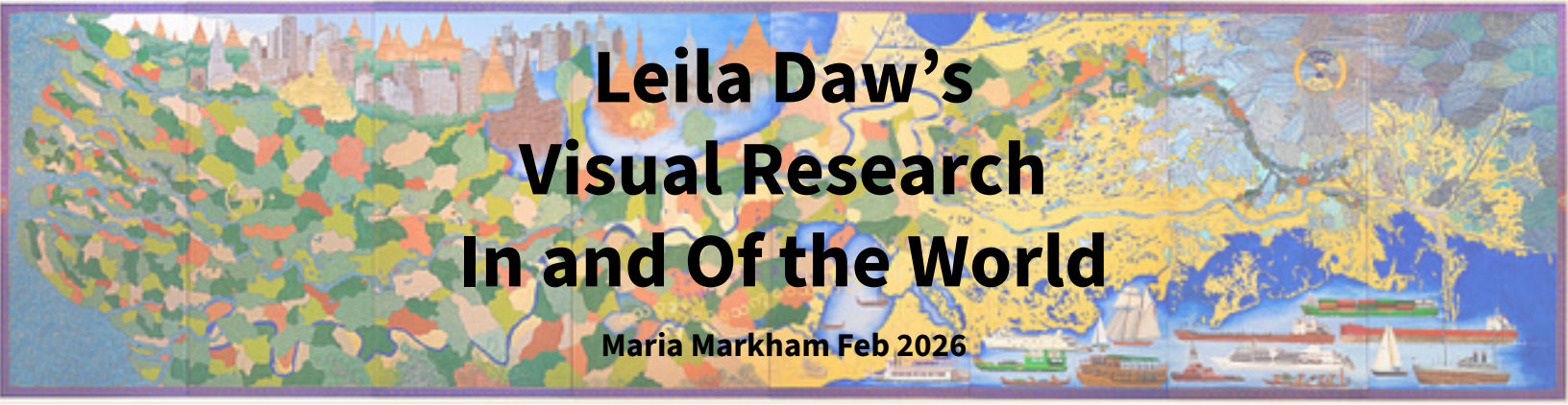


Leila Daw's Visual Research In and Of the World

Maria Markham Feb 2026

In *Time Lapse* on view at The New Alliance Art Gallery at Gateway Community College, Leila Daw's vibrant, inquisitive work explores above, below, and beyond the planet. Curated by Noé Jimenez, you first encounter large scale works, chosen for the scale of their expression, on diagonal and side walls. The diagonal wall splits the gallery, showing large pieces on each side. Given their size, the viewer has to travel along the walls to fully engage with these works highlighting their spatial and time-based aspects. Sometimes, we hover above the earth as in *Could Have Been a Great City* which Daw extrapolated from photos she took from an airplane showing a flooded landscape and desert terrain eroded by now absent water. Other times, we are looking through the earth's strata of millennia as in *Core Sample*.

Daw's works move beyond simple cartographies to consider a bird's eye view of landscapes, a wide-lens-like flattening of mountain ranges, or a sense of cosmic or mythic space. Daw's love of medieval maps, specifically portolan charts, is seen clearly in *Calling the Earth to Witness*. In this work, Daw illustrates the known world as it exists now. These mappings move beyond the idea of *orbis terrarum*, the world as a central point, to consider the impact of the human. Our vast extraction from and cluttering of the planet to devastating effect is articulated by a series of boats and buildings that crowd the canvas at its corners. These works consider the apocalyptic impact of our actions on the world.

Daw has been making work about potential collapse and the environment since the 1970s and calls herself an environmental feminist. Her works hold the earth, mother earth, as the ground for the most basic feminist impulse. Many pieces deal with the idea of apocalypse. "For a really long time, it's always been about collapse," she says, "the remains, the things that were there and are no longer there." Her ominous collapses, evident in *Could Have Been a Great City* and *Calling the Earth to Witness*, are terrible but also beautiful. Through this deliberate beauty, Daw coaxes the viewer to look carefully and perhaps approach the deeper political narratives embedded in the work.

Her older pieces have an uncanny contemporaneity, their content reflecting todays' crises. Their materiality and excavation of various strata (*Core Sample*) along with capitalist catastrophe (*Calling the Earth to Witness*) are even more relevant today. Daw creates layered works that are extensively researched across multiple disciplines including the sciences, philosophy, and anthropology. She worked with fibre and design at a time when these processes were frowned upon and continues to use multiple media, skilled draftsmanship, and accomplished design to span cultures, space, and time. Meticulous craft and assemblages in tapestry and multiple media also feed the present-dayness of the work.

In 2012, Daw traveled to Burma and learned how to work traditional Burmese tapestry, *shwe chi doe* kalaga, using gold thread embroidery and appliqué. She has visited many times since and her deep reverence and respect for Burmese culture and craft is evident in the careful

Calling the Earth to Witness, 2015, traditional shwe chi doe Burmese tapestry and mixed media on cotton, 8 panels, 5 in x 19 in

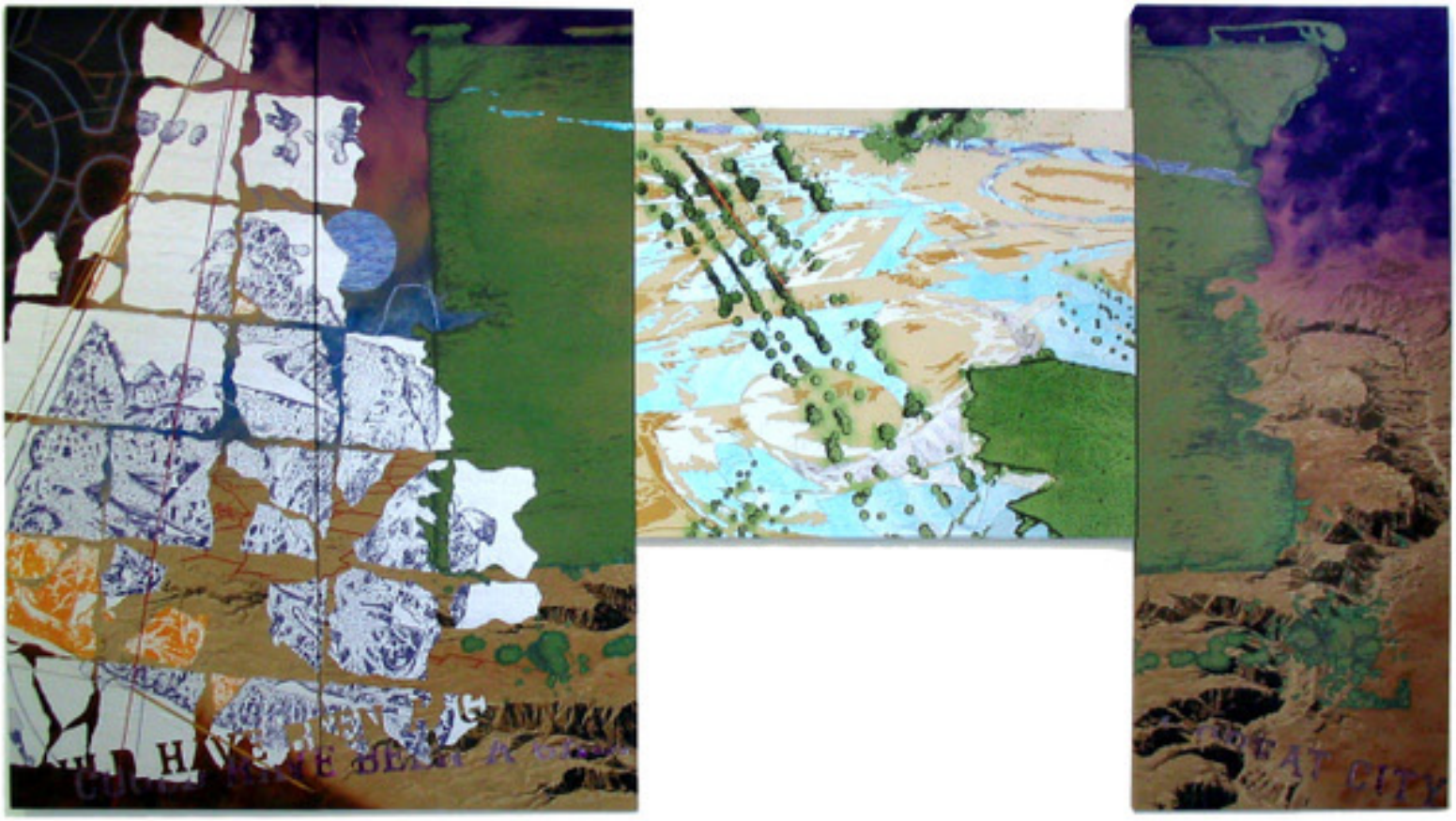
work(wo)manship in her tapestries. The threads, handcrafted by Burmese crafts people, are carefully coiled and individually stitched by Daw, laid out in narratives that encompass the beyond-human. Daw creates lush tapestries using additional materials such as beads, sequins, blobs of colored glass, and mirror fragments. The works exude a vibrancy that comes from the colourful and sparkly materials and multiple layers of carefully applied varnish, including a UV layer to prevent the fabric from fading. The sparkles reflect the abiding influence on her work of medieval art with its gold leaf and jewels embedded in surfaces. From this love of shiny things, Daw innovates with unusual media, for example, the metallic inner surface of pet food bags. She prints, paints, and draws on these surfaces. In *Could Have Been a Great City*, the original metallic sheen lends her painted aqua blues effervesance, whilst handmade sequins and beads add shine and sparkle to the tapestry and collage in *Calling the Earth to Witness*. This love of media and materiality is resonant throughout Daw's work, "if you're using sequins and threads and little pieces of foil and beads, it's very, very physical. The earth, of course, is also very physical."

These formally beautiful works express narratives that span thousands of years and delve into the archeological, geographical, cryptographical, and mytho-logical. Striking in their geological investigations, they invite us to delve deeply traveling beyond contemporary histories into the strata of millenia. As our world faces political, climate-based, and a host of other imminent challenges, Daw's work reminds us of the beauty that we might take solace in, and hopefully use to orient ourselves to think about our present circumstances in different terms.

Leila Daw: Time Lapse
On view Feb. 12-Apr. 10, 2026
NewAlliance Art Gallery
Gateway Community College
Corner of Church and George St.
New Haven, CT

Opening Reception:
Thursday Feb. 26, 5:00-7:00 pm

Artist Talk:
Thursday, Feb. 26, 11:00 am



Could Have Been a Great City, 2000, mixed media on canvas, 4 panels, 90 in x 170 in