

BAMPFA Presents First US Museum Exhibition of Work by Zeinab Saleh



On View from December 10, 2025 through April 19, 2026

***MATRIX 289 / Zeinab Saleh: Signs of a softer world* Features a Series of New Paintings by London-Based Artist**

(Berkeley, CA) September 22, 2025—In December, the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive will open the first solo museum exhibition in the United States of work by Zeinab Saleh (born 1996, Nairobi; lives and works in London). *MATRIX 289 / Zeinab Saleh: Signs of a softer world* will debut new paintings commissioned on the occasion of the exhibition. These new works showcase the artist’s meditative perspective on the everyday, bringing viewers into a world that is subtle yet strikingly clear. Using a tranquil color palette and techniques derived

from printmaking, Saleh renders atmospheric landscapes and interiors that prioritize slowness and quietude, offering a space of respite amidst a world so often filled with confusion and chaos. The exhibition marks the latest installment in BAMPFA's contemporary art exhibition series MATRIX, an experimental platform for artists to make and show new work.

Saleh approaches painting through material experimentation. She places objects, such as plants and textiles, directly onto the canvas and layers washes of acrylic paint onto them. She then removes the objects to reveal the



impressions they leave behind. Alternating between figuration and abstraction, Saleh's paintings often feature images, objects, or memories drawn from her own life, ranging from animals like cats and swans to domestic items like prayer rugs and wrought iron fences. While this imagery is rooted in her own personal experience, Saleh's paintings invite viewers to contemplate their own relationship to these specific references, finding connection in something that might not immediately seem familiar. Looking at two hands playing the board game carrom in *The Local Game* (2025), for example, one may not immediately recognize the game itself but might still connect to the sense of gathering, or instead puzzle over the thickly painted seashells that have replaced the game pieces.

With her solo exhibition at BAMPFA, Saleh joins nearly three hundred artists who have shown their work in MATRIX over the past five decades, including Gabriel Chaile, Nan Goldin, Alfredo Jaar, Young Joon Kwak, Julie Mehretu, Amol K Patil, Adrian Piper, Martin Puryear, and Cecilia

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Vicuña, among many others. Her exhibition advances the MATRIX program's renewed focus on showcasing previously unseen work by artists who are expanding the horizons of contemporary art. Saleh's US museum debut in the MATRIX program signals an important inflection point in the artist's career, coming shortly after acclaimed solo presentations at Tate Britain in 2024 and Pond Society, Shanghai earlier this year.

In conjunction with the opening of *MATRIX 289 / Zeinab Saleh: Signs of a softer world*, Saleh will visit BAMPFA for an Artist's Conversation on Wednesday, December 10 at 5:30 PM, where she will be joined by Senior Curator Anthony Graham for a discussion of her new work and her creative process. The conversation will be free with museum admission; for more information, visit bampfa.org.

"Through her paintings, Zeinab Saleh conveys a surprising sense of intimacy and relatability without depicting any singular narrative," said Graham, who curated the exhibition. "Through her innovative approach to painting, Saleh renders ethereal scenes that feel at once familiar and fantastic."

About Zeinab Saleh

Zeinab Saleh (b. 1996) was born in Nairobi and moved to London with her family at a young age. Saleh received her BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, in 2019. In 2018, she was awarded the Slade's Prankerd-Jones Memorial Prize. In 2017, she cofounded the collective and creative agency Muslim Sisterhood. Saleh lives and works in London.

Recent solo exhibitions of Saleh's work include *Earth remembers everything* at Pond Society, Shanghai (2025); *Art Now: Zeinab Saleh*, Tate Britain, London (2024); *j~o~y r~i~d~e*, Champe Lacombe, Biarritz, France (2023); *Softest place (on earth) [extended mix]*, Château Shatto, Los Angeles (2022); and *Softest place (on earth)*, Camden Art Centre, London (2021). Saleh's work has been featured in group exhibitions at museums and institutions such as *A Lover's Discourse*,

Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2023); *Redress*, University College London Art Museum (2018); and *Widening the Gaze: Curated by Zeinab Saleh*, Slade Research Centre, London (2018).

Her work is held in permanent collections worldwide, including Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA, Bordeaux; Pitzer College Art Galleries, Claremont, California; Start Museum, Shanghai; The Perimeter, London; and University Galleries, University of San Diego.

About BAMPFA

Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) ignites cultural change for a more inclusive and artistic world. BAMPFA has been uniquely dedicated to art and film since 1970, with international programming that is locally connected and globally relevant. It holds more than 25,000 artworks and 18,000 films and videos in its collection, with particular strengths in modern and contemporary art and historical Chinese painting, as well as the world's largest collection of African American quilts. As part of the University of California, Berkeley, BAMPFA is committed to artistic diversity through its robust slate of art exhibitions, film screenings, artist talks, live performances, and educational programs that shed new light on the art of the past and connect our audiences with leading filmmakers and artists of our time. BAMPFA sits on the edge of campus and downtown Berkeley, where it welcomes visitors from across and beyond the Bay Area in a repurposed building designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

Image credits

1. Zeinab Saleh, *Fragments of prayer*, 2025. Acrylic on linen, 50 x 60 in. (127 x 152 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Chateau Shatto.
2. Zeinab Saleh, *Soft insistence*, 2025. Acrylic on linen, 35 ½ x 5 ⅞ in. (90 x 60 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

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