

# ARTSHE SAYS

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SARAH HOOVER





*SARAH HOOVER IS  
READY FOR HER  
NEXT ACT*

**I**n an industry that shies away from outspokenness, **Sarah Hoover** has carved out an ingenious lane where freely stating her mind acts as the common denominator. Whether it be standing up against the patriarchy and its numerous holds on society, sharing insights into her mental health, or showcasing a preference for statement dresses, no topic is off limits with Hoover. Since entering into the art world 15 years ago and ascending the ladder to become a prominent dealer in the global scene, Hoover has enjoyed many experiences that some wait their entire careers to achieve. Now, with a Vogue-published essay, a newly anointed lecture series, and a book that has been optioned for a television show, Hoover is embarking upon a second life of sorts.

While her new mission - to expand the conversation around the unspoken hardships that accompany becoming a new mother - might seem far off from her art world endeavors, Hoover is confident that her art-centric lens on life will imbue whatever she puts forward.

Text by Maria Vogel  
Photo: Sarah Hoover





Sarah Hoover in her home.  
Photo: Andy Jackson



We're speaking at a significant time of transition for you. You've spent your entire adult life at the forefront of the art world as a director of a large, international gallery. Now, you are venturing into slightly uncharted waters, publishing your writing for the first time in the form of essays and a novel, the second of which has been optioned for a television show. How did this moment come to be?

Well first let me say, I'm so lucky. There's a big barrier to entry in a lot of the worlds I'm in and I'm under no illusion—a lot of success for a lot of people is dependent on right place, right time, right access, right skin color, right education, etc., and doesn't necessarily have to do with brilliance or hard work or “deserving” the position you end up in, which is pretty fucked up.

But technically what happened is I wrote a book, mostly during quarantine, and sold the tv rights to the greatest, most remarkable producer, who has incredible vision and is the opposite of a Hollywood creep. By the time we were going back to the office in the art world, I was pretty consumed with working on the pilot and finishing my book proposal, and it felt like a fun next step to pursue that! I don't know if my show will ever even actually get made, I hear it's really hard out there. I could fail spectacularly. Luckily, I don't actually know anything about Hollywood so I get to just pretend things are great and enjoy the journey of learning a new industry.

I also know nothing about the publishing/literary world so if I end up having to self-publish my book in installments via Instagram stories that only my mom reads, I'll still be able to convince myself I was successful. And it will be, in the sense that doing it has so far brought me only joy and empowerment.

What are some of the important lessons you gathered from spending 15 years in the heart of the art market?

Be nice—make being nice your habit and do it even when it takes ten seconds longer. That doesn't mean get taken advantage of—there is a nice way to say anything, there's even a nice way to say “you are a terrible person and no one likes you,” just ask my southern mother.

Be nice to everyone: rich people, poor people, assistants, their bosses—treat them all with grace—you are not a good person if you're only good to certain people based on exterior standards of wealth and fame.

Also, if you can, always do someone a favor when they ask. Most of the time it will bite you in the ass, be a waste of your time, and they will not even remember to say thank you, because people are busy and dealing with their own shit and sometimes, they are just selfish jerks. Do it anyway.

If you accomplish both niceness and willingness to help others, you will most likely develop a group of friends who are like-minded. Hold onto them and treat them with so much honor. Good friends are beyond essential, especially when you one day find yourself in a major postpartum depression spiral and you're a miserable bitch to be around but also deeply lonely and need people to cry to.



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Photo: Sarah Hoover



In regard to the art market itself, I would say two things: First, don't be a snob if you want to understand how art and money intersect. There are all sorts of art worlds and art markets and they all have their own value and being elitist about that is a waste of energy. Especially since a lot of times the things you start off thinking are tacky end up becoming market darlings. Even if they don't, they tell you something about culture, and about what may become important in your little corner of the art world. There's value in that information. Plus, nobody likes a hater, how dreadful. You can be a critic without being a snob.

Secondly, markets move quickly but it is the long game that really matters. At the end of the day, artists are human beings who brave themselves to make things people can look at and analyze for hundreds of years, things that speak to our collective power and history. We want them to have long term success which is much harder than flash in the pan success. It is exciting when an artist is on his or her (usually his, but I digress) third sold out show and prices are skyrocketing and museums are eyeing works. But I consider it exploitative to not try to strategize for that artist's fifteenth show, or thirtieth, for the different phases of their work as they age and grow.

## What knowledge and skills learned from your trajectory in the art world will you carry forth into this new phase of your life?

Well, I learned how to negotiate from the greatest negotiators in the modern world, and that is something I'm wildly appreciative of—especially as a woman, because I firmly feel that my gender has resulted in a deeply imbedded imposter syndrome that's been and continues to be pretty hard to shirk, because hello—our entire culture tells us we are “less than” literally all of the time. So, having a boss from the start that had confidence in me was a real gift, and it taught me that knowing your own value and the real worth of what you're selling (whether it be yourself as a brand or a product or art) is the only place to negotiate from. I had to fake my confidence until it became more real, and I still do some days.

I've also met a truly vast array of people. Some friendly, some terribly boring, some rude, some wonderful. I have learned something from each and every one, because I am now, 15 years in, well versed in the fine art of asking questions and listening. I could probably go into some interrogation unit at the CIA as my next move. Unless they give you wine at the CIA, once I have two sips of wine, I will share almost anything about myself.



I mean the art world has given me so, so much. An entire education about peoples' passions, about activism, about true freedom, about economic systems, about global trade, about history. I'm going to try really hard to never forget any of it. It's a fascinating, fast paced, extremely glamorous and important place.

What did the process of sitting down and starting to write look like? Was there an 'aha' moment when the idea to write your story in a public facing way came to you?

The process of sitting down and starting to write looked like me wearing no pants, lying in bed for hours on end with my laptop on my stomach which is probably really, really terrible for my organs despite what the people at Apple say, with my kid next to me watching cartoons because I'm a bad mom (eyeroll) who prioritized my own creative identity for an extra couple hours a day for like, six months. I guess I've been writing as a hobby for about three years, I started journaling when my son was born, then I took a great writing class with one of my best friends. But a few months before quarantine started, I decided to turn the hobby into something useful and committed to writing a whole book. Truthfully it poured out of me, it wasn't hard because it was fun, and it flowed. I have a lot of unqualified opinions that I've always wanted a way to share. Instagram just wasn't cutting it anymore!

My book is about my experience becoming a mom and I was writing it as I was processing my terrible and lengthy postpartum depression, as well as my relationship with my son, which changed a



lot during quarantine because I was physically with him so much more than usual, since before this I had a full-time job outside of the home. I guess my aha moment was when I realized that if I had read a book like mine when I was suffering, I wouldn't have felt so alone, and I would have recognized my problem and gotten help sooner. Then I started feeling like I almost had an ethical imperative to publish this thing.

How do you envision this second career life intersecting with the art world?

My true self is an art history nerd, like a real dork who only wants to talk about art and history stuff at parties, so a lot of my writing is through that lens, I can't give it up. Learning something new about art history is like a drug to me, literally my brain feels euphoric when I'm learning. I just want to chase that and write about things that are so interesting to me that I get lost in research and in words.

So, I hope to keep writing and lecturing about contemporary culture as seen through art, especially culture around parenthood and gender equality and income disparity and wealth inequality and things like that, which have impacted me personally in good and in bad ways. I'm obsessed with analyzing contradiction. I don't think I necessarily deserve a platform, but since I have a small one, I'm fired up about using it for discussions that I think really matter.

## Looking forward to the next few years, what most excites you about your new path?

The fact that I'm in the insanely lucky place to be able to chase my joy and ideas that get me excited. I'm committing some time to following whatever inspires me, writing about whatever feels empowering and fun. I'm being super judicious about any assignments I take so that I have time to work on my own creativity and my own projects--which is very different from working for someone else, in their structure, using their template. I don't know where I'll end up, exactly, but I hope it involves being in community with tons of women and parents who find reassurance and relief in my message and constantly talking about ideas and things that matter and make peoples' lives better.

I'm also doing some consulting projects for people I like, whose businesses I like, in the space where fashion, tech, art, branding and philanthropy overlap. Just giving advice, ideating, connecting people, strategizing, which is easy to do in the sense that it makes me happy to hook up people I care about whose missions I believe in. And of course, I will always do my nonprofit work, do whatever I can to amplify and make money for American Ballet Theatre, Recess, Skyhigh Farm, Art Production Fund. I absolutely love planning and throwing events, both collabs between the arts and consumer culture brands as well as nonprofit events, and hope that model of fundraising and entertaining doesn't entirely disappear in our new world--but evolves to be more meaningful.

