



Oki, 2007, by Ken Price
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FIRST NIGHT | VISUAL ART



Strange Clay review: Ceramics in Contemporary Art review — a show to delight and amaze

Hayward Gallery, SE1

NEW

Laura Freeman

Tuesday October 25 2022, 12.00pm, The Times

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★★★★☆

Strange doesn't begin to cover it. This is a bonkers, often beautiful, frequently eye-boggling show. *Strange Clay* is a celebration of the infinite possibilities of ceramic art. Start with mud, end with . . . anything the imagination can coil and throw and fire. It's an uneven show - bear with it, the best stuff's

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There are 23 contemporary artists to discover. The Chinese ceramicist Liu Jianhua fills a room with almost a thousand tumbling porcelain pieces. These are poignant ghosts of objects, glossy but fragile, made in response to a series of plane crashes in China in 2001. One of the passengers was a young boy whose toys were found floating in the ocean. The teddy bears, made uncuddly by clay, will break your heart.

Contrast this serene installation with Margate-based Lindsey Mendick's bizarre and verminous house. In *Till Death Do Us Part*, clay slugs and ceramic mice battle it out. An octopus erupts from a bathroom lavatory. Imagine Staffordshire spaniels and Dresden shepherdesses recast as rats and caterpillar pairs.

The American Brie Ruais worked with twice her bodyweight in clay to give us two stunning star-shaped ceramic masses. They are like volcanic craters seen from a vulture's eye view. Less successful are Ken Price's nearby clay splats with as many as 70 layers of acrylic surfboard paint. They look like dinosaur droppings.

The Japanese artist Takuro Kuwata got the wow with his glorious Willy Wonka-style walnut whips and croquembouches of clay. David Zink Yi's wall of flint and feather shapes, each with its own beetle-back, tortoise-shell or cowrie glaze, might be natural curiosities from some mission to a distant planet. In the next room, his giant ceramic squid sprawls in a pool of its own glossy ink. Rachel Kneebone is represented by two restrained porcelain twists. I've seen her be weirder elsewhere. Where are her intricate, tangled tributes to Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*?

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tears when she could not seduce Odysseus. Each tear becomes a bead on a necklace, some like urchins, others like gourds, pomegranates, jellyfish or swollen, gilded melons. Amid this madcappery, Edmund de Waal's *atmosphere* is muted and almost lost. Perfect in other settings, it is the odd one out here, like a monk in a bleached linen tunic amid the Notting Hill Carnival floats.

The exhibition runs to Jan 8 (southbankcentre.co.uk)

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