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Kutlug Ataman at Lehmann Maupin  
By Edward Leffingwell

Unconventional women were the subjects of two video installations by Turkish filmmaker Kutlug Ataman exploring new territory at the intersection of art and documentary. *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read* (2002) captured the obsessive devotion of the custodian of an amaryllis collection for the British National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens. Seen on four screens in a large gallery, Ataman's London-based subject goes about her botanical mission as she details the pitfalls and rewards of her avocation. Read tells Ataman that the life of these plants has become an increasingly important part of her professional life as a caregiver to cancer patients.

Addressing Ataman directly, Read slips her hands into protective gloves and sets about her work. Further protected by a disposable apron, she mixes her own growing medium and, clearly thrilled with the anticipation of what they will become, firmly sets new bulbs into pots in a garden shed behind her plant-filled home. She remarks on the flowers' sexuality with an erotic intensity and waxes enthusiastic on the details. She lifts pollen from a flower with a watercolor brush as the camera lingers and jockeys for place. When a specimen begins to fail, she cares for it, and when mites become epidemic, she destroys them with an intensity that resembles glee. Ataman's camera roams from his subject's beaming, angular face to the theater of a work counter, where she uses a scalpel to slice into the heart of a bulb, exclaiming triumphantly at the site of infestation. Read identifies with the flowers' affliction, remarking that it seems as though the mites have invaded her. In the distance, red blooms loom over her like the heads of lions.

The large, single screen of *kutlug ataman's semiha b. unplugged* (1997), in another gallery, offered eight hours in the life of nonagenarian Turkish opera diva Semiha Berksoy, reciting the aria of her life. The former dramatic soprano dresses for the camera, cheeks feverish with rouge, a multipointed jester's hat and veil on her head, bejeweled hands, ratty fur stole. She has devoted her life to art and to culture, she says, and, branded a communist, she was driven from the stage into exile, her roles taken by members of the chorus. Before her own theaterlike set of large, exotic paintings and curtained walls, she expressively recalls lost loves as she is carried along on the current of long-term memory. Ataman approaches these narratives without dissembling, bringing to his project the attentive regard of a witness in thrall.