



Eli Diner, “Samara Golden”, *Artforum*, April 2014.



Samara Golden.  
*Actions Reflect*,  
2014, mixed media,  
dimensions variable.  
Installation view.

## Samara Golden NIGHT GALLERY

Four, maybe five scenes made up Samara Golden’s sprawling exhibition “Mass Murder,” though clear boundaries were not easily distinguishable. One room spilled into the next, and sounds bled through the walls. The overall effect was disorienting, at times delirious, and scenes may not have appeared quite the same going as they did coming. I call them *scenes*, though one might think that *environments*, *situations*, or *tableaux* would serve just as well. But there was a heightened theatricality to the exhibition, a gruesome domestic drama, at once high camp and genuinely unsettling.

With its gloomy mood lighting and sinister sound track (featuring toy pianos, hissing radios, and the score from *Apocalypse Now* played backward), “Mass Murder” resembled nothing so much as a haunted house. Golden revels in the hokeyness attendant in such ghoulish effects and the sentimentality implicit in this low-tech fright-night fantasy, as if it were all a distant Halloween memory.

Yet the overfamiliar here became quickly defamiliarized. Through the clearing mist of a fog machine, it became evident that a single, strangely illegible material—at once dull and polished, solid and soft—accounted for nearly every object in sight: couches, lamps, and walls; a guitar, a baby grand, and a trio of old electric keyboards; down to and including the mother-of-pearl tiles encrusting vases, decorative boxes, and a tissue dispenser. And that was just one room—the parlor, we’ll call it. Around the corner, in the “kitchen,” an L-shaped counter, a table, a fridge, and some stools were all made of this stuff, which, it turns out, is Rmax, polyisocyanurate roof and wall insulation. In fabricating her scenes out

of a material meant to remain invisible within domestic architecture, Golden formally embodies the old tropes—delights in the clichés—about the hidden violence of domesticity and the dark underbelly of suburbia.

Though their forms are blunt, examined up close, the objects’ dim metallic surfaces are tormented with wrinkles. Globes of accumulated glue glisten around the edges. There is something clamorously fake in these textures, which, in turn, play strangely off those of the few other materials in the installation. In the parlor, for instance, the cheap carpeting and, strewn across the sofas, a couple of dingy blankets and a thrift-shop sweater adorned with fake pearls not only appeared lifeless and dull against the exuberant phoniness of the Rmax construction but also seemed somehow even phonier despite being *real* objects. A projection covering the far wall offered a beach at sunset with figures in silhouette strolling up and down, a video mural of the banal sublime. Indeed, the entire installation was a paean to the mundane, the crappy, the subtly grotesque.

In the kitchen, this *mise-en-scène* turned almost operatic. Perched along the counter was an array of pillows in the shape of animals, their little faces crudely painted on. The fabrics out of which Golden created these doggies and kitties constitute an extraordinary catalogue of kitsch textiles, though she manifests a particular predilection for food prints: nachos, bacon, fried chicken, and wieners cooking on the grill. Of course, this kind of mining of the abject and the perverse within the banal is an interest Golden shares with earlier practitioners of the immersive, spectacular tableau, Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley among them.

But unlike those of her predecessors, Golden’s rooms are all objects, no subjects. They are *tableaux morts*. Even the victim of the titular “murder” appeared to be an Rmax table into which a number of butter knives had been plunged. This world of things alone—this world of interiors—effected a vertiginous back-and-forth between specificity and generality, between here and nowhere in particular, between an abstracted domesticity and a real, lived-in place, peering through the fog of memory.

—Eli Diner