

ARTFORUM

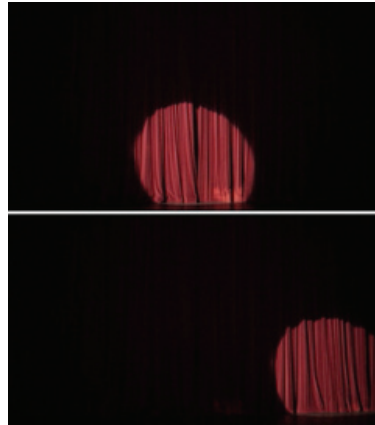
CRITICS' PICKS

“Pratfall Tramps”

ATLANTA CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
535 Means Street NW
February 6–April 11

The late comedian Gilda Radner once referred to life as the “delicious ambiguity.” Such inexactness and Radner’s legacy of laughs act as a benevolent guiding spirit for “Pratfall Tramps,” an exhibition curated by Rachel Reese that features the work of four female artists who uncover the nuances of comedic tropes. From the embarrassment of a joke that bombs, to the elasticity of the vaudevillian romp, to the gestures of a late-night host, this show elucidates the literary qualities of jokes. Jamie Isenstein’s looping video *Infinite Disco Soft-Shoe*, 2002–2004, features the artist in a top hat and tails, cane in hand, matching the jerky dance moves of an animatronic skeleton, while offscreen a piano plays a rickety version of the Bee Gees’ *Staying Alive*. Funny, sure, but rather than simply going for the gag, the artists here *unpack* the gag in a kind of semiotics of the ha-ha.

The signifiers of stand-up, such as a microphone, a red-brick wall, and a spotlight, are prevalent across several works. For instance, another looping video, Tammy Rae Carland’s *Live from Somewhere*, 2013, riffs on the prolonged opening sequence of Gilda Radner’s 1979 one-woman show, where a spotlight scanned a red-velvet curtain looking for the star until she finally emerged. Carland’s spotlight searches forever, though, heightening the relationship between the anxiety of the performer and the anticipation of the audience. Also running concurrently in a programming space is the *Gilda Radner Research and Translation Center*, a didactic reading room of all things Radner. While the humorous nature of life might remain ambiguous, her influence on the female artists featured in this smartly conceived exhibition certainly is not.



Tammy Rae Carland, *Live From Somewhere*, 2013, video projection, color, sound, 7 minutes 15 seconds.

— Katie Geha

Exhibition featuring Sara Greenberger Rafferty

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