

Maha Saab

*Ozy*

April 3<sup>rd</sup> – May 22<sup>nd</sup>

This April and May, Midway Contemporary Art is presenting an exhibition of new work by Maha Saab. In *Ozy*, the Los Angeles-based artist presents a selection of photography, drawing and sculpture completed over the past two years that reveal an idiosyncratic probing at the contours of still life, conceptual photography and post-minimalism sculpture.

An initial deadpan humor is evident in work such as *S.D.S. Prop for Science*, a painted paper sculpture originally fashioned as a prop for a theatrical performance. Now hung on the wall, this “prop for science” is completely disconnected from its original function as an object to be viewed by a distant and seated audience. While the work serves as a formally elegant sculpture, this close encounter with a theatrical device in a gallery setting demonstrates the subtle slippage and questioning that Saab uses to undermine the perception of her objects and images.

Saab’s use of photography in relation to her drawing and sculptural practice perhaps best demonstrates the playful strains of a layered and complex game of vision. In one series, *Sonny and Allison Drew A Picture*, four photographs depict a hand turning the pages of an electronic audio-photo album that contain rough sketches. Saab had asked two singers to make blind drawings of microphones, which she then retraced, altered and placed in this almost comical recording/viewing device. She has previously muted audio technology such as radios, microphones, and other devices through the photographic act, but in this series, it is the arrangement of the four photographs in a grid so that they read counterclockwise that alters our cognitive reception of these images. It’s as though the viewing process was being rewound. This subtle reversal within the reading of these four seemingly casual images provides a glimpse into the sinuous processes of recording, altering, repetition, and documenting that occurs throughout Saab’s work, offering a synesthetic crossing of perceptual wires.

In *Photographs of Flowers Arranged by an Architect in Shades of Green*, lilies and mums were, as the title dryly indicates, arranged by an architect. While informed by the tradition of still life photography and painting, her tasking of a professional so far outside of their field of expertise creates an awkward floral arrangement that resists the symbolic or metaphoric traditions of this genre. The presence of the lighting equipment within the frame and the unflattering angles from which these banal ikebana were photographed further suggests that an off-kilter morphing of the still life genre into production still has taken place. This distancing of the “behind the scenes” environment is shared by another work on view: *Interview 19*. Here the forms of two figures, a camera, and some lighting equipment are drawn in ink over the abstract patterning of an image of a radio. The delicate ink lines trace back to a photograph of the Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader being filmed under the glare of harsh lights. Saab’s selection of this source material, given Ader’s interest not only in still life, but also in the destabilizing of the authenticity of events and objects, indicates a common ironic stance towards the rigidity of genre.

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Maha Saab lives and works in Los Angeles. She has exhibited in numerous group shows in Los Angeles at venues such as Cardwell Jimerson Contemporary Art, Hayworth Gallery, Pauline Gallery, Richard Telles Fine Art and Michael Kohn Gallery. She also curated *The Chef’s Theory* last summer at 533 in Los Angeles. This summer, she is exhibiting in *California Dreaming*, the Portugal Arte curated by Aram Moshayedi and Michael Ned Holte. She graduated from the UCLA in 2007 and Parson School of Design in 2003.