

DAVIS, CALIFORNIA

Sahar KhouryJan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem
Museum of Art

Sahar Khoury is a bricoleur: an artist who finds material inspiration in depots and warehouses hawking industrial leftovers, recycled goods, and other castoffs. In “Weights and Measures,” the eight works spread throughout four galleries all give the impression of being stripped down to their essential components while also managing to convey an almost baroque sensibility, freely combining found and made elements.

The largest work on view, *Untitled (the elephant in the room [the tower of silence])*, (all works 2025), is the first to greet visitors. Caged in a tower between skeletal steel arches, a mechanized spiral staircase going nowhere rotates at one funereal revolution per minute. A shining golden duck decoy keeps watch over the top of one set of arches; you can see, perched on the other, a pyramid of tiny jars of Palestinian olive oil, glowing like a cluster of precious jewels. Discreet speakers broadcast a piece composed by Khoury’s frequent collaborators Lara Sarkisian and Esra Canoğullari, based on the song “Al-Atlal” (The Ruins) by fabled Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum. Threaded together with factory sounds and chanted Sufi prayers, its haunting and unidentifiable refrain can be heard throughout the show.

The most striking element in *the elephant in the room*, though, might be the actual elephant—or parts thereof. Two sets of massive cast-porcelain tusks, set vertically on either side of the structure’s open roof, curve inward toward the central tower. Like the duck decoy—another creature present in several pieces in the show—these clay tusks were cast during one of Khoury’s two recent residencies at the Kohler factory in Wisconsin. Already known for her ceramic work, Khoury has adroitly used the new skills she learned there to transform found objects through the magic of multiplication. Cast elements, whether made in porcelain or metal, are present in virtually every work on view. *Untitled (a dangling carrot or an elephant tusk bird cage)*, includes both. A rough cube of metal animal cages serves as the foundation for four ceramic tusks, installed at each corner of the structure’s second story. On three of them, suitcases have been speared like cocktail cherries on toothpicks (the fourth tusk punches through an institutional-size can of Palestinian olive oil). Additional elements include two ancient shovels—a large circular hole piercing the blade of each—that hang from a cheap white-metal coatrack at the center. There are also some rough bunches of cast-iron carrots as well as a single one, which dangle, per the title, from the coatrack. As the title suggests, the work provides a medley of visual metaphors: the triumphal arch of tusks, contained within a maze of cages hinting at species collapse; the dangling carrot that suggests bait; the disabled shovels, embodying broken tools of civilization; and the speared suitcases serving as possible stand-ins for travelers to exotic places, a rejection of colonialism. Perhaps the piece embodies all of these meanings, or none of them. Overwhelmingly rich with references, it creates a world for itself, in which a sense of urgency is filtered through a penchant for spectacle.

Its text is subtext, unlike that of the more overt wall piece *Untitled (the title of Omar El Akkad’s 2025 nonfiction book)*, in which blobby brass words, made letter by letter, have been released from the normal structures of sign and page. First horizontally, then vertically, then horizontally again, they spell out ONE DAY EVERYONE WILL HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AGAINST THIS: as much a prayer for a distant future as it is an astute observation of the unfortunate present.

—Maria Porges



Sahar Khoury, *Untitled (the elephant in the room [the tower of silence])*, 2025, steel, ceramic, speakers, motor, glass, altered spiral staircase, Palestinian olive oil. Installation view.