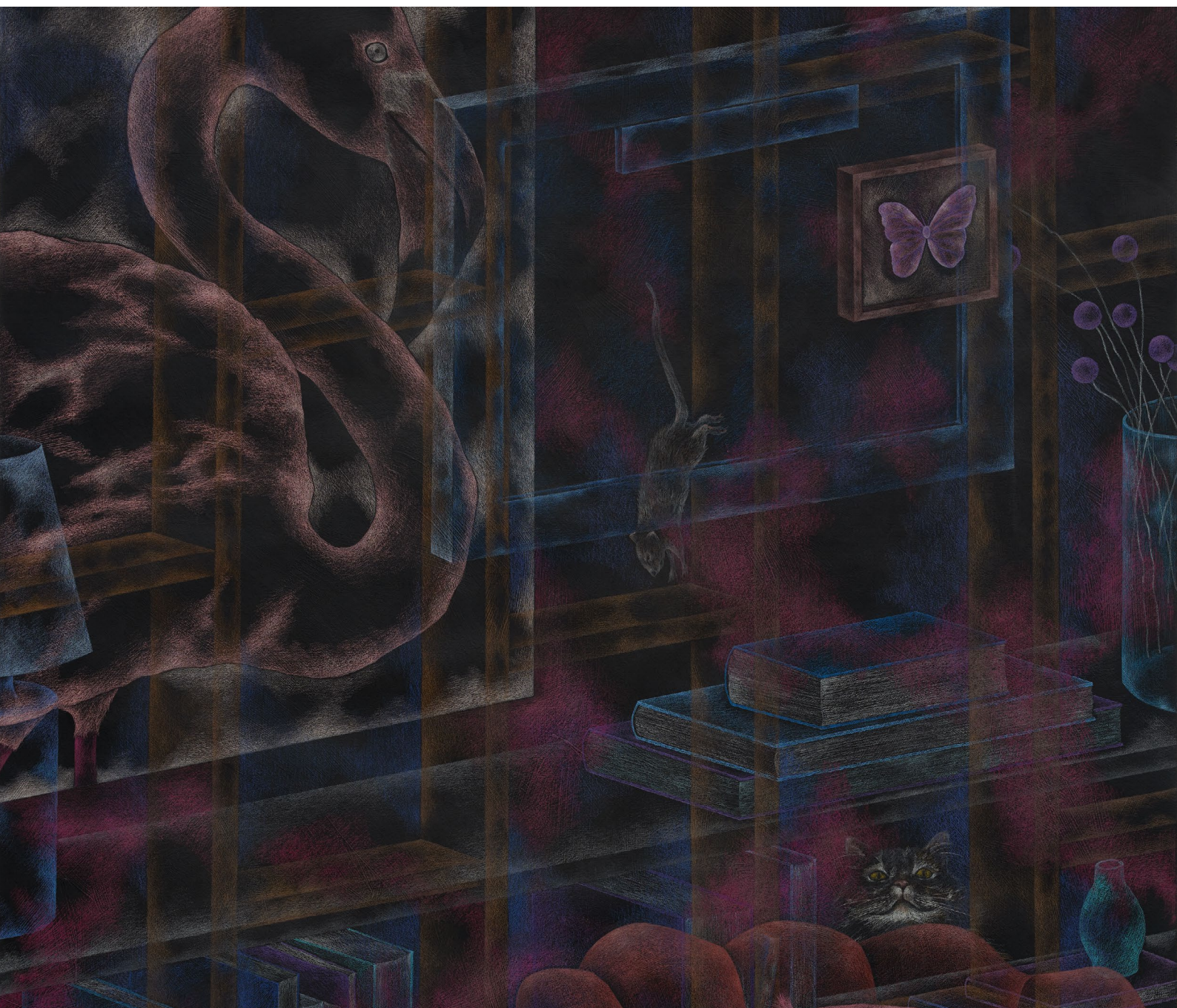


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Samantha Roth, *Perfect Strangers*, 2023 (detail)

Samantha Roth

A Bending Back

May 31 — June 24, 2023

91 Middlesex St, London E1 7DA, UK

Public Gallery is pleased to present *A Bending Back*, a solo exhibition of new works by American artist Samantha Roth and the artist's debut in the UK. Roth's practice is grounded in a curiosity for the idea of reflection, a dual reference to light bouncing back from a surface as well as the internal act of careful deliberation. Rendered in colored pencil on black-gessoed paper, Roth's drawings evoke the phantasmic brilliance and irrational spatiality of X-ray imaging, inviting viewers to consider the possibilities of what once was or what hides beneath the surface. In her most recent body of work, meticulously framed and multilayered compositions superimpose enigmatic portraits of everyday life onto one another, bringing together a tableau of transparencies through which to explore various modes of reflection.

Stacks of pamphlets and overgrown house plants comprise several of Roth's portraits and idiosyncratic interiors. Like a collection of short stories, her compositions are suffused with hyperspecific and often humor-filled details that slip between the artist's imagination and everyday observations. Works such as *Perfect Strangers* (2023) and *Just Between You and Me* (2023) take inspiration from "An Immense World" by Ed Yong, exploring the idea of *umwelt*, a German term describing the world as it is sensorially experienced by a particular species. The artist's compositions often include several animals, reflecting her curiosity for the co-inhabitants of domestic spaces. In *Perfect Strangers*, seven animals occupy an overcrowded interstitial space, tucked somewhere between a motley library and an assortment of home furnishings. Such depictions of confined and often claustrophobic interiors conjure mixed feelings of anxiety and excitement, or hope and despair, experienced in tandem by the artist during lockdown and later amplified while pregnant with her first child.

Red Files (2021) belongs to a series of drawings depicting sheets of paper stored in an array of overpacked shelves. These monochromatic compositions act as a mind palace in which the artist catalogs her scattered thoughts into various compartments. Feathery gestures fill the black ground with latent energy, leaving the viewer to wonder what information might remain concealed. Along similar lines, *Cactus Smuggler (Is this Your Card)* (2023) belongs to an ongoing series of figures with cactus and succulent cuttings taped to the body, a semi-autobiographical nod to both vegetation traffickers and the artist's own habit of obsessively collecting plant clippings on her neighborhood walks for later propagation. The figure holds up a playing card as if performing a magic trick, a reference to the artist's investigation of overlapping fields of vision and the power of misdirection – focused on the ace of diamonds, one might not notice the Cactus Smuggler's unbuttoned pants and early signs of pregnancy. Roth's scrupulous observations remark on the obsessive and voyeuristic habits commonplace though often uninvestigated in our most mundane routines, encouraging the mind to wander and new stories to unfold.

Samantha Roth (b. 1981, Brooklyn, NY) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA, USA. She holds an MFA from the University of Southern California, and a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University. Roth has exhibited at Tyler Park Presents, Los Angeles, CA; Jancar Jones, Los Angeles, CA; Pepin Moore, Los Angeles, CA; Luis De Jesus, Los Angeles, CA; Human Resources, Los Angeles, CA; AWHRHWR, Los Angeles, CA; Harkawik, New York, NY; and La Loma Projects, Los Angeles, CA.

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