

**“A Donovan-Guard In Her Own Right”**  
“Tara Donovan—Survey” at Ace Gallery

Tucked away in midtown L.A., Ace Gallery provides no signs or bold letters to alert the public of its location—hidden directly across the street from the El Rey Theatre. It sits behind a double door labeled “Ace Gallery,” pushed back behind the rest of the storefronts. Entering the building, there is still no indication of any sort of an exhibit. To find it, one must stumble up a dark creepy stairwell. At the second floor stairwell door, however, white walls and whispering clusters of art admirers greet the art-loving trekker. Offering a huge space for art exhibitions the gallery is a hidden world in the midtown area.

Featuring an artist well-known for her sculptures, “Tara Donovan—Survey” exhibits the artist’s strong and weak points. While her three-dimensional work intrigues and mesmerizes audiences, the two-dimensional framed work does not reach the same level of skill. One small piece made with circle stickers on transparent mylar is simple enough to create an elegant design, but the same concept of stickers on mylar inside a large lightbox produces a visually boring and uninteresting result. Next, the viewer is confronted with large 40-inch cubes of a particular item “held together by friction and gravity only,” according to the label. One cube consists of toothpicks, one of shattered glass and one of steel pins. While the cube sculptures are absorbing in a “How did she do that?” kind of way, their aesthetic appeal is once again lacking.

Despite these slight disappointments, Ace Gallery saves Donovan’s best work for last. The rest of the sculptures each have their own rooms, some tiny and some the size of a house. Most of these sculptures lie on the floor, creating beautiful monochromatic patterns. Her work has an assemblage feel to it because she uses everyday objects instead of traditional art media.

Unlike most assemblage artists, however, Donovan emphasizes the objects’ minimalist capability through pattern rather than trying to beautify trash. The floor works are the best examples of this minimalist technique. *Nebulous* consists of nothing but Scotch tape on its side stuck together and wrapped around itself. The sculpture rests low to the ground, reaching six inches at its tallest point. Still, it is large, with dimensions of 14 by 16 feet. This icy Lilliputian world resembles a monochromatic New York

landscape viewed from a helicopter. Donovan created a slight tonal variation by utilizing different brands of tape, emphasizing the sculptures topographical map semblance. If examined closely, one notices tiny dust bunnies and single strands of hair stuck to the tape.

One of the most amazing recent sculptures fills a gigantic room by itself. *Untitled*, made in 2003, consists solely of Styrofoam cups and hot glue. The sculpture, 10-feet high by 66-feet wide by 32-feet deep, emanates from the ceiling and reaches for the ground. The only lights in the room are encased inside the ceiling sculpture. The open side of every cup faces outward, creating a hypnotizing pattern of circles crammed together. Viewed lying down and looking up, the pattern of cups starts to breathe, generating a drug-induced feeling. This radiant, unique sculpture is one of a kind and worth the trip to Ace Gallery.

The everyday yet quirky materials like buttons, straws, toothpicks, and electrical wire used by Donovan constitute surprisingly beautiful artwork. “Tara Donovan—Survey” though it has its weak points, is an exceptionally distinctive solo sculpture exhibit.

*-Christina Balch*