

NIGHT GALLERY

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In Focus: Samara Golden

Disorientating interiors and invented spaces



'Mass Murder', 2014, installation view at Night Gallery, Los Angeles. Courtesy: the artist and Night Gallery, Los Angeles

Like many children, when she was young Samara Golden liked to lie with her legs over the back of the sofa and look at the room upside down. She was fascinated by the space that appeared: when the ceiling became the floor, the room became strange, much bigger, more exciting – large items of furniture now dangling down from above and all the clutter lofted up there too – and though physically real, only accessible from Golden's singular, inverted viewpoint.

She achieved a similar effect in her most recent exhibition, 'Mass Murder' (2014), at Night Gallery in Los Angeles. Through a darkened gallery, visitors entered *The Blue Room* (2014), a crepuscular installation in which seven silver couches were arranged on blue carpet. Hanging upside down were another four couches, hovering over their floor-bound counterparts. The disorientating effect was compounded by two long walls of mirrors that further doubled the



The Fireplace, 2013, anaglyphic video projections, foam insulation, paint, mirror and 3D glasses, installation view at MOCA, Los Angeles. Courtesy: the artist and Night Gallery, Los Angeles

arrangement and then, because they were at right angles, quadrupled it.

To walk through Golden's intense environments is to be assailed by discordant registers of information and material. In 'Mass Murder', for instance, the couches, side tables, lamps, ashtrays and a grand piano were all made – with varying degrees of finesse – from sheets of a silver-papered insulation board that is a favourite material of the artist's. An ashtray contained real cigarette butts, a blanket and sweater formerly belonging to Golden were slung over the arms of couches, and a large video projection of a hyper-saturated ocean sunset suffused the space with a coral glow. Elsewhere, Golden had coated a wide-brimmed hat in blue modelling putty, and added a glistening red brain that appeared to have exploded out of one side.

The spaces that Golden realizes in her installations are both actual and illusory,

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remembered and invented. 'Mass Murder' was inspired by Golden's childhood memories of her two very different grandmothers. When she combines almost unbearably significant personal artefacts with images that border on the generic – such as that sunset – she is opening the door to an alternative future. For years, Golden has been drawn to the theoretical construct of the sixth dimension – an idea that she absorbed as much from science fiction and psychedelia as from the 'many-worlds' interpretation of quantum mechanics. The first three dimensions, as everyone knows, are spatial, and the fourth is temporal. The fifth dimension – as yet hypothetical – involves travel back and forth through linear time. As Golden pictures it, the sixth dimension renders linear time spatial, so that infinite possible pasts and infinite possible futures exist simultaneously within every living moment.

The concept is, on the face of it, analogous to imaginative travel. But it could also be a metaphor for objects having multiple meanings, or for places splitting into alternative, and even conflicting, simultaneous versions of themselves. In *The Beachside Room* (2011), part of her exhibition 'Rape of the Mirror', also at Night Gallery, Golden pointed a video camera at a projection of waves breaking onto a beach. In front of the projection were two silver chairs, on one of which was a bundle of red fabric. The footage from the camera was playing on two monitors and was chroma-keyed to remove the colour red; the result was that waves from the rear projection now washed through the fabric in front, as if possessing it. If the red material was legible as a stand-in for a human body, then the monitors depicted something akin to teleportation.

'The place I want to go to in my work is totally indescribable,' Golden has said. To which end, she builds wormholes within her installations – as with the real-time, modified video footage – that allow us to slip through into parallel dimensions. Mirrors, which have featured prominently in all of Golden's major installations, achieve a similar effect. In *The Fireplace* (2013), a single silver armchair faces a faux-stone fireplace, above which what appears to be an oval mirror is actually a screen for analoglyphic (3D to you and me) renderings of Golden's iPhone photographs, which flash through at an astonishing clip. Handmade blue-and-red-lensed 3D glasses are available for viewers to wear, thus casting the photographs onto an illusionary recessive plane. An actual mirror is laid on the floor between the chair and the hearth; it reflects inverted writing projected on the ceiling.

The text is a kind of stream-of-consciousness, middle-of-the-night interior monologue, the

cyclical babble of doubt and worry that scrolls through your mind when you are too delirious with tiredness to sleep. Golden's work sails close, at times, to madness. (An installation made for Frieze New York in 2012 was titled *Bad Brains*.) It is a mistake, however, to read these densely coded, quasi-revelatory scenes solely as autobiographical, confessional or – worse – self-absorbed. Personal experience and biographical significance are the only routes Golden has found to access the intensity of pitch she demands of her work. The artist believes that if universality exists within art (and that's a big 'if') then it is only accessible through one's recognition of the authentic expression of another's experience.

Bad Brains was inspired by the history of Randall's Island, where the Frieze art fair is held, which since the mid-19th century has been the location of a number of New York's psychiatric hospitals. In the installation, ghostly grey faces painted on foam panels were piled on the floor in a heap, while a double staircase ascended either side of a horizontal mirror that reflected a video projection of blue water. Golden thinks of the mirror as a wishing well – a way into a better future or, less optimistically, just a vision of a more appealing present.

As 18th-century landscape painters knew, the view often looks much better when reflected in a mirror. Messy, confusing spaces snap into tight compositions, extraneous information is cropped out, and light and shade blend into pleasing chiaroscuro. Golden uses mirrors in her installations for these reasons and more. If a sense of disappointment clings to her rudimentary sculptures – a feeling that these low-class objects are striving, and failing, to transcend their materiality – then it is in the mirror that they finally become all they ever wanted to be.

Samara Golden is an artist based in Los Angeles, USA. Recent exhibitions include the solo show 'Mass Murder' at Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2014), and the group exhibition 'Room to Live' at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2013–14).

Jonathan Griffin