Sara Greenberger Rafferty

Sandroni Rey, Culver City CA November 4, 2006 - January 10, 2007

With a solo exhibit at P.S.1/MoMA already under her belt, Sara Greenberger Rafferty's first commercial outing follows notable group shows at Mary Boone and Andrew Kreps. In De/Feat (2006) we see Rafferty, adorned with shorn bangs and the glasses of radical intellectuals of yore, struggling to strap on and subsequently free herself from a straitjacket. The 12-minute loop loosely resembles a 1950s Borst Belt standup routine by a ring-in comic or illusionist, but given the surrounding dark gray floor and white walls, all the action seems to be taking place in an institution—whether modernist white cube or local insane asylum. take your pick—rather than a secluded resort in upstate New York where (surprise, surprise) this piece had its debut.

The artist's clunky hiking boots, dragging across the floor, somehow make the whole uneasy affair even more crushingly awkward as she flips her head in a variety of uncomfortable-looking positions. This tragicomedy unfolds to a background vaudevillian tune and nervous canned laughter. Though her action or acting out feels a bit too contrived for its own good, the result is still hilarious and dutifully offbeat. The whole schtick stands as a fitting testament to conceptual restraint, as well as to those hobbling neuroses of the mostly rich and famous.

In addition to De/Feat (shown in the container space behind Sandroni Rey), the gallery office discreetly showed a number of charcoal drawings based on black-and-white historical performances, further fleshing out an emerging obsession with a particular bygone era. Here we see one woman horizontally levitating while a hoop goes round her as if to show us there are no strings attached, two men in tuxedos creaming each other with pies, and a few shots of a female matinee idol handling a syringe of morphine before jabbing it into her gartered leg. And while the video sometimes feels ironically hip, these drawings by contrast appear openly earnest, if not a rather sophisticated homage to the likes of Raymond Pettibon. It is no new act to reconfigure pop culture, but these delicate lines are unabashedly seductive without in any way seeming cloying or cheap.