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Artist Claire Baker: ‘The rain holds you close, physically’

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A journey from Los Angeles to India via New Mexico is part of Claire Baker’s pursuit of nature and the monsoon that shapes her visions in her first solo exhibition in India



(From left) Bloom burst 5, 2024; (right) Floating flower, warm, 2024. Pics Courtesy/Project88; Claire Baker

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If you recognise that momentary hush of sound that precedes the hiss of falling rain during the monsoons in the city, you might understand Claire Baker’s thoughts. The Los Angeles-born artist is currently enjoying the arrival of the rains in our home state. “The season brings vitality to earth. The creatures emerge, and suddenly, there is an explosion of sounds,” the artist explains. She transfers these emotions, sounds and visual experiences to her canvas in the exhibition, Monsoon, Mausam, that opens at Project 88 in Colaba today.



Claire Baker utilises natural pigments in her art



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Baker arrived in the city in 2022, following her partner to India. Before that, she was already chasing the monsoons in the deserts in New Mexico. “I always choose places based on personal relationships,” she shares. Hosted by a friend of the family in the Western Ghats, she created the series that captures the ‘immersive’ nature of Maharashtra’s monsoon over the last few years. “I feel in tune with all of nature, not just the monsoon. Hence, the term Mausam [season/weather]. Connecting with vitality is a fundamental part of the painting experience,” she adds.

Why the monsoon though? The artist is quick to remind us of the slowly fading themes of naturalism in a concretised world. “I have always painted, and wanted to paint from my direct bodily experience of earth. I do not like to use the word landscape though, because it separates us from nature,” Baker says.

This passion defines Baker’s aesthetic that visualises moments of contact between her own senses and nature around her. She recalls a python paying her a visit during one of her painting sessions in the open. “I realised it had reached my boundary of cut grass. But after a moment of holding my gaze, it smoothly and gently returned to the tall grass,” Baker reveals. Such experiences shape her creative approach, she says.





Claire Baker’s art set against the horizon of a desert in New Mexico

This respect also reflects in the materials she utilises as an artist. Using oil paint sticks, she makes colours herself out of natural pigments, some of which are from stones found on location. Baker’s surroundings find their way into her paintings. “My paintings are a way for me to reflect back the creative energy of the earth —the material itself, the land, and my body,” she points out.

As for the rain itself, Baker says it is different in every region. “The monsoon here is more like a river from the sky. The rain holds you close, physically. Whereas in New Mexico, it comes as a curtain across the horizon,” she observes. The lush green and chaos of the season does find affinity in the artist’s nature. “I choose my project based on a personal connection. For now, I shall be in India,” she concludes.

Till August 9; 11 am to 7 pm (Tuesday to Saturday)
At Project 88, BMP Building, NA Sawant Marg, Colaba.

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