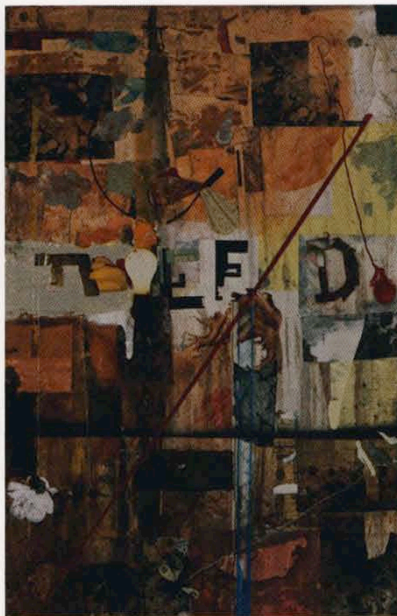


Miles, Christopher. Review. *Artforum* 47, no. 4 (December 2008), p. 310 - 311.



Brenna Youngblood,  
*Feed*, 2008, mixed  
media on panel,  
60 x 40 x 1 1/2".

Empire to Los Angeles. This layered background often figures centrally in her earlier work, which incorporates portraits, party snapshots, and interior and exterior scenes, often in complex collages that alter them: Faces are changed, having been cut and pasted; figures transported to new backdrops; bodies and objects multiplied; and spaces rendered in manners reminiscent of David Hockney's photocollages, but to more wonderful and unsettling ends. Such images are laden with signifiers of race, class, age, and lifestyle. But, as this exhibition made clear, Youngblood has moved away from totalizing scenes or scenarios and toward work that focuses on stray details, image fragments, and the conveying of atmosphere. For the first time, the artist exhibited simple, unaltered photographs, which zoom in on corners and other details of interior spaces. Similarly, the collages and paintings she exhibited portray details that most would consider extraneous or inconsequential, but that, say, a set designer or detective

would find essential to constructing, or reconstructing, a situation.

This is precisely the activity Youngblood facilitates. Setting scenes by foregrounding bits and pieces (a television set, a light switch, a chandelier, a liquor cabinet) along with some peripheral context (a glimpse of the wallpaper or of the ceiling), she asks viewers to profile the space. Simple changes in angle and cropping become playful and provocative maneuvers in the photographs, which serve as both exercises in, and metaphors for, the act of relating to spaces by way of their representation. The collaged works rupture the logic of space and oscillate between resembling two-dimensional graphics and generating illusionistic space; they suggest a range of mental image modes, from clear recall to fuzzy recollection to hallucination to poetic reconstruction. The presence of the photographs among the collages made for a compelling interplay, the photos reminding viewers that the collages, though often appearing flat and graphic, nonetheless describe space, and the collages reminding them that the photos, and the spaces they depict, are in fact *mélanges* and constructions.

Here, Youngblood invokes identity issues less confrontationally than she did in her earlier work depicting people and formulating clear narratives. Only gradually do the artist's new spaces prompt speculation about identity; these are realms that, for being more oblique, are as complex and difficult as America itself.

—Christopher Miles

## Brenna Youngblood

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

Brenna Youngblood's second solo exhibition at Margo Leavin at times felt redolent of Richard Prince or Robert Rauschenberg. The evocation owed less to the strategies that Youngblood shares with these artists—she'll produce a Prince-like deadpan photograph of an anonymous floral still-life painting, for example, or freestanding painted assemblages reminiscent of Rauschenberg's Combines—than from the distilling and mixing of Americana that is essential to her practice. Yet Youngblood's work, in the specific American vernacular it focuses on, differs greatly from Prince's distanced, appropriationist probes of sexuality and power in America's mainstream and fringes, and from Rauschenberg's wide embrace, and wry account, of the nation post-Eisenhower.

Youngblood's vernacular is that of a late-twentieth-century working-class African-American woman transplanted from California's Inland