The New Indian Express
April 5, 2025

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Heart to Art Conversations

Mumbai artist Laila Khan Furniturewalla paints a tribute to her parents



Laila Khan Furniturewall

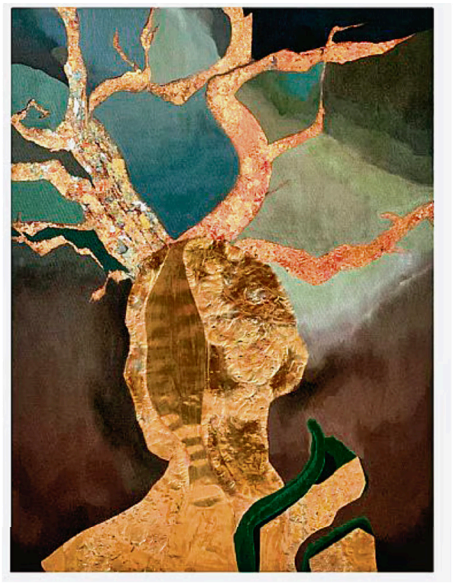
Shilpi Madan

Updated on: 04 May 2025, 6:00 am · 3 min read

Her paintings are visual poetry, knuckled with raw emotions. In her solo exhibition, Untamed Heart, showing after a gap of 18 years, in Mumbai, artist Laila Khan Furniturewalla dedicates her artworks to her parents, Sundri and actor-filmmaker Feroz Khan. "Some works have been in the making for years, while others emerged more recently, but all of them come from the same space of honesty and exploration. This exhibition is deeply personal and emotive," she says. Why call it Untamed Heart? "Through this collection, I wanted my heart to speak in its purest form," she smiles.

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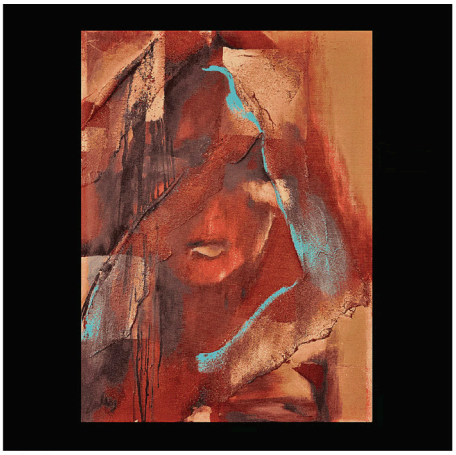
Slivers of burnished gold, a hushed collusion of reflective materials and expressions of the tuskered god run through the collection of 30 artworks. "Gold has always carried a sense of divinity and transcendence and naturally became part of my work due to its deep-rooted significance in religious and spiritual art," she says. Across cultures and traditions from Hindu and Buddhist temples, Mughal miniatures, Byzantine mosaics, and Renaissance and Baroque paintings, gold symbolises prosperity, divinity, and enlightenment. In India, gold is observed with immense sanctity across all religions, exuding an aura of spirituality. It is this profound symbolism that drew her towards weaving gold into her art.



Wish You Were Here

An alumnus of Slade School of Fine Art, and Central Saint Martins, in England, Laila began sculpting on canvas with sand in the 1990s, and has made the technique progress into her application of gold leaf, copper, pigment, acrylic into abstract sculptural compositions in this collection. "In a world governed by patterns, Ganesha emerges in my work not as an idol but as an evolving presence, an ancient force evoking a nurturing yet powerful energy reinforcing the idea of Gauri as the feminine principle within Ganesha representing Shakti," she says.

Wish You Were Here is "an extremely personal piece" as it reflects the loss of a loved one for Laila, and she brings in the complexities of coping with emotions and journeying through loss. Gauri 1 forms the pivot of her experiences across the world where she has seen foreigners—people outside of Indian culture—drawn to Ganesha. "In a world governed by patterns, Ganesha appears in my work not just as an idol but as a presence, an ancient force evoking powerful energy. Through Gauri 1, I wanted to explore the feminine principle within Ganesha, representing Shakti," she says.



Maya's Veil

"In a world dominated by digital tools, I wanted to emphasise the irreplaceable quality of handmade work. There is something profoundly interactive and tactile about art that is created by hand something digital mediums can never fully replicate," says Laila, for whom painting has always been a sanctuary. "Both my parents have shaped my artistic journey. This exhibition is my way of honouring them and expressing my gratitude. It's a tribute to everything they've passed down to me—not just their artistry, but their passion, their discipline, and their belief in staying true to yourself," says Laila, as she gears up for her solo show in Delhi.