

PENNY BYRNE (1965-)

Behind the instantly recognisable features and poses of Penny Byrne's porcelain figurines there is an air of menace – a far cry from their sweet origins as table decorations made from sugar and coloured icing. In the 18th century porcelain replaced the perishable – as Horace Walpole observed: '...jellies, biscuits, sugar plumbs [sic] and creams have long given way to harlequins, gondoliers, Turks, Chinese and shepherdesses of Saxon China' – and figurines moved from the dessert table to the collector's display case.

Byrne takes this genteel art form and flings it into the brutality of current affairs and international politics. A practising conservator, she restores the ceramics and glass of the nation's top museums, but outside this employment she reworks vintage

porcelain figurines and statues to convey pronouncements on politics and popular culture.

The pair of figures *George and Laura were prepared for the 'Long War'* (pictured) symbolises America's involvement in the Iraq war. The traditional pose of the courting couple is subverted by replacing the usual pastels of the woman's crinoline and the man's frockcoat with camouflage. George's right hand brandishes a pistol and his left sports the black leather glove of the assassin. Laura wields a grenade.

Byrne won the Pat Emery Award for Emerging Ceramicists two years running and was a postcard winner at the 2005 Linden Postcard Show. She has exhibited at *The (Royal) Melbourne Show* and held her first solo exhibition, *Blood, Sweat and Fears*, in 2007. Her figurines sell for \$2,500 to \$20,000.



George and Laura were well prepared for the 'Long War' 2006
Altered vintage porcelain figure group, epoxy resin, retouching medium, powder pigments
27.0 (h) x 21.0 (w) x 14.0 (d) cm
Photograph by Jeremy Dillon

Courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf Fine Art