

## *bow bow*

Canada, New York 5 May – 11 June

In a standout *I Love Lucy* scene from 1953, Ricky and Lucy go head-to-head in a dance-off. Ricky does a few versions of a kind of sophisticated, slowed-down hand jive, while Lucy, true to form, goes big with pinwheel arms, one-legged hopping and a novice grapevine. Ricky is doing it the way things are *supposed* to be done – measured, elegant and self-contained. As such, he’s like a personification of the stereotype of modern painting: gestural, sure, but composed – an ambassador for good taste. Lucy is all ‘deliberately clumsy actions’, as the standard definition of slapstick would have it, and a frenzied, sweaty, gesticulating mess. She’s also undeniably charismatic in comparison to the restrained actions of her opponent. This two-person show of California-based artists Johanna Jackson and Sahar Khoury takes a similarly charming slapstick approach. A rumination on using materials the wrong way, *bow bow* is the frisky side of the gestural and expressionistic, the messily handmade and an antiprecious approach. There are a lot of types of objects and materials on display:

sculptures made of steel or ceramic or concrete, paintings, rugs and one mirror – and each is imbued with its own sense of humour.

In addition to her tin book-sculptures and hand-hooked rugs, Jackson employs chunky blocks of ceramic to make sloppily glazed sculptures of a pendulum clock, a pair of shoes and an outsize penny. They are like 3D renditions of a kindergartener’s drawing, unkempt and expressive; mimetic but entirely messy.

Khoury’s work, here shown in New York for the first time, is a wonderful surprise. The artist uses a host of materials and techniques – among them poured concrete, papier-mâché, old clothes, painting, bamboo and more – in creating her paintings and sculptures. In one of my favourite pieces, *Untitled (triangle, rug pedestal)* (2017), a patch of mint-green machine-made rug is sunk into the side of a concrete sculpture that resembles a line drawing of a right-angled triangle. Other patches of the concrete are tinted with light pink paint (perhaps the effect of painting into wet cement). There is something alchemical about the way Khoury uses materials

here. However industrial, she prods them into feeling gentle and supple. For example, there is a series of holes in the base of the sculpture that, in Khoury’s hands, appear torn away rather than, say, drilled, which makes the stony construction material feel soft and vulnerable. I’m also taken with the way Khoury builds modes of display into the works themselves: one painting has a hanging device made of four paper shopping-bag handles that stick out of its top edge, and another hangs from a 60cm-tall bamboo triangle. An improvisational mode of problem solving is embedded into the formal qualities of the works.

At first glance one might be tempted to say this show is a little crowded. The artists and the great multitude of materials with which they make their work are pushed up against each other. Though a more measured mode of installation would allow for a greater amount of hallowed space around each object, maybe the disorderly presentation is fitting for these bodies of work in all their deliberately clumsy glory. *Ashton Cooper*



Sahar Khoury, *Untitled (triangle, rug pedestal)*, 2017, rug, cement, steel, paint, 70 × 58 × 20 cm. Courtesy the artist and Canada, New York