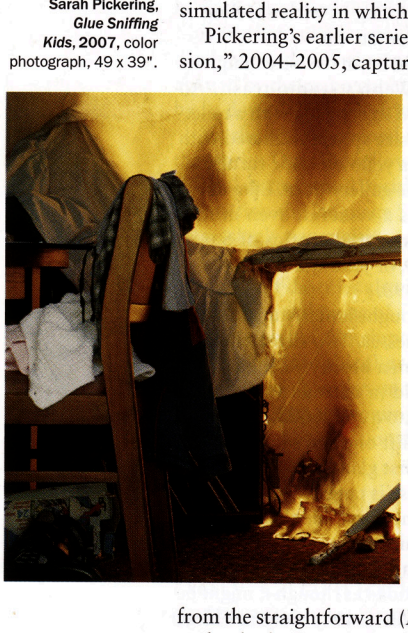
Sarah Pickering

DANIEL COONEY FINE ART

Preparedness seems to be a watchword of the era of "global terrorism" and global warming. The expectation of calamity keeps us stockpiling food, water, and moist towelettes, even as the distance between preparing for an unknown catastrophe and actually experiencing it encompasses a vast speculative terrain. In her third series on disaster preparedness, British artist Sarah Pickering again investigates that divide, plotting her most incisive course yet into the weird realms of simulated reality in which first responders practice their trades.



Sarah Pickering, *Glue Sniffing Kids*, 2007, color photograph, 49 x 39".

Pickering's earlier series "Public Order," 2002–2005, and "Explosion," 2004–2005, captured, respectively, the empty street sets (blank storefronts and housing facades) utilized for training by British riot police, and the pyrotechnic blasts used to prepare the police and the military for combat. In her latest project, "Fire Scene," 2007, Pickering introduces a heightened level of context. From 2006 to 2007, she served as artist-in-residence at the UK Fire Service College, where crime-scene investigators are trained to predict the behavior patterns of domestic fires. To this end, huge shipping crates are dressed to resemble a room—complete with furniture, carpeting, books, toys, objets d'art, clothes, and dishes—and are set ablaze. Once the fire has consumed the replica, trainees search for clues amid the ashes.

Pickering photographs these fires, usually shortly after their inception, from the close vantage of the doorway. As indicated by the images' titles, their causes range from the straightforward (*Electric Radiator* [all works 2007], *Candles*) to the shady (*Insurance Job*, *Glue Sniffing Kids*) to the grisly (*Vandals*, *Abduction*). The series isn't without a certain dastardly humor. In *Cigarette*, a blazing easy chair backgrounds a dining table littered with, among other items, a pack of Silk Cut cigarettes and a box of Cardene, a medication used to treat angina and hypertension, conditions caused in part by smoking. The tongue-in-cheek *House Fire* shows a living room furnished with a child's fort fashioned from a bedsheet and a toy house that has been set alight. The rooms' detailed appointments bind them convincingly to reality. The home computer in *Insurance Job*, for instance, looks old and incomplete, and in *Abduction*, a handgun is visible amid the blistering flames. Yet other features of the rooms pull back the curtain to demonstrate their pure functionality: None are decorated with wallpaper or paint, and the carpet pattern repeats in several photographs.

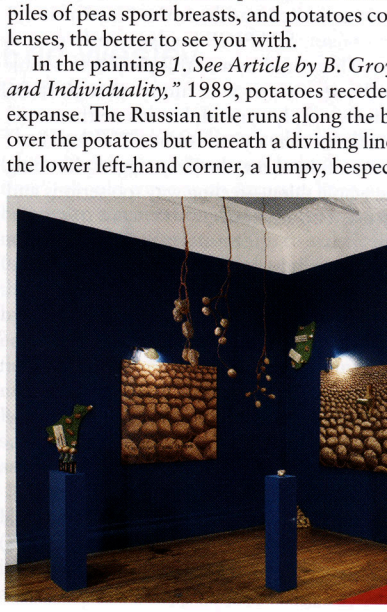
Though the premise of her series is seemingly simple, Pickering gets the maximum from the minimum. Her images reveal staged dramas (the artist likens them to British soap operas), but the act of photographing them transmutes the sensational into the documentary. Simultaneously, however, this same action serves to heighten the imaginary quality of the scenarios: Fake homes burned by acts of pretend arson or feigned carelessness are preserved in images that attest to their actuality. Additionally, the rooms are reconstructed over and over again—a sort of burning-bush effect, in which the fire does not consume its object and the set appears as though it has remained intact, further complicating ties to the real. Investigators search the smoldering remnants for hints of a fire's magnitude, direction, and intensity, and Pickering obligates her viewe for evidence that points either to the real c trust that some combination of the two wil

The Peppers

RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

In 1991, Ludmila Skripkina and Oleg Pe known as the Peppers, installed *Potato Roo* lery. The Peppers were part of a loose-kni "Moscow conceptualists" in the early 1 member was Ilya Kabakov. The '91 show now their only—solo gallery exhibition in included, among other things, six large pa made of peas and book fragments, and nu hung on and stacked atop cerulean blue w gnarled potato vines dangled menacingly f pounds of the vegetable slowly rotted in th

For the Peppers' recent show, also at Fel structed and presented alongside twenty- tures by the couple, all from 1989 to 199 and solidified the gallery's own role in bring during perestroika (in a manner similar to i Against the State: Perestroika Revisited"), a of the recent Sots Art exhibition that travel it reasserted the significance of the Pepp actively since the early '90s.

Potato Room is clearly indebted to Kaba in its animation of mundane items of *byt* (ev of fantasy. The sardonic world that the Pe in the potato installation but also in charts *Discharge as Related to the Degree of Vag to Hermin*, 1989, and *Methods of Provocat* absurdist irony (although theirs lacks Kaba Here is a world in which pot lids are used piles of peas sport breasts, and potatoes co lenses, the better to see you with.

In the painting *1. See Article by B. Gro and Individuality,"* 1989, potatoes recede expanse. The Russian title runs along the b over the potatoes but beneath a dividing lin the lower left-hand corner, a lumpy, bespec