

# SAM LEE | GALLERY

**ARTslant Los Angeles**  
May 12, 2009

***Rules of the Game***  
By Mitch Temple

**Room**  
Sam Lee Gallery  
990 N. Hill Street #190  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
May 16, 2009 – July 3, 2009



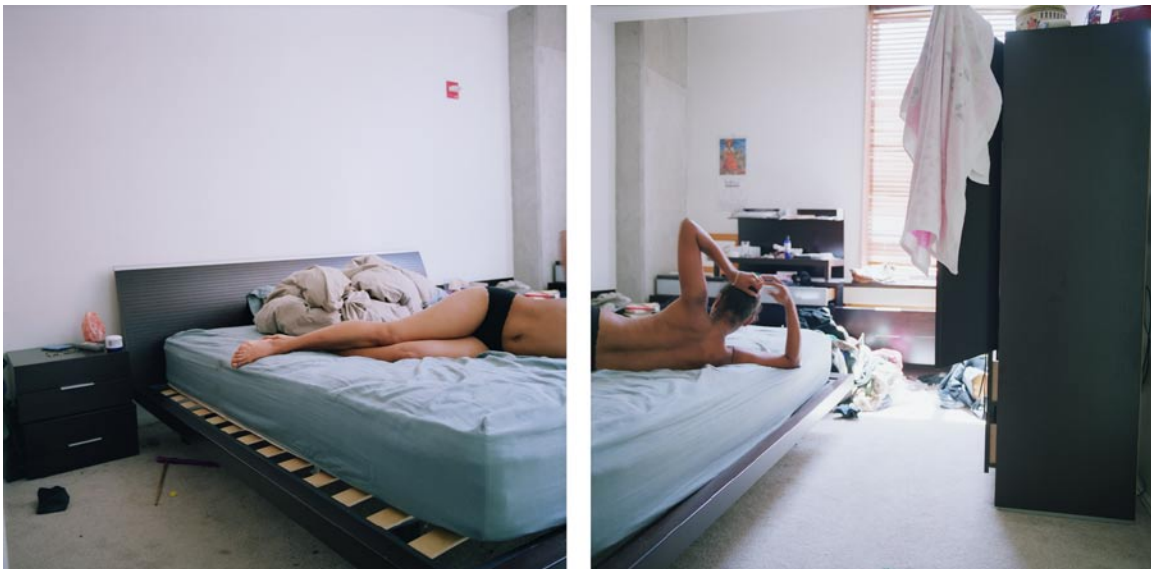
For her current exhibition, “Room”, Carrie Yury follows a simple set of rules. She takes pictures of women, only women. They are shown reclining in bed, or a few times on a couch, but always in their own private, unstaged residence. The women wear only underwear, and the rooms wear only available light. There is a rule of representation: the photographs show a cross section of nationalities, ages, and body types. The last rule is that each piece is composed of two photographs.

At first one reads this as a cut. The body is placed elegantly in frame between the two photographs and the two pictures’ edges guillotine these women somewhere between the hips and ribs. But Yury doesn’t connect the pictures to make the women whole. Instead she repeats a moment of hip or belly, pulling the body like taffy into mannered lengths. Something else happens. The two halves of the body are turned, twisted, or all together flipped. Predominantly the figures end up with their back to the viewer, rescuing their privacy while maintaining the elegance of an impossible pose. Yury plays a game throughout of finding edges that line up gracefully: in “Untitled (Odalisque)” a sliver of light gathers speed along the hip only to be repeated in the accompanying photo as light on the ribs before running back up the same hips as before; in “Untitled (Misled, Bywater)” the back of an arm jams into the edge and has become the front of the same arm when we see it again; in “Untitled (Newlywed Apartment)” the small of a back rises and what would have been a butt turns into a stomach.

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Along with the bodies the spaces they inhabit are treated to the same coup de theatre. Planes of space stay parallel to camera in one half of a piece, only to run headlong into a corner in the other half. Sometimes Yury betrays a preference for the torso and the space around that half of the piece will remain calm compared to its fugitive companion, but in pieces like “Untitled (Shotgun House)” the radiator in the soft foreground is split and both halves tilts down, but the lines of the ceiling run up at angles impossible for the architecture to support; at the center of the quake is an attractive female body, fashionable tattooed, calmly reclining in a colorful bed. In “Untitled (Double Jointed)” it’s the light that is most dramatically split. The room is lit by outdoor sunlight pouring in from a window on the right. In the right side of the diptych the camera fights to keep the midtones of the bed out of the murk and the flesh along the thigh and calves are eaten away by caustic highlights. But the picture on the left of the piece has a bed with rosy soft midtones and a torso warmly lit. Here Yury substitutes the contortions of light in the right half with a physical contortion—the double jointed woman (not model) bends her arm behind her head confusing our anatomical anticipations.



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The success, style, and energy of the series is largely dictated by the synapse Yury portrays. The sensual facts of kneaded flesh, tinfoil ashtrays, and quilted comforters are surrounded by rooms that are in turn surrounded by lives and lifestyles. Narratives of urban living, implied occupations, and familial obligations abound within casual photographic evidence. The body, which might have served as the only excuse as a center to and for these forces, slips out of its sentence.

There is a conscious line of art history at play beginning with Ingres' "Le Grande Odalisque" and sifts down through just about every man who has photographed nude or semi-nude woman under the cultural guise of beauty. The result has been impossible demands on the female body, and Yury matches one impossibility for another. The rules she sets are self imposed, and used to frame the stakes of the game. The pictures—employing a lot of the same techniques those male photographers used—frustrate the viewer away from any easily won sense of delight. They caution as much as they please. You are left watching these bodies twist and turn away from your eye and back into themselves.