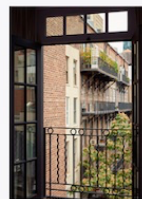


Call of the Wild
Sarah Graham's
monumental paintings
capture the cyclical
essence of nature.



Lay of the Land
Photographer Ben Sklar
loses his way and finds
perspective in Big Bend
National Park.



Above the Fray
Three decades on,
The Mercer's aura
of New York City
cool endures.

STATE OF THE ART

Call of the Wild

Alison McKenna



Photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna

At the Lyndsey Ingram gallery in Central London, monumental botanical paintings hovering between figuration and abstraction fill two rooms. Humid, tropical, and vast, they evoke the skies and plains of Africa. Petals and leaves swell into luminous, sculptural forms as washes of plant-based inks stain and bleed across the canvas, creating a tension between beauty and unease, order and entropy, vitality and decay. Pigments run, edges dissolve in osmosis, and parts of the canvas remain raw and unworked, where delicate traces of pencil and charcoal linger on the surface.

Musa acuminata, 2025, an artwork featuring a banana blossom, unfolds and overlaps, resembling a botanical study that's abstracted enough to suggest the soft wind and gentle light of the untamed Kenyan landscape, where the London-based artist Sarah Graham created the paintings for the exhibition *Genius Loci*. Within its layered petals, glimpses of tangerine heat, saffron wind, sunbaked ochre earth, and golden sunlight debut alongside a luxurious deep blue-black, the hue of the sky after twilight.

These plants are not passive subjects but living carriers of time and metamorphosis. The African light seems to have expanded Graham's palette, introducing a new intensity of color, while the artist's choice of ancient materials (charcoal, squid ink, and oak-gall ink, which has been used for writing since the Middle Ages) infuses the works with timelessness and primal energy. They are meditations on the passage of time and survival, creating a sensation of being fully immersed in a foreign land.

To make the paintings, Graham left London for a three-month residency in Kenya, working near Lake Naivasha and the Samburu National Reserve in a makeshift studio exposed to the elements, with minimal resources. "I found the endless plains, the invigorating light, and the wildlife all around me completely intoxicating," she recalls. "I had very little with me, and it was cathartic to empty both my mind and my environment of all the things I usually carry around at home."

Sharing motifs of interconnectedness and a fascination with organic forms, the banana blossom — possessing both male and female structures — deepens its symbolism of lushness, sensuality, and duality. Through it, Graham captures the cyclical essence of nature itself.

Genius Loci is on view at Lyndsey Ingram in London through November 14, 2025.