



CANVAS

GALLERY

SOPHIA BALAGAMWALA

FROG RAIN

2 - 11 September 2025

Artist statement

“Do you remember when we were small and it used to rain frogs?

Sometimes we would catch them in our lunch boxes at school, but by the time we got home they would have disappeared

They said a crocodile swam all the way from Manghopir to Karachi with the rains one day

We searched and searched but couldn't find him

Do you remember when the lights would go and we would have a beautiful night under the stars ?

Now we just dream of frogs and crocodiles and stars returning”

How do we remember and imagine the natural and urban worlds from our childhoods? What are the names that we gave to the places we visited, the rituals we had, and games we used to play? How do we remember the names and shapes of things and other beings?

Frog Rain presents a multimedia installation, drawings and paintings that explore a simultaneous grieving and joyful remembering of memories and spaces from childhood.

Of Waters, Frogs and Fish:
on Sophia Balagamwala’s ‘Frog Rain’

Sophia Balagamwala’s Frog Rain, the work after which the exhibition is titled, was first made in 2024 as an animated video work. This is the form in which it was shown at the exhibition Manzar: Art and Architecture from Pakistan, 1940s to Today late in 2024 in Doha. Here, at Canvas Gallery in Karachi, it takes a different form: an installation comprised of an audio work, and accompanied by small drawings and foldable mattresses leaning against the walls and laid out in varying forms across the floor. Without the accompanying animation, the work transforms in its evocations and provocations, with the narrator’s voice summoning both a nostalgia, and an urgent signal to the present. While the work was not made keeping Pakistan’s most recent and devastating floods in mind, it is a timely and germane work to encounter within this immediate context.

“Do you remember when we were small and it used to rain frogs?” the narrator asks. “Sometimes we would catch them in our lunchboxes, but by the time we got home, they would have disappeared.”

*We had big rains then and water would come into our house
We would make paper boats sail
We have big rains now too but they are different
The water is darker and angrier or is that us*

The relevance of the latter is plain to see, as is Pakistan’s status as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, even as it is one of those that contribute to it the least. Coupled with consistent lack of planning and management, alongside unchecked development projects that have had no regard for environments, ecologies, drainage systems and safety protocols, each year, the devastating impacts of this combination of factors becomes increasingly visible

But what about the frogs? As someone who was born and grew up in Karachi, I too remember the frogs, and have had conversations in recent years about how rarely one encounters them anymore. They are one of many species of life that seem to have disappeared from the city. However, frogs (often overlooked and easily forgotten), play a crucial role in maintaining healthy ecosystems across the globe and are seen as important bioindicators, i.e. organisms that provide critical insights into the health of an ecosystem. In Karachi, their disappearance, resulting from habitat loss, toxic chemicals (pesticides, fertilizers), capital development projects that impact environmental conditions and ecologies, climate change and global warming (Watts, 2024), is an alarming, yet barely noticed omen.

Balagamwala’s practice consistently draws from historical events, archives, memory, children’s books and fiction, in works that range across the mediums of painting, animation, books and sculptures. Often, these works offer critiques on political and institutional structures, speaking to ideas of power and control. Frog Rain (the exhibition) however, feels different, speaking at once to ideas of childhood and memory, of longing and desire, and of a wistfulness for a simpler time. This nostalgic ache seems to find some solace in the familiar and unchanged forms and materials of children’s swings and slides at Hill Park, which Balagamwala frequented with her father, and where she now visits with her own children. Smaller works, fluidly painted in thin layers, map the benches, trees and bird life in the park. The images are drawn from memories, photographs, and family archives, and we understand that there are stories here that we may not be privy to (Lishby drew a bird for me, 2025).

Elsewhere, we see two small children, sitting inside the form of a fish at the beach. Are these Balagamwala’s own children? Does it matter? As Karachiites, the sand, the water, the sound of the waves, and the constant sea breeze are an integral part of life in the city, and have always been. Trips to the beach are like rituals performed by families and friends, stretching across generations. And yet, the beach too has changed, as has Karachi’s coastline. Development and infrastructural projects deemed necessary for the advancement of this megacity, have devastated its marine ecosystems, even as access to the coast continues to be restricted, further limiting any truly public spaces of rest and recreation available to residents.

In his 1968 essay ‘The Right to the City’, Henri Lefebvre refers to the city as a site of production, change and exchange, and within it of the rights of all urban dwellers to participate in shaping the city that they inhabit. Lefebvre speaks of “[...] the need for security and opening, the need for certainty and adventure, that of organization of work and play, the needs for the predictable and the unpredictable, of similarity and difference, of isolation and encounter, exchange and investments, of independence (even solitude) and communication, of immediate and long-term prospects.” In many ways, the body of work in Frog Rain does the same, even as it asks us to consider the many changes and shifts that have occurred only in the last several decades. While Balagamwala questions “How do we remember the natural and urban worlds from our childhoods?”, the work also clearly signals to the ways in which we imagine and dream our futures, asking us to consider these urgently, deeply and carefully.

Profile

Sophia Balagamwala is a Karachi based artist who explores the interplay between historical events, personal memories, and fiction. Drawing inspiration from archives, histories, and children's books, she constructs narratives that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination. She works across the fields of animation, drawing, sculpture, painting and publications.

Balagamwala runs the Kurachee Reading Room, a collection centred around local artist publications formerly housed at the COMO Museum, Lahore (2021–2022), now at the AAN Ideas LAB (ArtSpace & Museum), Karachi. She is adjunct faculty at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi.

Recent projects include participation in Three Tired Tigers at the Jameel Arts Centre, (2024), MANZAR: Art and Architecture from Pakistan 1940s to Today, National Museum of Qatar (2024), Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennale, (2024 – 2025), the Art South Asia Project (ASAP) Research Grant (2022), and Artist Commission Award at the London, Asia, Art Worlds Conference, Paul Mellon Centre (2021).

Balagamwala holds a BA from the University of Toronto (2010) and an MFA from Cornell University (2014).

Education

2014	Masters of Fine Arts, Cornell University
2010	Bachelors of Arts, University of Toronto

Residencies and Awards

2022	Research Grant, Inventing the Nation, Art South Asia Project (ASAP), UK
2021	Artist Commission Award, London, Asia, Art Worlds Conference, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, UK
2019	Artist Residency, 18th Street Arts Centre, Santa Monica, CA, USA
2018	LADIESFUND Art Prize, Karachi, Pakistan
2014	Baskerville Painting Award, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA

Solo Exhibitions

2025	Frog Rain, Canvas Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
2018	BIG MEN WEAR REALLY BIG SHOES, Sanat Initiative, Karachi, Pakistan
2017	Heroes and Others, Taseer Art Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan
2016	YAY YAH WOH, VM Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
2014	The Moonch and His Poof, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2025	Cat People: Of Artists and Cats, La Galerie CAC, Noisy-le-Sec, France
2025	Voices from an Archived Silence, Transoceanic Exchanges, Studio Kayamani, Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi, Pakistan
2024	MANZAR: Art and Architecture from Pakistan, 1940s to today, National Museum of Qatar, Doha, Qatar
2024	Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennale 2024 - 2025, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2024	Three Tired Tigers, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, `UAE
2024	POWER / PLAY, Twelve Gates Arts, Philadelphia, PA, USA
2024	The Imminence of a Revelation, AAN Gandhara Art Space, Karachi, Pakistan
2024	Legacies of Crossings, Shahnaz Gallery, London, UK
2023	Body Ecologies, Canvas Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
2021	Re-Examine/Retrace, AAN Gandhara Art Space, Karachi, Pakistan
2020	Sagar Theatre on Queens Road, LB02 Collateral event, Plaza Theatre, Lahore, Pakistan
2019	The Jumbo Alteration, Canvas Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
2019	Self Portraits in the Age of Selfie, COMO Museum, Lahore, Pakistan
2018	THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN, Rossi and Rossi, London, UK
2017	Karachi Biennale 2017, Alliance Francais, Karachi, Pakistan
2014	CANT CAN'T, Site 109, New York, NY, USA
2013	Free School, Gary Snyder Project Space, New York, NY, USA

Workshops and Seminars

2021	Presenter, Inter-Archives Conversations #3, Narravatising the Archive, Asia Art Archive India
2020	Presenter, Constructing Personal Archives 2020, Online Open Dialogue Series, Curating for Culture
2018	Presenter, Tate Research Centre: Asia, Critical Perspectives on Art and Education, Habib University, Karachi Pakistan

Curatorial Projects

2019 - Present	Kurachee, Tiny Publication Grant, and Publication Research space at COMO Museum, Lahore, Pakistan
2015 - 18	Lead Curator, National History Museum, Greater Iqbal Park, Lahore, Pakistan

Select Work Experience

2015 - Present	Adjunct Faculty, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi, Pakistan
2011 - 18	Lead Curator, National History Museum, Lahore, Director of Exhibitions and Programs, The Citizens Archive of Pakistan, Karachi, Pakistan
2012 - 14	Teaching Assistant, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA

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