

Anna Bella Papp Is a Rising Young Art Star, and Her Work at the Nasher Shows Why

By [Lauren Smart](#) Thu., Oct. 23 2014 at 3:28 PM



Nasher Sculpture Center

This is Anna Bella Papp, a beautiful young mind in the art world.

Sometimes ink is given to the artists showing at the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#) simply due to its reputation. Which is not unexpected: It's the norm in the art world to approach a venerated institution's offerings as more noteworthy than less high-profile spaces. Plus, with bigger marketing budgets, the Dallas Museum of Art and the Kimbell Art Museum and the Nasher can make sure their shows get in front of your face, coating billboards or clinging to street lamps. You're rarely disappointed at a museum show, because they tend to be flashier, the atmosphere whispering the importance of the art. The pristine work hangs on pristine walls, giving you an ideal experience of the work.

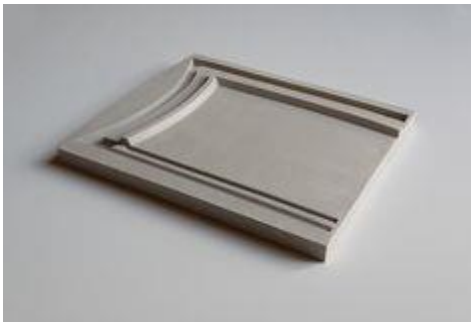
Without question, Anna Bella Papp's show at the Nasher benefits from its presence within Renzo Piano's architecturally stunning walls. But it's not like any other show you've seen at a Dallas museum lately. It's quiet, methodical and demands intimacy with the viewer.

"It's definitely not the kind of work that you just rush through, but places like this are just perfect to lose yourself in whichever piece of work -- you really have the luxury of being in close in an ideal space for making contact for art," says Papp. "I doubt that if they stayed in the middle of the road anyone would look at them. There's a forced energy in the building that allows you to concentrate."

If [Bettina Pousttchi's Sightings](#) exhibition was commenting on the drive-by nature of a museum by building an interior blacktop in a Nasher gallery, Papp's answer is to wave the driver over and calmly ask them to turn off the ignition. You'll walk quietly into a back room at the Nasher, surrounded on the outside by the bamboo garden, and you'll look at her feats of clay. This is the kind of art that demands thought and patience, attributes too often foreign in modern museums.

The Romanian-born artist is destined for international success, which you can see in her introspective, defiantly minimalistic work as well as you can in her resume. At just 26, she's already beginning to earn a name for herself with major showings at [Stuart Shave Modern Art Gallery](#) in London (which received [a glowing review in Frieze](#)), which then dedicated its entire booth to her work at the Independent art fair in New York. That's where her work caught the eye of Nasher Chief Curator Jed Morse.

"The Independent was really the first time that anyone in the US had a chance to see Anna Bella's work, so for me it was kind of a revelation," says Morse. "Because it's incredibly beautiful and subtle and quiet but really powerful and engaging at the same time."



Anna-Bella Papp, Untitled, 2013, clay, 5/8 x 12

And the work seems to belong in the Nasher. The flesh tones in Papp's slabs of clay reflect the colors of the wall, while also being architectural in their own right. Many of them even contain hints of ancient architecture, a column carved into one, an archway into another. One might attach philosophy onto her work, like Plato's ideals, or narrative, perhaps of an archaeological dig that led to these discoveries. But any notions of Truths in her work disseminate, washed away as quickly as the work itself could be. Unfired clay is just a bucket of water away from being mud.

"There are moments in clay where you cannot really go back. When it starts to dry you have to let it go, which is good because you don't overwork it," says Papp. "There's a natural flow of the work that's the physical, not the ideological thing. And then the two meet when it's finished."

Papp says one source of inspiration was her school's ceramics department, where they were always working with clay but never firing it, "always preparing for something but never completing it." Her pale sculptures are made entirely of clay -- a material more often seen in preparative models for larger pieces or sitting next to a kiln, waiting to be made into a glossy ceramic tile. There's a fragility

to her work, which is at once finished but also in sculptural limbo, waiting to be something larger or prettier. You won't find vivid color or ornate frames, and you won't twist your head in abstract consternation. You'll bend over the arrangement of white tables and examine, much the same way Papp would in her studio.

"Sometimes I work on a piece for a week or I leave it and go back to it. It's a long process and there are interruptions because it's a physical thing," says Papp. "It's not as easy as it appears to be. I like to be precise. You concentrate on the material itself for a time without trying to make it about anything in particular. Then, maybe I have coffee or read a book and it becomes loaded with meaning."

Sightings: Anna Bella Papp opens at the Nasher Sculpture Center Saturday, October 25 and remains on display through January 18, 2015. She will speak about the work at 2 p.m. Saturday, October 25. Admission to the museum is \$10.