

# A TIME TO PAUSE

Contributed by  
**Tara Sabarwal** to

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION ROOM**  
BY THE KALA CHAUPAL TRUST

Tara Sabharwal is an Indian-born, US-based painter, printmaker and curator. Known for her colorful, subtly layered paintings, Sabharwal has had 42 solo shows in the UK, US, India, among others. She has received several awards, including the Joan Mitchell CALL (Creating a Living Legacy), The British Council Scholarship, and the Gottlieb Foundation awards. Her work is in the collection of The British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Peabody Essex Museum among others.



A special  
mid week  
feature

Pic.courtesy Tara Sabarwal

**“It has been two weeks since my recovery from a nasty viral pneumonia (untested) that lasted more than five weeks.”**

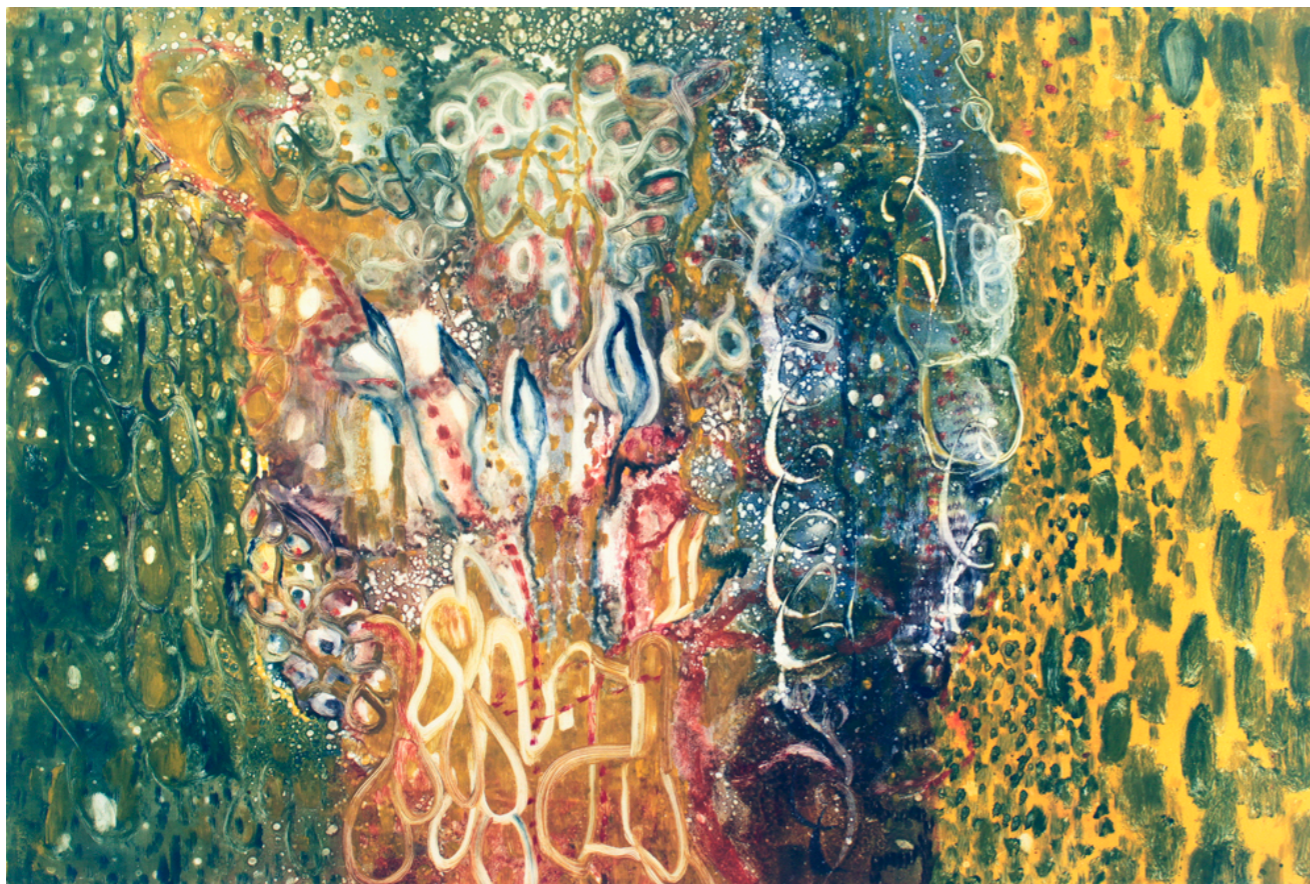
I am in New York City, safe in my apartment with my son, on our 7<sup>th</sup> week of lockdown.

It has been two weeks since my recovery from a nasty viral pneumonia (untested) that lasted more than five weeks. Luckily, the nightmare is over now and I have begun work. Days go fast, I follow the news, journal random thoughts and fears, do yoga, chores, meditate, check in on friends... while, all the time, my unconscious mind is absorbing the emotional weight and uncertainty of this pandemic. I remind myself to take one day at a time.

**We are in a place without answers and plans.**

Painting is my way to feel, to process my thoughts and find meaning, structure and sanity. I put ink on paper and watch it spread and splatter. I witness its unfolding transformation, and I am hooked. I have been ‘arriving’ at drawings of small sinister organisms, menacingly beautiful cellular creatures in armor, with jelly like frightened interiors. Creatures, who, like us, are battling to survive.

In some ways, these biomorphic forms represent a continuation of earlier works that engage with the dream-like interface between the conscious self and its subjective world, using figurative imagery and dioramas encased within womb-like vessels, to convey the entropic multiplicity of reality.



Sparkle. Painted Monotype, 30”X 44”

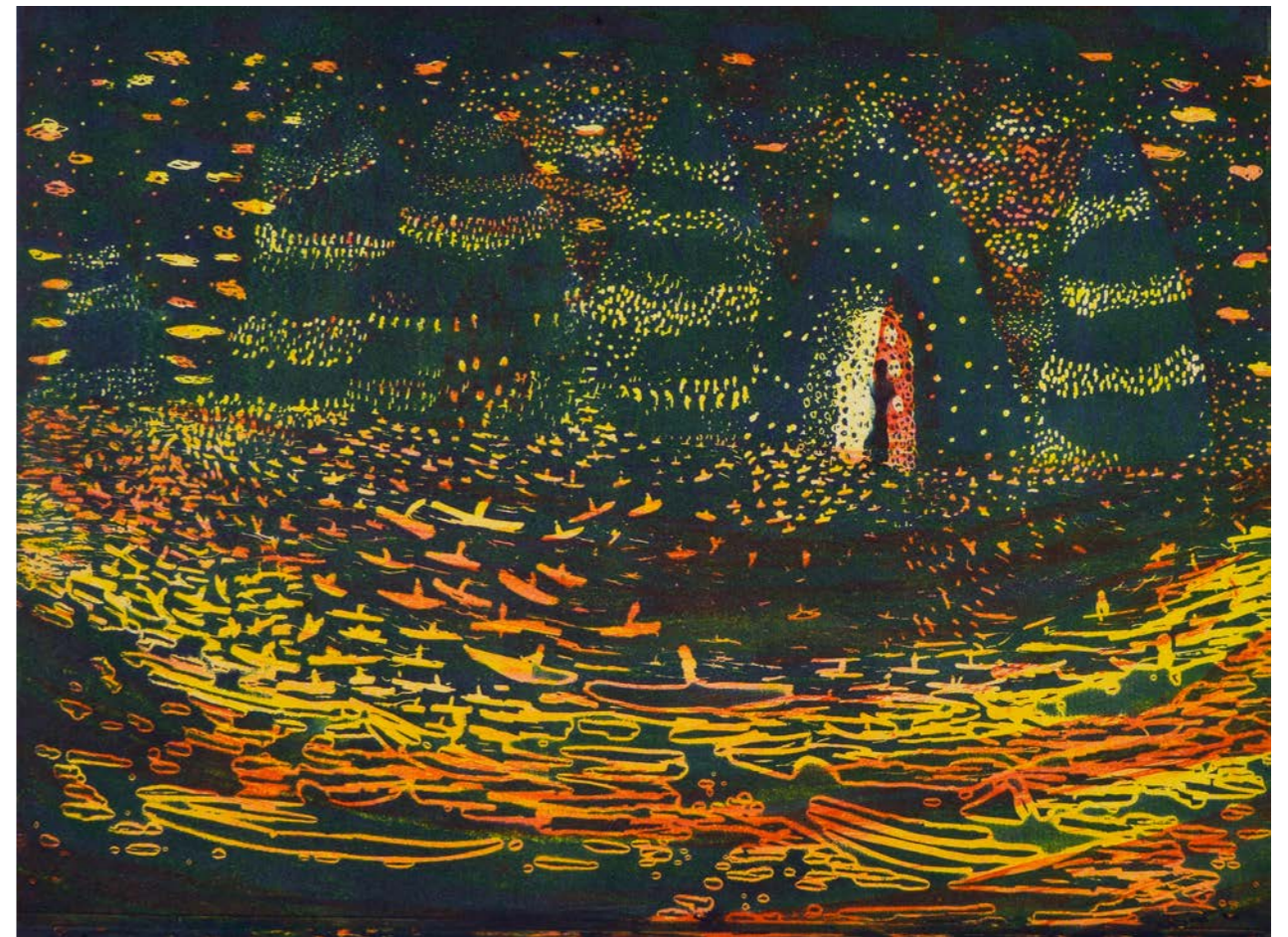


Time past time present. Painted Monoprint. 44”X30”

**In 2016, with the unfolding horror of the migration crisis, the figurative subject in my work came to be trapped within womb-life boats.**

The prints of my etching portfolio, “Boat in a Sea”, depict not only migrants on boats but also our essential human condition. While we are so much luckier than these migrants, we too are stuck in between shores, exploring the dark waters of the world through the light of our own self-discovery.

**Could we empathize with the refugees through the inevitability of our own impermanence?**



Boats at Night. Both, 9”X12” Etching.



Shining Waters Etching and Chine Cole, 9"X12"



You (will) know me. Collaged and painted Silkscreen, 44”X120”

**In 2018, I developed a large collaged silkscreen and a hinged book object. In both works, I used repetition to emphasize the persistence and unavoidability of the migration crisis in the context of xenophobia.**

These works emanate from questioning our need to construct the ‘other’ in order to know ourselves.

**Can we know ourselves without the other?**

**Can we embrace both, our similarities with the other but also the otherness of the other?**

**Increasingly the world is bringing us closer, but why is it not bringing us together?**



Together Alone, Hinged book object, 10"X14"X 6"

**While exploring these works and researching the migration crisis,**

**I had the good fortune of meeting artists whose work addresses similar topics of inter-sectionality, displacement, and immigration/migration.**

In 2017 I was able to form 'inBEtween' – a group of 30 artists from Germany, the United States and India. The artists in the group agreed to take the show to their own locations, where they would invite local artists and involve community. To date we have had six shows with several bookings ahead.

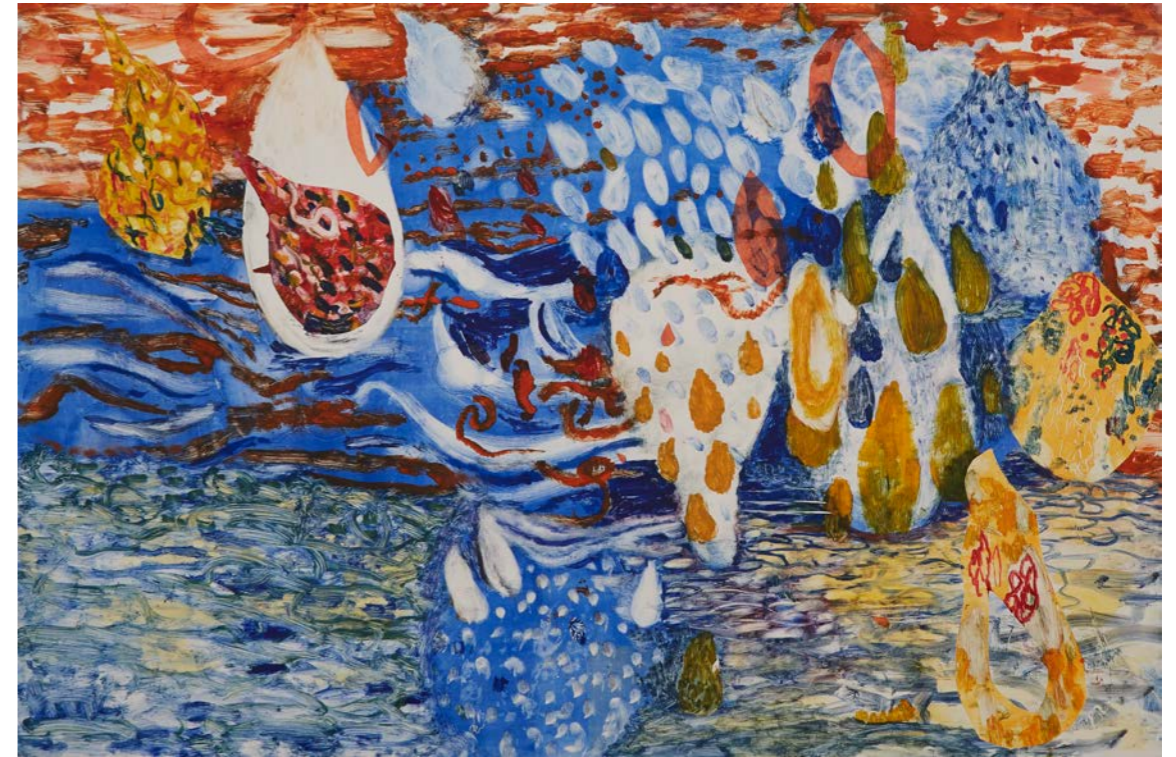
In January 2020, I curated 'YOU WILL KNOW ME, Migration Stories.' The show was held at Art Alive gallery, New Delhi, and was accompanied by a seminar featuring prominent intellectuals, activists, and artists. In December-January, India was ablaze with sectarian conflict sparked by CAA (Citizens amendment act) that targeted a Muslim minority. It was an inspiring moment of resistance and solidarity, and our show and seminar on populism and scapegoating was timely.

I returned to New York City in mid-January.

Although encouraged by the activism that I witnessed in India, I realize that there is still so much to do.



Through Time, Painted Monotype, 44" x 30"



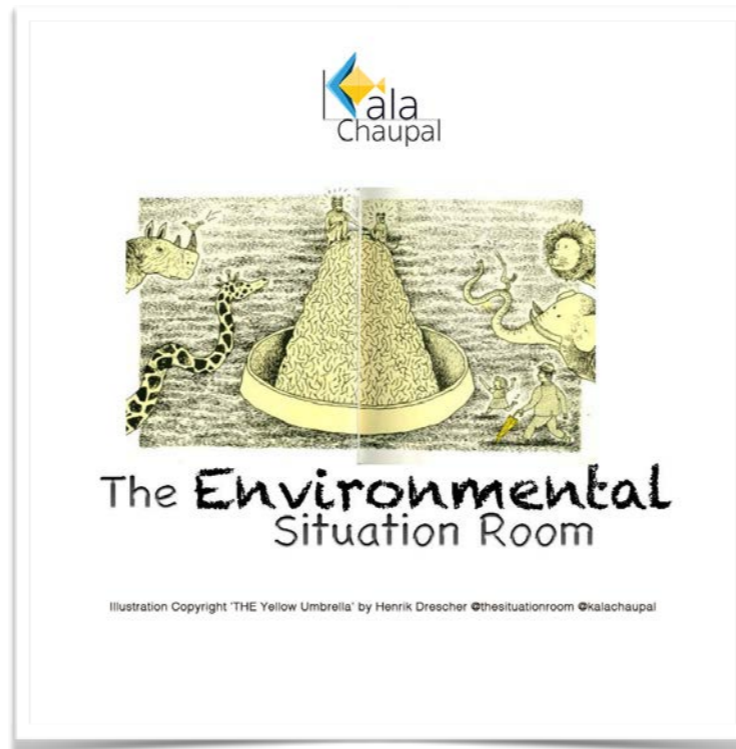
Conjugate, Painted Monotype 30"X44"

**The world is where it is due to countless wrong decisions in favor of short-sighted greed. Perhaps the refugees are just the first, most vulnerable victims, of an unsustainable system that will eventually consume us all?**

With COVID-19 this day seems nearer than ever. It feels like Nature has put us on pause, giving us a last chance to think through these decisions. Once again, I see how the poorest are hit hardest and minorities are scapegoated. At the same time, I applaud the heroes in our midst, medical and essential workers, scientists, and countless men and women looking out for each other. In uncertain times such as these, we find a renewed need for artists, intellectuals and activists to question, create and keep hope alive.

*Thank you, Helen Frederick and Leenika Jacob for setting up this platform, and for inviting me share my work and thoughts.*

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