

Musser, Amber Jamilla, "Lauren Halsey: *sister dreamer* lauren halsey's architectural ode to tha surge n splurge of south central los angeles," *BrooklynRail.com*, April 28, 2026

# THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ARTSEEN | MAY 2026

## Lauren Halsey: *sister dreamer* lauren halsey's architectural ode to tha surge n splurge of south central los angeles

By Amber Jamilla Musser



Installation view: Lauren Halsey: *sister dreamer* lauren halsey's architectural ode to tha surge n splurge of south central los angeles, Los Angeles, 2026–27. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Allen Chen/SLH Studio.

The opening for Lauren Halsey's *sister dreamer* was a party, a street fair with booths for local food, games, and music, to be exact. And walking down the middle of the street on that bright and sunny Los Angeles day, one could feel the ways that *sister dreamer* realized Halsey's long held ambitions for her work to speak to members of her community, rather than to speak about them. Visually, *sister dreamer* looks much like Halsey's 2023 rooftop commission for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *the eastside of south central los angeles hieroglyph prototype architecture (I)* (2022), in that it brings together a mixture of sphinxes modeled after people in Halsey's life—this time the orbit includes community leaders in addition to family members—along with columns ringed with the faces of people who inspired Halsey and structured like the Hathor columns in the Met's collection and a temple-like structure carved with imagery from Halsey's archive of paraphernalia from the past and present of the neighborhood. *sister dreamer* is larger: it has eight sphinxes, eight columns, and one pavilion in addition to water features and a garden. And, in contrast to Halsey's designation of *the eastside of south central los angeles* as a prototype, *sister dreamer* is described as an ode to the resilient spirit of her

neighborhood—its “surge ‘n splurge.” While Halsey’s fusion of ancient Egyptian architecture with the pulses of South Central funk is a central component of both works, *sister dreamer* is designed to shift the terms of what art itself means to a community. In contrast to seeing art as something representational, Halsey brings us toward the art of living.



Installation view: *Lauren Halsey: sister dreamer lauren halsey's architectural ode to the surge n splurge of south central los angeles*, Los Angeles, 2026–27. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Allen Chen/SLH Studio.

I see this especially in the difficulty categorizing *sister dreamer*. It is an installation, yes; but it is also a park, open to the public, with extensive public programming put on by Summaeverythang, the nonprofit co-founded by Halsey in 2020. Although one can remark on the beauty of Halsey’s sculptures, as a park its most important aspects are how it serves the community and its needs—how it fits into its ecosystem. Architecturally, what this looks like is the presence of benches, where I saw many people sit to take in the scene and the careful curation of its plant life. Signage on the grounds invites visitors to consider the garden an integral part of the experience of being in the park:

This greenery isn't just scenery. Lauren wants the plants to remind us of how they inspired sculpture and architecture, along with flora's connection to leisure and healing. That dreams are like seeds, so these gardens show a means of surging in the Hood on splurge. Not a rose in concrete this time, but California Lilac, Beaumont Guava, Mexican Marigold, and more. Much of what *sister dreamer* got growing on S. Western and 76th St. is from seed banks going back millennia. And some of those blossoms will bring the hovering birds that hum instead of shine searchlights, host monarch butterfly kickbacks mid-migration, and let honeybees be about the business of pollinating (so: don't start none won't be none).

Here, I note Halsey’s deliberate choice of flora. Each of these plants thrives in the heat and with little water; they are fast growing and will quickly fill the air with the scent of their flowers and, in the case of Beaumont guava, fruit. Halsey’s invocation of birds and bees also suggests an investment in the myriad different types of visitors to the area—not just those drawn in by community programming.



Installation view: *Lauren Halsey: sister dreamer* lauren halsey's architectural ode to the surge 'n splurge of south central los angeles, Los Angeles, 2026–27. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Allen Chen/SLH Studio.

Moreover, it is Halsey's framing of the garden as offering a place of healing—on both a personal and environmental scale—that invites us to think more deeply about the “surge 'n splurge” suggested by the title and poet Douglas Kearney's wall text, which describes *sister dreamer* as a “luxe space” that is an “anti-tomb.” The community that formed her and her values is abundantly present, and she is offering her art in service to it, hoping to nurture a spirit of imagination, care, and collectivity that orients toward possibilities in the now.

Taking in *sister dreamer* while walking around the street fair, I felt a lot of things. The sky was bright and blue and the sun was hot and high in the sky. People of all ages strolled around, getting ice cream, taking photos, greeting Halsey, who seemed to know everyone personally. It was a multiracial scene, and people seemed relaxed and happy. They were also eager to spread the word; I noticed several small crews interviewing visitors and filming their impressions. Indeed, I wasn't even home before I found dozens of Instagram reels describing their feelings of joy and arguing that *sister dreamer* was going to transform the art world. In many ways, I think this might be accurate. I register their happiness as a sign that they are perhaps excited to live among art, to feel like life is a bit more beautiful every day.

---