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Two Flights Up: Art and Text at [2nd floor projects]



Installation view of Sahar Khoury and Jaimie Healy; courtesy of [2nd floor projects]

Just a few blocks from the bustle of 24th and Mission on a shady street up two flights of stairs, an intimate project space run by artist Margaret Tedesco provides some of the most consistently exciting combinations of art and writing in the Bay Area.

The aptly-named [2nd floor projects] opened in 2007 with a show by Sahar Khoury. Seven years later, her work is again on view, this time with paintings and sculptures by Jaimie Healy. Completing the show is a personal essay by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, *A Desire for History*, printed as an

elegantly-designed limited edition broadsheet. Each [2nd floor projects] exhibition features newly commissioned writing ranging wildly in tone, style, content and physical form.

All three artists in the current exhibition (Sycamore included) work in fragments. Khoury's sculptures are amalgamations of familiar objects wrapped in patterns, tied in knots and rolled into tubes. Healy considers her work like elements of a crime scene, each object a small clue to a larger ongoing narrative. And Sycamore's non-linear essay speaks to the anxiety of loss -- specifically the loss of identity and community in the face of gentrification.

Together, the three form a powerful triad. Healy and Khoury's works share a visual language of mingled abstraction and representation. Sycamore's essay is full of snark, punchy lines and rhetorical questions. For all three, an underlying earnestness prevails. "Maybe I'm saying we all need different kinds of people in our lives, right?" writes Sycamore. "When anything becomes homogenous, there's a problem. When anything becomes so homogenous that people don't even think about it, that's worse."

Just inside the front door, Healy's *Untitled* rests against the wall on two longer wooden props, mimicking the simple wooden shelf with I-brackets above (a vestige of a previous show). A plaster semicircle echoes the hallway's walls and foreshadows the shape's reappearance at a much larger scale around the next corner.

Khoury's work doesn't appear until the main gallery space, but there it gathers in dense clusters, with tantalizing titles like *Untitled (hot dog on ball on vase on box on rugs)* and *Untitled (blouse landscape, vase, with Ethel in disguise)*. Ethel is a small stuffed cat, wrapped in a headdress like a miniature Mata Hari.

In front of the main room's bay windows, a grouping of five of Khoury's *Untitled* sculptures sit around and on top of a horizontal plinth of waxed concrete. In the opposite corner, a plinth of approximately the same dimensions stands upright, with two notches containing a "NY Times stick" and a "Jack Hanley pink knot" made of papier-mâché. Khoury skillfully balances solid and delicate, hard edges and organic twists, to create intricate combinations of found and fabricated objects. Heterogenous, to a tee.

Along the hallway and in the main gallery, Healy presents two pairs of paintings in the series *11. Among Horses*, named after a short story by Roberto Bolaño. Bolaño's character spends his evenings unable to write the stories that will pay for a trip to the city and a new life with his fiancée. His trip "recedes from his future, is lost, and he remains listless, inert, going automatically about his work among the horses."

Nine cast plaster horse heads on a low pedestal illustrate this story, while other sculptures offer mysterious clues about Healy's working process and serial storytelling. *Water bottle* is two plastic water bottles filled with latex slip. *Vent* is a perfect mimic of a wall vent, the likes of which cannot be found anywhere in [2nd floor projects]. *Magic Realism* (another ode to Bolaño) resembles a wedge for propping open one of the bay windows, except it's made of plaster.

Bolaño's *Among the Horses* is a cautionary tale against inactivity, yet Khoury, Healy and Sycamore are all ardent producers of objects, stories and experiences. There is no danger of them becoming "finished," as Bolaño's writer does, their willingness to take risks and test out new ideas makes viewing their work invigorating. In her concluding paragraph Sycamore asks, "Knowing the gap between what you want and what you yearn for, can there be hope in this disjuncture?"

While she speaks of social dynamics, this could also perfectly describe a version of Healy and Khoury's practices. Attempting -- and sometimes failing -- is what makes continued efforts worthwhile. Perhaps in another seven years a revisit to Healy's work will reveal just as many exciting developments as a flashback to Khoury's 2007 show does today.