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Snow Leopards and Skyscrapers  
<https://plusmagazine.net/sarah-morris/>

Publication  
Author  
Artist

Plus Magazine  
Jae Kim  
Sarah Morris

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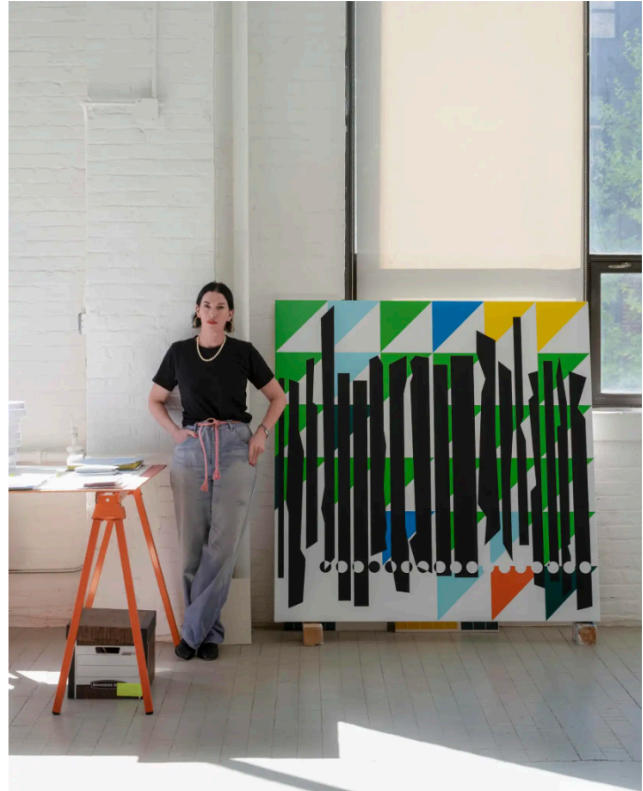
INTERVIEWS, ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

# Sarah Morris

## A City You Navigate

Words PLUS MAGAZINE

Photography JAE KIM

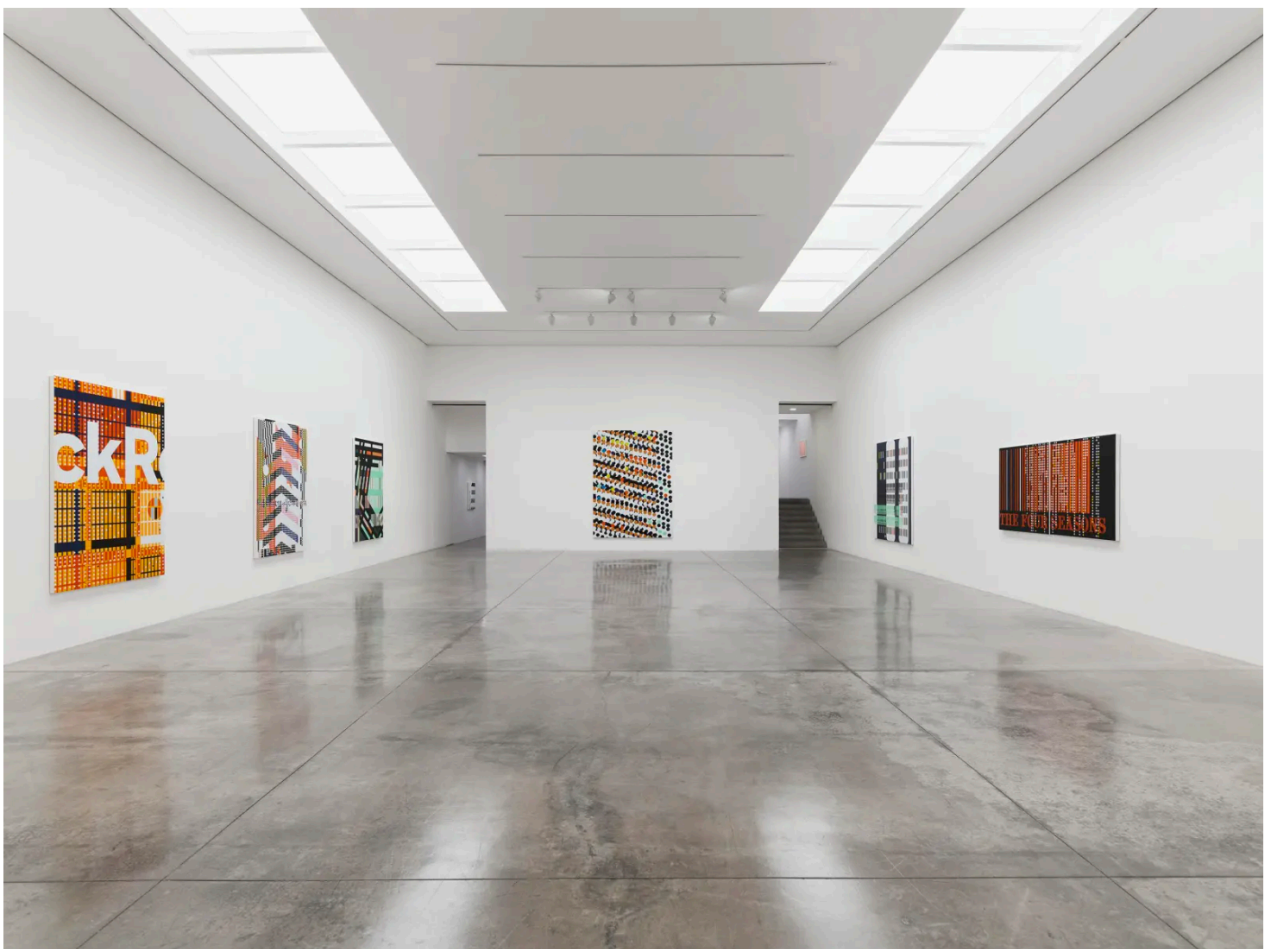


Sarah Morris has long examined the systems that shape contemporary life, translating the language of corporations, government bodies, and financial institutions into paintings of sharp geometry and charged color. Their surfaces can recall the grid of a city block, corporate signage, or the coded rhythms of urban movement. In films, Morris turns to the people and structures that animate those environments, turning their lens on the choreography of institutions; bodies in rehearsal, athletes mid-competition, pedestrians moving through intersections without looking up.

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Her current exhibition, “Snow Leopards and Skyscrapers” at White Cube Mason’s Yard, brings these strands together through a new group of paintings and two films made nearly three decades apart. Across them, New York runs through as a recurring presence, a city shaped by ambition, performance, and power, and one that has long informed Morris’s way of seeing.



Sarah Morris. “Snow Leopards and Skyscrapers,” White Cube Mason’s Yard. 11 March – 9 May 2026 © Sarah Morris. Photo © White Cube (Theo Christelis)

**PLUS MAGAZINE** *Midtown* was shot in a single day in 1998, and you’re placing it back into the present with your exhibition, “Snow Leopards and Skyscrapers.” What shifts for you when a work made that long ago is in the room again, especially given how we experience images, movement, and the city now?

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**SARAH MORRIS** A lot has changed. Even people's choreography, the way they hold their bodies and move through space, has shifted, largely because of the phone.

When I look at *Midtown*, what stands out is how people moved together through the city. You can see their faces, there is eye contact, a kind of shared presence. Now it feels very different. People look down, avoid contact, and there's a sense of withdrawal.

At the same time, in terms of how I view being an artist, I don't think much has changed. That film functioned as a manifesto for me. The world has evolved through globalization and digitization, but my way of thinking about navigating as an artist has remained consistent.

I made the film originally for a show at the Ludwig Museum. I wanted something condensed, almost like a manifesto for the paintings, a way of situating my practice. My first studio was on 42nd Street, and I wanted to understand how public, commercial, and corporate space informed artistic decision-making.

It was also a way of holding onto a place I loved, a kind of time capsule. I hired a news crew and worked with a very structured shot list, specific intersections, specific times of day, actual coordinates. I wanted to capture those pulse points and the flow of the city.

New York was the epicenter for me then, even though I was mainly living in London when I made the film. There was already a sense of looking back, thinking about what the city had given me and how it shaped my work. The graphics, the sound, the adrenaline, the movement of the eye, all of that comes from New York. It comes from the grid, the structure, the labyrinth of the city.

▮ And showing it alongside *Chris Rock (2025)*, made 27 years later, creates an unavoidable conversation between the two. What did you want that juxtaposition to produce?

SM I was interested in how a voice gets shaped by the city. How someone working in a completely different field understands their formation through New York.

Chris Rock talks about *Saturday Night Live* and the early comedy clubs where he started out. His stand-up comes from this idea of talking back, which feels very tied to the identity of New York.

I grew up with *Saturday Night Live*. The opening trailer is itself a lure for the city. It is the image of the city in it of itself, but at the same time, it's political satire. It sits in this space where it's both mainstream and slightly outside of it, and that tension is always interesting to me.

I wanted to look at how he developed his voice, how he navigated his profession, what shaped him, and what obstacles were there. New York is full of different systems happening all at once, all competing for space and attention, and comedy can be one of the ways those tensions get expressed. It can push back.

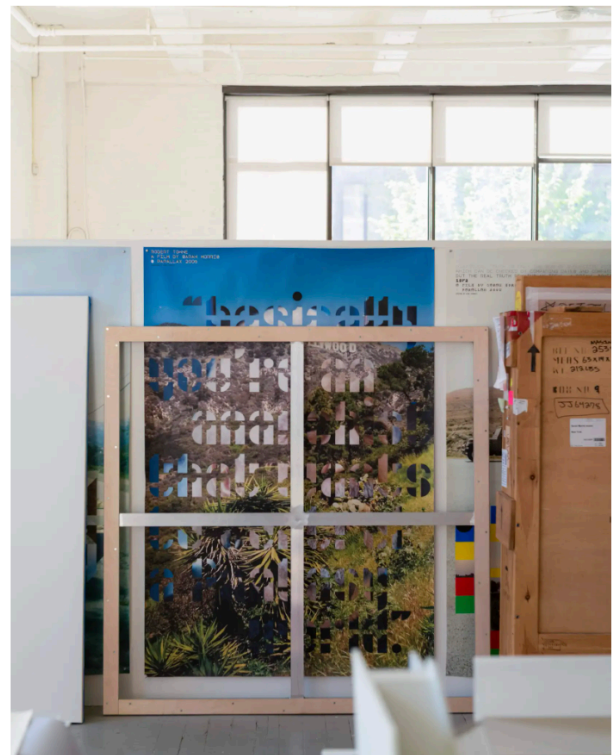
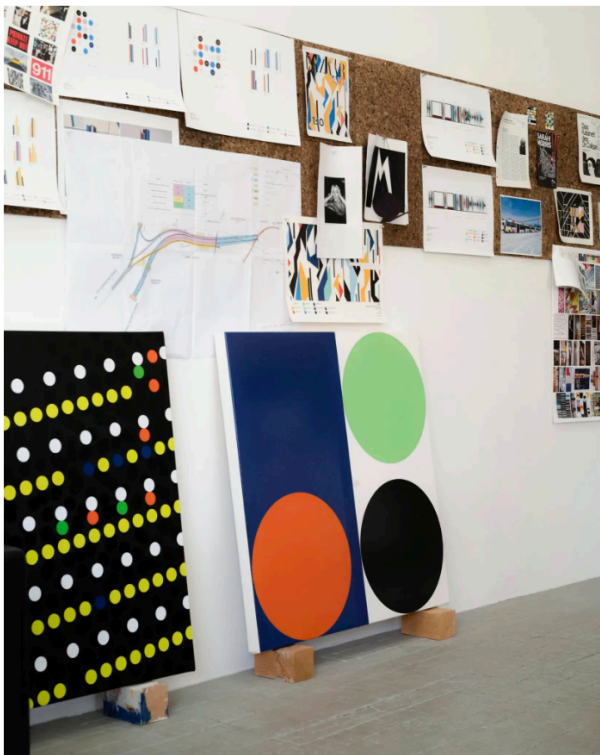
The way we filmed it added another layer. We were shooting a rehearsal for a Netflix live show on a constructed TV set which was the Baltimore Theater. It looks like a real performance space, and it is, but it's also, in this case, designed for broadcast. So what you're seeing is a rehearsal for a live television production, which adds another level to that idea of performance and staging.

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P That layering of rehearsal and broadcast brings up something that runs through a lot of your films, this interplay between performance and reality, between what's controlled and what isn't.

SM Yes, the idea of performance runs through all of it. If you think about *Beijing* (2008), for example, you have gymnasts, if you are watching "Los Angeles" (2004) you have actors in casting call sessions. There's aspiration, rejection, and competition. A lot of those people remain anonymous, even though they're part of something highly visible. Some of that spectacle is broadcast, some of it stays hidden. And that's true in New York as well, so many decisions are being made that you never actually see. What interests me is how performance connects to spectacle across different systems, whether it's entertainment, sports, politics, or comedy, and what those performances are addressing or pushing against.



Inside Sarah Morris's New York studio.

P And when that shifts into painting, how do you arrive at a visual language for a specific institution? Is it research-driven or more intuitive?

SM It's never just one thing. There are different points of entry: architecture, lighting, sometimes even nautical signaling, or currency, financial reports. All of that can feed into it.

But there isn't a direct line between reality and the painting. It's not illustrative in that sense. There's some research, but not in an investigative way.

The title itself is already a kind of provocation. It anchors the work in a place and a time, but the painting develops through a much broader internal process.

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P You mentioned the title as a provocation. What drew you to using the names of organizations and institutions in the first place?

SM I'm interested in creating quasi-institutions through painting, and that goes back to artists like Marcel Broodthaers, or even Warhol and Judd, who were already playing with those structures in different ways. These works function as stand-ins or proxies. They engage scale and the feeling of being enmeshed in systems larger than ourselves. There's a push-pull dynamic, a feedback loop between individuals and the structures that shape behavior. Those systems influence movement, decision-making, and perception, even when we try to ignore them. The work engages ideas of capitalist realism and subjectivity within those environments. So the paintings start to act like markers in space, directing movement and organizing experience.

P That interplay seems to carry into how your films and paintings relate to each other as well. In this exhibition, works such as *Department of War (2025)* and *Midtown* are encountered together in the same building. How does that proximity shift the experience of each?

SM They're always happening at the same time. It's not that one feeds the other in a linear way. Paintings are slow and systematic. Films are fast, collaborative, and expensive. They are two distinct systems that complement each other. Film allows broader distribution and accessibility. Painting remains physical in a different temporal way. Together, they explore what defines a place, from anonymous individuals to visible figures. The paintings can function as virtual architecture, extending beyond traditional definitions of painting. They are all part of a single creative output. Different mediums create multiple directionalities within the work. I'm interested in using reality as fiction and allowing paintings to stand in for reality.

They operate as forms of currency, markers of site, and indicators of power. They engage movement, exchange, and spatial hierarchy.

P Lastly, you've been working with White Cube for over thirty years now. What has it meant to grow your practice alongside them, from that first show titled "One False Move" at Duke Street in 1996 to now?

SM It feels very brief in retrospect. The art world in the 1990s was smaller, but it was still very competitive. You didn't get information instantly; it came through magazines, conversations, and meeting people directly. I met Jay Jopling in New York. He came to my studio on 28th Street when I was making those text paintings, and that's where the first show in London was immediately planned. Before that, I had a studio on 42nd Street, but it was temporary, part of New York City's redevelopment plan, so everyone knew we'd have to move on at some point.

London in the late 90s felt very alive in a different way. There were openings all the time, a lot of different directions of work happening simultaneously, and it felt less hierarchical than New York. There was also a lot of overlap between art, music, and fashion; people were moving across those spaces quite naturally.

For me, it's really been about relationships and our dialogue. When there is mutual understanding, collaboration continues.

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Sarah Morris's "Snow Leopards and Skyscrapers" is on view at White Cube Mason's Yard, 25-26 Masons Yard, London, from March 11 to May 9, 2025.