

Curator's Choice



Psyche

Audrey Whitty selects *Psyche*, by Claire Curneen, from the collection of the National Museum of Ireland

In 2015 the National Museum of Ireland (NMI), Collins Barracks acquired a remarkable sculpture entitled *Psyche* by the renowned ceramic artist Claire Curneen. Although originally from Kerry, Curneen has called Wales her home for over two decades and is currently senior lecturer at the Centre for Ceramic Studies, Cardiff Metropolitan University. In 2012 she became the recipient of the Creative Wales Ambassador Award from

history department) of the museum. The residency afforded Curneen the rare opportunity to work alongside the curator of this part of the national collection examining, interrogating and selecting historical ceramics that were both on display and in storage. As a result, a rather eclectic series of inspirers were brought forth in Curneen's work. Namely, the international treasure the Gaignières Fonthill Vase (c.1300 AD), 17th- and 18th-

and Renaissance antecedents. However, out of this new body of work came an intermingling of the humanist and figurative traditions of the Renaissance with those elements of the National Museum's ceramics collection noted above.

A major embodiment of this new work is the sculpture *Psyche* which consists of a hand-built androgynous-looking torso whose upper area of face, neck, shoulders and chest encompass surface embellishment of spots of gilding interspersed with predominantly red butterflies accentuated by splashes of blue. This same gilding and blue highlighting continues on the fingertips of the hands. The influence of heavily ornate Japanese porcelain such as Imari ware is apparent here, beautifully wrought by Curneen in what can only be described as an emotional accentuation of the figure's facial expression.

If funding had permitted, an argument might have been made for the NMI to acquire Curneen's entire body of work resulting from her residency, which later (in 2014 and 2015) became the exhibition 'To This I Put My Name' mounted by the Mission Gallery, Swansea and Ruthin Craft Centre. Instead the museum, using the resources of the National Museum of Ireland/Design and Crafts Council of Ireland Joint Purchase Fund for Contemporary Applied Arts, was fortunately able to acquire *Psyche*. It is one of the institution's most significant contemporary ceramic acquisitions while also representing the continued success of the Irish diaspora in all the visual arts. ■

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the Arts Council of Wales, using the following title: 'The Museum Object as a point of Reference'. Following this announcement Curneen made several research visits to the NMI at Collins Barracks where she worked with the author in discovering and indeed interpreting the 30,000 ceramic objects that are part of the Art and Industrial Division (decorative arts, design and

Japanese porcelain, Irish 19th-century Belleek porcelain and late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD) Chinese soft-paste porcelain. All aspects of this research bedrock later converged in the work produced by Curneen throughout 2013. The majority, as would be expected from such an internationally acclaimed artist in the medium, deal with the figurative (the human body in all aspects) firmly rooted in medieval

CLAIRE CURNEEN
PSYCHE 2013
porcelain,
underglaze
transfers, cobalt
blue oxide,
transparent
glaze, gold lustre
41x33cm
National
Museum of
Ireland Number
DC:2015.1 Photo
Claire Curneen

