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Aidan Dunne

Claire Curneen*Oliver Sears Gallery, 29 Molesworth St, Dublin*

★★★★



'Preaching to the Birds', Claire Curneen

Curneen strikes a different note but again the quality of her work is unmistakable. Her centrepiece, *Baroque and Berserk*, is a riotous porcelain diorama – not something you'd stumble across every day, for sure. Her porcelain and black stoneware sculptures are grounded in classical mythological and baroque imagery as a means of entry into themes of birth, death and the dramatic, perilous experiences in between. Of her diorama, a slice of "fragmented reality" she says: "Figures jostle with birds, trees, branches and broken pottery; the status quo has been disrupted." It delivers on that promise, and then some. It's a bravura work that should be in a public collection, but it does not overshadow her exquisite individual figures. As in *Daphne*, whose stoneware head and torso is in the process of transformation into a laurel, her arms and body sprouting branches. There's a pleasing, Italianate quality to Curneen's figures, which are not a million miles from Janet Mullarney's sculptures. *Daphne* seems to be an important protagonist for her, with *Daphne*-esque hints to her *Bird Figure*, as well. This androgynous figure wears a detachable, owl-like helmet and mask, suggesting an association with the sagacious, benevolent deity Minerva.



'Daphne', by Claire Curneen

Empty Tomb is a body pierced through with wounds; *Ancient Plaything* is a figure caught falling backwards, arms extended, quite like one of those hapless people buried in volcanic ash in Pompeii. Curneen's detailing and use of materials is superb. Each piece has a formidable, considered emotionally enriched presence, but is also delivered with imaginative audacity. *Until May 3rd. oliversearsgallery.com*

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