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In and out of Ruby's mind

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Ruby Wax stars in 'Ruby Wax is Out of Her Mind,' now playing at The Edye. (Chelsea Lauren, Getty Images)

Ruby Wax may be out of her mind, but she makes a good point with a lot of humor.

Now onstage at The Edye, Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center's intimate performance space adjacent to the Broad Stage, "Ruby Wax is Out of Her Mind" is wickedly funny about her bouts of depression, now medically controlled ("without chemicals I wouldn't be vertical"), which have repeatedly landed her in institutions for treatment. And institutions were the first place she performed the show, which she turned into a hit at the 2011 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and has developed into the tale she tells here.

In England, where the American-born British TV celebrity lives, mental illness is a silent epidemic. "One in four," she tells us early in her one-woman show, will be afflicted with mental illness of one kind or another, but absolutely no one talks about it. England, after all, is where she went to "to get away from the crazy," so when she's been sleeping for days to avoid the troubling "dark thoughts," her "uber-polite U.K. friends" can only comfort her by saying, "Perk

up."

Asked whether she would allow her photo to be taken for what she later discovered was a major British awareness campaign, she became "literally the poster girl" of that campaign, whose tagline was "This is the face of mental illness." Confronted by the posters plastered throughout the Underground (London's train transport system), she was gobsmacked to see herself so publicly outed. So, she says, she decided to pretend they were publicity posters for the show she now performs.

She takes us on an abbreviated journey through her life, coming from being "the runt of the litter" ignored by everyone, and moving to England where she joined the Royal Shakespeare Company and later became a TV star. She gives us a very funny easel-pad tour through "the three human brains" to explain how the impulses of early mental evolution conflict with the challenges of modern life, for which "there's no instruction manual."

Wax has gone on to find something resembling that manual: she received a degree from Oxford University in cognitive therapy which, in conversation with the audience after the show, she says kept her focused and gives her means to control her condition. Mental illness, she says, "is like herpes; you don't always have it."

There are only four performances left, Thursday through Sunday. Call (310) 434-3200; more info at: <http://thebroadstage.com/>.

In the eye of the beholder

Among the thoughts careening through my brain at the overwhelming visual experience known as Art Los Angeles Contemporary at The Barker Hangar, I wondered whether galleries selling art are trying to set trends, follow them or simply want to show us what they love and think will be timeless.

To my eye there's a great deal of derivative work: the Ed Ruscha look-alike text pieces; the faux Basquiat guerilla-style graffiti art; the neo-abstracts that remind us of prior superior works of the genre.

But my eyes will always be drawn to what they love and I found several riveting examples.

Images infused with influences from around the globe marked the dramatic graphic works offered by Tracy Williams' New York gallery. Gorgeous large hand-made paper sheets painted in starkly vibrant patterns calling to mind native American art were created by artist Alyssa Pheobus Mumtaz. Equally appealing, the small works by her husband, Murad Khan Mumtaz, on the opposite wall include cleverly illustrated dollar bills juxtaposing U.S. icons and Middle-Eastern symbols. He also paints fantasy scenes that are hauntingly reminiscent of a place that does not exist.

From La Jolla, the Quint Gallery showcased a powerful work by Adam Belt, "Through the Looking Glass: Hubble 2012." This is a simulacrum of the telescope embedded directly in the wall, and we look from the perspective of the lens into space, with a mystical greenish glow coming from its depths.

My favorite discovery, Lucia Koch, is a Brazilian artist whose work will be highlighted in May at Santa Monica's Christopher Grimes Gallery. Walk into this massive wall-sized work; you think you're standing inside a simple, tranquil architectural space in beautiful earth tones with a view of greenery through a skylight.

In reality this is a massive multi-panel photograph shot looking down into the inside of a rice box, and the skylight is the place where the box's see-through plastic would be.

It is hard to describe the complete feeling of calm and comfort this work invoked; but the idea is just brilliant. I will be first in line for the gallery show in May, which will also feature a site-specific work by the artist.

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