

## 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

## LAWEEKLY

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

## ARTSCENE

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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

# WESTERN ★ PROJECT

*Los Angeles Times*  
AROUND THE GALLERIES

Wicked humor, genuine anger

Wicked humor rips through Raymond Pettibon's new works on paper. And more.  
By David Pagel, Special to The Times



## **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

For immediate release:

TANYA BATURA  
Beautiful Dreams  
March 25 - April 29, 2006



Western Project is proud to present the first solo exhibition by Los Angeles artist, Tanya Batura. An MFA graduate of UCLA in 2003, Batura has created a body of work called, Beautiful Dreams , figurative works in a stark and minimal vocabulary, hand built in clay and pristinely finished. Her technical virtuosity is formidable; a haunting perfection of form and surface. Each work is an anonymous and androgynous portrait; life size heads possibly sleeping, dreaming or restrained, each a contrast of pristine materiality and emotion.

It is Batura's particularly curious blend of historical references: the severe restraint of Canova's marble faces, the earthy quality of Kiki Smith, and the outside the box thinking of David Cronenberg, which creates these images of complex feeling and drama. Further, Batura has compounded the allure of fetish magazine imagery with Classical notions of beauty, blending them into an erotic ideal. Joining old and new cultural visions brings a familiar sense and uneasiness to her sculptures; a slick and seductive authority, achingly pregnant with possibilities, encouraging us to look deeper into our own sleeping desires and fantasies.

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## GALLERY REVIEWS

### Summer sampler has a dark side

At L.A. Louver Gallery, "Rogue Wave '05" is loaded with power. And more.

By David Pagel  
Special to The Times  
July 8, 2005

"Rogue Wave '05: Nineteen Artists From Los Angeles" is a potent show loaded with sculptures, videos, paintings, drawings and digital prints by well-known artists and others just out of graduate school. Efficiently installed indoors and outdoors on the first and second floors of L.A. Louver Gallery, its 52 works include more hits than is typical of such summer samplers. Los Angeles is too big an art center to be defined by movements or "-isms," but "Rogue Wave" puts its finger on the pulse of much of contemporary art, here and elsewhere. Call it the apocalyptic carnivalesque.

On the ground floor, the mood is set by the sounds of helicopters and sirens, which spill from Joe Sola 's video projection in a darkened back gallery. "More Cinematic Los Angeles County Museum of Art on Fire" shows black smoke billowing from the institution, crowds gathering outside, news helicopters circling and firetrucks arriving with lights flashing and sirens blaring.

Sola's cleverly engineered spoof has the look of reality TV. It updates Ed Ruscha's famous

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painting "The Los Angeles County Museum on Fire" (1968). Like that barbed picture, the young artist's looped scene brings a grin to your face that is anything but innocent. Humor and horror dance through the mind.

Grim fascination is elicited throughout the first-floor galleries. It's embodied most provocatively in Tanya Batura 's extraordinarily realistic heads made of clay and painted so impeccably they seem untouched by human hands. Designed to disturb, the three lifesize sculptures are too beautiful to do only that.

Drew Dominick 's model-size sculptures of a snowmobile, a chieftain on horseback and a pierced jackrabbit bring a Mad Max sensibility to art and history. Made of scraps of cardboard, foam core, drywall, lumps of clay and what appears to be giant spitballs, these grungy works treat sculptures by Joseph Beuys as the mirror image of those by Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington, who mythologized the Wild West in the same way the German artist made up wild stories about life in Western Europe.

Kelly McLane 's 16-foot-long painting on paper surveys a wasteland of worn tires, abandoned aircraft, ruined buildings and log bridges. Inhabited by cougars, elephants and pit bulls, her futuristic world is also filled with painterly flourishes and lightning-like draftsmanship, suggesting that art is not a hothouse flower but an indestructible weed.

An undertow of anxiety tugs at the abstract works. The burnt edges of Mark Bradford 's silvery collage seem elegiac. The bright colors and playful shapes in Mindy Shapero's crafty sculpture cannot keep obsessiveness or compulsiveness at bay, transforming even simple activities into traps.

Upstairs, a circus sideshow atmosphere dominates, but it does not eliminate the darkness. You hear it before you see it: Rhythmic drumbeats spill from a side gallery, where "Parade Video Installation #1" plays continuously. Created by a duo who call themselves B&T , this trippy video-in-a-tent harks back to the 1960s but without the high hopes of the Summer of Love. Chilly, mesmerizing and clear-eyed about the inroads corporate culture has made into the soul of creativity, it pounds out a frightening and fascinating vision.

Nathan Mabry's two fired-clay sculptures resembles the offspring of an ancient fertility figure and a frat-house prank. Lucas Reiner 's three paintings of trees trimmed to within inches of their lives have the pathos of circus freaks and the stubbornness of survivalists.

In this context, stylish images by Sean Higgins , Violet Hopkins and Christopher Pate (the gallery's chief preparator and co-curator of the exhibition) look more ominous than they would on their own. They're not quite threatening but too in touch with destruction to be merely pretty pictures.

Not so long ago, art seemed to be either dark or light — dedicated to exposing life's ugly underbelly or celebrating its joyous highlights. In contrast, "Rogue Wave" captures the complexities of the present, when events are often the opposite of what they are made out to be, and nothing is as simple as it looks.

L.A. Louver Gallery , 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through Sept. 3. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.lalouver.com](http://www.lalouver.com)