

Ben Stone

By [Susan Snodgrass](#) [✉](#) January 28, 2011 12:04pm



Claes Oldenburg's statement "I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic . . . or violent, or whatever is necessary" can readily be applied to the art of Ben Stone, whose six recent works explore pathos in contemporary American life, particularly as manifested by tragi-comic characters in his native Chicago.

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Much of Stone's work—mainly sculpture, but also video and performative acts—tends to be concerned with aberrant human behavior, specifically in the contexts of sports and familial conflicts. (He once had a police restraining order issued against himself, and he built a robot to officiate at his own wedding.) Combining traditional art-historical forms, such as portrait busts and sculptural tableaux, with a handmade esthetic, he elevates the most banal subject to the level of cultural icon.

Some of the works on view transform two-dimensional graphics into three-dimensional sculptures. For *Neighbor* (2010), Stone transfigured the hat-wearing, black-cloaked figure from the city's omnipresent neighborhood-watch signs into a near life-size cone of a figure made of painted laminate on wood. Conversely, the artist finds artistic fodder in society's fallen idols, including its sports teams, as in *Abe's Song* (2008), in which a small cast-resin totem of Abraham Lincoln, painted bright orange and wearing a Chicago Bears knit hat, sheds a tear, presumably for his losing team.

Idolatry and idiocy converge in the show's star attraction, *Blue Meanies* (2010), a sculpture based on the beating, during a 2002 Chicago game, of Kansas City Royals first-base coach Tom Gamboa by two intoxicated White Sox fans, William Ligue, Jr., and his 15-year-old son. Stone depicts a fallen Gamboa defending himself from the bare-chested Lignes, the elder of whom hovers over him in a drunken rage while his son kneels nearby with his fist raised. Stone's scene of family dysfunction, violence and struggle becomes a kind of modern-day Laocoön. All three figures are realized life-size in white resin-coated polystyrene that from a distance suggests the luster of Roman marble. Notable is the artist's fastidious attention to detail, particularly in his characters' clothing, hair and tattoos, all impressively drawn in blue ballpoint pen.

A wall relief depicting Team Rocket, the evil protagonists from the Pokemon TV series, rendered in high-gloss, candy-colored enamel on coated polystyrene, relates in both material and form to Stone's earlier relief portraits of made-up and manicured "Salon Beauties." He is less concerned with the issues of consumerism and spectacle that define Pop art and the work of, for example, Jeff Koons and Tony Tasset, than with low-tech production values and the odd fascinations that drive the public imagination. Stone assumes the role of interlocutor, a champion of an art earnest in all its intentions regardless of its humble origins.

Photo: Ben Stone: *Blue Meanies*, 2010, ballpoint pen on coated polystyrene and wood; at [Western Exhibitions](#).