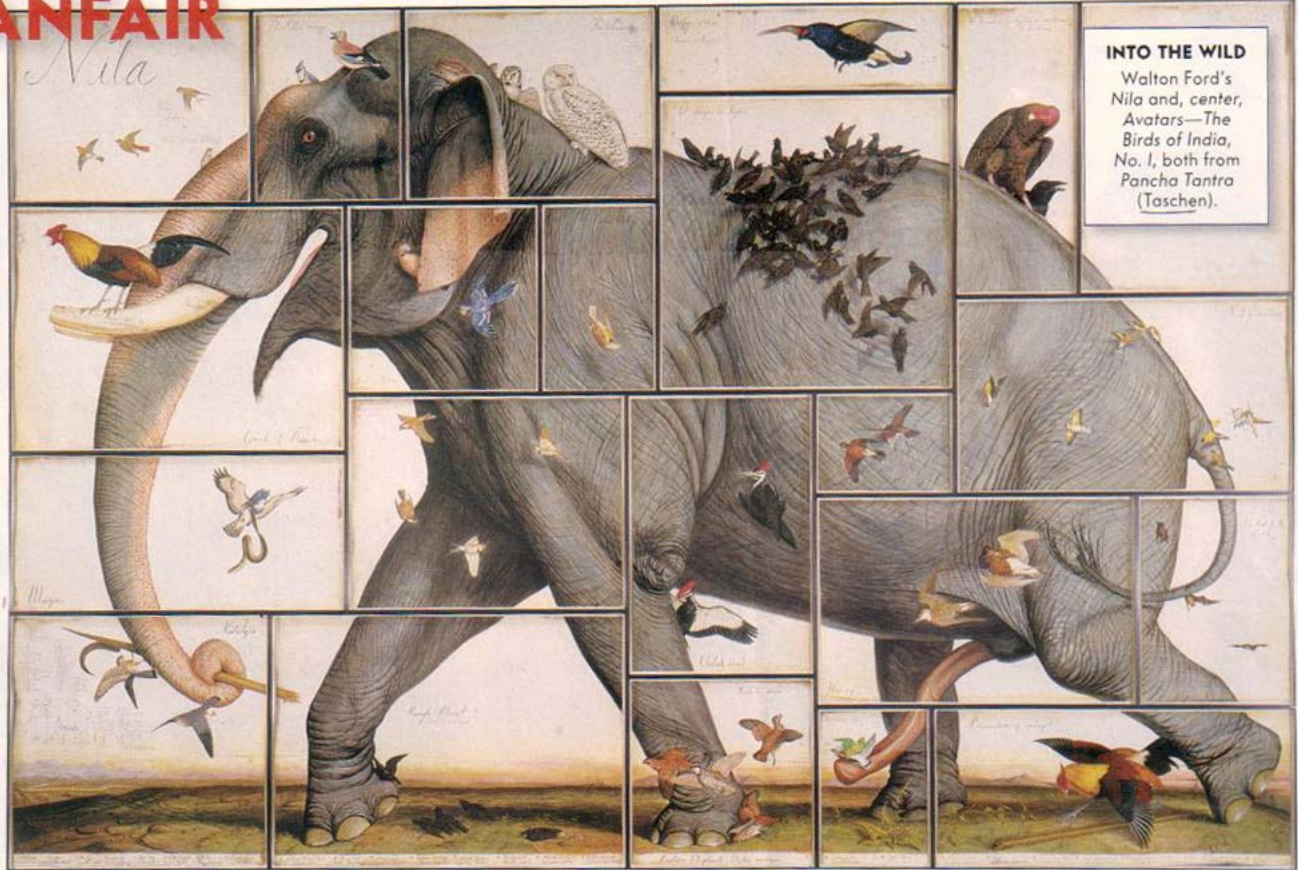


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FANFAIR



INTO THE WILD

Walton Ford's *Nila* and, center, *Avatars—The Birds of India*, No. 1, both from *Pancha Tantra* (Taschen).

Art of Darkness

WALTON FORD'S PROVOCATIVE SYMBOLISM

The matter-of-fact cruelty of the animal kingdom has never seemed more disturbingly beautiful than in the outsize watercolors painted by **Walton Ford**. The pictures collected in *Pancha Tantra*, newly published by Taschen and named for an ancient Indian text of animal fables, brim with predatory violence, much of it humanized. A panther that's escaped from a Swiss zoo prowls in the snow like Frankenstein's monster. A parakeet dies surrounded by



his friends—like Nelson at Trafalgar—as three-masted ships lurk ominously in the bay beyond. A grinning lion strides over Delacroix's corpse. A gorilla clutches the skull of Carl Akeley, the explorer-taxidermist whose dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History, in New York, enthralled Ford as a boy. Ford's art riffs ironically on the colonialist naturalism of men like Akeley, Sir Richard Burton, and John James Audubon. Says Walton, "When I became aware I wanted to paint animals, it seemed a perfect opportunity to use the visual language that went along with the colonial enterprise of collecting animals in the 19th century. It wasn't an intellectual lock for me—it just seemed to fit." —GRAHAM FULLER