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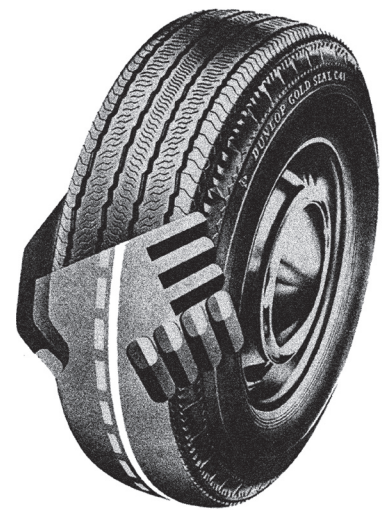

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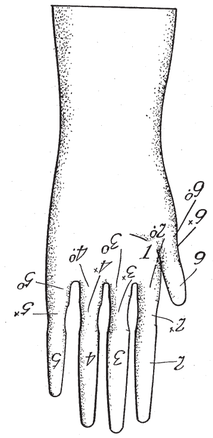

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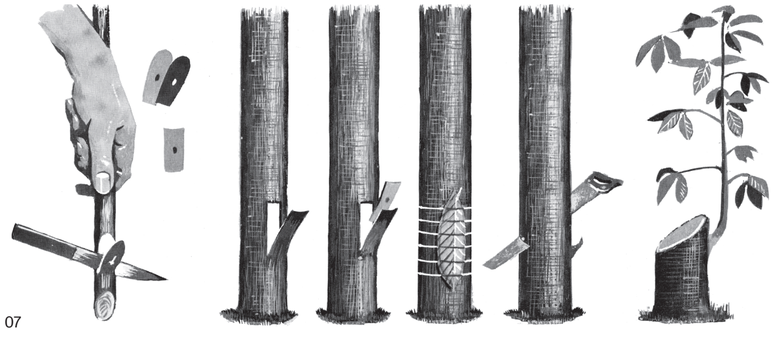

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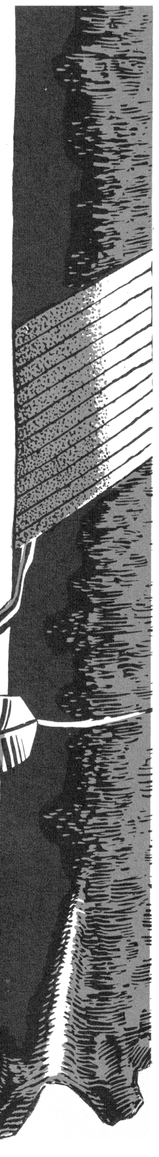

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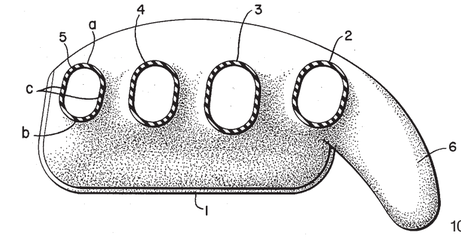
FIG. 3.



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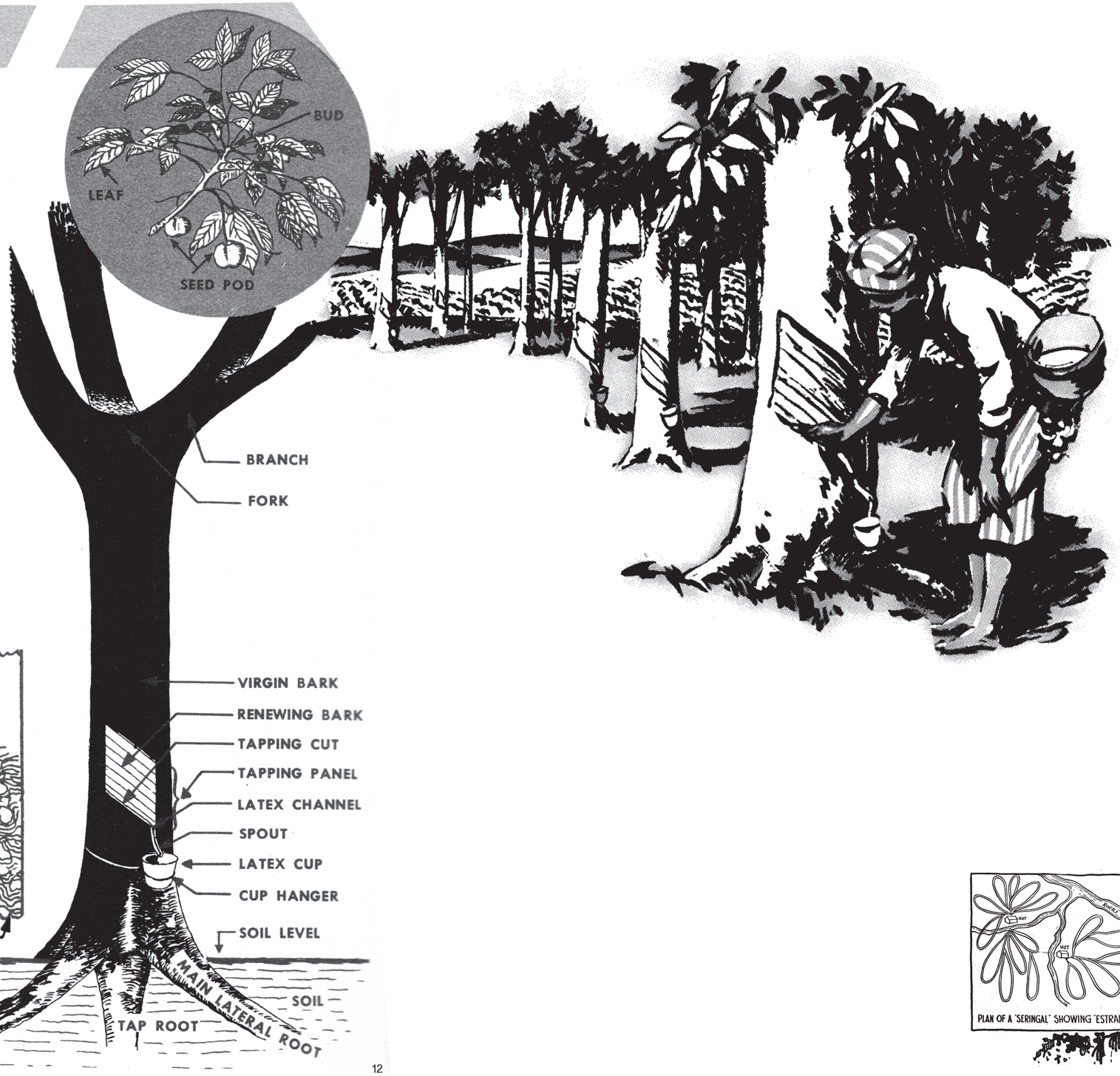

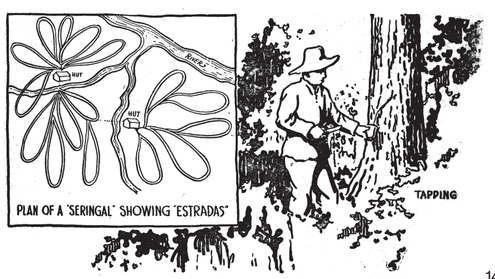

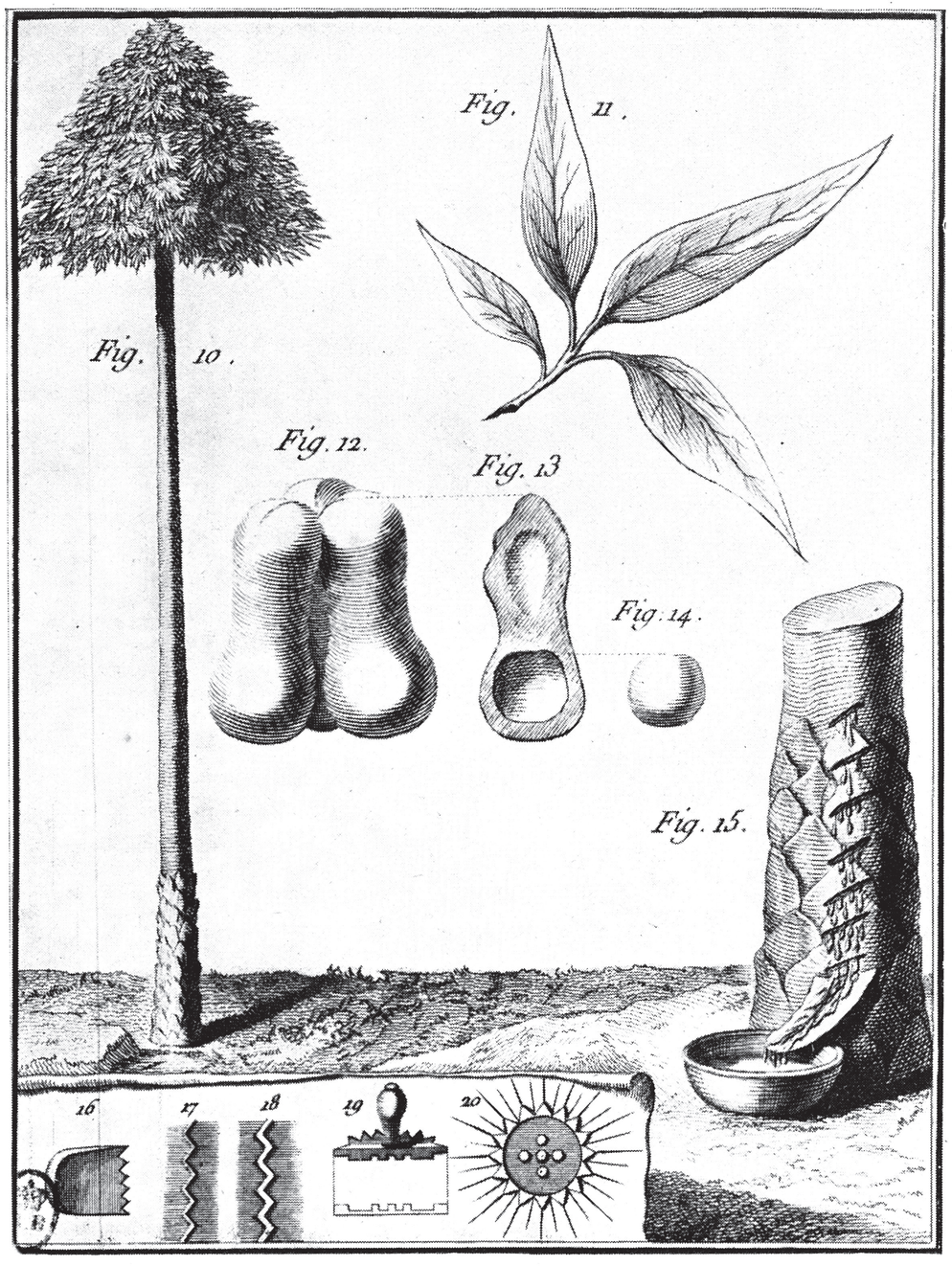

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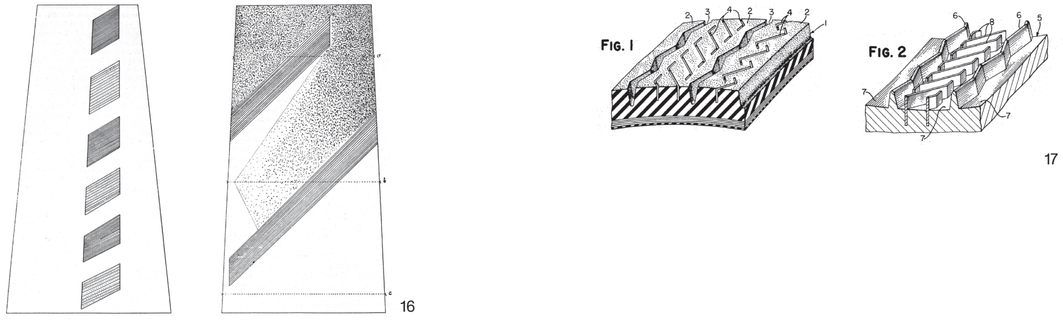


16

17

Sara Garzón

ROUTING RUBBER

There is a pressing need for the recovery of the land that, because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, is recoverable at first only through imagination.

– Edward Said (1994)

The exhibition *ROUTING RUBBER*, displayed at Canal Projects from January 19th to March 30th, 2024, elucidates Ecuadorian artist Adrián Balseca's critical perspectives on the historical and contemporary implications of industrialization projects, particularly those associated with the rubber industry. Over the years, Balseca's practice has delved into the impacts of developmentalist ideologies on the depletion of natural ecosystems and the expropriation of ancestral lands in the pursuit of financial growth.

ROUTING RUBBER challenges prevailing perceptions of the Amazon, presenting it not as an untouched wilderness but as a site of origin for industrial modernity. Drawing on history, anthropology, and visual culture, Balseca's exhibition provides insight into how modern views have legitimized the continued exploitation of Amazonian territories. Through film, archival ephemera such as postcards and pamphlets, and sculptural works, *ROUTING RUBBER* prompts viewers to question the commodification of nature and envision alternative processes of imagination that can help liberate Amazonia from exploitative claims.

In the Super 16mm film *The Skin of Labour* (2016), the artist offers a black-and-white, grainy view of various *Hevea Brasiliensis* —Amazonian rubber trees. The silent, nine-minute film showcases a closeup of a rubber tree with an incision in the bark, releasing a liquid substance. Perceived initially as an aerial view, the liquid's movement is reminiscent of a river flowing downstream. The fibrous texture of the bark resembles river foliage. The shot then shifts to the larger rainforest, revealing individual trees in a close-up perspective. Rays of sunlight penetrate the landscape, and the once flowing river becomes a milky slow sap of latex that bleeds out the tree. The image underscores how the mechanics of industrialization deriving from the rainforest are portrayed to be occurring beneath the surface, as though they are "natural" byproducts of the landscape.

The film's poetic portrayal of rubber tapping, devoid of explicitly visual human labor, prompts contemplation on the equivalence between rubber and tree, and between worker and work. Five latex gloves also hang alongside the perimeter as if receding into the film symbolizing the production of surgical and transportation instruments that pivoted modern industries in the early twentieth century. The evocation of the human hand, however, renders the worker inexistent. The gloves stand in for both producer and product, while the worker—the *cauchero*, *seringueiro*, or *hulero*—becomes subsumed in the logic of a market that renders them invisible, consumed. While we as viewers do not see the labor of tapping, we contend with the skin of the glove as an index of the working body.

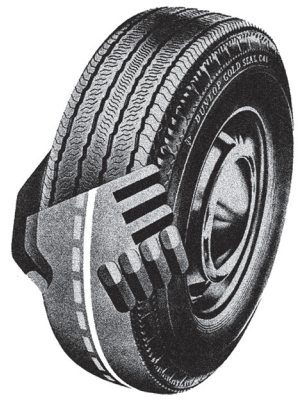
The exhibition's accompanying archive, an unofficial and partial collection of ephemera, links rubber commodities such as gloves and tires with Amazonian *Hevea Brasiliensis*. The archive includes pamphlets, advertisements, manuals, and other materials from The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, The Pan American Union, and the 1939 New York World's Fair. These materials visually connect rubber tapping patterns with industrial growth processes, depicting "nature" as a construct shaped by colonial histories and the modern-industrial gaze. Historic materials like *L'Histoire du Pneu* produced by Goodyear (ca. 1968) and the comic book *The Wonder Book of Rubber* published by B.F. Goodrich Company in 1965, all delineate the technical development of rubber and its application in various industries. These perspectives align with the United States' infrastructural development and the exponential growth of superhighway construction, connecting tapping patterns, highway development, and societal evolution. For instance, a pamphlet from the United States' Rubber Bureau, titled *Natural Rubber and You* (1949), describes tapping methods and the benefits of latex for the American economy.

The story of the scientific study and appropriation of plant knowledge is well documented. Even though rubber has been used by Taino, Aztec, and Amazonian communities since approximately 1650 BCE, the material was appropriated and studied by the likes of the geographer Charles Marie de La Condamine (1701–1774), who together with the botanist François Fresnau (1703–1770), wrote the first reports on the rubber plant and its possible uses. What we can draw from Balseca's archive, however, is the way in which the representations of rubber trees as both species and commodity celebrated the material as magical, or an "object of wonder," contributing to today's contested imaginary of Amazonia as a "fantastical" terrain.

Challenging the trope of the Amazon as a hyper-natural site, *ROUTING RUBBER* provides a view of the environment that is conditioned by the rules of the free market and is materialized in the administration of resources, the domestication of land, and the disciplining of labor. The works in the exhibition also leave traces of exploitative labor, massacres, and other remembrances of a violent modernity.

01
First rubber surgical glove developed by Johns Hopkins Hospital and Goodyear Rubber Company, 1894. The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives, The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.

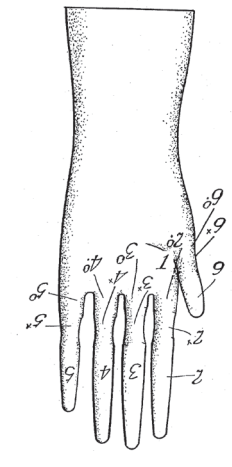
02
The 'BI-HUBER' knife for use with two hands, courtesy of Messrs. David Bridge & Co., Ltd., *The Rubber Industry of the Amazon and How its Supremacy can be Maintained*, J. F. Woodroffe and Harold Hamel Smith, 1915.



03
Dunlop 'Gold Seal' Tyres, advertisement, 1963.

04
"More Natural Rubber Means Better Roads," advertisement, *Natural Rubber Bureau*, 1950.

05
Castilla Tapping Knife, *Rubber: The Pan American Union,* George L. Seeley, 1944.



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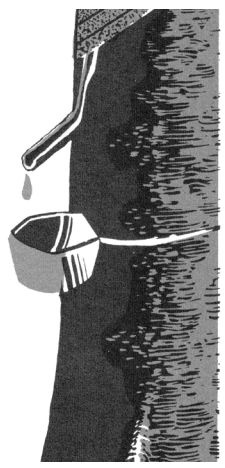
Rubber Glove pattent, J. B. Abler, 1920.

07
"Hevea Brasiliensis Planting Methods," booklet, *Natural Rubber and You*, Natural Rubber Bureau, 1949.



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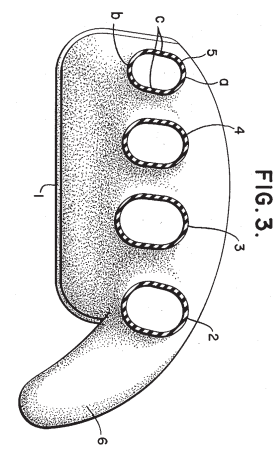
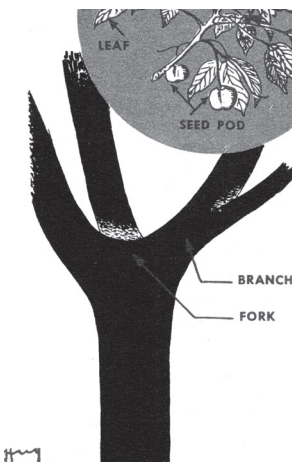
Natural Rubber and You, Natural Rubber Bureau, 1949.

09
"Following The Equator," advertisement, *The Saturday Evening Post*, Pennsylvania Balloons, 1926.



10
Apparatus for Producing Rubber Gloves, patent, A. Angioletti, 1963.

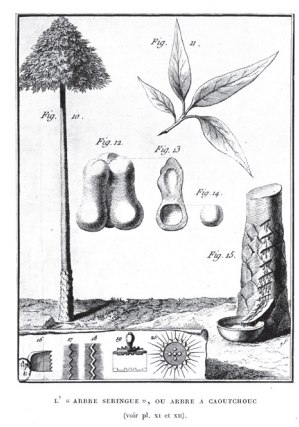
11
"All from the Goodyear family tree," Goodyear advertisement, 1960. The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., 2024.



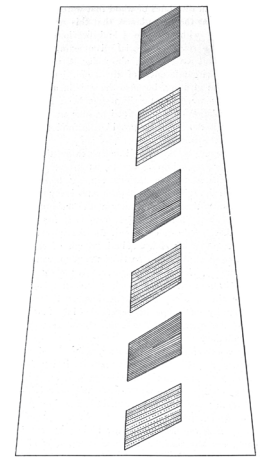
12
Drawing based on original by U.S. Dept. of Commerce, *Natural Rubber and You* booklet, Natural Rubber Bureau, 1949.

13
"US Royal Rubber Tires Production on Rubber Plantation," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1930.

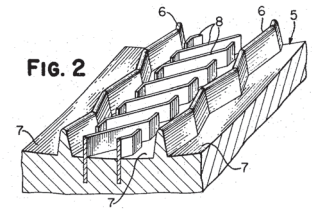
14
"Plan of a 'Seringal' Showing 'Estrada'," *Rubber: A Wonder Story,* United States Rubber Company, Illustration, George Carlson, Jhon Martin, 1919.



15
"L' 'Arbre Seringue', ou Arabe at Cauchcoq," drawing, François Fresneau, 1751.



16
"Tapping diagram I & II," *Physiological Principles for Determining the Value of the Various Rubber Tapping Methods*, F.H. Renton, Hans Fitting, 1909.



17
"Manufacturing Method of Tire Molds on Wood," John D. Petersen, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., 1910-1966.

18
Various advertisements. "Symbol of a Never-Ending Frontier," Goodyear, 1920-1951. Dunlop, 1950. Pennsylvania Balloon Co., 1926.