



SALON 94
243 BOWERY

The New York Times

November 10, 2011

Mika Rottenberg and Jon Kessler: ‘Seven’

By ROBERTA SMITH

Performa 11 at Nicole Klagsbrun Project Space

534 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Nov. 19

Mika Rottenberg makes videos that involve women performing mysterious, product-oriented rituals in close quarters, usually with hilarious feminist overtones and not a little body heat. Jon Kessler specializes in kinetic sculptures that clank and gyrate in a mad-scientist sort of way, often with political implications. Apparently they had enough in common to garner a commission to collaborate on a live performance (the first for both) from Performa 11, the visual art performance biennial whose fourth iteration began its three-week run on Nov. 1 in New York.

The result is “Seven,” a 37-minute piece involving seven live performers in an installation that includes video. The action centers on the transcontinental production of “chakra juice,” a magic elixir, one assumes, distilled from human sweat. It comes in the seven colors ascribed in Indian medicine to the body’s seven force centers, located at intervals from the bottom of the spine to the crown of the head. Performed continuously in a 37-minute cycle Wednesday through Saturday from 2 through 8 p.m., “Seven” combines the artists’ interests to entertaining, if not completely seamless effect.

At one end of the assembly line is a New York-based laboratory (the gallery) where sweat is harvested after some typically Rottenbergian exertions by several performers, and reserved in vessels made of a special clay; the clay arrives from the African savannah through the kind of pneumatic tubes once common to department stores. The African side of the operation, conducted by the residents of a tiny, isolated village, appears on television monitors.

With colored lights flashing, things zipping back and forth across the Atlantic, and liquids and solids changing state and hue — all under the watchful eye of a lab technician who conducts

herself with the aplomb of a skilled illusionist — there is quite a bit of firsthand action to follow, most of it in line with Ms. Rottenberg’s aesthetic. But gradually the on-screen drama takes over; the savannah is not only mesmerizingly beautiful, it is also the juice’s destination. The closing scene, a kind of performance within the performance, seems to be mostly Mr. Kessler’s. It is unexpectedly dazzling, as, in a different way, is the realization that all this human effort we’ve just witnessed is for nature’s benefit.