

Sahar Khoury: *Afterhours*

The artist bypasses traditions of object making and inhabits a unique sculptural space

By Sahar Khraibani
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Sahar Khoury, *Untitled (belts with Lola sitting)*, 2019. Glazed ceramic, bronze, belts, 42 x 12 1/2 x 23 inches. Courtesy the artist and Canada. Photo: Joe DeNardo.

Nestled in the smaller gallery of Canada's newly inaugurated Tribeca space, Sahar Khoury's solo show *Afterhours* presents sculptures that upon first encounter resemble screens, tapestries, and baskets. Khoury's sculptures prioritize distortion over function and take pleasure in moments of material chaos. The layering in of personal mementos makes it so that the work can absorb the histories embedded in the discarded materials and reinvent them with new possibilities.

On View

Canada

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Two felines stand guard in front of and over two of the sculptures, *Untitled (belts with Lola sitting)* (2019) and *Untitled (1900-1999 with Pearl sleeping)* (2019). In *belts with Lola sitting*, a charming makeshift tower functions as the pedestal for a bronze cast of a cat. Three red, black, and gold ceramic vessels, built with irregular protrusions and cavities, are stacked one on top of the other. The black cast bronze and irregularly modeled cat poses at the top, with her tail hovering weightlessly behind. The artist is known for sculpting her two cats, Lola and Pearl, many times, working directly from live postures and using materials such as paper and fabric to capture their rough sculptural form. However, the cats on view here present the first instance where Khoury has cast these forms in bronze, making their presence in the space heavier, more solid, and noticeable. A collection of tightly strung leather belts reinforces the sculpture. The straps and buckles interact with the vessels for utility and structural integrity, and intertwine with the colors, so that gold, red, brown and pewter surfaces are heavily present in the space.



Sahar Khoury, *Untitled (wall relief with blue glaze and green line)*, 2019. Paper and textile mâché, glazed ceramic, steel, spray enamel, oil stick, 26 1/2 x 21 x 5 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist and Canada. Photo: Joe DeNardo.

In *Untitled (1900-1999 with Pearl sleeping)*, Khoury erects a gate-like, almost architectural, screen made with papier-mâché, reflective tape, enamel, belts, and bronze. The surface is painted bone white and sculpted with a repetitive window pattern. The pattern is actually comprised of numerals, scrunched together illegibly. On the interior façade, the object is reinforced with reflective bike tape, allowing light to absorb and bounce off the characters, creating shadows and halos. The sculptures on view don't offer a tangible narrative, but instead depict a certain mood, the artist's intimate life and curiosities. We can recognize their meaning through our bodies, walking through, feeling the weight (or lack thereof) of the cat on top of the vessels, or the cinch of a belt. It is through the prevalent human touch of the artist that these objects bring into focus our own felt and material histories.

The reliefs hanging on two adjacent walls, *Untitled (wall piece with purple blobs)* (2019) and *Untitled (wall relief with blue glaze and green line)* (2019), resemble tapestries upon first sight. They borrow from similar architectural aesthetics as the sculptures in the round, hinting at their patterns, but instead they use colors as their primary subjects. They play with the dimensionality of a sculptural piece, towing the line between flat and three-dimensional, but firmly existing in between. Purple blobs, blue glazes, and occasional steel rods create emotional landscapes. There is something alchemical about the way Khoury uses materials, and, however industrial, she prods them into feeling supple, rich, and gentle. Khoury builds modes of display into the works: *Untitled (wall relief with blue glaze and green line)* has a hanging mechanism made out of two shopping-bag handles that stick out of its top edges. The improvisational approach to problem solving is apparent and embedded into the formal qualities of the work.

Khoury's sculptures exist outside of what we conventionally associate with bronze statues; they provide clear indications of process, imperfections, and the human touch, which are reflected in the finished works. By using quotidian materials and revealing their armatures, as well, the artist bypasses traditions of object making and inhabits a unique sculptural space that is at once aesthetically raw and purposefully disorderly. The work, however, remains formally elegant, rough and emotionally beautiful.

Contributor

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Sahar Khraibani is a contributor to the Brooklyn Rail.