

Art Now LA, February 26, 2026

Sarah Sze

Feel Free

*Reflections on Our Media Saturated Society*

Gagosian Gallery

January 29 – February 28, 2026

by Jody Zellen



Sarah Sze's large-scale, mixed media paintings are quirky, expansive works — simultaneously atmospheric and urban. They suggest journeys into deep space through recognizable, as well as purely abstract elements. Best known for pushing the boundaries of sculpture with assemblages of everyday objects, precariously fashioned together with wire to create small as well as room-sized chaotic and dynamic constellations, she returned to making paintings in 2018. In these pieces, she begins with a photographic image onto which she layers paint and collage materials, often obscuring it beyond recognition to suggest decay and the passage of time. These works span multiple panels that are also collaged on top of each other, though only noticeable when viewed from the side.

In *Breathless* (all works 2026), a painting that is 202 inches wide, Sze begins with a cityscape. Over this expansive picture she combines myriad small, photographic reproductions including images of hands, animals and sunsets, as well as small brightly colored rectangles with dripping lines of paint. The entire work appears to be covered in thin strips of ripped posters or torn billboard imagery. These ragged stripes create vertical layers that push and pull the eye back and forth.

In *Escape Artist*, the eye weaves through the composition taking in the recognizable collaged elements — hands, heads and even a yellow sneaker — before getting lost in a criss-cross of orange and red splatters that bisect disintegrated and abstracted photographic reproductions of the landscape. The paintings are amalgamations of styles and materials ranging from fields of pixels that become geometric forms to snippets culled from magazines or printed posters. Images of the sun rising —or setting — appear within many of the works, as do animals like wolves and deer, often covered by splotches and streaks of paint.

Sze draws from her subconscious to purposely blur the boundaries between dream and reality. She juxtaposes the paintings with sculptural elements she refers to as 'remnants of the workspace.' Long strands of string dangle from the rafters onto the floor alongside

tools and printed ephemera that feels as though it fell off or out of the actual paintings. The piles on the floor recall of Sze's sculptures.

While the paintings conjure movement, the sculptural installation *Once in a Lifetime* (titled after a 1981 Talking Heads song), is a towering assemblage built from found objects, ladders and tripods, as well as devices that reference the tools Sze might use in constructing her work. This slapdash construction is set in the center of a dark room and illuminated by multiple projections that rotate across the walls. Small ladders, magnifying glasses and silhouetted cut-outs create a magic lantern-like display that is constantly changing. The color of the projected light shifts from sky blue to fiery orange. The sculpture feels like a 3-D mobile, functioning as a miniature self-contained world that defies gravity, a surreal construction hovering in space. The projected imagery includes both the natural landscape and the urban environment. Cars and trucks travel down freeways, while buildings are demolished and then rise again in reverse.

The highlight of the exhibition is *Sleepers*, a work originally created in 2024 but reconfigured for Gagosian's space. In this compelling and haunting piece, many video fragments are projected onto modest-sized, hand-torn paper screens that are suspended between perspectival lines of string that move in from opposite walls toward a central window that becomes a vertical shaft of light. The video transitions from all encompassing skies at sunrise or sunset that cast an orange aura onto the space, shifting to green — blurred trees and leaves — then circles back to a disjointed collage of myriad fragments. The fragments — one image per screen — are mirrored on either side of the vertical window and include black and white videos of individuals sleeping, as well as diverse snippets of modern life, be it birds, animals, buildings or ocean waves. The overall impression is like a dream with ever-changing pictures that oscillate between fiction and reality. Sze's playful videos and paintings are reflections on our media saturated world and speak to the different ways memories and emotions can be constructed.

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