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Kutlug Ataman
Lehmann Maupin
Through Wednesday

By Holland Cotter

The New York solo debut of the London-based artist Kutlug Ataman consists of a single, riveting video installation, "Women Who Wear Wigs." In it, four Turkish women talk at length about wearing wigs, a prosaic enough cosmetic enhancement that for each of them turns out to have wrenching personal implications.

One of the subjects is accused of being a political terrorist and has been living in disguise for 30 years; another is a glamorous journalist who has lost her hair from chemotherapy for breast cancer. A third is an observant Muslim who covers her head with a wig in place of the scarf she is forbidden to wear as a student at a secular university. The last is a transsexual prostitute whose head is periodically shaved by the police.

The four long interviews run simultaneously side by side and are very different. The woman accused of terrorism keeps her face turned away from the camera; the student doesn't appear on screen at all. The transsexual, filmed at home, describes police harassment with a mix of anger and humor. The journalist, meticulously coiffed and made up, speaks from her hospital bed as Mr. Ataman's camera wanders down to an intravenous tube in her arm.

In each case, truth and self-delusion mingle. All four subjects are dealing head-on with imposed conditions, but each is shaping her response to them in ways that are simultaneously assertive and protective: shaping a view of herself that, like a wig, helps to create a new identity but also hides an old one.

Some artists are doing compelling work with "reality" video these days. Mr. Ataman, whose work has appeared in the Venice and Istanbul biennials, is one of them.