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REVIEWS APR. 21, 2014



## Samara Golden

LOS ANGELES,  
at Night

by Jennifer S. Li



Far left, view of Samara Golden's installation *Actions Reflect*, 2014, mixed mediums; at Night.

In the macabre comedy *Being John Malkovich*, the protagonist discovers a small door in his office that turns out to be a gateway into the mind of actor/filmmaker John Malkovich, and then gives people access to it for a fee. Samara Golden's immersive exhibition "Mass Murder" at Night Gallery provided as close to a physical entry into the mind of an artist as can be accomplished without such a magic portal. Often compared to the late Mike Kelley, Golden uses a stream-of-consciousness approach to build affecting installations that incorporate pop cultural elements.

The gallery entrance took visitors into an almost pitch-black space filled with cacophonous music—the soundtrack to *Apocalypse Now* played backward—that produced an off-kilter ambience. From there, a hallway led into the first room, which featured plush periwinkle carpet, mirrored walls and plumes of misty smoke emitted from machines. Multiple hard-angled couches lined the room, including some affixed to the ceiling, and a grand piano stood off to one side. Golden built all the furniture from an aluminum-faced foam board called Rmax. She has a personal history with the material—her father used it to fabricate geodesic domes for a failed emergency-preparedness retail enterprise—and she enjoys its light, pliant qualities. Various items were placed on the couches: a peach chenille blanket, a beaded sweater, a plastic hat with a toy brain attached to it. Keepsake boxes and a guitar, all made out of Rmax, decorated the top of the piano. Video footage of a sunset on the beach, projected against an entire wall, filled the room with fiery, glowing light.

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This surreal lounge gave way to a domestic, kitchenlike scene (again made largely of Rmax) in the second room, which contained a countertop construction—on which, incongruously, a number of handmade fabric-stuffed animals were arranged—a refrigerator and vegetable-patterned wallpaper. Set neatly with placemats and cloth napkins, a dining table for two was impaled with butter knives. Three clock radios flashed the wrong time and played a mix of music, white noise and talk shows.

At the gallery, Golden mentioned to me that the first room was about "my 'fancy' grandma, but it's also meant to be a contemplative space"; when conceiving the second room, she imagined her grandparents sitting down to a meal at the table, in a scenario that represented the difficulty and delicacy of relationships. In the press release, she offers other ideas behind the installation, with a list of statements such as: "It's the disillusionment of the Vietnam generation, it's my parents. . . . It's a room that was both my sister's place and my grandma's. . . . It's the black and white TV, the alcohol, the reading, the neon knitted Afghans, the curly grey hair, the heart problems, the smoke, and the cigarettes." But while the work might have touched on her own biography, Golden was careful not to dictate a narrative to viewers, instead giving them space for their own ruminations.

Ultimately, visitors to John Malkovich's mind initiated a series of events that affected both their lives and that of the host, much to his dismay. Unlike Malkovich, Golden is a generous host, inviting people into her headspace and allowing them not only to see through her eyes but also to steer the production to their own conclusions.

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