

Sarah Sze

Teaching Resource

Sarah Sze / February 3 – August 18, 2024

About Sarah Sze

Sarah Sze was born in Boston in 1969. She received a BA from Yale University and an MFA from New York's School of Visual Arts. Sze studied both architecture and painting. She was a 2003 MacArthur Fellow and the 2013 US Representative for the Venice Biennale. Sze lives and works in New York.

Installations

An *installation* is a type of sculpture that arranges objects in a space. When designing a new art installation, Sarah Sze considers how she can create a sculpture that reflects the architecture around it. She believes that architecture not only impacts the way you move through space, but also what you notice about the sculpture. Her sculptures call attention to the museum's design, drawing your gaze to specific places in the building.

Sze's sculptures are often made from inexpensive materials that are easy to find – transforming a mundane object into something significant. She hopes viewers will consider which objects she chose to use, how she put the parts together, and even how an installation will be taken down at the end.

Think about the items in your school backpack, even the trash at the bottom of the bag. How could you use those things to create a sculpture about your daily life?

Visual Imagery

Sze believes that each modern generation has been increasingly exposed to visual images, to the point where they lose significance.

Think of a time when you see many images, such as when you are scrolling on a phone. How much time do you spend with each image or video? How many images do you think you see in a day?

Since it is hard to have a connection with something you can't touch, hear, taste, or smell, Sze hopes her sculptures will allow us to step away from this fragmented relationship with visual images and focus attention on an object's physical presence.

Find one image or item in Sze's installation that attracts your interest. Spend at least two minutes examining and sketching it. How would this item taste, feel, smell and sound? Where would you normally see this image or item? How does it fit into the larger sculpture? Why do you think she chose to include it?



Sarah Sze. Photo: Thierry Bal



Sarah Sze, *Images that Images Beget* (detail), 2023.
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How Do You Recharge?

Sze says, "Being alone with my art is an incredible pleasure." For her, art can serve as a break from caring for her aging parents, parenting her children, and her teaching responsibilities. She finds it energizing to create art in her own space.

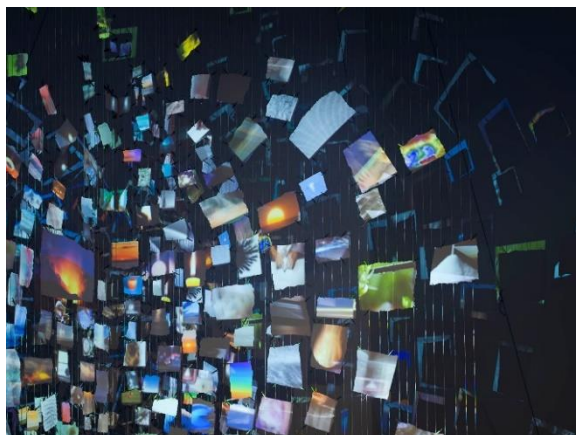
What parts of daily life do you need a break from? How do you create the space for yourself to recover?

In the Artist's Words

Read the thoughts from Sarah Sze and consider the questions below.

Sze explains that there are not many pictures of her as a child because she was born before everyone had a smartphone with a camera. Other moments were also important, but are forgotten since no photograph exists to remind her.

In my generation, if you asked me, "what did you look like as a child," there's, like, four pictures that my parents framed and put on the wall. And that's what I think I looked like. With my children, there's, like, 70 pictures a day. We have a really different sense of the image.¹



Sarah Sze, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, 2023. © Sarah Sze.

Displaying photos keeps a memory alive. Sometimes it can also limit your memory to things you can see in the picture, while leaving out things that can't be seen, such as feelings or words.

Think of a photo you have seen that reminds you of a memory from your past. Describe it to a partner. Who and what is in the photo? Where was it taken? How do the color and lighting affect the mood of the photo?

Draw and Remember

Think about one special moment from your childhood that you do *not* have recorded in a photograph. **Draw a picture of that moment to help you remember it in the future.**

Is there anyone else that you think remembers this exact moment? If so, how do you think their memory would differ from yours?



¹ Sarah Sze: Emotional Time. [Art21.org](https://www.art21.org)

Photographing Installations

Sarah Sze's sculptures are full of small details. After Sze finishes a sculpture, she photographs it many times to capture its small details. These photos help create a memory of the sculpture. Instead of trying to document the whole artwork in one photograph, Sze wants to see how each detail can express something different or essential about the piece.

Work with a partner to each take three thoughtful photographs of details in the same sculpture. Don't copy each other; do your own thing. Afterwards, share your pictures.

Can you recognize where their photos are located within the larger sculpture? Did you notice those details before seeing the photograph? What do those details reveal about the sculpture as a whole?



Sarah Sze. Studio Image, 2023. Images courtesy of the artist

Final Thoughts

It takes time to explore Sze's sculptures. She thinks of your first glimpse of a sculpture as being the same as the first line in a novel: the idea that hooks you into the bigger story. When you leave the sculpture, it's the end of the novel.

How did one of Sze's sculptures hook you into a closer look? How did the story develop as you journeyed through it? Where did it challenge you? Was the ending satisfying for you?

Additional Resources

Explore the exhibition on the Nasher Mobile Guide: <https://pwa.nashersculpturecenter.org/?guide=38>

See more of Sarah Sze's work at her website: <https://www.sarahsze.com/>

See Sarah Sze in action as she designs a new subway station in New York City:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oivCLEc_jfU

Sarah Sze on Art21: <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/sarah-sze-emotional-time/>

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Knowledge and Skills | §117.302. Art, Level I (b) (4)

Fine Arts: Critical Evaluation | §117.52. Art, Level I (c) (3) and (4)

English: Reading Comprehension of Literary Nonfiction | §110.31. English I (b) (6)

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