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LIFE + CULTURE

Laila Khan Furniturewalla: Digital Art Can Produce Anything, But What The Human Hand Creates Is Unique

The artist—who's back after 18 years with her show 'Untamed Heart'—gets candid on the unfiltered expression on her canvas, her well-known parents and taking her creativity to fashion.

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Artist Laila Khan Furniturewalla with her artwork 'UNTAMED HEART' - titled on the theme of her new solo show

Art is life's blood, coursing through an artist's day (and night) even when they are not in the moment of creating anything on canvas. For Laila Khan Furniturewalla—who has trained at the Slade School of Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in London—it moves that very way, all though her daily work, setting up businesses, her travels and quiet moments. So, when she's back with a show after 18 years, you realise art never really moved afar from her, as Laila recounts how it fuels her energy and thought.

In her new outing, she seamlessly integrates traditional materials of the earth like sand, gold leaf, copper, pigment and acrylic into modern abstract compositions, dipping into spirituality while standing at the intersection of tradition and innovation.

Over a candid chat before her show that starts in Mumbai tomorrow, she tells all about what 'Untamed Heart' is all about, the emotion and artistic fervour of her famous parents and more.

A Brush With Laila

ELLE: You are back as an artist in the public sphere after a hiatus of 18 years. A long break, deliberately taken?



LKF: The 18-year gap for my solo show was not intentional. I think life happened, and we make choices based on our nature. I got involved with my husband's business, Furniturewalla, which is a luxury furniture, lighting, art and home decor brand, that we reinvented together. I was deeply engaged with that, travelling all over the world with him. We were also building homes and raising a family, so the years just went by. But in life, I believe things happen when they are meant to. I never lost my connection with art; I was always painting whenever I could. My last show was in New York in 2012, it was a group exhibition of international artists in an important gallery in Chelsea. I have participated in group shows, but I had to be ready to present a cohesive body of work. Now, the time has finally presented itself.

My son was very young, and these were his formative years. I was waiting for him to become more independent before immersing myself fully in art, as it is an incredibly demanding and time-consuming process.

ELLE: 'Untamed Heart' is said to be a deeply solo show. Please tell us more.

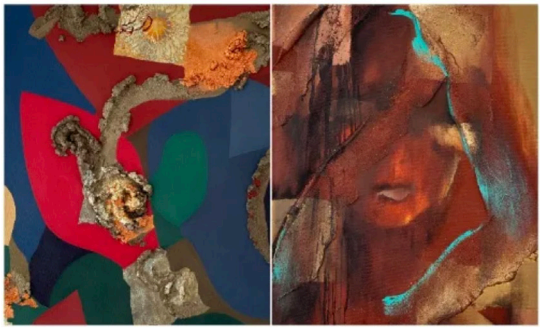


Artist Laila Khan Furniturewalla with her artwork 'Hello From The Other Side'

The paintings in my show 'UNTAMED HEART' were created in a very quiet and personal way. I never exhibited them before; they were made purely for myself because the process was necessary for me.

It is thus a celebration of unfiltered expression. It reflects my decision to break free from expectations, boundaries, or any limitations I might have placed on myself. I wanted to channel pure energy into this work. I draw deep inspiration from nature, and I believe art has the power to transcend materiality to express truth, whether through beauty or even ugliness, depending on what one chooses to project.

ELLE: It's an interesting choice of materials in the new show. How did it add to your canvas?



metal leaf, and acrylic. I transitioned from oil paints to acrylics over time. I hadn't used sand for many years, but I incorporated it in my first solo show, and now it has found its way back into my work. I love the tactile interaction that three-dimensional art allows. While digital art can produce almost anything today, what the human hand can create remains unique and irreplaceable. I use a lot of reflective materials in my work, gold leaf, metallic pigments, and gilding.

Gold, in particular, holds deep spiritual significance. It is revered in Hindu and Buddhist temples, as well as in Tanjore and Renaissance art. In my paintings, Lord Ganesha often emerges as an evolving presence, and gold serves as an homage to him.

ELLE: Should art reflect emotion and does yours do that?



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Art is a pure form of expression. It comes from a realm that we don't fully understand. As an artist, you have to be completely honest, because that truth gets expressed through the work. If it's not authentic, people can sense it, and the connection will be fleeting.

The earth is sacred to me and I seek to convey something meaningful through my paintings. The sky, the sea, the horizon, all of these elements affect me deeply. I need to feel the heartbeat of a piece; that emotional depth is what gives it life. 'UNTAMED HEART' is a celebration of raw emotion and unfiltered expression. It is my heart speaking in its purest form.

> *My mother would often design for my father's (late veteran actor Feroz Khan) movies, specifically for the actresses. All the looks in Qurbani and Dharmatma were created by her. My father relied on her for the overall visual aesthetic.*

ELLE: How did your parents' artistic influence shape your journey to date?

LKF: Both my parents are extremely artistic, ahead of their time, and very modern. They love art, collecting, and building beautiful homes. My father was a big critic of my work, he would never flatter me unnecessarily. He critiqued my work as if I were not his daughter, which is what I expected. He would only ask for the pieces he genuinely liked; he wouldn't display my work in the house just for the sake of it. It was only when he saw me retail and sell my artworks that he acknowledged my path as an artist. That's when he agreed to support me in studying art and funded my education at Slade School of Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in London.

My mother played a crucial role in shaping me as an artist. She instilled confidence in me when she recognised my talent. She told me, "You are going to be an artist, and that's what you're meant to do." She saw that in me even before I did. I believe it's so important for parents to encourage and nurture their children's potential. My parents truly embodied this belief, and I am deeply grateful for their support.

ELLE: In fact, your mum was the designer for your father's (Feroz Khan) film, *Qurbani*. Do share more about her artistic leaning

LKF: Yes. My mother (Sundri Khan) is a garment fashion designer, and she would often design for my father's movies, specifically for the actresses. All the looks in *Qurbani* and *Dharmatma* were created by her. My father relied on her for the overall visual aesthetic. At home, my parents started collecting art very early, so we have a fascinating collection. They had a very modern aesthetic, and that reflects in our home. Our farmhouse in Bangalore, for instance, was designed in the 1980s, yet it still looks relevant today. I believe that is a great benchmark for those who appreciate a truly contemporary aesthetic.

ELLE: Do your travels center around art as well? If so, which are the places that you've felt most at home in?

LKF: They do; I love visiting galleries across the world! There are so many beautiful galleries and some of those I truly admire are the Musée Rodin and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the Prado in Madrid, and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Of course, cities like Paris feel like museums in themselves.

What I find most fascinating is walking through European cities and unexpectedly discovering hidden treasures in small, lesser-known galleries. To me, that feels like a revelation, it's an experience I deeply enjoy. I also remember traveling through Italy once, specifically searching for certain sculptures by Bernini. Many of them were housed in chapels and churches, not necessarily listed on tourist maps, and finding them was an incredibly rewarding experience.

ELLE: Have you ever thought of moving your artistic flair to fashion, creating say, fluid design on garments?

LKF: Yes, I have thought about it. However, it would need to be executed in the right way. An artist pours their soul, contemplation, and heart into their work. If it can be translated onto fabric in a way that makes it accessible to more people, without losing its artistic essence then it is a wonderful idea. But it must be done with great care and aesthetic integrity.

ELLE: We know well Laila the artist and painter. But any other hobbies you have or always wanted to take up?

LKF: Yes, I am very passionate about collecting beautiful things, especially for interior design. My husband and I travel extensively, and we love curating special pieces for our home. I also love music, and I have a deep interest in learning Urdu. It is a language that is unfortunately fading in India, and I would love to explore it more deeply.

ELLE: What's coming up next?

LKF: I'm looking forward to traveling amidst nature, that's where I truly connect and hear the heartbeat I mentioned earlier. I hope this experience will bring something new to my next series. For now, I am painting full-time, and I'm excited to continue this journey.