Sara Greenberger Rafferty

Rachel Uffner Gallery
170 Suffolk Street, near Houston Street, Lower East Side
Through Dec. 21

Sara Greenberger Rafferty first seized the spotlight with cleverly altered photographs of comedians, using a combination of hand-staining and computer tweaking to give some famous faces (Joan Rivers and Bill Cosby, among others) a bit of mystique. Her latest show shies away from celebrities, and from figures in general, instead presenting utterly banal objects and interiors: a bathroom door, a wooden stool, a wall of subway tiles. This development sounds awfully dull, but it seems to be Ms. Rafferty’s way of giving herself license to undertake some wild material experiments with clear film and irregularly shaped pieces of transparent acrylic. Simply put, she has shifted from manipulating photographs to making uncanny photo-objects, à la Robert Heinecken or Carl Cheng. Her otherwise unprepossessing subjects assume the status of preserved specimens, like flies in amber or leaves pressed between sheets of wax paper.

A hint of stage presence remains, however, in an image of a door marked “Audience Entrance” and in another one of microphones awaiting performers. Even more to the point is the set of white curtains that covers a large swath of the main gallery; look closely, and you’ll see a clear vinyl silhouette attached to it, as well as a swarm of insects printed on the curtains themselves. If there’s an entertainer here, he or she is insubstantial and inconspicuous: a ghost, or a fly on the wall.

KAREN ROSENBERG

An untitled image, made of acrylic polymer and inkjet prints on acetate on Plexiglas, by Sara Greenberger Rafferty.