

# WESTERN ★ PROJECT

## ARTFORUM



Tanya Batura, *Monochroma C*, 2008, ceramic and acrylic paint, 10 x 18 x 11".

Tanya Batura, [WESTERN PROJECT](#), 3830 Main Street, September 6–October 4

In recent years, [Tanya Batura](#) has demonstrated a compelling penchant for eroticizing clay and updating Neoclassical sculpture. Batura's glossy white heads sport monstrous red mouths and swollen tongues, sensuous cheeks and rolling chins, and are often paired with sadomasochistic paraphernalia (ropes and bagged heads figure prominently). Although these earlier works wander dangerously close to images of torture in news and entertainment media without discernible commentary, a powerful new body of work further develops Batura's operatic pleasure/pain balancing act. It leaves the clown paint and overt psychosexuality behind in favor of a more streamlined and formal approach, to great effect.

"Monochroma" consists of eight clay heads; each is painted the same rich shade of deep brown-black with a smooth, glossy surface that belies any concrete relationship to skin tone or portraiture. The works more readily evoke Etruscan sculpture, Ingres's *Odalisque*, or apparitions from a dream.

It is improbable, in this day and age, to consider a blindfolded head, such as the one in *Monochroma A*, 2008, without thinking of torture, but the simplicity of color and form in this work undercuts the suggestion of tragedy. It fuses the art-historical past and the political present with a melancholic humanism that reflects on, rather than exploits, ideas about life and death. Though "Monochroma" is strictly limited to heads and necks, taken as a group, the series conveys a surprisingly fluid motion: The arch of a truncated shoulder and the smooth curve of a cheek morph easily into elegant abstraction. While the subject matter flirts with lulling viewers into an unconscious appreciation of violence, Batura evades this trick and instead carves out a nuanced if queasy place where pathos resides side by side with harmony, historic ideals of beauty are part and parcel with contemporary images of suffering, and the tension between attraction and revulsion remains pragmatically taut.

— *Annie Buckley*

# WESTERN ★ PROJECT

Art LTD - October 2008

**Tanya Batura: "Monochroma" at Western Project**

by Allison Gibson

*Oct 2008*



LOS ANGELES

The milieu of groaning heads that make up "Monochroma," Tanya Batura's second solo exhibition at Western Project, argues against the conventional wisdom that it is impolite to stare. Inviting you to gape openly, if a bit uncomfortably, the sculptures of bald, androgynous heads, necks, and a select few shoulders, dare you to pull your eyes away, though you wouldn't for fear of missing a lick of the lips or a winking eye. As the exhibition's title implies, the sculptures are all a murky black-brown, a diversion from Batura's oeuvre of pale faces with a smudged red lip here, or crimson tongue there.

"Monochroma" is the ultimate in voyeuristic venues; the viewer has the sense of accidentally walking in on a fetishist gathering where the participants continue on, unaware that you're among them. Monochroma A, an upright head with a smooth complexion and a scarf over its eyes, coquettishly presents its tongue through thin, parted lips. The tongue has the rough, sandpaper surface of a cat's, juxtaposing the silky bow tied behind the figure's head. The bow is like a fragment of one of Degas' Little Dancers, but instead of representing that ubiquitous femininity, it masks the wanton eyes of an androgynous character. The arching Monochroma C presents a vulnerable throat and delicately open mouth, while creating an amorous curiosity about the unseen position of the body that would be below it.

The continual contrasts between the delicately inviting surfaces of the sculptures' faces and the glimpses of texture found on wood grain cut-off points, wrinkled scarves and textured tongues, are as conflicting as the overwhelming senses of eroticism and horror that the entirety of the works elicit. The sculptures create a dichotomy of sensations for the viewer, who simultaneously blushes and shifts her feet while suppressing the urge to run a hand over the enticing surface of a cheek.

The way that the sculptures are aligned in the gallery, atop simple wooden pedestals, creates the illusion of a flipbook of images. When scanning the pieces in order, the erratically positioned sculptures seem to be acting out a complicated scene, concluding with the bandaged Monochroma H, its head wrapped up like someone with a sore tooth. Depending on the overall interpretation that the viewer has of the sculptures, that scene will vary in genre.

"Monochroma C," 2008, **Tanya Batura**, Clay, acrylic paint, 10" x 18" x 11"

Photo: Anthony Cunha, courtesy Western Project

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# WESTERN ★ PROJECT

**ARTSCENE** - Volume 28, No. 2  
October 2008, page 25

by Annie Buckley

Eight elegant clay sculptures comprise **Tanya Batura's** new body of work. Arranged on simple, wooden pedestals, placed in a right angle shape within the space of the gallery, Batura's smooth heads on truncated necks shine like enigmatic jewels. Each one is painted the same deep brownish black shade, rubbed to a smooth, shiny and decidedly inorganic surface, hence the show's title, "Monochroma." The postures, too, seem culled from science fiction more than nature. A neck, curved at an eerie angle, rises in a balletic arch in one work, while another features a head gazing serenely at the patterned hole where its missing torso would lie. At once peaceful and disturbing, this new body of work capitalizes on Batura's mastery at her craft, spinning tales of mystery and intrigue in contrast to the pathos and eroticism of her earlier works.

Western Project  
Culver City

## LA WEEKLY

September 12-18, 2008

### Opening Week

The fall art season begins  
by Christopher Miles

### Tanya Batura at Western Project

Batura continues her infatuation with doughy human heads, and most notably their mouths, as sites of erotic tension. But while in the past she has relied on various flushing, blushing and rouging of her heavily stylized white sculpted clay heads, her latest work casts all of them in a single color or deep gray-brown, almost that of basalt stone. That puts more burden on pulling off her psychosexual maneuvering with form alone, and she generally excels. Polishing or giving wood-grain textures to harshly cut-off facets, Batura toys with the idea of the portrait head or bust as the mute object of décor, but some of these new sculptures seem almost to moan — they're more about the bodies from which they've been cropped/chopped. Their positions, and the hints of bent, flexed and relaxed musculature still revealed despite the artist's heavy stylization, suggest scenarios that elicit blush, if not a little angst, from their viewers. *Western Project, 3830 Main St., Culver City, (310) 838-0609 or [www.western-project.com](http://www.western-project.com). Through Oct. 4.*

# WESTERN ★ PROJECT

Los Angeles Times, April 14, 2006

AROUND THE GALLERIES by David Pagel

## Voyeurism turned into a virtue.

American art has never been comfortable with voyeurism. It's too passive, detached and fetishistic for our national mythology, which puts a priority on active participation, utilitarianism and pragmatism.

At Western Project, **Tanya Batura's** L.A. solo debut turns this ethos upside down and inside out. Her masterfully sculpted and exquisitely painted ceramic figures transform viewers into voyeurs while making a virtue of voyeurism. Both creepy and intimate, her works stir an uneasy stew of emotions that is difficult to dismiss and impossible to resolve.

Batura's life-size heads rest on plain plywood pedestals or hang flush with the wall, like perverse hunting trophies. Most depict corpulent bald men with their eyes shut, lips parted and tongues extended in ecstasy.

Some look as if they have just tasted a delicacy so delicious it's transcendent. Others appear to be lost in orgasmic bliss. From other angles or points of view, the same figures appear to be sleeping. Or dead.

All are painted icy white, like the porcelain fixtures in labs and bathrooms. Batura sprays translucent layers of rosy red or cool lavender on their lips and tongues, creating highlights that suggest smeared lipstick or hypothermia. Delicate yellows, browns, purples and greens on the surrounding flesh resemble faded bruises.

Two of Batura's figures wear dull green bondage hoods. They lack the unsettling power of her six other works because they are missing the expressiveness Batura captures on the exposed faces.

More important, the hooded figures do not convey the intense pleasures so visible on the uncovered faces. That is where her fantasy-fueled Realism is at its best: setting the stage for imaginary dramas in which satisfaction is both out of reach and too close for comfort.

**Western Project**, 3830 Main St., Culver City, (310) 838-0609, through April 29. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.western-project.com](http://www.western-project.com)