

Michèle Coxon

Though she has previously worked in sculpture and painting, Coxon's MA show at the University of Wolverhampton is entirely ceramic.

Drawing on medieval tombs *My Mother* depicts her mother's corpse complete with dog at feet, head on pillow and hands at prayer. In contrast to those church memorials depicting the knight and his fashionable lady in frozen incorruptibly – this partakes more of those which function as *momento mori*, depicting corpses or skulls. Toadstools grow around the body, and the inside of the head and pillow seem to have rotted away in accordance with nature's natural cycle of death and decay. Of a domestic scale you can imagine on a mantelpiece, this clay has with it mixed some of the mother's actual ashes, along no doubt with some tears.

Coxon is well travelled and has had an extensive previous career in children's writing and animal illustration that, though often of the cute and fluffy variety, has given her a solid grounding in figuration and drawing. Her more recent work is part of an artistic re-invention or possibly a return to her youthful ambitions. Like a shoot from the stock of an established and polite tea rose, it will be interesting to see the nature of the blooms that develop along this new branch.

For me the most enjoyable piece is *Madonna of the Jungle* - the only polychrome work on show – in which she combines the profound and the playful. It both celebrates and undercuts the popular tradition of domestic religious figurines, as well as the Staffordshire pottery themes of biblical characters and exotic animals. Though kitschy, such items drew on ceramic work by respected artists such as Andrea della Robbia or the clay studies for larger works often made by academic sculptors. In *Madonna of the Jungle*, mysteriously, the Madonna is represented as a chimpanzee, and the Child clutches a cockatoo rather than a goldfinch. The lion lays down with the lamb – only in this case the zebra lays down with the cheetahs. Though reminiscent of folk paintings such as Edward Hicks' *The Peaceable Kingdom*, humans are absent from this garden and paradise is left entirely to the animals. A cheeky nod perhaps to Darwinism or *The Planet of the Apes*.



Madonna of the Jungle
porcelain
2010, 50 x 38 x 25 cms

Staffordshire pottery flat-backs also depicted in/famous people like Dick Turpin,

Napolean or Nelson. Coxon celebrates her artistic heroes Ai Wei Wei, Gilbert and George and Grayson Perry in modelled work a lá Meissen or Chelsea. It would be interesting to see someone like Coxon take on the tradition of intimate domestic sculpture and drag it into the contemporary, whilst eshewing bombast. I would hope that she becomes more edgy, confident, sharp or even brutal in attacking her themes - if she wants to emulate her artistic heroes rather than just admire them.

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