

"Mechanical Perception"

FOTOFEST HOUSTON
 1113 Vine Street, Suite 101
 September 15–October 19

In the gallery's darkened entrance, a projector plays Eileen Maxson's *Untitled +++, 2008*—repeating shots of disembodied hands and the murder of a hapless young man in a witness box. Weighty concrete pillars flank the screen, as sensationally banal broadcasting meets a sound track of über-Melvins drone metal. Maxson's video builds tension through repetition, splicing lo-fi advertisements and ominous noise into the narrative. As the channels flip and the footage wobbles like a well-worn VHS tape, the astonishing grief of the protagonist providing testimony makes him sickening bait for scorn and disaster. Guilty and awkward, he discusses difficult details, racked by mental and later physical torture. In this simple, brutal work, Maxson bleeds sincerity, her motives hidden in the media tropes that she apes so well.



Eileen Maxson, *Unknown +++, 2008*, still from a color video with sound, 3 minutes 17 seconds.

Soody Sharifi's installation evinces emotional more than mechanical perception. She has hung Iranian propaganda posters along a hallway that leads to a foyer and a sparsely decorated living room carved out within the gallery; visitors must remove their shoes to enter the social space. In the process, Sharifi has given the viewer a sense of home within otherness. Mei-Mei Dillard commands attention with carefully composed C-prints that mimic seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting. Banal narratives, the images cling to their goal of repeating art history's motifs. Anderson Wrangle's "mechanization" also relies on a breadth of tradition, bringing a dry humor to his relationship with formal concerns. Wrangle contributes several playful experiments: a video of colored smoke curling through a forest, a diptych self-portrait as both hunter and prey, and houseplants gridded with white string—mathematics attempting to control nature. Brian Piana has muted the emotion in online interaction, creating barren representations of the Internet's structure in refined and brightly painted objects. The show's curators aimed to define a regional set of photographers and video artists but have also assembled a range of passionate human adaptations to mechanical processes—quite a feat on its own.

— Sean Carroll