

# Art in America

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## FIRST LOOK

### VIRGINIA OVERTON BY ALEX GARTENFELD

FOR A SOLO SHOW in January at the Power Station in Dallas, Virginia Overton performed her duties with Southern grace. She transported many of the installation materials herself in a 1984 Chevrolet Deluxe pickup truck. She mounted a blue lightbox in the vehicle's bed and parked it in the gallery, creating a beacon for a tailgate party or a rave. When the proprietors told her that locals might not make her Sunday opening because the Cowboys were playing that day, Overton incorporated into her exhibition a TV showing the game. They said it was the foundation's best-attended opening yet.

The title of that show, "Deluxe," refers to the model of the truck and the "bigger in Texas" (or America) motto, but also to the treatment a collector might expect when commissioning new works. Primarily a sculptor, Overton isn't merely being satirical with her ingratiation. The installation was true to her interest in deploying vernacular forms to unpack issues of class that go deep in art. The artist affects authenticity and localism, and merges art and entertainment. It's unsettling how she slips between artist-laborer and performer.

Overton is from Tennessee, and her sculpture invites associations with Southern Gothic, particularly in the works with wood, which are forcefully entropic. For several untitled pieces, Overton leans wood against the wall, topping the arrangement with slops of drywall mud. They look like the ramp of a chicken coop sabotaged with schmutz, or a construction site she's deserted. In a group show last year at the New York gallery Mitchell-Innes & Nash, her untitled contribution comprised three long planks of Douglas



View of Virginia Overton's exhibition "Deluxe," showing *Untitled (Broncos vs Patriots)*, 2012, live feed of a football game on a 60-inch television, and *Untitled (Bench)*, 2012, pine boards and five-gallon buckets. Photo Kevin Todora. Courtesy The Power Station, Dallas.

fir wedged between the gallery's two columns to create a triangle. For all its suggestions of decorative monumentality, the tentative work lacked symmetry and unity. Overton's structure read as an elegant, ridiculous contraption, a bit of play, and high-end Jenga blocks.

Seth Price writes about a recent tendency toward manicured ruins, which promote "active preservation, make-work, and industry." He finds the reason for this departure from the sublime ruin in a modernist obsession with reuse, a "repetition and depletion" enacted by elites to promote civic and consumer values among the middle class. This emptying and preserving he calls the "lumber of life," quoting John Ashbery. Overton empties lumber itself—her pre-fab ruins coincide and contrast with the

prolonged slowdown of the American housing market, a prime indicator of economic health for the middle class. Moreover, they embody and critique the art world's attachment to finished art objects, in contrast with increasing digitization, paying homage to the repurposing of objects.

In another untitled series of works, the artist bends and binds mirrored Plexiglas with a ratchet strap. The resulting bulky forms evoke fat people with tightly buttoned pants, and her own awkward appropriation of strenuous physical labor. Under pressure, the material threatens to snap back at the viewer. Yet Overton often reuses Plexiglas panels, and the more she does, the more slackened and the more obedient her material becomes. ○

**CURRENTLY ON VIEW**  
A solo exhibition at The Kitchen,  
New York, Mar. 21-May 6.