

### Art in Review

#### Sara Greenberger Rafferty

Tears

Rachel Uffner Gallery  
47 Orchard Street, near Hester  
Street, Lower East Side  
Through Oct. 25

A lot of current art — too much — falls under the heading “Doing Things to and With Photographs.” Collage, photomontage, appropriation, rephotography and video animation all qualify. A distressing amount of contemporary painting is photo dependent.

Proceeding modestly and in sync with her longtime interest in popular culture, Sara Greenberger Rafferty has found some new ground that combines analog and digital, chance and control, painterliness and reproduction. She began by scanning and printing images of some well-known comedians, including Goldie Hawn, Vicki Lawrence, Bill Cosby and Madeline Kahn. She then splashed the prints with water,

blurring the colors and disfiguring the faces and, after some in-computer manipulations, reprinted them as photographs.

The results are mysterious wisps of personality and expression, hovering on the brink of familiarity. They have a forensic aura, like evidence rescued from the elements, and evoke the fading of fame and youth. Ms. Hawn, seen in a double image, is a ghost of her former self, like a Warhol star as spirit photograph. Ms. Lawrence’s face seems to have been torn and roughly stitched back together, but she also resembles a monster whose lips are dripping with blood. Joan Rivers’s face is not much more than pale pink splatters; Katherine Heigl’s suggests a seasoned player landing a punch line.

The precedents for these efforts include Richard Prince’s apocalyptic “Sunset” series of 1981, the torn-poster works of the French affichistes and the satiric watercolors of the German Expressionist George Grosz. They show Ms. Rafferty emphasizing coherence, accessibility and perhaps even salability, over obscurity and a sometimes off-putting penchant for skipping from medium to medium. But something else usually in check — some genie of color, violence and untapped emotion — has also been set loose, full of promise.

ROBERTA SMITH



RACHEL UFFNER GALLERY

Manipulated photographs by Sara Greenberger Rafferty.

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