

# The New York Times

Mika Rottenberg: Dough  
Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery  
526 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
Through February 25

In her New York gallery debut, and her third major piece to be seen in New York in two years, Mika Rottenberg continues to combine video and installation to create a claustrophobic, boxed-in space that feels like the center of an alternative but all-too-familiar universe.

In this world's often vertical, assembly-line-like compartments, women are enslaved and enshrined, serviced and exploited. Bodily functions are equated with capitalist production, and ideals of upper-class femininity are aggressively countered. The video centers on a kind of hive whose queen is an immense woman seated in cramped quarters. She guides a fleshy mass of dough from a hole in the ceiling through one in the floor. Below, other women intercept the extruded dough — which suggests both an intestine and its contents — breaking it into sections and ultimately vacuum-packing it in plastic bags.

Meanwhile, the large woman, apparently suffering from allergies, is also producing tears brought on by flowers that are grown within this jerry-built system. The tears run down one of her legs, drop through a hole in the floor and evaporate on a sizzling square of tile. It's an elaborate process undeterred by its futility. Sound familiar?

In addition to its rich social, physiological and sculptural metaphors, Ms. Rottenberg's work is distinguished by an elaborate interplay of hisses, plops and creaking. Conflating creation myth, sweatshop and beauty parlor, the work also combines real and video space. Viewers are confined to a small, tacky structure like those on the screen, yet we also move through the system with the all-seeing camera — like a parasite. On the way out, crossing a raised platform covered with linoleum, you may notice water falling drop by drop on a heated square, incessantly ceasing to exist.

ROBERTA SMITH