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Samara Golden Is Spilling Her 'Guts'

LOS ANGELES — It's a dizzying and disorienting experience, where moments of serenity jockey with sensations of disgust. Inaugurating Night Gallery's new warehouse space, which opens this weekend, the artist Samara Golden has built a mirrored chamber that creates the illusion of a skyscraper. Different floors offer competing images — from calm turquoise waters to coiled snakes and crabs — capturing the emotional whiplash of the last two years.

The installation has a relatively small footprint within the warehouse. But peer into the wedge-shaped space from a viewing platform and this skyscraper seems to stretch up endlessly into the sky, and infinitely down into the abyss. Along the way is a heap of small twisted sculptures evoking intestines and a scene of a trashed apartment (as well as those snakes).

The installation is titled "Guts," and Golden, who is based in Los Angeles, is to some degree spilling her own. In an interview, she compared the work to "a brain where different thoughts battle with each other" — a sense of cognitive dissonance perhaps familiar to many these days. "I'm absolutely broken by the pandemic," she admits, describing a feeling of isolation and disconnection, "but I've always been someone not at ease with the world, seeing the injustices."

The title can be read many ways: it describes "the stomachache you get if you're scared, but also 'having guts' is having the confidence to try new things," the artist offered.

Golden, 48, has used mirrors before to create psychologically loaded installations for MoMA PS1, the Fabric Workshop and Museum and the 2017 Whitney Biennial. At that tentpole of cutting-edge art, viewers peered into "The Meat Grinder's Iron Clothes," which Roberta Smith, writing in *The New York Times*, described as "a dystopian combination of mirrors and eight



Samara Golden inside her skyscraper-like installation, "Guts," with floors of sculptures evoking the emotional upheaval of the last two years.

half-size miniature interiors — including some upside down — that create endless kaleidoscopic reflections of class conflict.”

“The melding of pleasure and horror it can elicit,” Smith added, “would have delighted Georges Bataille, the radical philosopher for whom ‘truth has only one face: that of a violent contradiction.’”

While the Whitney installation exposed class hierarchies, the new work is looser and more intuitive in its cascade of imagery. Golden experimented with new materials, using spray foam to make the small animal and bodily sculptures and dichroic (or multilayered) vinyl to create backdrops that dramatically change color, depending on your angle.

“The piece speaks to the art history of Southern California because of its viscerality,” said Davida Nemeroff, the founder of Night Gallery, noting echoes of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy.

Golden and Nemeroff first met when attending the Columbia University M.F.A. program and moved to Los Angeles around the same time in 2009. Nemeroff opened Night Gallery a year later in a strip-mall as an artist-run space with nighttime hours (hence the name) before stepping up the business side, easing into regular daytime hours and moving just south of downtown. Golden’s last solo show there was “Mass Murder” in 2014, an ominous walk-in installation inspired by her grandparents’ living spaces.

“I’ve wanted to do a show with Samara since then, but she’s had a lot of institutional commitments,” Nemeroff said. She immediately thought of Golden when she first visited the warehouse nearly a year ago, across the street from her existing gallery space. “I don’t want to be too insulting but it was kind of a junkyard, with broken mannequins, disco balls, feral cats,” Nemeroff said, noting that it had been used for raves. But she said it still “felt like a cathedral” and had a scale and viewing platform that she knew Golden could put to use. After “Guts” comes down, Nemeroff plans to use the space for regular exhibitions with a focus on sculpture.

At that point “Guts” will be heading to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, which has a \$344 million expansion underway to create a new center for contemporary art. The work will be part of the inaugural show, “Dream Home,” expected to open by the end of the year.

“There is quite a lot of empty spectacle in recent art,” said Justin Paton, its curator. “But Samara’s spectacle is the opposite: full of pressure, despair, fantasy, and also wonder — all of these emotional contradictions.”