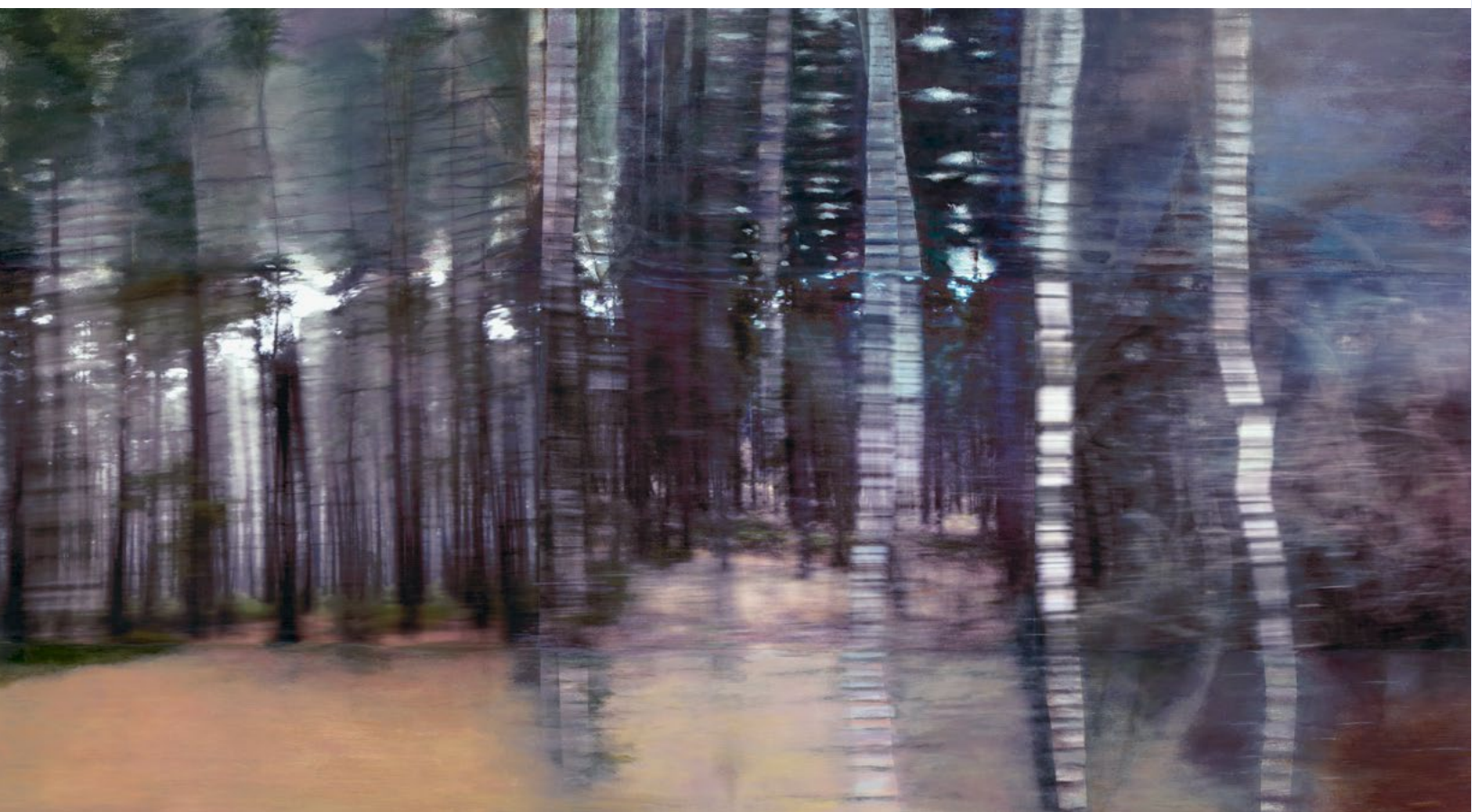


## SARA FRIEDLANDER

*Blurred Landscapes —  
Czech Woods, 2009*

Original photos and paint on wooden panel  
26 x 48 x 2 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## SUSAN HEEGER

# I Let You Go

### Lessons from my Monther's Death

**W**hen my mother died, I didn't know what to do with myself, but I had to do something. After clearing my house of all her medicines and equipment, I set up a kind of memorial in my office. Along the bookshelves, I propped pictures of her—as a toddler hugging a cat, as a three-year-old being cuddled by *her* mom, who would die within months. I tried to represent the eras of her youth, from the early terriers and pet chickens to the grim reign of a stepmother, to sorority sisters and fellow Navy WAVES, who, arm in arm, giggled with her at the camera. Later, on her wedding day, she poses in a blue suit, looking grave, as if she knows she's making a mistake.

I tucked battery-operated candles among the photos, with bowls of water (“The dead get thirsty,” said a Buddhist friend of my sister’s) and chocolate, her favorite food. Next came shells she’d gathered on beaches, china dogs from her childhood, and the amber beads she was wearing when she died. And though they’d been divorced forever and he’d married again, twice, my dad’s picture joined the rest on the three-year anniversary of his death, which fell a week after hers. Once he was there, of course, I had to add my brother, John, who died before both of them.

\* \* \*

In her final days, Mom assured my sister and me: *I'll never leave you. I'll always be here.* Touching first Laura's heart, then mine.

I was used to her exaggerated comforts, which tended to skip past the realities of suffering.

*Oh, sweetheart, darling! Tomorrow's another day! When I'm sad, I clean out a drawer! You'll see, you'll look back on this and laugh!*

This time, as her body failed, I sensed her trying to console herself, hating the thought of our grieving.

After she died, her promise stuck in my head. *Would* she somehow hang around? Shouldn't I consider the possibility?

I began to do things to show my openness.

I went to a yoga studio for a ritual called “Finding Your Spirit Guide,” described as out-of-body “journeying,” led by visions of “power animals.”

While I'd read Carlos Castaneda in my teens, and experimented with acid, I didn't actually expect a visionary