

EXHIBITION GUIDE

MIKA ROTTENBERG

6 Sep – 4 Nov 2018

‘...it’s about taking something to an extreme to examine it.’¹

Mika Rottenberg is known for her ability to highlight the complex absurdities of our globalised economy and the fragility of the human bodies trapped within them, spun through a lens of humour and confusion. She juxtaposes the vulnerabilities and strengths of her protagonists within uncanny interpretations of our physical world.

Rottenberg’s elaborate visual narratives draw on cinematic and sculptural traditions to forge a new language that uses cause and effect structures to explore labour and globalisation, economy and production of value, and how our own affective relationships are increasingly monetised. The artist explains that through film, architectural installation, and sculpture, she “designs systems with their own subjective logic, precarious systems that are constantly on the verge of collapsing, both logically and physically but somehow are able to hold themselves together through this motion of perpetual movement and growth, until they also pop...”

In films such as *Mary’s Cherries* (2004), female workers occupy meticulously crafted sets, working to produce items (both physical and metaphysical), passing matter from stage to stage, transformed through their skill and physicality. The women in this film are in fact professional fantasy wrestlers who hire their services out online. Rottenberg refers to the non-actors who star in her films as ‘talents’, and often works with women who use their talents – either extreme skills or bodies, to earn money. She pays them the same wage as they would command for their online services, and bases the structures of her films on the women themselves rather than fitting them into an existing narrative. Many of the workers in Rottenberg’s films look restrained in claustrophobic spaces, sweating or bored, mirroring working conditions inherent to globalised capitalism. This reading is complicated by these women having agency in the manner in which they present themselves for consumption; under the eye of Rottenberg’s camera, and in real life.

In more recent works Rottenberg has made directly visible the invisible labour of workers in various locations around the world, all connected through global trade. In *NoNoseKnows* (2015) the camera pans along a line of pearl cultivators meticulously sorting pearls. Women are used for this task as their small hands are more suited to the job. One of them pedals a wheel, whose turning belt powers a fan in another space that wafts flower pollen up the nose of a hayfeverish woman. Her resulting sneeze (a reoccurring motif in Rottenberg’s

work) creates plates of various noodle dishes. Here entanglements of production and consumption across the globe are grotesquely rendered.

In her films Rottenberg creates contractions in space, linking places that are sometimes thousands of miles or worlds apart. In *Cosmic Generator* (2017) – a film that explores the production of luck – the artist traces the lines of connection between the border wall that runs through Calexico, California and Mexicali, Mexico, and a surreal plastic commodities market in Yiwu, China. These locations are connected by an oesophageal tunnel, along which the camera moves. The tunnel surfaces in the vending trolley of a woman who walks alongside the Mexico-US border. (Incredibly, the piece was literally shot as Trump took the presidency and commenced his trade war with China and threatened his mythical ‘wall’ with Mexico.) Using seamless edits to bridge disparate spaces the films collapse geography, just like a product moving across accelerated globalised trade routes.

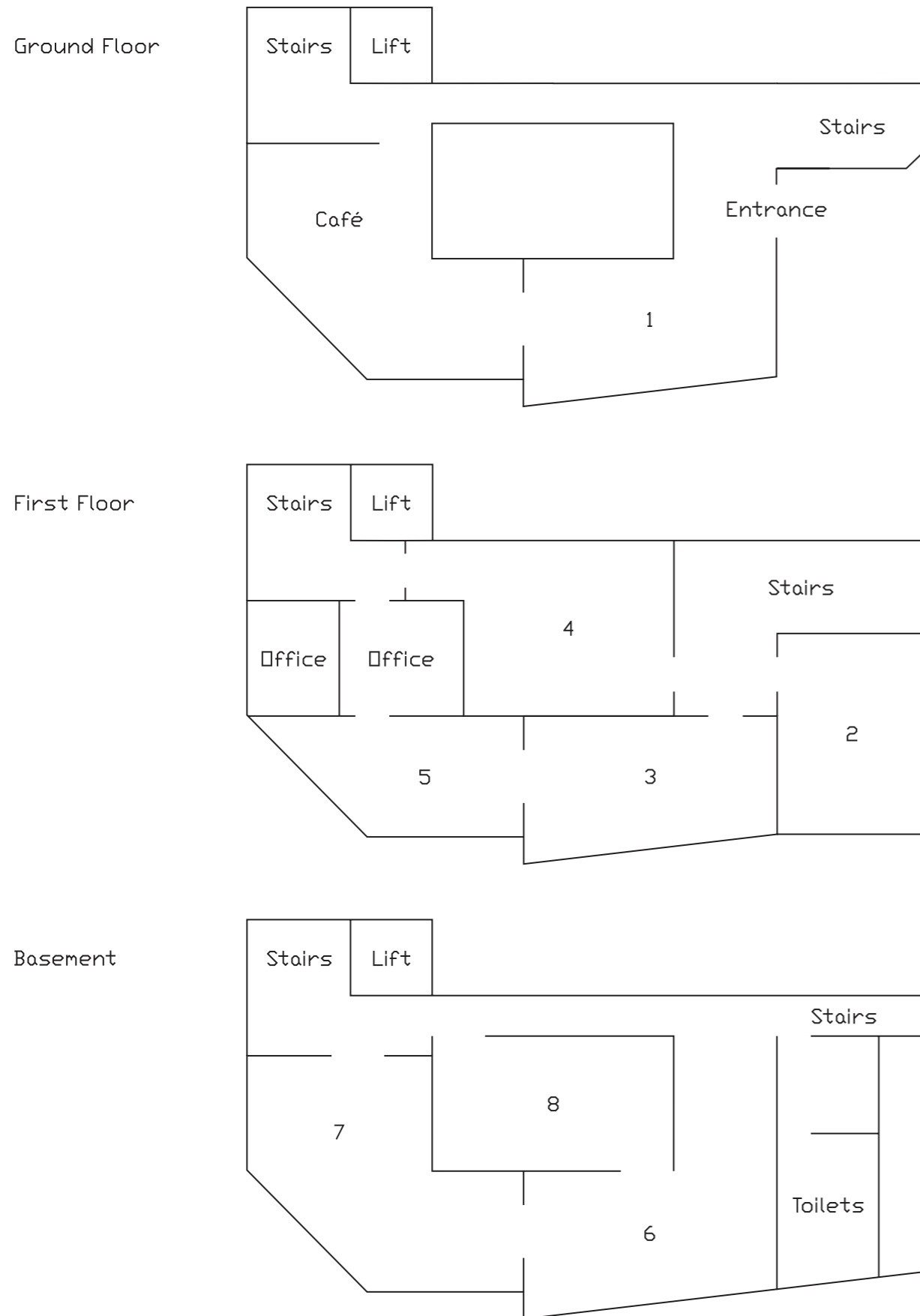
The way in which we encounter Rottenberg’s films in the exhibition space is fundamental. *Mary’s Cherries* is housed in a stucco lined cramped box that mirrors the spaces the women work in. We approach *BallsBowlsSoulsHoles* (2014) by passing through a rotating bingo announcement board. *NoNoseKnows* is reached through a pearl shop, and *Cosmic Generator* is entered through a tunnel. Around the gallery works like *Ponytail* (2018) and *Frying Pans* (2018), confuse what is an animate or an inanimate object, producing an uncanny sense of the material world around us as having agency. These kinetic presences and elements from the films sets or built structures that extend them, situate the viewer directly within Rottenberg’s hallucinatory imaginary. We are at once distanced and intimately involved, observing her workers just as a manager would to keep tabs on productivity.

With thanks to Katrin Altekamp, Andrea Rosen, shoot in China productions, and all the film participants, including actors and those from the locales in which they were shot, without whose work these projects would not have been possible. Additional thanks to MAMbo Museo d’Arte Moderna di Bologna, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Julia Stocheck Collection, Antoine de Galbert, Paris, the collection of Jill and Peter Kraus, Galerie Laurent Godin, Skulptur Projekte Münster, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Outset Contemporary Art Fund, London, and Polyeco Contemporary Art Initiative, Piraeu. Thanks also goes to Oliver Fuke, Natasha Hoare, Nathalie Boobis, Mark Couzens, Andy Healy, James Murison, Kitty Clark, Paulina Michnowska, Lucy Woodhouse, Nicholas Tudor, Jamie George, Jammie Nicholas, Thomas Adam, Sam Tierney, Lucy Cowling, and Katie Simpson. With the support of Artis, Principal Hotels, The Embassy of the Argentinan Republic in the United Kingdom and Graham’s Port.

1 Mika Rottenberg quoted in Hsuan L. Hsu, ‘Mika Rottenberg’s Productive Bodies’ *Camera Obscura* (2010).

FLOORPLAN

LIST OF WORKS



GROUND FLOOR

RIGHT STAIRWELL

Untitled, Ceiling Projection
2018

Single-channel video installation 6:38
Courtesy of the artist, Goldsmiths CCA, London, MAMbo Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna and Kunsthhaus Bregenz

1 GARCIA FAMILY FOUNDATION GALLERY

Mary's Cherries
2004

Single-channel video installation 5:50
Courtesy of the artist and Julia Stoschek Foundation

Sneeze

2012

Single-channel video 3:02

Camera: Mahdi Lepar

Sound design and mix: Nati Taub, Ronen Nagel

Courtesy of the artist and Antoine de Galbert, Paris

FIRST FLOOR

2 CANDIDA & ZAK GERTLER GALLERY

Cosmic Generator (Variant 4)
2017–18

Sculpture and video installation 26:37

Camera: David Hollander

Set: Katrin Altekamp, Cary Cahill

Sound mix and design: Nati Taub, Ronen Nagel
Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned by Skulptur Projekte Münster and produced with generous support from Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Outset Contemporary Art Fund, London, and Polyeco Contemporary Art Initiative, Piraeus, and forthdensity productions

3 DASKALOPOULOS TANK GALLERY

Frying Pans
2018

Stove-tops, pans, water dripping system, lights
Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Goldsmiths CCA, London, MAMbo Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna and Kunsthhaus Bregenz

4 BRIDGET RILEY GALLERY

NoNoseKnows (Artist Variant)
2015

Sculpture and video installation 21:58

Camera: David Hollander

Set: Katrin Altekamp, Joshua Pelletier

Sound mix and design: Nati Taub, Ronen Nagel
Courtesy of the artist

5 RODEN COURTYARD GALLERY

BASEMENT

CORRIDOR

Time and a Half
2003

Single-channel video 3:40

Courtesy of the artist, Andrea Rosen Gallery, and a private collection

6 WESTON GALLERY

Bowls Balls Souls Holes (Bingo variant)
2014

Video and sculpture installation 27:54

Camera: Eric Van Den Brulle

Set: Katrin Altekamp, Joshua Pelletier

Sound design and mix: Nati Taub, Ronen Nagel
Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Jill and Peter Kraus

Finger

2018

Artificial finger, mechanical system, 7 × 13 cm
Courtesy of the artist

7 BASEMENT 1

Ponytail (Orange #1)
2018

Hair, mechanism, motor, microcontroller
Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Goldsmiths CCA, London, MAMbo Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna and Kunsthhaus Bregenz

8 OAK FOUNDATION GALLERY