Sara Greenberger Rafferty, “Tears”
An artist shows that, while comedy ain’t pretty, it can make for compelling art.

Rachel Uffner, through October 25

Sara Greenberger Rafferty is interested in illusionists, escape artists and comedians; in gags and one-liners; in warblers, hoofers and film stars; and in the relationship of all these things to the respective roles of artwork and artist. Her one-person show at the Kitchen this spring was both ambitious and unwieldy, a sprawling, shaggy-dog compendium of the artist’s preoccupations, as well as her sculpture, drawing, printmaking and photography. Rafferty’s first show for Rachel Uffner puts many of the same themes to use, but in a tighter act.

The exhibition consists of portraits of famous comics, many of them female, and still lifes of classic props—a rubber chicken, a whoopee cushion—made by printing found images from the internet, and then squirting them with water. These prints are then scanned, digitally altered and outputed again as photos. The Rorschach inkblot-like results are both disturbing and seductive, evoking both slapstick and violence.

In one, Joan Rivers’s face blooms with a rash of splotches, while in another, Bill Cosby, shilling for E.F. Hutton, seems to have had a beaker of acid thrown in his face, which melts and runs. The rubber chicken resembles a puddle of piss or cum, the whoopee cushion, a bloody organ. A double image of Goldie Hawn, from her Laugh-In days, shows the actress in body paint; the word anger is barely visible on her arm.

Rafferty is not the first to draw a parallel between the virtuosic activities of artists and entertainers, but she serves up an engaging mix of beauty, pathos and Freudian slips, and this time out her delivery is perfect.—Anne Doran