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## **Designs for Living: Margo Leavin Gallery**

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How refreshing to see this sharp arrangement of bright, crisp, confident recent photographs by Laurie Simmons, Sarah Charlesworth, and Louise Lawler - redolent of '80s smarts and deployed here to consider the domestic and its complex nexus of psychic, social, and spatial concerns. "Designs for Living" gives weight to both "design" and "living," looking at how the constructed (curated, designed) nature of familial environments is reflected in and through choice of furniture and upholstery, wallpaper and paint colors, arrangements of collectibles and artworks; and how it's possible to trace, through the erotic life of objects, some aspects of those who make and live with them.

Simmons's new series of photographs began after someone gave her *The Instant Decorator* by Frances Josline Gold, a do-it-yourself home-design planner from 1976. Outline drawings on transparent acetate of the rooms and furnishings of an imaginary house allow the homemaker to test out her creative bent (home economics as artistry) with swatches of fabric and wallpaper. The clean, empty lines of the little rooms suggest a streamlined, minimal aesthetic, but when - to produce these photos - Simmons tries it out herself, we get a crazy quilt of knick-knacks, patterns, and themes. The template-rooms and any actual fabric that might be placed within to "see how it looked" are totally different scales, but this proved only to be productive for the artist. In *The Instant Decorator* (Wood Paneled Den), 2001, the gray twill that "upholsters" an armchair and a gauzy dotted swatch "rug" skew the way the room refers and what takes importance over what. Butterfly collections, candy boxes, and stacks of books that make up the "collaged" wall of collectibles are as much portraits of someone (the homemaker? Simmons?) as is the "photograph" of Queen Elizabeth II nearby. While these photographs at first suggest collage, their seamless surfaces negate this and suture a roiling hodgepodge to domestic tranquility.

- Bruce Hainley