



SARA GREENBERGER RAFFERTY: GLOVES OFF

*Sara
Green
berger
Rafferty
Gloves
Off*

SAMUEL DORSKY MUSEUM OF ART
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT NEW PALTZ

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art
State University of New York at New Paltz

University Art Museum
University at Albany
State University of New York



Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	56
Sara J. Pasti	
<i>Power Grid Failure: The Shocks and Disruptions of Sara Greenberger Rafferty</i>	59
Andrew Ingall	
<i>Jokes On Us</i>	68
Corinna Ripps Schaming	
<i>First as Farce, Then as Tragedy: A Conversation with Sara Greenberger Rafferty</i>	71
Jonathan Thomas	
<i>Exhibition Checklist</i>	79
<i>Selected Biography and Bibliography</i>	81

Phyllis Diller, 2009
C-print mounted to Plexiglas
20 x 24 x 1/8 inches





Phyllis, 2009
C-print mounted to Plexiglas
24 x 20 x 1/8 inches

Phyllis II, 2009
C-print mounted to Plexiglas
24 x 20 x 1/8 inches





Harold's Clock, 2006
C-print
16 x 16 inches



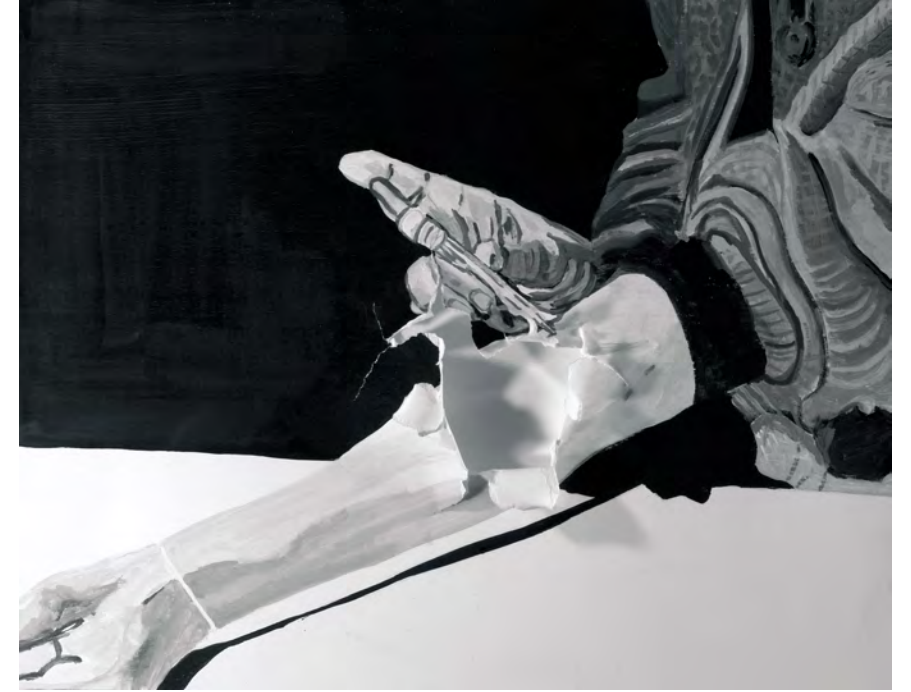
Lucy Not Funny, 2006
C-print
24 x 16 inches



Sparring Partner, 2006
C-print
20 x 16 inches



Shecky, 2006
C-print
20 x 16 inches



If Starts with a Poke, 2006
C-print
16 x 20 inches



Double Gun Prop, 2011
Direct substrate print on Plexiglas
9 1/2 x 45 x 1/2 inches

Bills Prop., 2010
Direct substrate print on Plexiglas
12 1/2 x 13 3/4 x 1/2 inches





Installation view,
Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art,
2017

Window Piece, 2011
Direct substrate print on
Plexiglas and hardware
74 x 35 x 1/2 inches



Installation view, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, 2017

Charles w. Parker Oct. 24, 1964?

The other night he hooked his electric toothbrush up to the hi-fi, played the 1812 overture and blew out all his teeth?

ACCIDENT
Bill D'ley January 10, 1968?
? ' \?
l. I
Fang just directed the cheapest horror movie ever produced in Hollywood.

Bob Petrilli May 12, 1964?

Insurance agent called me last week and offered me a free insurance policy with any other company?

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley January 10, 1968?
The best scene in the picture is when I/ dodge the taxi?? and hit the snow plow. They just don't make snow plows like they usea to.?

Phyllis Gag September 1964?
" ' a, ? -t::Lr_?
? \,;;r? '??
..w.- 1=d. window

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag March
,: ,:/A. ,?
;I..._?

Somebody's painting your brush??? good r??? OR H ngon l cl "?

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag April
ng was watching me

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag October
boss fell from

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag June,
er since they put

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag
CJ D: 'I T
y Ii'i ev e s
e doctor sewed

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley Sept.
ng wanted to wnter w
doin,

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag Sept. 4, 1964?

You know that big yellow line down the middle of the road? He was trying not to drive under it

I Ray ,\Rl.e"(es June 20, 1965?
Imagine getting a ticket for running over a squirrel. He was in a hurry?

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag Sept. 4, 1964?

Couldn't stand it anymore so I yanked the wheel out of his hands and rammed the car into a street light.

ACCIDENT
Charles w. Parker Oct. 24, 1964?
He said, "Now look what you've done. We're shi -p-...
The other night he hooked his electric toothbrush up to the hi-fi, played the 1812 overture and blew out all his teeth?

ACCIDENTS
Delaine Helwig January 15, 1969?
My last accident was my instructor's fault. He said to look to the left and right, but he was looking at the front of the car.

I Ray ,\Rl.e"(es June 20, 1965?
Imagine getting a ticket for running over a squirrel. He was in a hurry?

I Ray ,\Rl.e"(es June 20, 1965?
Imagine getting a ticket for running over a squirrel. He was in a hurry?

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
Plus the prosecuting attorney pulled a cheap courtroom stunt. He brought my lawyer in to testify.

ACCIDENT
Charles w. Parker Oct. 24, 1964?
He said, "Now look what you've done. We're shi -p-...
The other night he hooked his electric toothbrush up to the hi-fi, played the 1812 overture and blew out all his teeth?

ACCIDENT
I'm saving quite a bit on the food bill. Fang has canned tongue. He got his tongue caught in the door.

Phyllis Gag November, 1964?
Painted a door on the dining room wall - then one day I tried to walk thru it with a traffic cone.

ACCIDENT
Phyllis Gag December 14, 1964?
I think Fang f, und out...
n 'lie He got a big accident policy. The last time she was...

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
I asked him if he'd seen that big cement pole on the corner of Elm St. and he said...
?=?
The best scene in the picture is when I/ dodge the taxi?? and hit the snow plow. They just don't make snow plows like they usea to.?

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
And for the 10th consecutive time, I flunked my drivers test. On a technicality.
license. By the Coast Guard?

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
The man I hit was carried into the court room on a stretcher. I said, "Judge, this is an example I went down a dead-end street this morning, and now it isn't a dead-end anymore."

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
And I just got over a bad experience in traffic court. The Judge pointed at me and said...
meter I've just used by r.?

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
I demanded to know why the judge had no choice to get out of the way. The man explained...

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
All through the trial my lawyer said not to worry. Then the Jury brought in a verdict.

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
Before sentence was pronounced, my lawyer pleaded with the Jury to look over my record.

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
The judge was horrified at the sentence. He didn't think it was severe enough?

ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
My lawyer said I didn't make a good impression on the jury. Just because when they asked me to tell the truth, the whole thing fell apart.

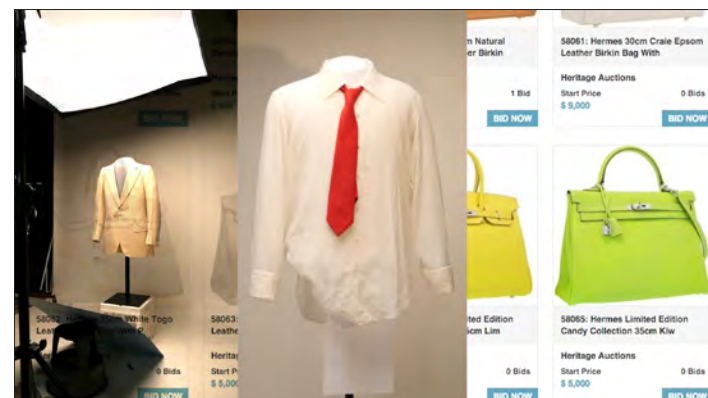
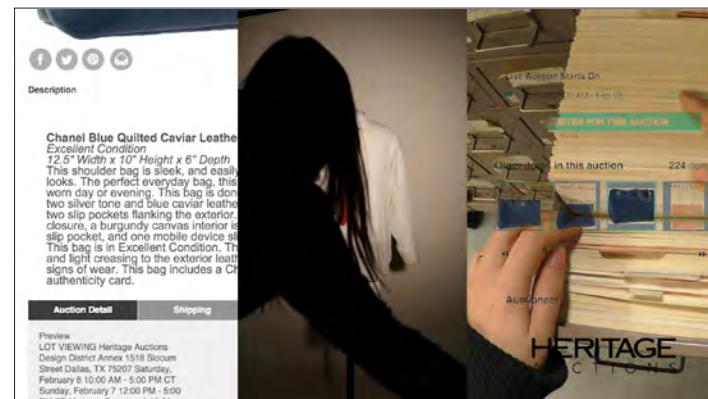
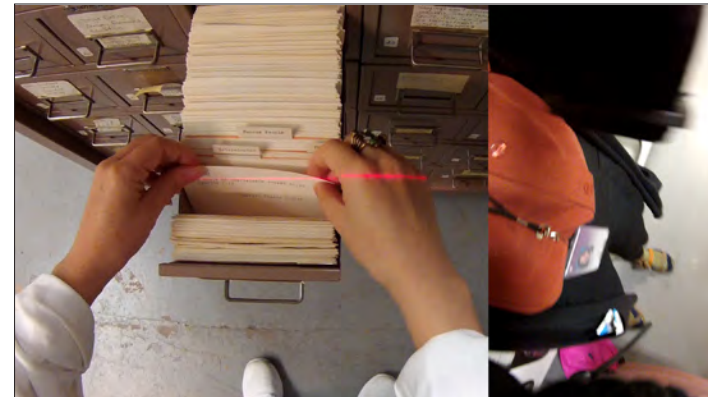
ACCIDENT
Bill Daley December 21, 1964?
Plus the prosecuting attorney pulled a cheap courtroom stunt. He brought my lawyer in to testify.

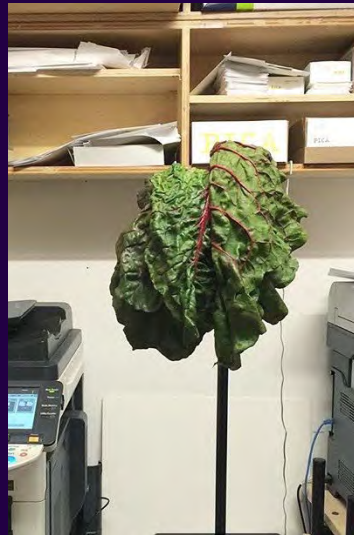
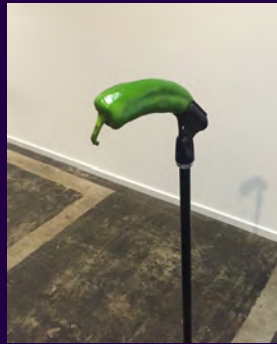
ACCIDENT
Charles w. Parker Oct. 24, 1964?
He said, "Now look what you've done. We're shi -p-...
The other night he hooked his electric toothbrush up to the hi-fi, played the 1812 overture and blew out all his teeth?

ACCIDENT
I'm saving quite a bit on the food bill. Fang has canned tongue. He got his tongue caught in the door.



Identify, 2017
Video, 18 minutes with sound



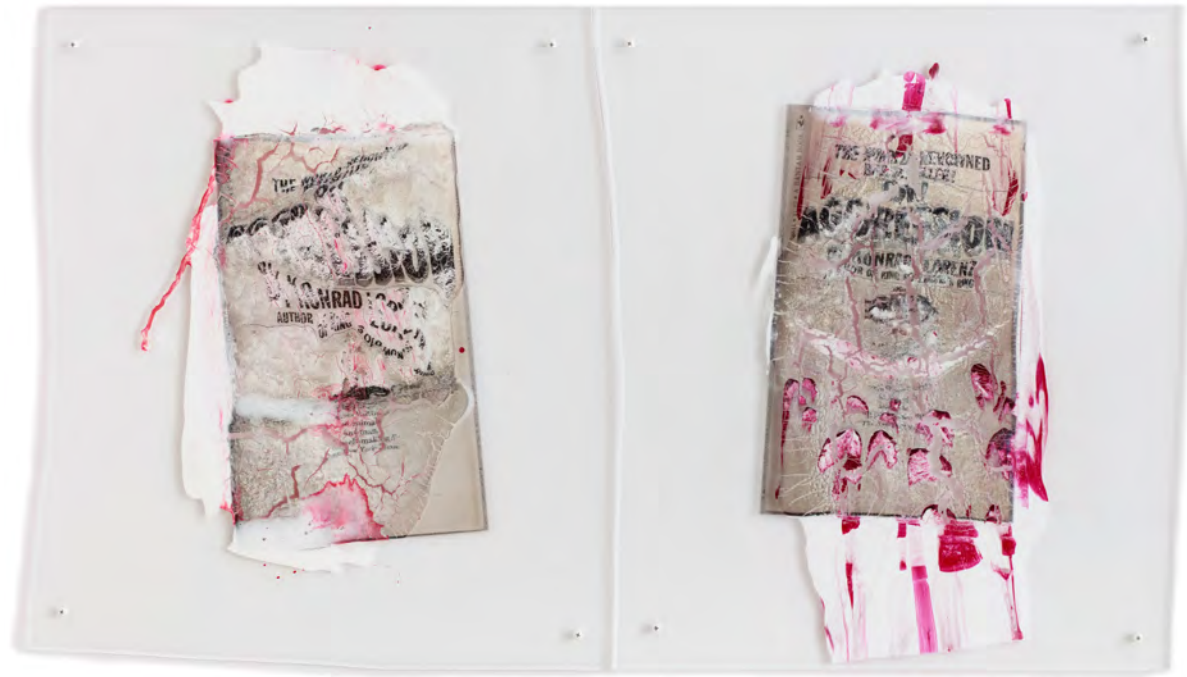


Testing VI-VIII, 2014-15

Testing I-V, 2009
Installation view, Atlanta Contemporary, 2015

Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate
on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 83 ¼ x 60 ¼ x 2 ½ inches





On Aggression, On Aggression, 2016
 Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate
 on Plexiglas, and hardware
 Two objects, each irregular, overall 24 x 41 ½ x ½ inches



Grid, 2016
 Acrylic polymer, inkjet prints, and
 paper on acetate on Plexiglas,
 and hardware
 Irregular, 70 ½ x 24 x ½ inches



Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 83 1/2 x 40 x 1/2 inches



Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 91 x 40 x 1/2 inches

Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 60 x 57 1/2 x 1/2 inches





Untitled, 2013
Acrylic polymer and inkjet print on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 35 3/4 x 24 x 1/2 inches

Untitled, 2013
Acrylic polymer and inkjet print on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 55 x 40 x 1/2 inches



Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 72 x 40 1/2 x 1/2 inches





Jokes On You, 2016
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Six components, irregular, approximately
40 x 227 ¼ x ½ inches

Y2K Moschino Dress, 2016
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 76 1/2 x 40 x 1/2 inches

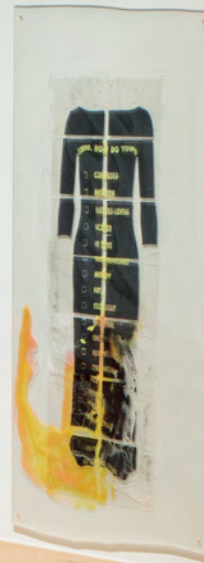


Dress, 2016
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on
acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 50 x 18 x ½ inches



SARA BEDRICK
GALLERY

Sara
Greenberger
Rafferty
Gloves Off



Installation view, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, 2017

Untitled (for soapbox), 2014
Direct substrate-printed acetate, and hardware
24 x 24 inches





Untitled (for stage), 2014
Direct substrate-printed acetate, and hardware
52 x 83 3/8 inches

Untitled (for stage), detail, 2014





Installation view, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, 2017

Introduction

On behalf of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz and the University Art Museum at the University at Albany, I am pleased to present *Sara Greenberger Rafferty: Gloves Off*, an exhibition of hand-crafted, three-dimensional photographs and other works that address a wide range of contemporary topics from comedy, violence, gender, fashion, and politics to the nature of institutions and technology, both analog and digital.

This is the second collaboration between the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art and the University Art Museum, both part of the State University of New York system. We are grateful for the support and encouragement of our respective institutions, which make it possible for us to produce high-quality exhibitions and publications that address the art and culture of our time. We are also grateful to the staff members of both museums who worked diligently to make this project a success.

At SUNY New Paltz, we thank President Donald Christian and Provost Lorin Basden Arnold. At the Dorsky Museum, we are grateful to Coordinator of Exhibitions and Programs Ursula Morgan, Program Manager Janis Benincasa, Manager of Education and Visitor Experience Zachary Bowman, Graduate Assistant Mary-Beth Fiorentino, Collections Manager/Registrar Wayne Lempka, Visitor Services Coordinator Amy Pickering, and Preparator Bob Wagner. We are also grateful to Michael Prudhomme for his assistance with the installation, and Daniel Belasco, the Dorsky's former curator of exhibitions and programs, for bringing Ms. Rafferty's work to the attention of the museum.

At the University at Albany, thanks to Interim President James R. Stellar, Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Darrell P. Wheeler, and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs William B. Hedberg. At the University Art Museum, thanks to former UAM Director Janet Riker for championing this exhibition, and to Registrar Darcie Abbatiello, Administrative Assistant Alana Akacki, Exhibition Designer Zheng Hu, Exhibition and Outreach Coordinator Naomi Lewis, Administrative Assistant Joanne Lue, Associate Director/Curator Corinna Ripps Schaming, and Preparator Jeffrey Wright-Sedam.

Allison Cooper and Rachel Uffner, both of Rachel Uffner Gallery, have been extraordinarily helpful throughout the process of organizing this exhibition and catalogue. We are also grateful to Lisa and Stuart Ginsberg, Jamie and Peter Hort, Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins, Gregory R. Miller and Michael Wiener, Susan and Randolph Randolph, and Jeffrey and Audrey Spiegel for their generous loan of artworks to this exhibition. Both institutions owe a debt of gratitude to the foundations, corporations, and individuals that support our programs and help us realize our goals. For this exhibition, the Dorsky Museum is grateful to the Friends of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, the SUNY New Paltz Foundation, and the Dorsky Museum Contemporary Art Program Fund. And from the University Art Museum, thanks to The University at Albany Foundation. We are also grateful to the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant, and to the Rachel Uffner Gallery.

Curator Andrew Ingall has done a superb job organizing an exhibition that sets the challenging work of Sara Greenberger Rafferty into its art historical, political, and cultural contexts. Jonathan Thomas's interview shines a light on the artist's working process and the evolution of her work, from her 2005 graduation from Columbia University's MFA program to the present day. Zheng Hu's catalogue design captures the essential nature and significance of the objects as well as the curatorial construct that informs the exhibition. Corinna Ripps Schaming is also to be acknowledged for her masterful organization of the version of the exhibition presented in Albany.

Last but not least, we wish to thank Sara Greenberger Rafferty for creating the work that has resulted in this exhibition and for her generous investment of time and energy—including the premiere of a new video at the Dorsky and a site-specific work installed at the University Art Museum—which made it possible to realize this ambitious and timely presentation.

Sara J. Pasti
The Neil C. Trager Director
Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

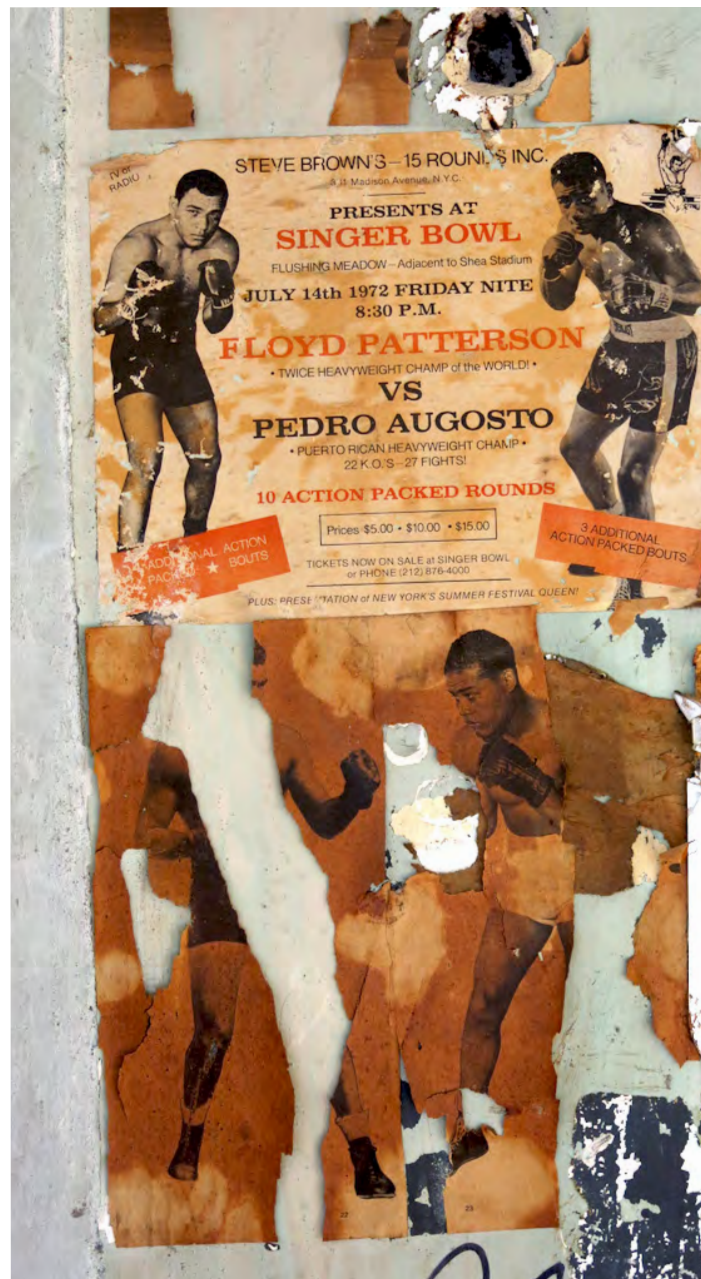


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Power Grid Failure: The Shocks and Disruptions of Sara Greenberger Rafferty

Andrew Ingall

In September 2016, I met with Sara Greenberger Rafferty at her studio in Red Hook, Brooklyn when her lease was ending. Works of art were hastily taped to walls and tacked with pins. Stacks of clear plastic boxes, tightly packed with acrylic paint tubes, were open. Small Styrofoam trays were laid on a shelf, each holding multi-hued screws in neat rows like ammunition. While many artworks drew my attention, the walls—similar to the teal color of the Styrofoam trays—provided the greatest inspiration. In the process of vacating her studio, Rafferty had removed furniture to reveal walls with posters and newsprint, distressed and yellowed with age. One full-color page from a collector's magazine stood out: the 1974 “Rumble in the Jungle” between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman. Both men, shirtless and wearing trunks, raise their gloved fists in battle stance. (Figs. 1–4)

Rafferty has also been persistently engaged in combat, albeit with less fanfare than a world heavyweight championship. Her art acknowledges, shocks, and disrupts systems of oppression, most notably the persistent grid that not only dominates art history but also exerts control over every aspect of our lives. Her work reveals the brutality and violence deeply woven into fashion, comedy, domestic life, and other areas of American popular culture.

The grid is ubiquitous in the physical world of our homes, workplaces, and cities. It appears as floor tile, cabinetry, apartment buildings, urban plans, and electrical networks. As a fundamental element of cartography, it divides land into latitudes, longitudes, tracts, and territories. It is the warp and weft of textiles. The grid also shows up virtually on our screens: as the windows and menus of graphical user interfaces, the rows and columns of pixels, and the cells and tables of an Excel spreadsheet. (Figs. 5–9, 11–12, 17–19)

For centuries, the grid has proven to be a useful organizing tool for collections of material culture and data. However, media theorist Bernhard Siegert has identified the grid's sinister and “totalitarian” nature. While the grid provides order and simplicity, it simultaneously



Fig. 5

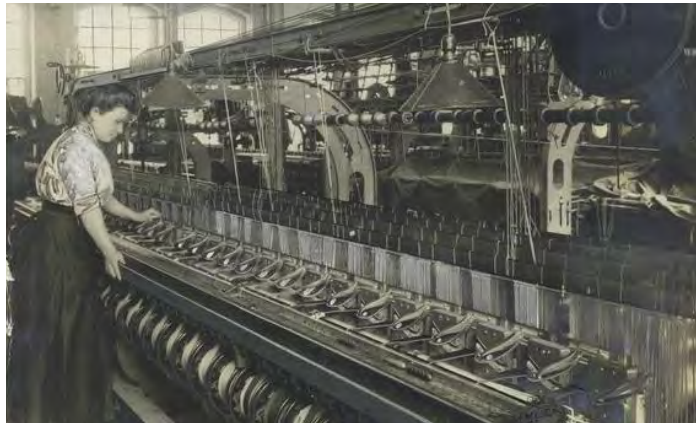


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 9



Fig. 8



Fig. 12

regulates, restricts, and punishes. The grid separates people across international borders, controls bodies in detention centers and prisons, and tracks the movement and behavior of individuals online, making their private activity public information.¹

For artists, the grid is similarly double-edged in its productivity and limitation. From antiquity to today, it has been a popular method to transfer or scale an image to another surface, one square at a time. During the Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti originated the veil (*velum*), a woven thread lattice stretched on a frame, to realize an accurate rendering of figures in space. In the twentieth century, art historian Rosalind Krauss noted that minimalists such as Sol LeWitt and Agnes Martin (Fig. 15) embraced the spiritual purity and mythic power of the grid. Krauss argued that the grid is emblematic of modern art because of its “capacity to serve as a paradigm or model for the antidevelopmental, the antinarrative, the antihistorical.”² As a twenty-first-century artist, Sara Greenberger Rafferty recognizes that while the grid may suppress stories, particularly those that concern trauma, the structure is in itself a manifestation of trauma. As an act of resistance, Rafferty advances the grid into new artistic territory by distorting its form and contaminating it with troubling narratives.

For the past decade, Rafferty has consistently used the language, gestures, and props associated with stand-up comedy, a medium with the ability to transmit painful stories through pleasure. *Jokes On You* (2016) is a large-scale work consisting of six Plexiglas panels that feature high-fashion clothing grabbed from the Internet and ephemera copied from collections in the National Museum of American History. Rafferty fragments the garments by blowing them up and printing them on standard, rectangular 8 ½ x 11-inch sheets of acetate, a medium associated with the analog technologies of archival storage, celluloid film, and overhead projectors. In a further step of mediation and interruption, she stains the images with paint colors (resembling bodily fluids) that dry and crack.

One of the Plexiglas panels incorporates twelve index cards scanned from the Phyllis Diller “Gag File,” the centerpiece of the National Museum’s collection related to the pioneering entertainer known for her flamboyant costumes, self-deprecating humor, and self-constructed ugliness.³ (Fig. 16) While participating in a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship in May 2016, Rafferty studied and documented Diller’s clothing, props, scripts, photographs, and ephemera.

The “Gag File” consists of approximately 50,000 jokes, typewritten and organized by subject. One card, dated June 28, 1965 and categorized as “Argument,” reads: “I asked my neighbor if her bad tempered husband was upset when she bought a new dress. She said, ‘In a way, but then, I can always cover up the bullet hole with a scarf or a pin.’”

Diller’s joke ridicules the consumer habits of women, their stereotypical desire for the latest fashions, and the reactive consternation of their husbands. By removing the gag from its original grid—a steel file cabinet housing forty-eight drawers—and recontextualizing it with other materials, Rafferty exposes the violence associated with systems, relationships, and organizational tools that assert control over women’s bodies.

Another index card, dated August 4, 1964, references Fang, a dull-witted husband invented by Diller and employed frequently in her act. Although Diller drew from her experience as a suburban San Francisco Bay Area homemaker, the fictitious Fang had little in common with her true spouse. According to Diller, “Just as I was the antithesis of the happy and attractive Fifties housewife, so Fang flipped the image of the capable husband who was king of his castle, and I soon realized he was a beloved character. No one knew that I was living with an agoraphobic sex tyrant who couldn’t socialize and rarely held down a job. And not until the

year of my retirement would I be aware that my stage act was actually a form of therapy.”⁴ If she had not received a “talking cure” by way of stand-up comedy, Diller may have resorted to violence, inflicted either on her husband or herself.

Other images in *Jokes On You* underscore abuse. Rafferty pairs a vintage 1980s Moschino “wife-beater” vest with a recent Donna Karan DKNY jacket that admonishes critics, “Don’t Knock New York.” Another Plexiglas section depicts a woman’s blazer lying face down on the floor, wounded with multi-colored screws like bullet holes. (Fig. 20) Diller asserts, “Comedy is mock hostility,”⁵ a statement aligned with Sigmund Freud’s theory that jokes enable both performer and audience to release repressed aggression and sexual desire. Indeed, the vernacular of comedians is deeply rooted in violence: if a comic “kills at show,” she “leaves the audience in stitches.” Diller notably earned the moniker “Killer Diller” because of her ability to deliver twelve punchlines per minute, roughly the same rate of fire as an M16 assault rifle. (Fig. 14)

Phyllis Diller is also a subject in *Tears*, a set of portraits from 2009 that conveys abuse, injury, and damage. Rafferty scanned found images, transferred them to paper, distorted them using a “waterlogging” technique, and then rephotographed the object. In one portrait, purple bruises appear on Diller’s nose and chin. A black feather boa constricts her neck. Another image, derived from a still from “The Muppet Show,” features Diller tilting her head up. Her mouth is wide open, her red lips smeared, but her facial expression is ambiguous: is she laughing or screaming in terror? Returning to the subject of her actual husband, Diller writes pleadingly in her autobiography, “I’m telling you, if our marriage amounted to a lot of date rape, then Sherwood Diller was the worst sex offender who ever lived.”⁶

Rafferty is most blunt in a series of “punched props” from 2006. Using paint on gessoed paper, Rafferty reproduced imagery associated with early and mid-twentieth-century comedy and entertainment. Forgoing her fist, Rafferty meticulously punctured the painted paper and photographed the remains as glossy black and white prints. One deceptively simple prop, a circle with a Roman numeral clock face, represents the iconic timepiece from *Safety Last!*, the 1923 silent film celebrated for its physical comedy, thrilling stunts, and in-camera visual tricks. Comedian Harold Lloyd dangles from a skyscraper high above traffic, clutches the hands of the building’s clock, and narrowly avoids a fall to the ground. Rafferty leaves Lloyd in the lurch: her rendition of the clock is missing its hands. The artist, too, is a master of sight gags, but employs her shtick in the darkest of shades.

Between 2010 and 2011, Rafferty produced another set of props, this time printing directly on Plexiglas. Like the *Tears* portraits, Rafferty manipulated the imagery in a process resulting in bleeds, drips, and stains that resemble watercolor. Groucho glasses, cream pies, banana peels, and rubber chickens have specific associations with vaudeville. However, categories for other props in the series are ambiguous. For example, long knives and handcuffs could be used as accessories either in a magic show or a murder scene. Cut into biomorphic shapes and installed on gallery walls, the props resemble cells in metastasis, spreading aggressively into cultural systems and public spaces.

More recently, Rafferty has meditated on themes of policing, espionage, and surveillance. She compares a row of large Plexiglas works featuring fashion imagery to the rogue’s gallery, a late-nineteenth-century criminal surveillance system that coincided with technological advances in modern photography. Beginning in New York City in 1858, and later spreading to other police departments in the U.S. and around the world, police departments displayed rows of mug shots on walls, panels, and publications. (Fig. 13) Rafferty manipulates images of



Fig. 13



Fig. 16

Year	Balance Due to Society	Annual Expenses
	Currency	Currency
1834	4052 0 10	4372 6 6
1835		
1836		
1837		
1838		
1839		
1840		

Fig. 17



Fig. 15

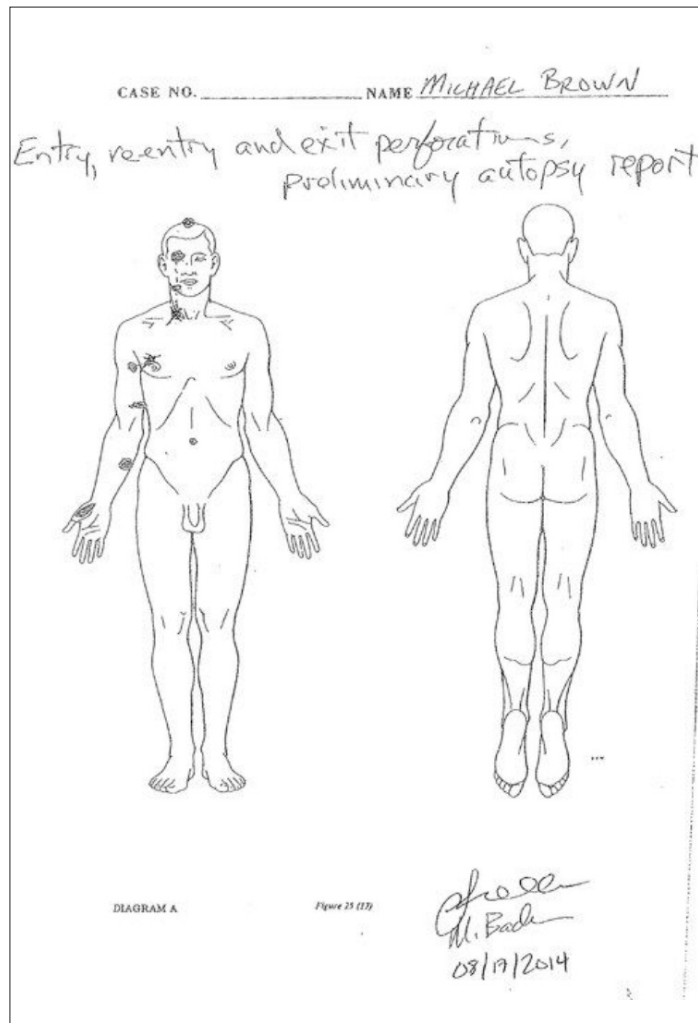


Fig. 14



Fig. 19



Fig. 18

clothing—advertised on retail websites and indexed on computer screens in rows—by blowing them up to life-size. Installed on walls, the thick, glossy acrylic screens reflect the faces and bodies of gallery and museum visitors. Anyone is a suspect.

Costumes, disguises, and props are not only essential accessories for entertainers like Phyllis Diller but are also useful to spies and other criminal offenders.⁷ (Fig. 10) A faceless “rogue” featured in *Grid* (2016) wears a pink Moschino dress printed on a grid of standard-size acetate pages. Like a puppeteer, Rafferty compels the model to disassemble her garment and body in rectangular pieces. She is on the brink of collapse. One leg has broken off. The other limb is hidden by a computer screenshot of folder icons. (p. 31)

The Smithsonian, a quasi-federal agency, is not dissimilar from an online shopping site that tracks information about its consumers. In order to gain access to state-owned assets, Rafferty agreed to a background investigation, fingerprinting, and credentialing through the Smithsonian’s Office of Protection Services. Her artist’s research fellowship heightened an awareness of the capacity of the U.S. government—especially in cooperation with technology companies—to collect bulk data from citizens, thereby violating their right to privacy. Those who battle over definitions of American democracy and “greatness” have no choice but to take the gloves off. We live in a social matrix of uncensored and unfiltered aggression.

Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, reports of harassment and violence against immigrants, women, LGBTQ individuals, Jews, and Americans of color have increased. Donald J. Trump announced that his administration might register Muslims in a database. He followed up with an executive order temporarily barring entry to refugees and citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries. Technology enables Instagrammers to bully and bots to tweet hate. At the same time, the Internet is a powerful resource for creative disruption and the dismantling of oppressive grids. Resistance takes the form of collective rebellion and protest, but most often it occurs in everyday actions by individuals—including artists—who utilize their tools and skills to speak truth to power. The joke is on all of us if we fail.

Fig. 20
Jokes On You, detail, 2016



Andrew Ingall is an independent curator, scholar, and principal at Pandamonium Productions.

¹ Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors and Other Articulations of the Real*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 98.

² Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October*, Vol. 9, Summer 1979, 64.

³ In the late 1960s, *Playboy* asked Phyllis Diller to pose nude. According to the comedian, the magazine’s editors intended the shoot as a gag: Diller wore shapeless dresses on stage and the public conceived of her body as flat-chested and scrawny. The resulting unpublished photograph, in which Diller is draped only in a bedspread, shows her full-figured and attractive. The editors decided to shelve it.

⁴ Phyllis Diller, *Like a Lampshade in a Whorehouse: My Life in Comedy* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005), 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷ As part of her public persona, Diller explained that she wore gloves because “all clowns wear gloves—even Mickey Mouse.” “Fresh Air,” National Public Radio, 1986.

Jokes On Us

Corinna Ripps Schaming

Like the title of the exhibit, Sara Greenberger Rafferty comes on with gloves off, immersing herself in the discontinuities, tensions, and fractures that permeate our culture. She is a self-professed information hoarder always conjugating and sorting things out so that she—and we—can “work it out.” Like the comics she references in some of her work, Rafferty the artist needs “material,” and like a comic she wants to know how the work “reads” to an audience. So her approach is both an invitation and a provocation to enjoin the metaphorical battle: look over her shoulder at the screen, meet her in the studio, get inside her head, and share with her all the attendant anxieties that come with life during wartime—because for Rafferty, it is indeed always wartime. In *Gloves Off*, she has perpetually reworked and rethought how both minor transgressions and larger aggressions are the prods that make us vulnerable. But her wartime is not personal or psychological; instead it is a much bigger battle that requires us to process our own anxieties through the myriad forms of cultural and societal information that bombard us. In Rafferty’s world (and in our world), it is not a question, for example, of gender domination, rather of vulnerability, of standing alone like the stand-up comic onstage or the artist in the studio. The demons are out there lurking in a culture of unchallenged rhetoric, fictionalized headlines, and tired euphemisms that permeate our often-unconscious intake of all the “material” that constitutes life in the first half of the twenty-first century. The sorting—like the joke—is on us. Are we being coerced, or are we complicit?

Gloves Off Reader (2017), Rafferty’s installation at the University Art Museum, is a reinforcement of her preoccupations—a call-and-response to over-absorption and image sprawl, an examination of the density of information that inundates and confuses our moment. A barrage of source material generated by Google and by old-fashioned hands-in-the-archive research fuels her practice: it heightens her anxieties, but it also pushes her forward. So does other printed matter: screen grabs, snapshots, books, PDF printouts, printer paper strips, and reams of blank paper are attached to the walls, subtitled by Rafferty’s painted hardware that both fastens and punctures those walls. The parts become physical manifestations of her interior processing. Her preoccupations are writ large, revealed and shared. And we are invited to join her as she stokes us with things that we vaguely recognize: designer clothes, raunchy jokes, trade paperbacks ranging from a book about the evolution of bathrooms to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination*. The texts come directly from

Rafferty’s studio, and include “books that I’ve read or that I like the covers of, books that I have in the studio, mostly that relate to my work. And images of the books. Printouts of texts and printouts of images of the texts.”¹

Rafferty’s *Jokes On You* (2016)—its missing apostrophe deliberately conveying a double meaning—presides smack in the middle of *Gloves Off Reader* as a centerpiece, a warning, a taunt. Six Plexiglas panels feature high-fashion clothes and typescript jokes on index cards. The clothes are torn, spattered, and pierced (hand-violated by Rafferty), the jokes are from comedian Phyllis Diller’s “Gag File” (sourced by Rafferty from collections at the National Museum of American History). These cryptic polymer fragments are closely linked to the textual action that surrounds them. Embedded in both are signs of the symbolic violence and sad absurdities that shape our jokes, our (mis)information sources, our style, our cultural barometers—and our existence.

Recently quoted on the importance of Robert Rauschenberg, Rafferty referred to him as “an artist who reads, cares about politics, challenges social norms and systems of power, obsesses over representations in culture, and synthesizes emotions and ideas through urgent investment in objects, images, and performances.”² She could easily be speaking of herself.

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¹ E-mail from Sara Greenberger Rafferty, December 18, 2016.

² “The Artist’s Artist: A Rauschenberg Symposium,” *Art in America*, January 2017, pp. 52–53.

Unusual Foods

Phyllis Gag November, 1964

A cereal for people who'd rather die than be champions.

Fig. 21



Fig. 26

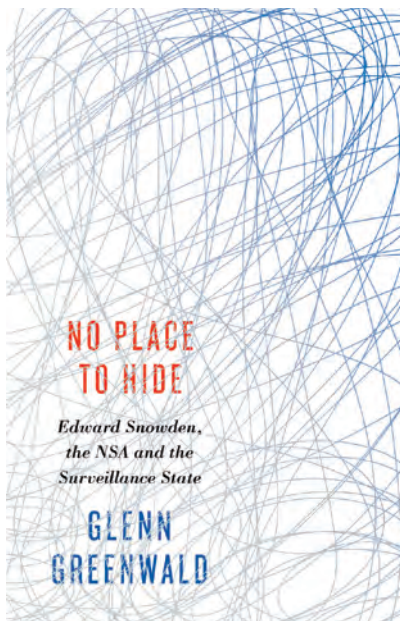


Fig. 25



Fig. 27



Fig. 22

Special Source Operations
Corporate Partner Access

As part of these programs, the NSA exploits the access that certain telecom companies have to international systems, having entered into contracts with foreign telecoms to build, maintain, and upgrade their networks. The US companies then redirect the target country's communications data to NSA repositories.

The core purpose of BLARNEY is depicted in one NSA briefing:

Substantive & Analytic

BLARNEY relied on one relationship in particular—a long-standing partnership with AT&T Inc., according to the Wall Street Journal's reporting on the program. According to the NSA's own files, in 2010 the list of countries targeted by BLARNEY included Brazil, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, and Venezuela, as well as the European Union and the United Nations.

FAIRVIEW, another SSO program, also collects what the NSA treats as "massive amounts of data" from around the world. And it, too, relies mostly on a single "corporate partner" and, in particular, that partner's access to the telecommunications systems of foreign nations. The NSA's internal summary of FAIRVIEW is simple and clear:

Unique Aspects

- Access to massive amounts of data
- Controlled by variety of legal authorities
- Most accesses are controlled by partner

US-984 FAIRVIEW

(TS//SI) US-984 (PD//OG) (U) - key corporate partner with access to international cables, routers, and satellites.
(TS//SI) Key Targets: Global

According to NSA documents, FAIRVIEW "is typically in the top five at NSA as a collection source for serialized production"—meaning ongoing surveillance—and one of the largest providers of metadata." Its overwhelming reliance on one telecom is demonstrated by its claim that

Fig. 24

SERVING OUR CUSTOMERS

In its description of the BLARNEY program, the NSA lists the types of information it is supposed to provide to its customers as "consumer terrorism," "diplomatic"—and "economic":

BLARNEY AT A GLANCE
The target is the NSA's exploitation of corporate partner access to international cables, routers, and satellites.

US-984 BLARNEY

(TS//SI) US-984 (PD//OG) (A) - provides collection against DNR and DNI FISA Court Order authorized communications.

(TS//SI) Key Targets: Diplomatic establishment, counterterrorism, Foreign Government, Economic

Further evidence of the NSA's economic interest appears in a PRISM document showing a "sampling" of the "Reporting Topics" for the week of February 2-8, 2013. A list of the types of information gathered from various countries clearly includes economic and financial categories, among them "energy," "trade," and "oil":

One 2006 memorandum from the global capabilities manager of the agency's International Security

Fig. 23

First as Farce, Then as Tragedy: A Conversation with Sara Greenberger Rafferty

Jonathan Thomas

Jonathan Thomas: I'm curious about the research you were doing at the Smithsonian this year. I wonder what you were studying and how that came about?

Sara Greenberger Rafferty: I first conceived of the idea around 2007–2008, during the end of the Bush years, when I heard that they had the Phyllis Diller joke files at the National Museum of American History. I managed to gain access during the end of the Obama years, in May 2016, during the presidential primaries. I was in Washington D.C. and every day I would walk past a giant blue sign that read "TRUMP FALL 2016." It was hung outside the old Post Office, which Trump was turning into a hotel, so at the time it was a construction site. The National Museum of American History, where I was working, is across the street from the new National Museum of African American History and Culture, which was also under construction last summer. They call the National Museum of American History America's attic.

JT: Why do they call it an attic?

SGR: Because it's whatever junk people donated, the garbage of U.S. history, which has a way of telling its own story. Before she died, Phyllis Diller bequeathed her joke files and some of her costumes to the museum. The joke collection is roughly 50,000 3x5-inch index cards in a big metal filing cabinet with alphabetized subjects. Many of the jokes are cross-referenced and double-filed under a couple of subjects, so it's not necessarily 50,000 individual jokes. It's a physical database. When she was putting a set together, she would pull cards and put them in an order.

JT: What was it like working in that institutional setting?

SGR: I had a basement office in the museum. It was a really depressing, subterranean, windowless room, probably the size of this two-top dining table. But then I would go up to the fourth floor, which felt very much like a hospital with corridors upon corridors, a very confusing labyrinth of rooms, some that needed keys to get into, some that

needed swipe access. There was a central office where you went to borrow the keys to open these spaces. You had to wear an ID around your neck at all times, and to get the ID you needed to get a full security background check, get fingerprinted, and all that stuff. So there I was, sitting in this windowless room, reading absurd jokes of the twentieth century all day long by myself.

JT: Were they just Phyllis Diller jokes that you were reading?

SGR: Yes, many of them were her jokes, and many of them were written for her by joke writers, and in some cases the card even said who wrote the joke and how much she paid for it.

JT: Who was Phyllis Diller?

SGR: Phyllis Diller was an American comedian, one of the first very successful female stand-up comedians. She performed on stage with jokes—not bits, not acts. She was representative of the mid-century conception of the white middle-class housewife, which is kind of crucial. This is what allowed her into that space.

JT: Into the male-dominated space of stand-up comedy?

SGR: Yes, and also into the televisual space. But at the same time, although she always said she wasn't political, she did a few things that were pointed in taking on the persona of a happy/unhappy housewife, which was the dominant female narrative in popular culture at that time.

JT: And other comedians, like Lucille Ball, played that role as well.

SGR: Definitely. And while Lucille Ball would make herself look absurd, Phyllis Diller made herself look insane, hysterical, frightening—

JT: She looked electrocuted.

SGR: Yeah. Phyllis Diller is not my favorite comedian, but she’s an important figure. I personally gravitate toward more overtly engaged and less populist acts, but I appreciate the specter of Phyllis Diller and her place in history. So to get back to the experience, I was struck almost immediately by the fact that all these jokes that I was reading were part of an earlier form of the bulk collection of data by our government. It had me thinking about the NSA revelations of the past couple of years, and of reading Glenn Greenwald’s book, *No Place to Hide*. I thought it was pretty funny that I was reading through this bulk collection of data, and all the curators I ran into were so proud of the collection, but no one had read more than a few jokes.

JT: This practice of filing notecards is something that connects Phyllis Diller to other comedians. Joan Rivers, for instance, also compiled a massive collection of jokes on notecards.

SGR: She did, and the same museum is actually trying to acquire that collection.

JT: So you wanted to go to this archive to get a firsthand look at the Phyllis Diller material because you were hoping that it might shed more light on her practice?

SGR: No, I was hoping that it might be generative, to provide a script, or a form, or imagery, for work that could spin it into critique. One of the things that’s cool about the Smithsonian Fellowship is that it’s about the way artists use research to make work that might not be expected or totally sanctioned. But at the same time, there’s only so much you can do. It was fascinating doing research in Washington on the eve of the election. But what was perhaps most interesting was realizing the absurdity, more than just the danger and the sinisterness and the extreme Nazism of the bulk collection of data. It’s farcical. It’s what I’ve been saying since the election of Trump—*first as farce, then as tragedy*.¹ It’s farcical to collect 50,000 jokes. No one’s ever going to read them, but they’re there if you want to read them, and it’s the same with the government’s bulk collection of data on American citizens. It’s dangerous because it can be accessed, but the very fact of its being collected in bulk is absurd. It’s an unworkable and counter-productive scale, which is not the scale of intelligence. So it’s made me think about scale, which I always think about, and also the difference between human scale and institutional scale, or architectural scale, or the non-human scale of things.

JT: On the topic of scale, you spent some of your formative years working for Claes Oldenburg. Can you tell me about that experience? Were there any important lessons that you learned in that setting?

SGR: I worked with Claes and Coosje van Bruggen, and Coosje really ran the show. I worked in their studio from 2000 to 2007, which coincided with my ages 21 to 28. So it

was one-quarter of my life, and my entire adult life by the time I quit, which was pretty significant. One of the things I thought about on a daily basis while I was working there was mortality, which is less a matter of scale than an effect of joining artists late in their career, when they’re thinking about their legacy.

JT: What do you mean by thinking about mortality?

SGR: I felt that, from day one, the tasks that we were doing were geared towards a post-living future, for the work and its legacy. The way that interfaces with scale has to do with the impact that Claes and Coosje have as artists. There were a lot of gender allusions in his work, and also in the dynamic of a married couple making work together. Working with them didn’t really inform my ideas about scale as much as you might think it would, except that it was essentially a two-person operation, which was pretty major in terms of output and fabricated scale. Looking at earlier works by Claes, I think I learned a lot about the pointedness of specific object-making and about using humor and form as critique, but I don’t know if you could make a great argument for seeing that in the later work made during the years I was working there. I was doing the catalogue raisonné, so I was really immersed in the historical stuff. Looking back, Coosje was probably more influential for me.

JT: How so?

SGR: Well, she was really tough, and she was a hard person to work with, but she was also so insanely generous. She was a really interesting model for me, both in terms of how to be and how not to be, because she was in so much pain from a lot of things that had happened to her throughout her life and career, in a way that a lot of primarily twentieth-century women are calcified against. She was in pain, even though she had a very privileged life. But then she did things like allow me to shift my schedule from working four days to working three days while keeping my insurance and salary, so that I could work in the studio to develop my own practice. And I was just remembering recently how, in early 2001, when it was Bush’s inauguration, I asked for the day off to go protest the inauguration and Coosje said, “That’s a great idea. I really want you to do that, and I’m going to send you because I want you to go to the National Gallery and look at the prints they have of Claes’s,” which was not a job that needed to be done, but she made a job for me to do so that I could go. It was a small gesture, but it was a vote of faith. There are many other things that she did that were generous, even though she could also be tough.

JT: On the topic of gender, we were talking about Phyllis Diller. Diller’s breakthrough occurred in 1955, when she was 37 years old and had five kids. She’s spoken about how, coming out as a comic, as a woman, she faced almost total rejection; how nobody wanted you to be a comic because doing so would signal a loss of femininity. She compared it

to the “Cave Age,” as in—keep women in the cave! Decades later, in 2007, Christopher Hitchens wrote an article for *Vanity Fair* called “Why Women Aren’t Funny.” Over half a century had passed between 1955 and 2007, but it’s as if we’re still in the caves, even today. Are you familiar with this text?

SGR: Yeah, I read it at the time.

JT: You made a two-volume zine this year called *WOMEN AREN’T FUNNY*.

SGR: Yeah, exactly, and I intend to put out many more issues in that series.

JT: *WOMEN AREN’T FUNNY* is conceived as a serial zine?

SGR: Yeah. I made volumes 1 and 2 with Sean Joseph Patrick Carney of Social Malpractice Publishing. In those issues, I’m not using any words on purpose. In volume 1 we see all these absurd products that are marketed towards women that are in the form of hourglass figures and designed for storing your accessories or I don’t know what. It’s a wordless zine “presented without comment,” which is something I’ve noticed happens a lot on right-wing media outlets such as Breitbart. My feeling is that, if you look at these pictures serially, you’ll think about the normalcy of misogyny, but perhaps it reads like an awesome catalogue to someone? It’s inconsequential, but I thought that collecting them could say something visually. The second volume is all images of t-shirts made after the Al Bundy character from “Married With Children,” who had a club called No Ma’am. This is a TV show that was on when I was a child. I think the third volume, which I’m working on now, is going to be a 2017 calendar with images of planning calendars that are marketed towards women, suggesting that if we buy these things we can affirm or actualize ourselves. Who needs affirmation? And why is this a feminized position?

JT: It’s interesting that the years 2007–2008 have come up a few times in our conversation already. You said that this is when you hit on the idea of visiting the Phyllis Diller joke files; it’s when you left Claes and Coosje’s studio, after working there for several years; it’s when Christopher Hitchens published his misogynistic screed for *Vanity Fair*, arguing that men are funny but women are not; and also, importantly, 2007–2008 is the moment of the financial crash. I wonder if the crash had an impact on your formal strategies as an artist in any way?

SGR: It did. I mean, ironically, during the crash, I had a full-time job. My job at the studio stopped at the end of 2007, which is when the crash was technically starting, but we didn’t really know about it until later in 2008. That was when people were starting to realize what was happening. I started teaching full-time in the fall of 2007. That job was definitely at risk, but I didn’t lose it. I remember feeling really anxious about money. I was in my studio, working on

my Kitchen show in the summer of 2008, which was going to open in January 2009, and with regard to your question about formal strategies, until that moment it was weird—I came up in the very go-go early aughts of the art world. I finished grad school at Columbia in 2005, and I didn’t have my first commercial gallery show until the end of 2009. At the time, I was probably one of the only artists—of the ones I went to grad school with—who didn’t go straight to the commercial sales, to only working in the studio, to not having a job. I worked three days a week, which was lucky, but I remember one of my friends from school, who was a really successful artist, saying, “I’m so sorry you have to have a job,” and this was about six months after we graduated. The problem is, when it dries up, you feel like you have no skills, like you can’t do anything. But I had a job, and during that time I didn’t say no to any job offer that came along. I said yes to all these adjunct teaching offers, because I was terrified about losing my job. People don’t have jobs, I thought, so you can’t say no to a job. So when I was working on my Kitchen show, that was the moment when the previous ethos of “Do whatever you need to do to make the work— put it on the credit card, beg, borrow and steal, make the biggest, baddest, most major project” gave way. I mean, that was never really what I did, but I definitely would have gone into more debt on behalf of a project because I wanted to see a vision realized, and blah-blah-blah. During that summer of 2008, when I was working on the Kitchen show, I said to myself, look, I have this much money and I’m making the show for this much money. That spiraled into the way I approach almost everything, which is: how much do I have? How much can I spend on it? What’s realistic? So I did that whole series of waterlogged photos.

JT: What does waterlogged mean?

SGR: Saturated with water, and ruined. But these photos weren’t called waterlogged until years after I made them. I started with the term *Tears*, which could be read as tears or tears [a heteronym, pronounced differently], and then I started referring to them as waterlogged. The reason I started making these images in 2008 is because I had no money. I had no equipment to do what I wanted to do, and so I wondered, what can I make in my studio using what I have on hand, but still make with a kind of monumentality of scale? So basically everything was made out of garbage, and was made out of the same kinds of things that you can make while sitting at your office job, like 8 ½ x 11-inch sheets of paper printed on a desktop printer and scanned. I would then turn these into photographs that were bigger. Getting back to scale, this domestic or office-worker scale of the “sheet of paper” became a touchstone starting around this time.

JT: How does waterlogging alter the structure of the image?

SGR: The water takes the ink from being a low-resolution, digi-looking, pixelated photograph, with the image sitting on top of the paper, and binds the ink into the paper’s



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 34



Fig. 31

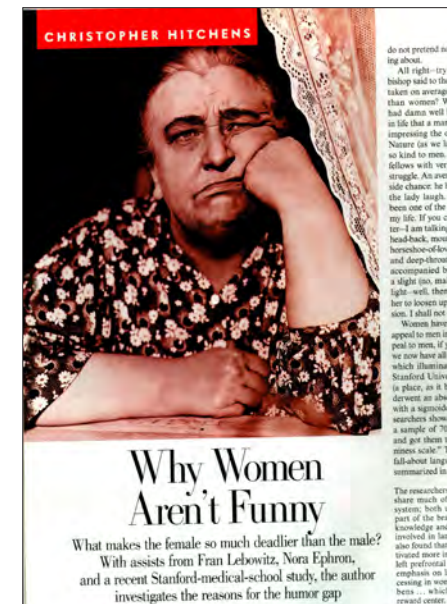


Fig. 32



Fig. 33

fibers so that, when I scan it, there is a compression of the distance between surface and support. And because it's a re-photography project, it's ultimately high-resolution.

JT: It's as if the surface of the paper is a stage for the illusion of photographic emulsion becoming unmoored from its support. What we see in this work is a collapsing of image and support, image and object, or at least that's the way it reads, even if, in the end, given the process of production, this is not really the case.

SGR: Yes, it was very important to me that they were chemical photographs, not pigment prints. So this merging of image and support actually exists at the surface level of emulsion.

JT: Your work seems to be ambivalent about photography as a medium. Whatever photography was, we're now in a world in which two billion photos are uploaded every day to platforms owned by Facebook, so there's the flood, the oversaturation. And there's also the general dilemma that artists face when it comes to presenting photographic images in an exhibition. The question is how to physicalize them, and what we see in your work is that there's either an attack on the image—the punched images, the waterlogging—or there's an amplification of the objecthood of the photo as a thing.

SGR: The reason that I primarily engage in '80s era re-photography is because I'm extremely skeptical about the way that photography has been used as an oppressive and subjective tool; it's an exceptionally irrational and emotional tool. More photographs were taken in the past year than in the first 150 years of photographic history combined. It's a shifting landscape, or a moving target, and so I am responding to the way that images are used in culture. I have extreme difficulty representing people, representing either a mass of people through individuals or representing individuals through photographs, even though it's essentially my main interest, and a lot of the work that has affected me most deeply is presented in that mode.

JT: Such as?

SGR: Nan Goldin, Roy DeCarava, Lewis Hine, or Charcot's commissioned photographs of women hysterics.

JT: So you're trying to work within photography but without slipping into the way that it's been instrumentalized as a tool in the service of power?

SGR: It's something I think about. I'd say it's a parameter and a set of ethics that I use in the making of work.

JT: And what about the role of violence? Some of your pictures have been punched; waterlogging causes photos of bodies to bleed into chromatic abstraction; and with the prop sculptures, you have Groucho glasses, a banana peel,

a cream pie, and a chicken—but also knives, guns, and handcuffs.

SGR: Yes, it's a spectrum. There's benign violence that turns into real violence, which then turns back again. We see this happening in the world, where everyday violence turns into a mass killing or a war. It's a question of scale, the scale of a person versus a global scale. I'm also teasing out the subjective experience of being a female-bodied person in this culture.

JT: Your work is also concerned with bodily damage. We've talked about the waterlogging, in which bodies bleed into formlessness, but there's also the bandage-wrapped lounge chair and the various band-aids that relate to bodily harm as antidote. I wonder what draws you to band-aids as subject matter?

SGR: I think again it's the absurdity: it's supposed to be skin, but it's not. Like the heteronyms of many of my titles, linguistics are deployed. We know what a band-aid is supposed to do for a “boo-boo,” but it's also something that metaphorically can't contain the wound that it's trying to protect or heal. When we say something's a “band-aid,” we mean it's just a surface treatment of a systemic problem.

JT: So on the one hand there's a cycle between benign and actual violence, which we see in the props, and then there's the way in which the work internalizes this violence or finds itself subjected to it by being physically wounded or attacked or bandaged, thereby signaling some form of bodily damage. And what about the collars and ties and pants and dresses that later appear in your work? What brought you from comedy and violence to investigating clothing and fashion?

SGR: For me it was a logical step. I started with the comedians, mostly female comedians, in the *Tears* series. And then I started thinking about pictogram symbols or what you were describing as image-objects. I wondered, while I can think of so many things that are gendered female, what sort of things are distinctly gendered male? This is what led to these new Plexiglas works. My challenge again was how to represent the figure without taking a picture of a person. That's when I began making pants and ties, and then I did shirts that were more “unisex.”

JT: When did this shift occur?

SGR: In 2012, when I started teaching at Hampshire College. It was the first place I ever worked that had “all-gender” restrooms. But they didn't have enough money to remodel every restroom, so the doors said “all-gender restroom without urinals” and “all-gender restroom with urinals.” And I thought, *that's gendered!* So I was contending with the limits of being progressive in the context of real-world issues like budgets and timelines. Making all-gender restrooms does not dismantle the patriarchy, nor the perception of gender difference or our societal relation to

gender. Of course it's a step in the right direction, but I just started laughing at how absurd it was. So I made a couple of urinal pictures and then I thought, OK, this is going to be annoying because it's going to read as a Duchamp thing, and it does. But like hanging the noose at dick height, I like the idea of having an artwork on the wall that's invited to be pissed on. No one thinks the urinal is neutral. It's a male thing. So then I started thinking about the clothes that were male, and that eventually led to the dresses, because dresses are the pictogram for female.

JT: Are you also addressing the field of high fashion?

SGR: Yes, I spent a lot of time in my last show at Rachel Uffner, *Dresses and Books* [2016], dealing specifically with one designer, Franco Moschino, a classic postmodern designer who is part of a lineage that goes from Elsa Schiaparelli through Rudi Gernreich to Commes des Garçons.

JT: I'm not familiar with Rudi Gernreich.

SGR: He was an LA-based designer who was making gender-neutral clothes in the 1960s and 70s. He famously made a topless bikini, which of course wears differently on men and women, such as those distinctions still very much exist. But he also offers a utopian vision of a post-gender world. I have totally mixed feelings about Moschino, but I liked his relationship to humor and putting pictograms on his own work, whether it was the shadow of hands or actual words. I went down a research rabbit hole on the legacy of fashions that were simultaneously trying to be critical and subversive but were also high fashion. How can you embed critique in products?

JT: In terms of materials, you often use acetate, Plexiglas, paint, and inkjet prints. Do you see the work existing as sculpture, or photography, or is medium not important?

SGR: Medium's not important to me, but I see them as handmade photographs.

JT: Is the relation between transparency and opacity important for you? Maybe this connects to your interest in screws and the exposure of hardware?

SGR: The way I started to get interested in transparency and plastic was that I was invited to make an outdoor sculpture for a space during an art fair in 2010, and there was a budget of \$750 and no shipping budget. So I thought, what can I do for an outdoor sculpture for \$750 that takes up space but is not going to bury me in debt? I had been wanting to make solid photographs that could live outside, and I was trying to come up with ideas for making rectangular photographs that were printed on plastic. To step back, in 2008, I was commissioned to do a Public Art Fund sculpture, and I wanted to do this sculpture that was about a chained body, but without the body. I was thinking about Houdini, the famous magician, who was a precursor

to a lot of comedians: Houdini, a tiny little Jew from the Midwest. I was conceiving of the sculpture and I thought that if it were just a chain on the ground, it would look like a bike had been stolen; it would be too slight, too human scale. So I built a huge person-sized Plexiglas box, and at that time, in 2008, I wanted to print photographs on the Plexi but the technology hadn't progressed enough for me to be able to do it, or rather the technology wasn't accessible to me. But two years later, for my next outdoor sculpture, it was possible. That was when I started making the props as outdoor sculptures. Eventually I started screwing them to the wall and to the floor. I had already done the show at The Kitchen, where everything was up on the wall via nails. It was really important to me that the hanging mechanism was shown, that it wasn't magic.

JT: So your aim was to make photos solid?

SGR: Yeah, to make a 3D 2D object. And as for the screws, I could have devised a system of secret pins that go in the wall that would have allowed me to hang the work on the wall without showing how it was done, but that's not my sense of ethics about how things are made. It's very important to me to show it. So screwing through the work was a way for me to get the things on the wall, and then it became also a form of aggression towards the work. Then I realized that I was putting four holes in each piece to hold it up, and that I was only using four screws because it looked correct. That's when I started putting all the screws in the middle of the work, as a design element, because they were becoming part of the work.

JT: So in the relation between transparency and opacity we're also dealing with a tension between revealing and concealing, which takes us back to the logic of fashion—

SGR: And magic, and comedy.

JT: How comedy?

SGR: Because it's this effortless presentation of your persona, but it's really exceptionally crafted and pointed. It's real, but it's not real. It's a representation of self, but it's not. It's a projection. Sort of like an interview.

December 10, 2016

New York City

Jonathan Thomas is editor in chief of The Third Rail.

¹ “Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” Karl Marx, *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 1.

Exhibition Checklist

All works are courtesy the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery unless otherwise indicated.

Gloves Off Reader, 2017
Mixed materials
Dimensions variable

Identify, 2017
Video
18 minutes with sound

Testing I–X, 2009–2017
Microphone stands and mixed materials
Dimensions variable

Dress, 2016
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 50 x 18 x ½ inches
Collection of Jeffrey and Audrey Spiegel

Grid, 2016
Acrylic polymer, inkjet prints, and paper on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 70 ½ x 24 x ½ inches

Jokes On You, 2016
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Six components, irregular, approximately 40 x 227 ¾ x ½ inches

On Aggression, On Aggression, 2016
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Two objects, each irregular, overall 24 x 41 ½ x ½ inches

Y2K Moschino Dress, 2016
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 76 ½ x 40 x ½ inches

Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 91 x 40 x ½ inches

Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 83 ½ x 40 x ½ inches

Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 60 x 57 ½ x ½ inches

Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 83 ¼ x 60 ¼ x 2 ½ inches

Untitled, 2014
Acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 72 x 40 ½ x ½ inches
Collection of Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins

Untitled (for soapbox), 2014
Direct substrate-printed acetate, and hardware
24 x 24 inches

Untitled (for stage), 2014
Direct substrate-printed acetate, and hardware
52 x 83 ¾ inches

Untitled, 2013
Acrylic polymer and inkjet print on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 55 x 40 x ½ inches

Untitled, 2013
Acrylic polymer and inkjet print on acetate on Plexiglas, and hardware
Irregular, 35 ¾ x 24 x ½ inches
Collection of Lisa and Stuart Ginsberg, New York

Window Piece, 2011
Direct substrate print on Plexiglas and hardware
74 x 35 x ½ inches

Props, 2010–2012
Direct substrate prints on Plexiglas and hardware
Dimensions variable

Phyllis, 2009
C-print mounted to Plexiglas
24 x 20 x ¼ inches
Collection of Susan and Randolph Randolph

Phyllis II, 2009
C-print mounted to Plexiglas
24 x 20 x ¼ inches
Collection of Gregory R. Miller and Michael Weiner

Phyllis Diller, 2009
C-print mounted to Plexiglas
20 x 24 x ¼ inches

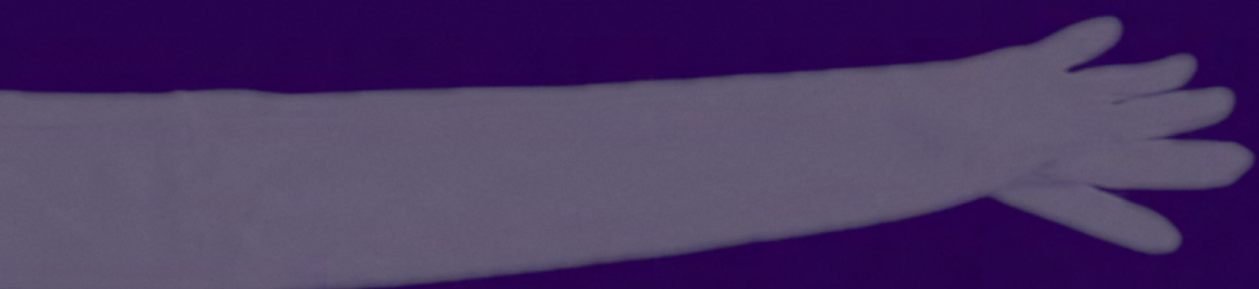
Harold's Clock, 2006
C-print
16 x 16 inches


It Starts with a Poke, 2006
C-print
16 x 20 inches

Lucy Not Funny, 2006
C-print
24 x 16 inches
Collection of Peter and Jamie Hort

Shecky, 2006
C-print
20 x 16 inches

Sparring Partner, 2006
C-print
20 x 16 inches





Selected Biography and Bibliography

Born in 1978, Evanston, IL
Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

Education

- 2005** M.F.A., Sculpture and New Genres, Columbia University School of the Arts, New York, NY
- 2000** B.F.A., Photography with Honors and Art History Concentration, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI

Solo Exhibitions

- 2016** *Dead Jokes*, Document, Chicago, IL
New Works: Dresses and Books, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY
- 2014** *Riga Repair, kim?* Contemporary Art Center, Riga, Latvia
Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY
Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland, OR
- 2011** *Remote*, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY
Suburban Studio, The Suburban, Oak Park, IL
- 2010** *In Residence*, Eli Marsh Gallery, Amherst College, Amherst, MA
- 2009** *Tears*, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY
Bananas, The Kitchen, New York, NY, curated by Matthew Lyons
- 2006** *De/Feat and Drawings*, Sandroni Rey Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Sara Greenberger Rafferty, MoMA PS1, New York, NY

Group Exhibitions and Performances

- 2016** *You Talkin' to Me?*, Galerie Barbara Seiler, Zurich, Switzerland
Her Wherever, Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, NY
Certain Skins, James Cohan Gallery, New York, NY
Lasting Concept, PICA, Portland, OR, curated by Rob Halverson
Untitled Body Parts, Simone Subal Gallery, New York, NY
- 2015** *Pratfall Tramps*, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA
Beyond the Surface: Image as Object, Philadelphia Photo Arts Center, Philadelphia, PA, curated by Dan Leers
Laugh In, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA, curated by Jill Dawsey

- 2014** *SHAPESHIFTING: Contemporary Masculinities*, College of Wooster Art Museum, Wooster, OH
Tragedy Plus Time, Hammer Biennial, Public Fiction, Los Angeles, CA
2014 *Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, curated by Michelle Grabner
The Last Brucennial, New York, NY, curated by the Bruce High Quality Foundation

- 2013** *Paper Cuts*, New York Art Book Fair/MoMA PS1, New York, NY
Work, Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York, NY

- 2012** *Funny*, FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY, curated by Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
What Do You Believe In, New York Photo Festival 2012, Brooklyn, NY, curated by Amy Smith-Stewart

- 2011** *Perfectly Damaged*, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY
The Anxiety of Photography, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO, curated by Matthew Thompson
Shame the Devil, The Kitchen, New York, NY, curated by Petrushka Bazin

- 2010** *Houdini: Art and Magic*, The Jewish Museum, New York, NY; Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, WI
Love & Theft, White Flag Projects, St. Louis, MO

- 2009** *Put On*, Circus Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Off the Wall, Van de Weghe Fine Art, New York, NY

- 2008** *Trapdoor*, Metrotech Center, Brooklyn, New York, NY, organized by Public Art Fund
Untitled (Vicarious): Photographing the Constructed Object, Gagosian Gallery, New York, NY
The Human Face Is a Monument, Guild & Greyshkul, New York, NY, curated by Sara VanDerBeek
3 Rooms—Sara Greenberger Rafferty, Shana Lutker, David Kennedy-Cutler, D'Amelio Terras Gallery, New York, NY

2007 Display, Museum 52, New York, NY
Time-Based Art Festival 2007, PICA, Portland, OR, curated by Kristan Kennedy
 For the People of Paris, Sutton Lane, Paris, France, curated by Sean Paul, Blake Rayne, and Scott Lyall

2006 VIEW 12: *Heartbreaker*, Mary Boone Gallery, New York, NY, curated by Amy Smith-Stewart
Bring the War Home, QED, Los Angeles, CA and Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, NY, curated by Drew Heitzler
Metaphysics of Youth, Fuori Uso, Pescara, Italy, curated by Irina Zucca and Luigi Fassi
The Mind/Body Problem, Artists Space, New York, NY, curated by Christian Rattemeyer

2005 Talk to the Land, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY, curated by Matt Keegan
 Annotations, Champion Fine Arts, Los Angeles, CA, curated by Public-Holiday Projects

Exhibition Catalogues

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 Virno, Paolo. “Jokes and Innovative Action: For a Logic of Change,” *Artforum*, January 2008.
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 Kron, Cat. “Sara Greenberger Rafferty: Andy Kaufman and copyright meet in this conversation with the artist,” *BOMB Magazine*, May 13, 2014, online.
 McNelis, Ashley. “(Re)Presented: Sara Greenberger Rafferty,” *BOMB Magazine*, July 31, 2012, online.
 Kiper, Dmitry. “Interview with SGR,” *Musée Magazine*, Autumn No. 1, 2011.
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 Zucker, Kevin. “Interview with Sara Greenberger Rafferty,” *JoyQuarterly*, Spring 2009.
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and Recommended Reading (with text by Mellissa Huber), self-published, 2016.
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Andrea Blanch: artist portrait, p. 80
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 José Andres Ramirez: pp. 29, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39
 Jan Rattia: p. 27
 Adam Reich: pp. 14–15, 17, 19
 Various, via Instagram: p. 26

Fig. 1, 3 Studio of Sara Greenberger Rafferty, 2016. Photo: Mary Manning.
 Fig. 2, 4 Studio of Sara Greenberger Rafferty, 2016. Photo: Andrew Ingall.
 Fig. 5 Pietro da Cortona, *Christ on the Cross with the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Saint John*, c. 1661. Pen and brown ink and gray wash over black chalk, heightened with white gouache, on light brown paper, squared in black chalk; the oval only reinforced in red chalk. Courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Fig. 6 Ribbon loom weaving neckties, Cheney Brothers’ Factory, South Manchester, CT. Keystone View Company. Courtesy New York Public Library.

Fig. 7 Albert P. and Gloria Martin home, c. 1952–1954, Los Angeles. Courtesy Shooting LA.

Fig. 8 Cellblock 9 at Eastern State Penitentiary, c. 1890. From Michael J. Cassidy, *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*. Philadelphia: Patterson and White, 1897. Courtesy Eastern State Penitentiary.

Fig. 9 Armstrong’s Linoleum catalogue, c. 1951–1961. Courtesy Linoleum City.

Fig. 10 Pages from Phyllis Diller *Like a Lampshade in a Whorehouse: My Life in Comedy*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005.

Fig. 11 Man at loom with child, Seminole Village, New York World’s Fair, c. 1939–1940. Courtesy New York Public Library.

Fig. 12 Camp 5 of Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba is one of six units that make up the detention center and is reserved for non-compliant and hostile inmates. Courtesy U.S. Department of Defense. Photo: Staff Sgt. Jon Soucy.

Fig. 13 [Thomas F. Byrnes], *Rogue’s Gallery*, c. 1891. Wooden cabinet. Collection Philippe Zoummeroff. Courtesy Romantic Agony and Serge Plantureux.

Fig. 14 Diagram of Michael Brown’s bullet wounds in a preliminary autopsy report, 2014.

Fig. 15 Alexander Liberman, *Agnes Martin*, 1973. Gelatin silver print. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Photo: © J. Paul Getty Trust.

Fig. 16 Pages from Phyllis Diller *Like a Lampshade in a Whorehouse: My Life in Comedy*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005.

Fig. 17 Sales of sugar imported on September 1, 1832. Account of plantation owner Sir George Cornwall Bart, Grenada. Courtesy New York Public Library.

Fig. 18 Artist’s gridded sketch of Senenmut, c. 1479–1458 B.C. Limestone, ink. Rogers Fund, 1936. Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org.

Fig. 19 City atlas of Albany, New York, 1876. G.M. Hopkins Company. Courtesy New York Public Library.

Fig. 20 Sara Greenberger Rafferty, detail of *Jokes On You*, 2016. Photo: JSP Photography.

Fig. 21 “Phyllis Gag: Unusual Foods,” scan of 3 x 5-inch index card. Collection National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Fig. 22 Sara Greenberger Rafferty, *Untitled*, 2014. Private collection, New York. Photo: José Andres Ramirez.

Figs. 23–25 Cover and interior pages from Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.

Fig. 26 Rudi Gernreich, *topless bathing suit (monokini)*, 1964. Collection Indianapolis Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Crane Fund, (2010.21) © Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Fig. 27 Page from Peggy Moffitt, *The Rudi Gernreich Book*. Cologne: Taschen, 1999.

Fig. 28 *Tears* exhibition poster for Sara Greenberger Rafferty, 2009. Silkscreen on paper. Photo: Sara Greenberger Rafferty.

Fig. 29 Advertisement for Seagram’s Coolers, c. 1998.

Fig. 30 Rafferty and Coosje van Bruggen, summer 2002.

Fig. 31 Zine covers for Sara Greenberger Rafferty, *Women Aren’t Funny 1 & 2*. New York: Social Malpractice Publishing, 2016.

Fig. 32 Christopher Hitchens, “Why Women Aren’t Funny,” *Vanity Fair*, January 2007.

Fig. 33 Sara Greenberger Rafferty, *Strapped (Sanitorium Chair)*, 2009. Painted galvanized steel and bandages, 27 x 69 x 27 inches. Photo: Adam Reich.

Fig. 34 Work in progress, 2012, in Rafferty’s studio. Photo: Sara Greenberger Rafferty.

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