

FIRELEI BÁEZ: SUEÑO DE LA MADRUGADA (A MIDNIGHT'S DREAM)

28 June – 8 September 2024

MAIN GALLERY AND FIRE STATION
GALLERIES

LARGE PRINT EXHIBITION GUIDE



Introduction

Sueño de la Madrugada (A Midnight's Dream) is Firelei Báez's first solo exhibition in the UK.

Known for her visually striking and exuberant paintings, she also makes drawings, installations, and sculptures. Through extensive research and critical engagement with archives, Báez delves into the rich and complex legacies of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. By resisting binaries and exploring lesser known histories, she challenges the distorted narratives of colonial powers. In her multi-layered creations, myths and folklore become tools of cultural and spiritual resistance, enabling Báez to create work that encompasses her experiences and invites viewers to reflect on their own.

“At its core, the power of art lies in its ability to dismantle barriers and help you connect. There’s something radical about forging connections and breaking through the confines of narrow identities or isolated environments. Sometimes, our attachments or affiliations can be so ingrained that they blind us to other perspectives or realities. Art can open our eyes to new possibilities and understandings”

– Firelei Báez

Main Gallery

In the main gallery, Báez draws on her experiences of climate change and migration to create an immersive installation. The azure canopy overhead, reminiscent of hurricane tarpaulins, signifies a troubled relationship between refuge and calamity. Light filters through the fabric, evoking the dappled sunlight below forest canopies, and depths of the ocean. Inside this atmospheric environment, Báez's large-scale aluminium silhouettes of Ciguapas, figures from Dominican folklore, are both foreboding and elusive. Ciguapas appear throughout the exhibition but are not confined to a single form. As in the myth, they evade straightforward interpretation. Two key traits

persist: their backwards-facing feet, rendering them untraceable, and their flowing, lustrous mane. Recalling childhood stories, Báez envisions Ciguapas as fluid in gender, embodying diverse identities. By painting these mythical creatures, Báez prompts viewers to reconsider what it means to be human and to imagine freedom from earthly constraints.

Fire Station

At the Fire Station, Báez's works move fluidly between abstraction and figuration. A series of floor-to ceiling abstract paintings envelops the first gallery, immersing visitors in a vibrant, dynamic environment drenched with colour and transitioning from day to night.

In the second gallery, Báez has transformed old book pages by layering figurative elements, symbolic imagery, and abstract gestures, turning them into vessels for alternative interpretations and multi authored histories. Each page, when viewed individually, invites intimacy, presenting what seems to be a single picture. Viewers gain a sense of multiple narratives as they move from examining the miniature details to observing the broader constellation. The paintings of Ciguapas reappear through colour-drenched silhouettes upstairs. Their exuberant, rippled surfaces hint at their expansive and unknowable inner worlds. Colonial powers have often tried to categorise and explain “the Other,” creating fixed and reductive narratives. In Báez’s works, ambiguity

becomes a form of agency and resistance. By refusing to be constrained by external presumptions or expectations, this agency can also help us transform the future. Sueño de la Madrugada (A Midnight's Dream) creates a journey through liminal spaces where ecology, power dynamics, and resistance intersect. Viewers are challenged to contemplate dual geographies, conflicting realities, and the contradictions inherent in seeking refuge amidst calamity.

“When someone hears a story about Ciguapas from an outsider’s perspective, they might wonder about the purpose of such myths. After all, stories don’t directly provide food or actual solutions to real-world problems. But humans tend to do extraordinary things when they believe others have done them before. So, a story serves as a pathway for achieving something beyond the ordinary, inspiring action and resilience.”

– Firelei Báez

About Firelei Báez

Firelei Báez (b. 1981, Dominican Republic, lives in New York, USA) received an MFA from Hunter College, a BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art, and studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. In 2024, Báez's first major US survey exhibition, curated by Eva Respini, opened at the ICA Boston. Her work has been presented in many significant international exhibitions, including the inaugural installation of the ICA Watershed, Boston (2021) and The Milk of Dreams at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022), curated by Cecilia Alemani. Recent solo presentations of Báez's work include exhibitions at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek; Witte de With Center

for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; and Pérez Art Museum Miami.

Public Programming

Firelei Báez in conversation with Alvaro

Barrington

Fri 28 Jun, 6–8pm

£10 / £5

Main Gallery

Join us for a conversation between artists Firelei Báez and Alvaro Barrington, chaired by Felix Choong and Makella Ama.

Somatic Movement Workshop led by Sia Gbamo

Sun 21 Jul, 9am–11am

£10 / £5

Main Gallery

An interactive workshop encouraging participants to slow down and consider the body as a mutating ecosystem in connection to the sounds and themes of the exhibition.

Film Night with Brixton Community Cinema

Wed 31 Jul, 5–9pm

£10 / £5

Main Gallery

An evening of films programmed by Brixton Community Cinema exploring spirituality and ecology. The screening will be followed by a sharing circle and vegan food, catered by Garden of Afruika. The programme will also include a 'Take Away' produced by Em-Dash.

Nature Walk with Misery

Sat 10 Aug, 5–6pm

Free

Meeting point: SLG. Local parks and green spaces in Peckham and Camberwell An afternoon nature walk around local parks, gardens and green spaces, led by Misery; a sober mental health collective for QTIBPOC.

Misery × SLG: Gallery Takeover

Sat 10 Aug, 6–8:30 pm

£10 / £5

Main Gallery

An evening of board games in the Main Gallery which will be transformed into a space of immersive and relaxed escapism.

Curators' Tour

Wed 10 Jul, 24 Jul, 7 Aug

6:30–7:30pm

Free

Main Gallery and Fire Station

Join us for a curator-led tour of the exhibition.

About New Curators

New Curators offers aspiring curators from lower socioeconomic backgrounds a paid, 12-month intensive curatorial training from its base at the SLG. This unique programme is designed to equip the next generation of curators with the knowledge, practical skills, networks, and confidence needed to thrive in the contemporary art world and transform it from within. The programme comprises academic seminars, skills training sessions, extensive networking opportunities, coaching and mentorship, and practical experience working collaboratively on a major exhibition.

Sueño de la Madrugada (A Midnight's Dream) is curated by the inaugural cohort of New Curators fellows: Carol Bedoy (Mexico/USA), Courtney Brown (USA), Felix Choong (UK), Lemeeze Davids (South Africa), Rosie Fitter (UK), Lucia Jurikova (Slovakia), Aditi Kapoor (India), Makella Ama Ketedzi (Ghana/UK), Rey Londres (USA/Cuba), Nikita Sena (UK/Ghana) and Amandine Vabre Chau (Hong Kong/France).