

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

This Sayre Gomez sculpture is a monument to the worst habits of L.A.'s City Council



Sayre Gomez's sculpture "Halloween City," 2022, on view at François detail — the Reef building south of downtown L.A. (Paul Salvesson /

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So in addition to flooding and hellfire, climate change is going to [make pollen season worse](#). (CCing all producers of NFTs.) I'm **Carolina A. Miranda**, arts and urban design columnist at the Los Angeles Times, and I and my angry sinuses have a culture newsletter for you:

The most garish building in L.A.?

If you were to build a monument to the **Los Angeles City Council**, what would it be?

Perhaps it would look like **the Reef**. I'm talking about that dour 12-story building downtown just south of the 10 that is wrapped on three sides by staggeringly ginormous **LED advertising billboards** that no doubt have seared countless eyeballs between here and Mars.

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The digital signage on the Reef is so large it can be seen from the 10 Freeway and throughout the neighborhood. (Dania Maxwell / Los Angeles Times)

The building, built in 1957, initially served as home to the **Los Angeles Home Furnishing Mart**, where a cooperative of furniture companies could display their wares. In the new millennium, however, the property began to change hands, and by 2012 it was controlled by **Avedis and Ara Tavitian**, a pair of medical doctors turned real estate investors who had big — *big* — plans to turn the building, along with its adjacent lots, into a mixed-use skyscraper mega-development called **Broadway Square Los Angeles**. This would include 1,444 apartments and condominiums, a 208-room hotel and, of course, plenty of retail. After protests by neighborhood groups — this area is one of the poorest in Los Angeles - million into an affordable housing fund controlled by a developer who represents the district.

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Needless to say, the development has yet to happen. But the company was allowed to saddle the Reef with those three massive **LED advertising billboards**, which each measuring about **55 by 245 feet**. As my colleagues **David Zahniser** and **Emily Alpert Reyes** [have reported in the past](#), this involved all kinds of workarounds that came courtesy of Price's office: The councilman allowed the signs to be twice as big as recommended by the planning department, and their images change every eight seconds — instead of the one-minute interval recommended by the city.

Three months after these exemptions were approved, the Tavitiens' real estate company donated **\$75,000** to a political action committee working to reelect Price. Meanwhile, residents in the neighborhood say the glare from the light is so intense it has affected their ability to sleep.

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Resident José Tlatenchi, who lives within view of the Reef, is shown watching TV in his apartment — curtains closed to block out the glare of the building's digital signs. (Dania Maxwell / Los Angeles Times)

The Reef is one of those urban monstrosities that
time I drive past it (really, it's blinding), so I was
to its last garish detail — by artist **Sayre Gome**
Ghebaly Gallery. The painter and sculptor has

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height of nearly 5 feet, complete with LED billboards flashing a rotating array of advertisements.

The reduced size makes for a truly bizarre and uncanny sight — highlighting its grim facades, its willfully homely form and the mammoth scale of its LED billboards, which have all the design grace of the drunk guy wearing a lampshade at the party.

It is Los Angeles on those days when it's been beat hard with the ugly stick.

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Another view of Sayre Gomez's "Halloween City." (Paul Salvesson / François Ghebaly Gallery)

Gomez, who hails from Chicago but has lived in Los Angeles since 2006, says that, in creating the piece, he was interested less in the look of the city than in what it represents visually and historically: an industry that has been reinvented for the 21st as :

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