



## Mika Rottenberg's Squeeze at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

August 27, 2010



With a flick of an electrical switch, we hear the creak and groan of sliding wooden chambers that reveal, by turns, a wiggling tongue, a towering blonde factory worker, and documentary footage of female laborers tending iceberg lettuce at a farm in Arizona.



Enter Mika Rottenberg's grossly amusing world, as seen in her new 20-minute video installation, *Squeeze* (2010), on view at the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art](#) through October 3rd. A post-feminist splicing of real and staged images, the video centers on a low-tech architectural contraption, whose shifting wooden walls, windows, and drawers expand and contract like those of a living organism to reveal a perverse fantasy world operating within them. (From October 30th to December 18, *Squeeze* will be presented at the [Mary Boone Gallery](#) in New York, in collaboration with [Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery](#).)



Aptly described in the exhibit's accompanying brochure as a "paranormal factory," *Squeeze* depicts a place where humiliations of all kinds collide. In a cramped, pitch-black wooden cubicle with cutout holes, a fleshy African American woman, known as Trixxter Bombshell, sits Buddha-style, on an oversized rotating platter. In another darkened chamber, an anonymous crew of female laborers collectively bludgeons hunks of iceberg lettuce, rubber, and compacts of blush, into a revolting mash, which will eventually combine to form a brick of useless feminine detritus, a la [Soylent Green](#). (A photograph of the famous art dealer, Mary Boone, presenting this compressed cube of what Rottenberg calls "globally sourced rubber, lettuce make up" will be available for sale in the gallery show).

All the while, a 6'4" blonde, known as Bunny Glamazon, evokes a cartoonish blue-collar factory supervisor, impassively watching the various scenarios depicting female servitude between chomps on her white bread sandwich.

Rottenberg was born in Argentina, grew up in Tel Aviv, and now lives in Harlem, where she's become known for video installations such as *Tropical Breeze* (2004), presenting visceral depictions of the uses and abuses of women's bodies in the labor market. As in *Dough* (2006), which contrasts the squeezing of dough with body fat, Rottenberg spices her surrealist visual brew with ample doses of visual chicanery. Puns abound. In *Squeeze*, there is the somewhat gruesome juxtaposition of fatty flesh and processed lumps of jiggling rubber. Elsewhere, milky latex dripping from scarred trees draws both auditory and visual comparisons a yellow liquid resembling urine that spurts through a hole into a plastic cup.

The high point of the film occurs when five lettuce farm laborers--and later, a team of five rubber plant workers--stick their hands down a row of portals in their respective fields, only to emerge from

Rottenberg's factory wall, as if dismembered, much like Thing, in the 60's television series [The Addams Family](#), only to enjoy a spa treatment by a ready team of Asian manicurists.

In the context of a nightmarish spa or body processing plant, this paranormal assembly line attends, by turns, a series of buttocks protruding from holes, a wiggling tongue, which is subject to occasional spray treatments, and a rosy-faced woman enduring a cheek compression. There is a question of who is on the top here. Perhaps, in this jerry-rigged hierarchy, all women are created equal. Like the stairs in a print by [M. C. Escher](#), there is no up or down, only the constant circling around what amounts to an elaborate--and viciously amusing--exercise in futility.