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Kutlug Ataman
Lehmann Maupin, through Jan 11
By Laura Auricchio

In two recent video installations at Lehmann Maupin, Turkish-born Kutlug Ataman presents a sympathetic and intriguing portrait of women on the verge.

In *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read*, form and content conspire to draw us into the anxious mind of the title character—a florimaniac driven to distraction by her love for plants. On four large screens, each filmed during a different season, we see Read, an amateur British botanist, going about her all-consuming business of caring for 500 amaryllis in her small London flat. Ataman arranges his double-sided projections in a square with gaps at each corner, rendering fragments of several images visible from every spot in the gallery. Adding to the confusion, four different voice-overs play simultaneously and loudly. At certain points, Read sounds like a Martha Stewart clone, issuing careful but stern directives on proper bulb-handling procedure. Other times, she lingers lovingly over leaves and petals, or despairs at the loss of some 400 plants to a devastating storm. As she struggles single-mindedly to cultivate tropical flowers in an English climate, Read emerges as both a confident master of fate and a troubled victim of passion.

Despite its simpler form, the single-screen *kutlug ataman's semiha b. unplugged* paints an equally complex picture. In nearly eight hours of sprawling monologue filmed in the home of the 90-year-old Turkish opera diva, Semiha Berksoy weaves her own life story into the broader tapestry of Turkey's history from the Ottoman Empire to the present. As she tells her tale, Berksoy dons a series of faded but elaborate costumes from past roles played on-stage and off. Piles of dusty props fill her rooms, including a mannequin representing Berksoy's dying mother (who passed away when she was seven years old). Dramatic self-invention is the key to Berksoy's majestic persona, as she borrows traits from Norman Bates, Miss Havisham and tragic figures from grand opera. Though her stories are clearly embellished, Ataman employs the respectful style of straight-forward documentary. The boundaries of truth, like those of normality, are up for grabs.