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## Karen Lofgren

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In the 1970s, Lynda Benglis notoriously flirted with vulgarity in her slicing response to the machismo of contemporary male artists. Karen Lofgren's solo debut, the installation *Gold Flood*, 2009, expands on Benglis's response to Minimalist sculpture by injecting that aesthetic with a dose of the fantastic and potent ambiguity (as well as historical scholarship in a limited-edition artist's book) surrounding the most sought-after of substances: gold. Lofgren's site-specific sculpture (in multiple parts) lines the baseboards along the gallery walls, and though made of wood that is carefully rendered and painted, the pieces here look to be, as the title suggests, flooding the gallery with the scintillating metal. Meaning is multifaceted, but the first thought that comes to mind is that Lofgren's gilded puddles are easy stand-ins for the recent rise and fall of the wealthy (and the artists they supported), raising the question, Is the gold flood coming or receding?

The simple material presence of *Gold Flood* changes its context. The space of the gallery itself, the gadgets of climate control, the air vents, and the lighting armature all begin to appear as part of the exhibition. And the piece, in its own way, offers the subtle sleight of institutional critique. The California clique of Light and Spacers made spaces obvious (or dramatically unobvious, if such a thing is possible) with their own tactics, notably in Robert Irwin's scrim that closed off a few feet of the Pace Gallery for his 1974 installation *Soft Wall* (recently on view in Los Angeles). But a work like Lofgren's, though unobvious in its shimmering presence, is subtle in its gesture of making a viewer aware of the space in a way that ditches some of the voodoo of Light and Space. The veneer of her work isn't perfect, but it's pretty close, and just messy enough to clue viewers in that this is a sculpture and not a trick of the eye or mere eye candy, but something a little deeper and more troubling than its shine.

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