

Sayre Gomez Opens Up About His Strange New Soldier Sculptures

By *Emily Watlington* February 2, 2026 5:00am



Sayre Gomez: *Soldier 1* and *Soldier 2*, both 2025. Photo Jeff McLane

Sayre Gomez is known for painting urban landscapes marked by gritty realism. But when it comes to his subject—Los Angeles—that realism is always tied up in fantasy, punctuated by signs and sunsets. For his latest show “Precious Moments,” on view at David Kordansky in Los Angeles through March 1, he mixed things up: the show’s titular figures are two cartoonish kids modeled after his own. They share haircuts with his children and even borrowed their clothes, their exaggerated eyes and perfectly smooth skin warped in slightly dirty, well-loved princess dresses and gremlin shirts.

Like much of Gomez’s work, the show depicts ordinary scenes—the door to a bar decorated with Zebra stripes, a peeling sign at a hairdresser. But often, the doom that, these days, lurks and looms—that we try to keep at bay while going about daily life—makes subtle appearances. Bright orange sunsets look like fiery LA skies, a view through a window dotted with cutesy stickers is interrupted by sticky residue. The childlike kitsch in this show evokes an innocence that feels almost menacing, foreshadowing its inevitable spoiling: A facsimile of worm-shaped playground equipment joins a painting of a strip club named Play Pen beneath a dark, lightning-filled sky. Below, Gomez describes his new sculptures and his attempt to see the world through his kids’ eyes.

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View of Sayre Gomez's 2026 exhibition "Precious Moments" at David Kordansky, Los Angeles. Photo Jeff McLane

I've been trying to incorporate the worldview of my children into my work more over the past few years, and this show is the most sort of heavy-handed version. For me, the title "Precious Moments" evokes how you just you don't get enough time with your family or your kids; they grow so fast, and everything is fleeting. I'm just trying to savor it all.

The savoring can feel very schizophrenic, with the world being in the state that it's in. Sometimes you just have to keep things at bay in order to focus on what's right in front of you. It's hard to do, and it can feel very surreal, with all these contradictory, competing emotions and experiences.

My work tends to sort of turn dark very quickly, and kind of naturally. *Vaccine Flag* (2025) shows this tattered flag advertising vaccinations from this kind of forgotten pandemic era, and in other paintings, you can see hints of fire season in the sunsets and smog. This decade has felt like just one catastrophe after another, like we've been collectively pummeled. And now, with this ICE shit... it's hard to put it into words how dystopian things are getting.

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When you have young kids, the people that you're spending most of your time with are completely oblivious to so much. And so you start keeping up the charade going for their sake, at least to some degree. It can be kind of nice to use my kids' world as a little bit of a break from it all. Yet while injecting my kids' perspective into the work makes it bittersweet, it can also make it more sinister.

My son just turned six, and my daughter will be five in May. I made sculptures of both of them; they're sit up in the rafters. They're based on those Precious Moments collectible figurines that I feel like my grandma had when I was a kid. The Precious Moments brand is very openly Christian, which I don't like, but I've also noticed that a lot of different subcultures have appropriated Precious Moments. They're interesting as blank frames of reference in that way: they're not recognizable like Disney characters or something, but they do have this familiarity... and some anonymity, too.

For the sculptures, I stole some of my kids' clothes and added little patches. I called them *Soldier 1* and *Soldier 2* (both 2025) because I feel like they're these figures who are just starting to get their awareness and become outfitted for the world in a way. But they're still floating up in the rafters. They haven't come down to join the dregs yet.

I had to have custom wigs made because the heads are gigantic. I don't really make figurative stuff at all, but this age and this time is just really special and I wanted to capture it. I meant the whole show as a love letter to them in my family.

The [21-minute] video *Precious Moments* (2026) is basically the nexus for the exhibition. It has a soundtrack that my kids picked paired with some basic footage I shot out of the car window, trying to get their perspective. When we're driving around, they're really into listening to certain music; there are songs that they'll request over and over again. It means maybe we're listening to Gummibär while driving by this giant homeless encampment. It's just such a hardcore experience.

I wanted to showcase, very realistically, what they are experiencing. In one scene, there's a robot going by on the sidewalk; I paired that with the Little John song from *Merry little Batman*, the Batman holiday cartoon that my kids are obsessed with.

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Sayre Gomez: *Oceanwide Plaza*, 2025–26. Photo Jeff McLane

There are other sculptures in the show. I was thinking about scale as this simple, effective way to change something really dramatically. You can make something feel uncanny or you can make it feel intimate. With the telephone poles [*Totem 4* (2024) and *Totem 5* (2025)] or *Oceanwide Plaza* (2025–26), a model of a 60-story skyscraper development that went bust, I shrunk both down closer to the scale of the human body. You can't really see a telephone pole for what it is when you stand beside it, and if you stand far away enough to see the whole thing, you lose the details.

In your mind's eye, a telephone pole probably looks like a stick with some strings coming off it. But if you actually look at it, it's an extremely complex thing. Formally, it has a weird, interesting relationship to sculpture and to art history, and it has probably three to five generations of technology piled onto the same pole. At the bottom, you've got the oldest form of technology, which is the written word. The pole becomes the community poster board on the college campus quad, where people advertise guitar lessons and dog walking services, flyers for getting rid of bed bugs or announcing "my band's playing on Friday night." And then you've got these cell towers that connect you to Yokohama or wherever. When you mess with the scale, it can be more than the 1,000th pole you've driven by today. —*As told to Emily Watlington*