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ART By HETTIE JUDAH JAN. 12, 2017

## A Show of Not-So-Inviting Rooms, Courtesy of 15 Female Artists

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Bringing together life-size dwelling spaces, miniature buildings and revealing interior photographs, the exhibition "Room," which debuts at Sadie Coles HQ in London this week, opens the doors to 15 private — and emotionally charged — spaces created by female artists.



Penny Slinger, Bookworm(An Exorcism), 1977, Photo Collage, 13.5 x 20 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and BROADWAY 1602 HARLEM & UPTOWN

Visitors will find a teenager's room, courtesy of Klara Liden, with moody black furnishings and a parent-snaring booby trap rigged with an ax. Nan Goldin shows us empty bedrooms in German brothels, overripe with chintz, swagged pelmets and sentimental pictures of children. At a doll's-house scale, Andra Ursuta recreates the kitchen of her childhood home in Romania, a site of trauma, now destroyed. "It seems to me that all the rooms are sites for emotional action, whether confronting difficult memory, social utopias, gender issues or fantasy," Coles says. "There's a lot of rage, too."

Rage certainly emanates from Louise Bourgeois's "Cell XVIII (Portrait)" (2000), a distressed, cloth-covered head trapped in a box made of mesh and glass. But three photo and collage series by artists in their earlier years — Francesca Woodman, Penny Slinger and Joanna Piotrowska — explore the relationship between room and body in more emotionally ambiguous, and even playful, terms. In 12 tiny black-and-white photographs made between 1975 and 1980, Woodman merges her models into the shabby décor of interiors in Rhode Island, New York and Rome. Some hide behind mirrors, others tumble or protrude from closets; slow shutter speeds allow their bodies to blur and fragment against the still background. Slinger's photo



Nan Goldin's photograph of her hotel bed, "My Bed, Hotel La Louisiane, Paris" (1996), offers a portrait in absentia that is at once sordid and romanticized. Above the twisted sheets and cheap checkered blanket, open bags of fruit form an apparently ad hoc still life, and a journal and notebook hint at a mind busy with ideas and inspiration, placing Goldin on a continuum with Paris's down-at-the-heel bohemians. Copyright the artist, courtesy SPROVIERI, London

collages ("An Exorcism," 1977) present surreal tableaux, most featuring young women, set within the confines of an unfurnished Gothic mansion. And for her "Shelter" series, made in Lisbon last year, Joanna Piotrowska invited her subjects to construct a den out of their possessions. These infantile and often awkward rooms-within-rooms show adults sheltering beneath mountains of rugs, stacks of books, wine boxes, a sun umbrella and even a sled.



Francesca Woodman's "Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island" (1975-78).  
Copyright the Estate of Francesca Woodman, courtesy George and Betty Woodman, and Victoria Miro, London

Exploring the ideas that informed “Room,” the curator Laura Lord drew on a number of female-authored texts, including Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) and Nan Shepherd’s “The Living Mountain” (1949). While all the artists in “Room” are female, neither Lord nor Coles sees anything as reductive as a feminine gaze or approach running through the show. In fact, some — notably Sarah Lucas and Heidi Bucher — have created explicitly male spaces. Lucas’s “Chuffing Away to Oblivion” (1996) is a smoking shed, yellowed as if with decades of nicotine and lined with lurid tabloid newspapers. Suspended from the gallery ceiling, Bucher’s “Herrenzimmer” (1977-8), a latex cast of the inside surface of her father’s study, floats with the translucent lightness of skin.

“There are certainly examples of male artists who are making similar kinds of spaces,” says Coles, citing James Casebere and Gregor Schneider, among other examples. “The works in the show are not defined as ‘women’s work,’ in a domestic or emotional way; it’s not really like that. The focus on female artists does raise interesting questions, in terms of how far gender impacts on our reading of a work. Is it inescapable?”

*“Room” is on view Jan. 13–Feb. 18 at Sadie Coles HQ, 62 Kingly St., London, [sadiccoles.com](http://sadiccoles.com).*