

Press Release

Firelei Báez. Feet squelching on wet grass, nourished by uncertainty

12 May – 31 July 2026

Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street



New York...On the heels of two major solo museum exhibitions in 2025, Firelei Báez will unveil an ambitious, enveloping constellation of radiant new paintings and works on paper, along with new large-scale bronze sculptures, in her first New York exhibition with Hauser & Wirth. Across two floors of the gallery's 22nd Street location, Báez extends her ongoing engagement with colonial legacies and the natural, spiritual and cosmic reverberations of the African diaspora. A storyteller and world maker, Báez works within the tradition of history painting while quietly undoing the very conventions through which histories are fixed and made legible. In this presentation, she subtly shifts her focus away from the discernible, if chimerical, figures that occupy her previous bodies of work to achieve a more atmospheric sensibility, one that invites a broader, deeper understanding of how bodies and nature shape our experience of being in the world.

A highlight of the exhibition is 'View of Nature' (2026), an eight-panel painting stretching across the entire back wall of the gallery's first floor. Based upon John Emslie's 1852 engraving similarly titled, this work traces gradations of climate and geography from the equator to the Arctic Circle—a visual palimpsest that permits its taxonomic structure to flicker through to the surface.



Fragments of text, diagrams and cartographic markings emerge and dissolve within richly layered passages of foliage and light. Central to the work's visual and emotional impact is the artist's technique of pouring the paint in a liquid state that pools, disperses and coalesces into landscapes of shifting forms and auras. Moving across the panels from left to right, Báez's palette transitions from warm tropical tones into icy whites and blues, culminating in an atmosphere of frozen terrain. Whereas the original document rendered the natural world as a system to be measured, Báez's work conjures a changeable field where intuition and embodied knowledge take precedence over applied classification.

Nearby, two towering bronze sculptures of ciguapas—female tricksters of Dominican folklore that recur across Báez's oeuvre—command the space. Equal parts woman, plant and animal, these powerful shape-shifters are rendered here as both fully embodied and in flux. Taking the hybridity of her mythical references as cue, Báez has adorned one of them with plumes of real feathers and another with sculpted foliage, amplifying their mutability. They kneel, double and coil, bound by thick, rope-like braids that can be read simultaneously as hair, viscera or vegetal growth. The effect is one of accumulation and strain—of tension between heaven and earth, between the weight of history and the possibility of being freed from it.

On the second floor, a new series of monumental works on paper shifts the exhibition from the palpably terrestrial toward a more ethereal frequency. Luminous fields of color, in which pigments radiate and crystallize across the surface, are steered by gravity, time and the physical limitations of the artist's reach. The forms visible in these works resist immediate legibility, dispersing across registers that are at once cellular—recalling the intricate anatomy of flora—and as cosmically vast as the formations of interstellar space. Occupying a more intimate and placid space in the gallery's building, they demand a slower reading and direct our attention to the limits of human perception, where recognition falters and form is registered more through sensation than through sight alone.

About the artist

Báez received an MFA from Hunter College, a BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art, and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Since 2024, Báez has been the subject of a major U.S. survey, organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Des Moines Art Center, before traveling to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, where it remains on view through May 2026. Her work has been featured in major international exhibitions, including 'The Milk of Dreams' at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022), curated by Cecilia Alemani, and the inaugural installation of the ICA Watershed in Boston (2021). Recent solo exhibitions have been held at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk; Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art), Rotterdam; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; and Pérez Art Museum Miami.

Báez has participated in numerous group exhibitions at institutions including the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Cleveland Museum of Art; the Baltimore Museum of Art; and the Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai. She is the recipient of several major awards, including the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts (2020), the Artes Mundi Prize (2021), the Philip Guston Rome Prize (2021), and the Cooper Union President's Citation (2022). Her work is held in prominent public and private collections worldwide, including the Baltimore Museum of Art; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; Dallas Museum of Art; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo; Pérez Art Museum Miami; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Tate, London; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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Caption and courtesy information

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View of Nature (detail)

2026

Oil on linen

261.6 x 191.5 x 3.8 cm / 103 x 75 3/8 x 1 1/2 in per panel

Untitled

2026

Acrylic and pastel on Evelon paper

195.6 x 326.1 cm / 77 x 128 3/8 in