

CRITICS' PICKS



Samantha Roth, *Cactus Smuggler (Nail File)*, 2022, paper, gesso, and colored pencil, 42 7/8 × 29".

LOS ANGELES

Samantha Roth

TYLER PARK PRESENTS

4043 West Sunset Blvd.

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Rendered in colored pencil on black-gessoed paper, Samantha Roth's drawings exude the dim luminance and irrational spatiality of X-rays and somniferous visions, evoking the eerie, unmoored feeling of days and places melting together during Covid-19 lockdowns. In the seven semiautobiographical pieces here, the artist meanders through her pandemic reflections, frequently veering into personal quirks in order to unpack the obsessive, voyeuristic, and paranoid tendencies that surfaced for so many of us during more than two years of isolation. Her show's title, "Duplex," not only refers to the type of home

she lives in, but also emphasizes the interplay between darkness and light, between concealment and revelation within this imagery.

In *Head to Head*, 2021, Roth imagines a radiographic view through her bedroom and into her neighbor's dwelling. The layered transparencies of jumbled furniture intermingling across separate apartments convey a portentous yet slightly comical mood of confusion and disorder. Furthering this narrative of impracticable desire for remote interaction, *Eavesdropper*, 2021—a drawing aptly displayed alone in a tiny chamber—features the titular subject pressing their upper body against a wall as a phantasmal arm materializes behind the figure, ostensibly trying to embrace them.

Tensions between transgression and tenderness are especially pointed in *Cactus Smuggler (Nail File)*, 2022. Here, the subject insouciantly grooms her fingernails while hiding about two dozen plant cuttings beneath her clothing, carefully taped to her body. According to the artist, this piece was inspired by pangs of self-identification in reading news articles about a spate of vegetation traffickers. In these stories, Roth recognized her own penchant for occasionally snatching succulent clippings to fill out her garden. As in other drawings, she modeled the figure after herself, yet omitted distinguishing features to leave the thief's identity open-ended.

Alluding to the artifice behind these quasi-confessional stagings, *Two, To, Too*, 2022, portrays a flat file with several drawers tantalizingly ajar, revealing peeks of paper masks, doodles of cats, cactus cuttings, and the artist's scribbled signature—just enough detail to allow inquisitive viewers to fill in the gaps with fancy, as an eavesdropper would.

— Annabel Osberg