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ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Review: Sayre Gomez paintings of L.A. are a sensational shambles



Sayre Gomez, "Palm Tower," 2019, acrylic on canvas. (François Ghebaly Gallery)

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHTART CRITIC OCT. 9, 2019 7 AM

In a pitch-perfect new exhibition of paintings by Sayre Gomez, an exquisitely rendered cellphone tower does a correspondingly poor job of masquerading as a palm tree. The vivid friction between his paintings' flawless precision and their subjects' utter disaster is the show's bracing leitmotif.

At François Ghebaly Gallery, the 10-foot-tall "Palm Tower" is one of 12 canvases, eight painted sculptures and two videos shown on monitors painted with smiley faces and patriotic stickers. The tower picture is dominated by a cloudy, Tiepolo-worthy sky washed in frothy pastel colors of pink, blue and violet.



Sayre Gomez, "Glendale Door," 2019, acrylic on canvas. (François Ghebaly Gallery)

The sun, just peeking over a distant urban horizon at the lower right, is a blare of pure white light. Follow the adjacent silvery line of a guardrail along an elevated highway toward the left, and your eye arrives at the top of a chunky antenna tucked in among ludicrous, spiky artificial palm fronds.

Circuits suddenly jam. Badly camouflaged social infrastructure is exquisitely rendered within beautifully fabricated scenography. (Gomez is a whiz with a spray gun.) Slowly, the whole landscape begins to radiate a toxic glow. A creepy feeling of impending, inescapable doom arises.

Gomez repeats that grinding tension — call it a sensational shambles — throughout the show.

A tattered flag is snagged on a fence, airplane condensation-trails crisscrossing the azure sky. Fluffy bedroom comforters are on sale in a broken-down store window. A filthy strip of pigeon spikes runs across the top of a soot-covered car rental sign, while forked lightning strikes an urban skyline next to mini-mall signage exhorting passersby to find fast-food solace within.

Gallery rooms are dotted with eight shabby yellow parking-lot stanchions, from which hefty chains dangle. These tubular vertical sculptures are utterly strange.



Sayre Gomez, "Senior Regional Manager," 2019, mixed media. (François Ghebaly Gallery)

Convincingly made from painted cardboard, PVC and polyurethane foam, they're blunt, dumb-as-a-post structures meant to corral and contain movement. Sculpture asks to be seen in the round, but these urge vigilance in the process.

Gomez slyly labels the traffic-control stanchions with bureaucratic titles — "Department Head," "CEO," "Senior Regional Manager," etc. There's something of a military-postindustrial-complex feel to this disconcerting show, which seems spot-on for the anxieties of life today.

Sayre Gomez

Where: François Ghebaly Gallery,
2245 E. Washington Blvd., L.A.

When: Through Nov. 3, closed
Mondays

Info: (323) 282-5187, ghebaly.com

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<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2019-10-09/sayre-gomez-paintings-francois-ghelaby-review>