



CANVAS

SOPHIA BALAGAMWALA

GALLERY

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.



Title: A Hike  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 12 x 12 inches



Title: A Million Oysters were Washed Ashore (Diptych)

Year: 2025

Medium: Acrylics and gouache on linen

Size: 10 x 8 inches each



Title: Bench  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 10 x 8 inches



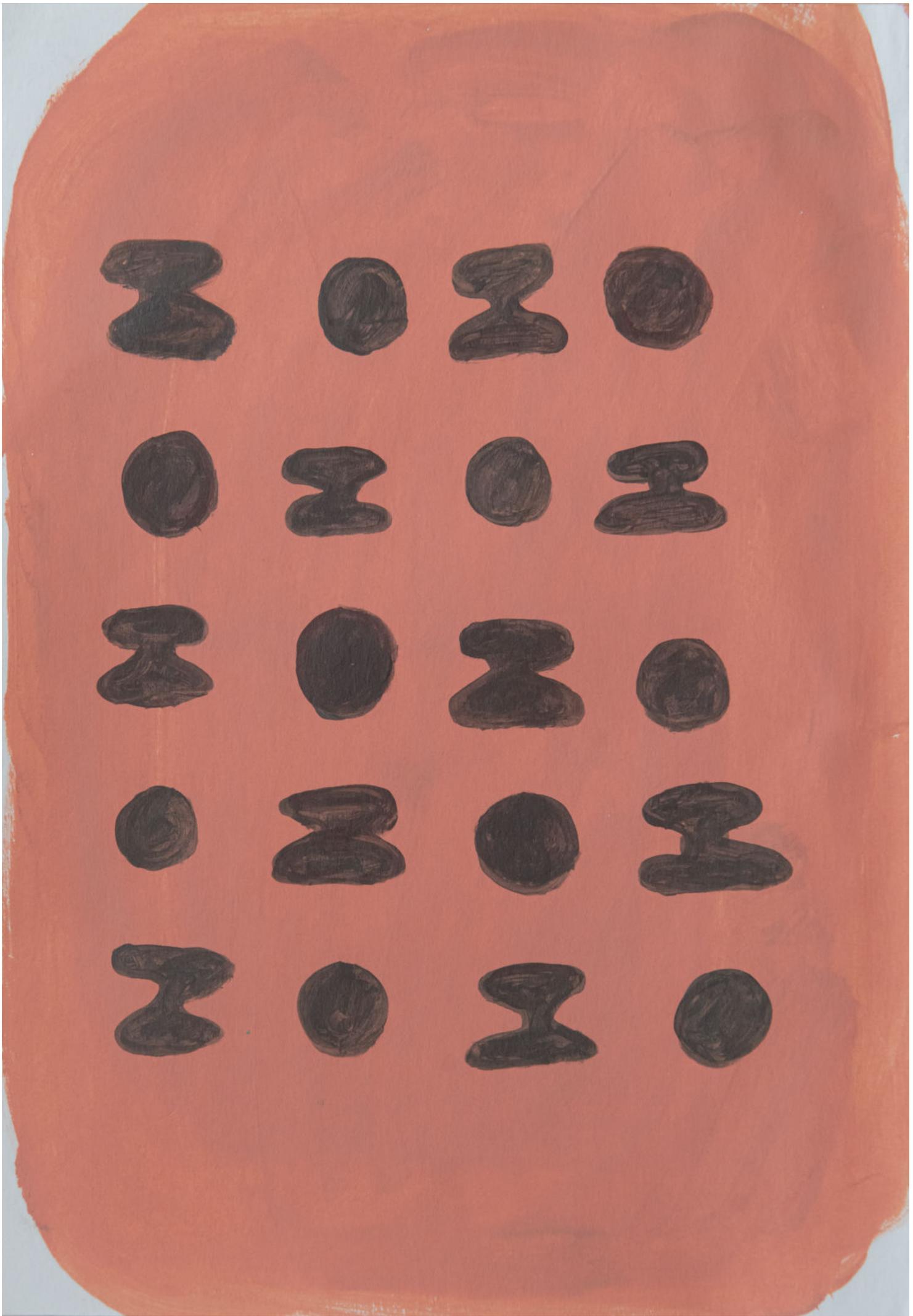
Title: Climber  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 48 x 36 inches



Title: Dotty Slide  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 10 x 10 inches



Title: Fish in the Sand  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 10 x 12 inches



Title: Grill  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 9 x 6 inches



Title: Hill Park  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 15 x 8 inches



Title: Hill Park Ducks  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 9 x 9 inches



Title: Last Day of School

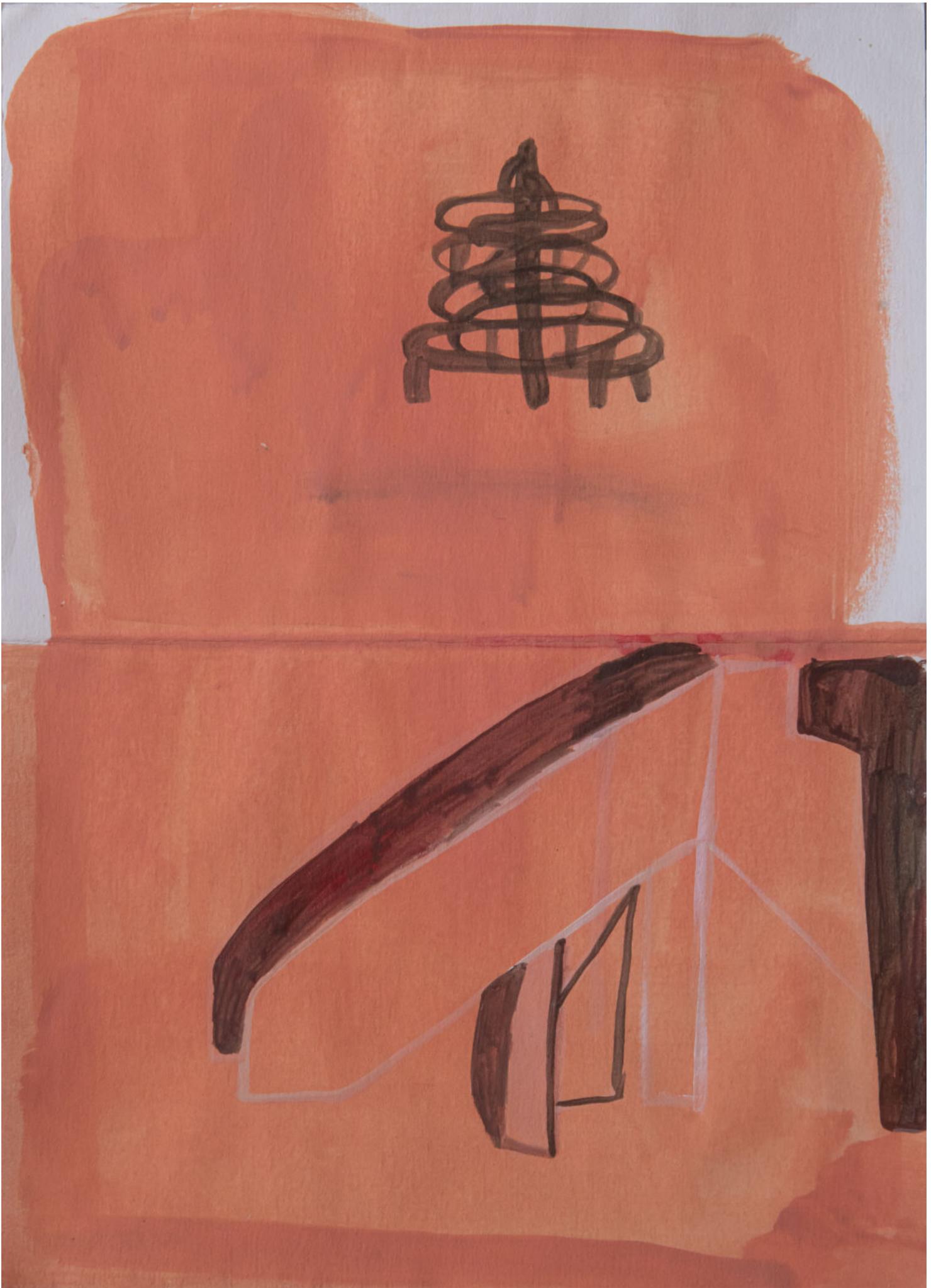
Year: 2025

Medium: Acrylics and oil crayon on linen

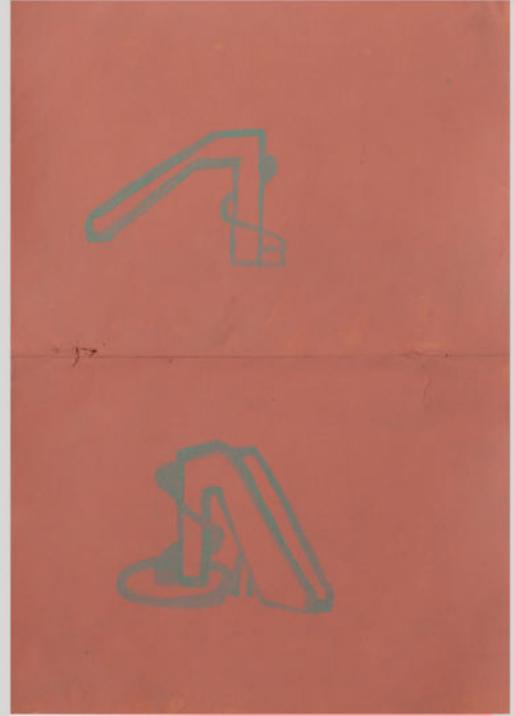
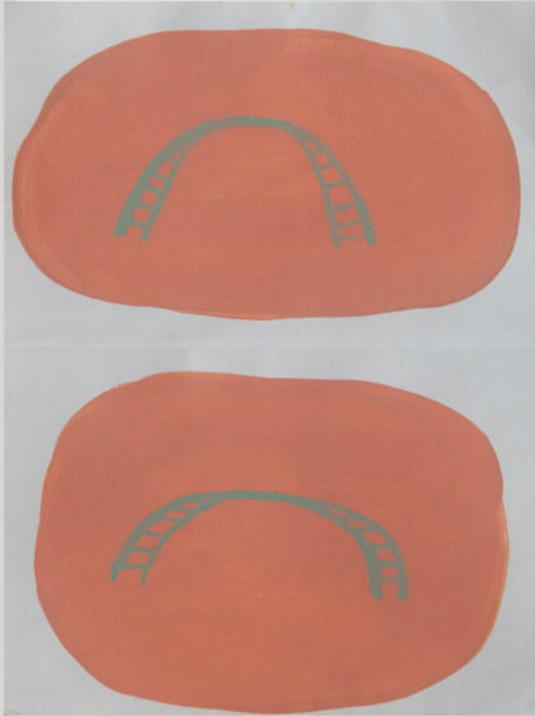
Size: 8 x 8 inches



Title: Lishby Drew a Bird for Me  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 18 x 18 inches



Title: Park Studies I  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on paper  
Size: 12 x 9 inches



Title: Park Studies II: Curly Slides and Climber (Diptych)

Year: 2025

Medium: Acrylics on paper

Size: 8 x 6 inches each

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Title: Park Studies III  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 12 x 9 inches



Title: Sand Man  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 18 x 18 inches



Title: Side of the Small Slide

Year: 2025

Medium: Acrylics and gouache on linen

Size: 6 x 6 inches



Title: Side View of a Climber  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on paper  
Size: 8 x 12 inches



Title: Slide  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 48 x 36 inches



Title: Spotty Slide  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics and gouache on linen  
Size: 10 x 8 inches



Title: Three way Slide  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on linen  
Size: 58 x 72 inches



Title: Tree  
Year: 2025  
Medium: Acrylics on paper  
Size: 9 x 6 inches

## 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, Narrativising 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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