

Art Now L.A.
March 14, 2022

Samara Golden: 'Guts'
Speaking to Our Fears, Desires and Dreams
Night Gallery
January 21 - March 26, 2022

by Jody Zellen



Guts are internal, as well as external. Internally, they are the organs in the stomach or belly. Externally, guts is more of an emotional state—empowered, as in it takes guts... or instinctual, as in a visceral (gut) reaction. Both meanings apply with respect to Samara Golden's spectacular installation in Night Gallery's new space. Within the expansive, raw warehouse, Golden has erected a tall white wall diagonally across the long room.

Viewers can walk around the backside of this imposing wall to find a window opening, or ascend stairs to view the work from a balcony. Peering inside what turns out to be a triangular structure reveals a fantastical building with numerous floors (and ceilings) containing different objects and species. This structure is adjacent to a mirrored floor, ceiling and walls which creates an infinity mirror filled with endless receding perspectives. The work is breathtaking and hard to comprehend, making it even more intriguing.

Like Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Rooms*, Golden's installation takes viewers on a journey through the different floors of the building, alluding to both past, present and future. The white exterior frame of the building rises above the balcony to suggest a towering skyscraper that can be seen but not entered. The only option is to gaze into the space, looking up and down and trying to assimilate its construction and understand the components that make up this incredible illusion. While in a few instances, intestine-shaped snakes scurry out from their confines onto the mirrored floor, for the most part the 'action' is contained. One floor appears to be a flowing stream created by layering blue and green reflective materials. Another 'floor' (which is actually a ceiling in reflection) is filled with interconnected and overlapping intestines in a range of flesh-related colors. Chairs, couches and other remnants of a disaster are strewn across another level. Zombie-like disintegrating bodies in bright colors crawl through yet another space.

Looking through one of two open windows at ground level or down into the structure from the balcony, creates a dizzying, de-centered effect where any recognizable sense of place disappears until one catches their reflection in the mirrors, locating oneself in the chaos. Metaphorically, the work relates to the dissociated feeling brought on by the pandemic and months of isolation that exaggerated the need for human connection. None of the floors within Golden's building are inviting, rather they emit the aura of nightmares filled with fears and uncertainty. While it is hard to look away, this is not a welcoming place. *Guts painting 1* and *Guts painting 2* (2022) are stand-alone large-scale works comprised of intertwining sculpted, bulbous intestinal forms in multiple colors that almost suggest a three-dimensional Jackson Pollock drip painting. They recall moments in horror or science fiction films where aliens burst from human bodies spilling the contents of their guts. These 'paintings' have

captured and preserved this refuse. *Nuclear Bomb* is another compelling and chilling work that sits alone in the darkened space under the balcony. Here, using soft fabric or lint, Golden has crafted the shape of a nuclear explosion confined inside a small mirrored box. It is easy to recall the image of a mushroom cloud spreading out in all directions from depictions in numerous documentary films and photographs. Yet in Golden's recreation, while the scale is diminished, its destructive power still reverberates.

Guts is a memorable and powerful exhibition that speaks to our fears, desires and dreams. Golden draws from history while simultaneously thinking about the future, creating a place no one wants to be and from which there is no escape. This gutsy, thoughtful and imaginative work resonates long after viewing.

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