

# DART DesignArtsDaily

## Burn, Baby, Burn

By Peggy Roalf Thursday, January 17, 2008

Sarah Pickering has an uncanny knack for developing visual narratives designed to simultaneously scare and thrill the viewer. In her series, *Explosions*, which was exhibited at Daniel Cooney Fine Art in 2006, the bucolic English countryside is rocked by outbursts of napalm, land mines, artillery and other kinds of ordnance. Photographed on military proving grounds where scaled-down versions of the real thing are detonated to prepare troops for combat, these images reveal how little we know about the actual theater of war - and how compelling it is to view a scene that includes a firestorm.



Left to right: *Cigarette Accident*; *Abduction*; *Electric Radiator*, by Sarah Pickering, courtesy of Daniel Cooney Fine Art.

In her new series, *Fire Scene*, Pickering delves into what might be the most fearful of thoughts: a fire at home. The images currently on view at Daniel Cooney make this fear palpable. In scene after scene, fire engulfs the contents of some clearly downscale homes, and the titles she ascribes them only ups the ante: *Glue Sniffing Kids*; *Insurance Job*; *Cigarette Accident*; *Makeshift Cooking*.

But things are not quite what they seem to be. In her continuing fascination with simulated events and how they are perceived, Pickering has found another site for her investigations. As the artist in residence at the UK Fire Service College, she had access to the set-up rooms that are used to stage fires to be studied by forensic crime scene investigators in training.

The rooms are painstakingly assembled to a level of detail that reveals the lives and the behavior patterns of their imaginary inhabitants. They have pictures on the walls, underwear in drawers, ornaments, trinkets, and books on shelves, and even food on the kitchen table. Sarah Pickering says they are modeled after homes typical of a low-income social group, "people with guilty secrets and complicated personal lives -- with more than a passing similarity to the sensational characterizations in British soap operas. By photographing the rooms as they burn, I try to capture the idea of completeness and ruin set within a continuing cycle of construction and destruction."

*Fire Scene* continues through March 15, 2008 at Daniel Cooney Fine Art, 511 West 25th Street, #506 New York, NY 10001. For more information, [please check the website](#).