

Teresa Baker: Somewhere Between Earth and Sky is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Dean Daderko, Ferring Foundation Chief Curator, with support from Grace Early, Exhibitions Assistant.

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Artist Talk: Teresa Baker

Saturday, September 6, 11:00 am–12:00 pm

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Teresa Baker. Photo: Erica Elan Ciganek.

Teresa Baker (Mandan/Hidatsa, b. 1985, Watford City, ND) is an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes in Western, ND and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. Through a mixed media practice combining artificial and natural materials together, Baker creates abstracted landscapes that explore vast space, and how we move, see and explore within them. The materials, texture, shapes, and color relationships are guided by Baker’s Mandan/Hidatsa culture. In her practice, Baker imbues innate objects with culture and identity.

Baker was named a 2025 Guggenheim Fellow and is a 2022 Joan Mitchell Fellow. She has held solo exhibitions at de boer (Los Angeles), Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (AZ), Pied-à-terre (San Francisco), Interface Gallery (Oakland), and the Art Museum of Southeast Texas (Beaumont). Her work has also been featured in group shows at Ballroom Marfa (TX), Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art (KS), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco), di Rosa (Napa), Marin MoCA (Novato), and Anthony Meier (Mill Valley). Residencies include Fogo Island Arts (Newfoundland), MacDowell, and the Headlands Center for the Arts. Her work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Portland Museum of Art, Nerman Museum, Forge Collection, and The Tia Collection. In 2023, she was featured in *Made in L.A.* at the Hammer Museum.

Wed–Sun 10:00 am–5:00 pm
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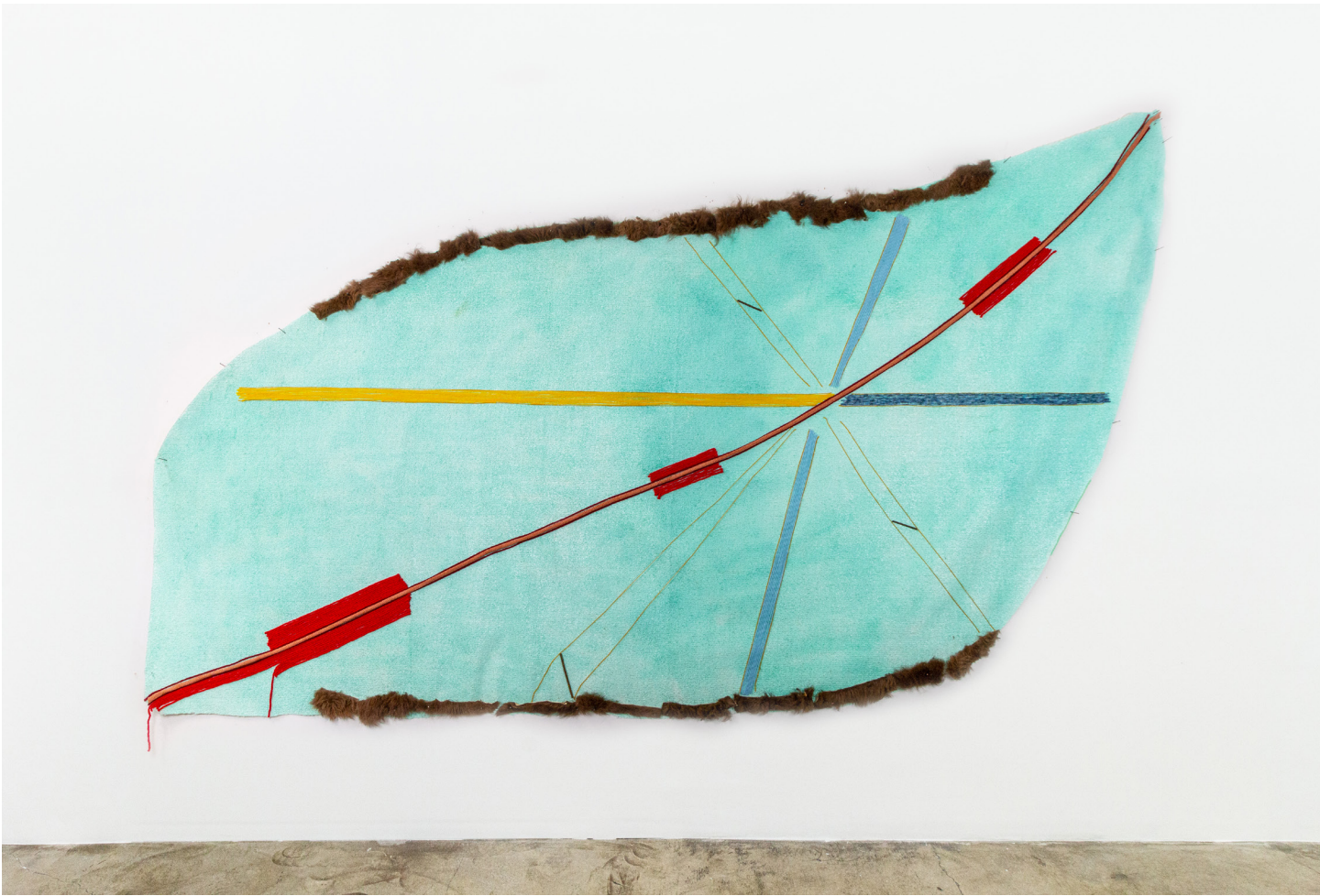
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Gallery Guide
Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

September 5, 2025–February 8, 2026



Teresa Baker: Somewhere Between Earth and Sky



Teresa Baker, *Converging*, 2023. Spray paint, yarn, buffalo hide and willow on artificial turf, 67 1/2 × 114 inches. © Teresa Baker. Tia Collection. Image courtesy the artist and de boer, Los Angeles, California; Photo: Jacob Phillip.

As the most comprehensive presentation of Teresa Baker’s work to date, *Somewhere Between Earth and Sky* brings together an array of artworks on artificial turf, sculptures, and drawings made by the artist between 2019 and the present. Baker’s works can be appreciated for their abstract dynamism, textures, and colors;

they can conjure grassy plains stretching towards distant horizons, or views of these places from up in the air. Her instinctive and confident play with scale, shape, color, composition, and materiality conveys an unbound, expansive sense of possibility.



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Interactions between shape, color, and unexpected materials reach singular solutions in each of Baker’s paintings. Together, they evidence a unified path the artist has taken to arrive at a finished composition. Baker’s practice can be appreciated from a variety of vantages. Perhaps the most obvious is that, unlike the majority of painters who work on canvas, she chooses artificial turf as her ground. This first happened more than a decade ago when, as a young artist living in Beaumont, Texas, Baker found herself intrigued by this unlikely material at a big box hardware store, and embraced the challenge of working with it. Offered in a limited number of colors like blue, red, black, green, tan, and gray, this chromatic limitation didn’t intimidate her. Instead, she recognized its textural and conceptual possibilities.

Shaped grounds are another hallmark of Baker’s work. Rather than opting for familiar rectangular formats, Baker begins by cutting into each piece of turf. She creates unique, organic forms that stimulate eyes to circulate around their contours. Shape offers Baker a structure to which she can respond, as she brings in color, linear composition, and a host of unexpected materials.



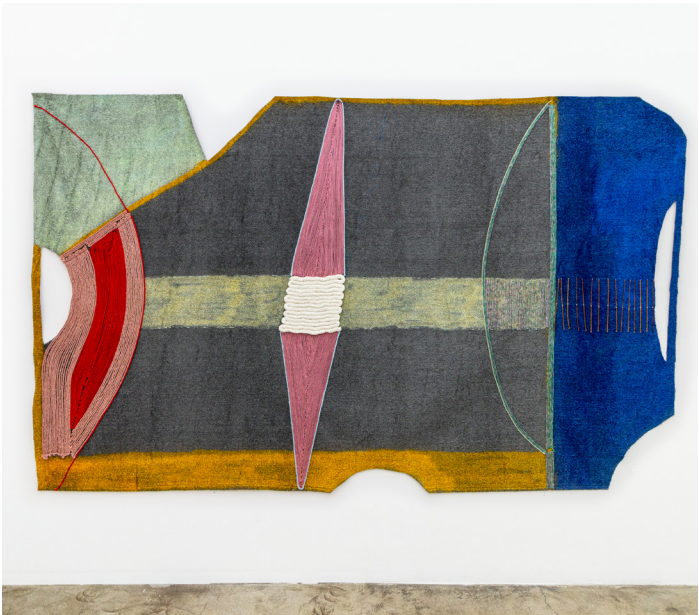
Teresa Baker, *Twenty minutes to sunset*, 2023. Spray paint, acrylic, buckskin, artificial sinew and yarn on artificial turf, 105 × 118 inches. Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art at Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas. Courtesy the artist & de boer Los Angeles & Antwerp. Photo: Jacob Phillip.

Color is one of the ways Baker establishes the spatial and emotional tenor of her compositions. Initially, Baker sprayed acrylic paint onto the turf; more recently, she brushes it on. In *Wild Kindness* (2023), two central panels in pink cool down the red ground peeking out from behind their edges. Together, the pink and red establish a tension between flatness and depth, as though we’re seeing through a window into a far deeper space.

Line also animates Baker’s works. Sometimes, she offers pathways that suggest landscape features like horizons, rippling water, or snaking rivers. But representation is typically balanced by abstraction. Lines convey dynamism and movement. They can suggest invisible forces as they sweep across the turf. Often, they’re the result of full-bodied gestures. The nubbly turf holds onto lengths of yarn as Baker establishes the character of a particular work. When she is pleased with a composition, she glues the yarn to the artificial turf and later stitches it down. Baker plays flatness against depth. She shows us the contained and the uncontainable. Applications of materials like buffalo hide, willow, natural and artificial sinew, natural and artificial hide, cornhusks, and beads contribute further textural interest and offer an invitation to look closely. Baker’s use of these materials honors her Native American cultural heritage and is as inventive as her form. She relishes the opportunity to learn from her work, which gives it an unparalleled liveliness and spirited sensibility. And she continues to hit new strides, expanding in scale and methods of presentation. Freedom and discovery appear to be Baker’s ultimate goals.

Teresa Baker’s inventive play with abstraction sidesteps the limitations and specificities of representational painting. She resists straightforward depictions of landscapes, even as she regularly references or evokes natural spaces across her work. Consider how the prickly texture of artificial turf suggests grass and grassy plains in the mottled, dun browns and tans of *Good Weather*. Are we encountering a view across plains, or one from the air? Scale is instrumental here, and the generous size of Baker’s compositions offers spaces viewers can project themselves into. *Lucky Mound* remembers a specific geologic formation in Montana with familial ties. Its presence at CAM may also prompt comparisons to Native American earthworks, including those within the city limits and nearby at Cahokia, which gives St. Louis the nickname “Mound City.” *Lucky Mound*’s vertical stripes of thick yarn could be rays of sunlight or property divisions. Baker’s work often calls to mind how land is surveyed, evidenced by titles like *Mapping the Territory* and *Mapping Out the Land*. For the artist, the composition of *Expanse* suggests “a trail, a map, a directional device.” We might imagine green plots seen through the crosshairs of a surveyor’s camera, or even GPS coordinates.

These narratives hearken to the division and privatization of property across the Midwest and the Great Plains from the early 1800s onward. Baker draws out the stories and energies resonating in landscapes with profound feeling.



Teresa Baker, *Field Notes*, 2022. Willow, spray paint and yarn on artificial turf, 74 × 120 inches. Gochman Family Collection, New York, NY. Courtesy the artist & de boer Los Angeles & Antwerp. Photo: Jacob Phillip.

Double-sided pieces like *Everything I Carry With Me* are a new development in her practice. Instead of being displayed on a wall, this work is suspended from the ceiling. Moving around it, viewers will notice two divergent approaches to composition: One side establishes a rhythm of flat planes punctuated by taut vertical lines, while the second evokes a tidal flow or stars dancing on water whose deep interior volume sends waves into the surrounding space.

Drawing has long been central to Teresa Baker’s artistic investigations. And as it represents a more private aspect of her practice, it is a pleasure to be exhibiting thirteen of the artist’s drawings in this exhibition. Across these works, we see Baker referencing distinctive landscape formations, experimenting with color, suggesting the dynamism and flux of natural phenomena, and considering shapes and compositional possibilities that inform—or are informed by—her works on artificial turf. Wind, waves and rock formations can be perceived in some works; others are paintings made or yet to be made. Created primarily with oil pastel on notebook paper, these drawings may call to mind ledger art, the artistic form used by Native American creators beginning in the early 19th century to chronicle important events, often on commercially printed paper. Here, the pre-printed inspirational quotes at the bottom of each page do not affect the drawing’s content. As in her paintings, these drawings also resist blunt references

in favor of expansiveness. We might sense Baker’s deep appreciation for Modernist abstraction throughout these works. These are not ledger drawings per se; rather, Baker connects multiple histories as she realizes her own singular vision. The dynamic installation of these colorful framed drawings along a diagonal axis is notable. Gestural and unexpected, as these framed works arc across the wall, they mirror the ways yarn and line activate the artist’s compositions on artificial turf. In Baker’s hands, drawing’s immediacy fosters a sense of experimentation, freedom, and joy.

Baker’s approach to painting also informs her sculptural practice. Her willow baskets are inspired by burden baskets, which are used to harvest and transport bulk materials. Baker presents them in a new light by weaving synthetic materials into them, or casting them in bronze. Dark blue artificial turf and willow combine in *Dusk*, for instance. And *Abundant* began its life as a hand-woven willow basket. The original weaving was sacrificed during the process of bronze casting: Encased in refractory plaster, it burned away before the resulting mold was invested with molten bronze. Back in the studio, Baker detailed segments of the bronze casting with colorful coats of enamel paint. *Abundant* plays with how we perceive space: It can be enjoyed as a visually compelling object; it also frames dynamic views of its surroundings as viewers circulate around it.

Teresa Baker’s formal and material strategies, her thoughtful perspective on cultural heritage, and her commitment to exploring new roads rather than traveling those that are already mapped and known, establish her as one of today’s most inspiring creators. Her singular methods reveal abstraction’s narrative capacities and capabilities, its depth and reach. Through her work, Baker invigorates, connects, and generously expands European and American modern painting histories, and offers us a visionary approach to abstraction.