

ARTFORUM

Chicago

Sara Greenberger Rafferty and Ruby Sky Stiler

THE SUBURBAN

125 N Harvey

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Sara Greenberger Rafferty, *Suburban Studio*, 2011, mixed media, dimensions variable.

Sara Greenberger Rafferty’s highly conceptual output looks at how the logic of performance—be it comedic, musical, or even domestic in nature—becomes as slippery as a banana peel once the performer herself is removed from the scene. Rafferty’s works ask: Without bodies, does a stage become a shelf? Will the jokes still fly if they take the form of pictograms, as they do in the cutout Plexiglas images of a banana, a rubber chicken, and Groucho glasses lying flat on the grass outside the exhibition space? Inside, a fiberboard platform, images of a woman wailing into a microphone, abstracted images of spotlights, and silhouettes of a behind-the-scenes figure bending over a table all suggest the apparatus of a staged performance (complete with prop apple), but they also correspond to Rafferty’s own working setup—hence the installation’s title, *Suburban Studio*, 2011. The platform supports the idea of an act or a show, but it also serves as a shelf for the images placed on top of it. The work reads as the artist’s photographic copy stand, which is where her images are composed and is, if you think about it, both a shelf and a stage.

Ruby Sky Stiler’s five rectangular mosaics also use a shelf as a staging device. A thin, custom-made railing frames the bottom of each work while bolstering its impression of weightiness. Stiler’s works “perform” as something they’re not: Each Cubist-style composition appears to have been assembled out of smooth-edged tile or marble, but is in fact a relief chiseled from foamcore and coated with resin to affect an aged, grungy patina. As remarkable as these surface effects can be, it is the artist’s underlying project of reconstructing and restaging outmoded modern and classical forms by way of glue and foamcore—the same materials from which stage backgrounds and props are made—that proves even more compelling.

— Claudine Ise