

BARNABY BARFORD

BARNABY BARFORD works with both mass-produced and found porcelain figurines, deconstructing them and re-assembling them to create darkly humorous narratives.

Barford focuses on reinventing the meaning of 19th-century kitsch figurines. For example, in the whimsically-titled *How am I supposed to learn?* (2011), he uses the figure of an innocent, adorable little boy – something you might find at Grandma’s house – and places him on top of a sea of pornographic magazines [3]. His small,

delicate and perfectly-formed figurines revel in dark humour and satire.

Within his one-off sculptural pieces, Barford focuses on levels of society, from underground hoodie culture to socialites. No class or section of society is safe from his provocative approach and bold attempts at redefining social roles. Barford states that his work ‘is influenced by the dark English humour and satire, and explores and celebrates the human condition.’



1 Happy Meal, 2009. Porcelain, earthenware, enamel paint, painted wooden base, other media. 21 x 100 x 40 cm (8 x 39.5 x 15.5 in). Photograph by the artist.

2 Mary had a little lamb, 2007. Bone china, porcelain, metal, enamel paint. 27 x 29 cm (10.5 x 11.5 in). Photograph by the artist.

3 How else am I gonna learn? (detail), 2011. Porcelain, ceramic, enamel paint, wood, other media. 20 cm x 70 cm x 40 cm (8 x 27.5 x 15.5 in). Photograph by the artist.

4 Family Feast, 2009. Porcelain, earthenware, enamel paint, painted wooden base, other media. 31 x 100 x 40 cm (12 x 39.5 x 15.5 in). Photograph by the artist.



5 Dear Lord, for what we are about to receive make us truly thankful, 2007. Earthenware, porcelain, enamel paint. 30 x 38 x 28 cm (12 x 15 x 11 in). Photograph by the artist.

6 At least I'm still here, 2010. Porcelain, enamel paint, other media. 27 x 100 x 40 (10.5 x 39.5 x 15.5 in). Photograph by the artist.

7 Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses, 2009. Porcelain, earthenware, enamel paint, painted wooden Bbase, other media. 28 x 80 x 45 cm (11 x 31.5 x 17.5 in). Photograph by the artist.



CHRISTIE BROWN is an artist whose ceramic career has spanned more than 25 years. Her approach, and the context behind her work, is highly influenced by ancient civilisations and histories, drawing particularly on Egyptian civilisation, archaeology and psychology (the archaeology of the mind). Most recently, her work has moved towards notions of museum culture and the placement of objects, both new and old, within ‘collections’.

How did you get started in clay?

After a five-year career in television in the 1970s I needed to find something more directly creative to do. It was a period of great social change when young people were reacting against greed and consumerism and the horrors of the Vietnam war, similar in many ways to the challenges

young people face today. I left my secure job and went into community theatre in the country for a time. Pottery night school at the Sir John Cass College of Arts (now part of the London Metropolitan University) provided my first contact with clay and the immediacy of the material seemed to give me some kind of grounded experience. After a time spent coming to terms with the difficulty of learning a new skill, I returned to college in 1980 to study at Harrow School of Art, Middlesex, which offered a way forward to a career as a rural potter. Within a year however a passion for life drawing, and an important relationship, informed a figurative sculptural approach which began to take precedence over my interest in vessels. This was the

- 1 Installation shot of Fragments of Narrative, 2000. Solo exhibition at Wapping Hydraulic Power Station. Photography by Kate Forrest.
- 2 Ex-Votos, Between the Wolf and the Dog series, 2003–2004. Brick clay. Dimensions variable. Photograph by Philip Sayer.



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beginning of a 30-year involvement with the human figure as the key starting point in my work.

How would you describe your work?

I describe the work I make as 'sculpture which deals with ideas about continuity in human lives'. The human figure remains a central form in the work but recently ideas about groups, relationships and repetition has meant that the work has developed beyond the single figure into installation, while other elements have also played a part, including mixed media and found objects.

What is the relationship between clay and the human figure in your work?

Clay and the body have a long association, both materially

and thematically. Some of the earliest clay fragments found in ancient archaeological sites have been figurative, while the material has featured as the key expressive component in the processes that lead to bronze sculpture. Clay also features as a key material in many myths of origin and creation from various cultures. For an artist who explores and makes reference to the fragments in museums, this connection seems to emphasise the continued profound relationship between this material and figurative art. Added to this, our planet is largely made up of clay and it therefore becomes a carrier of a huge range of symbolic meanings.

What do you want the figure in your work to communicate?

... I am interested in the timeline that connects contemporary human beings to our ancestors and the notion of continuity, which gives us all a context in a secular world. Within



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this broad field I may explore a range of particular characterisation or narrative fragments that can be used to effect my ideas, but what I may be saying, and what can be read, can often be quite different and is certainly only within limited control. However, if the viewer is able to take something from the work that disturbs or moves them or challenges the way they think then I feel satisfied that I have done my job.

How clearly do you want the figure to be read in your work?

The figure is a pretty clear element in my work. I may use other objects such as furniture, toys or amuletic [items], whether made or found, but the figure forms the central character to any narrative that is assembled.

What is your working process?

As an artist who delves around in museums for inspiration and reference, I'm interested in the parallel between archaeology and psychoanalysis; both modern era constructions which aspire to teach us more about the complexity of human beings and their behaviour. This naturally takes me into a range of areas such as my recent and current preoccupation with the human-animal hybrid and the puppet tableaux. Although I recently tried working in small coils for a time, I tend to use the technique of press moulding to make the work because I enjoy carving an original model rather than building it by coiling. Moulds also give me an opportunity to explore concepts about repetition and the multitude or crowd who are all the same but all unique. Also, a rolled slab of clay can be compared to the skin as it is stretched into the moulds and the emerging creature sometimes feels like something newly born.

3 The Danish Hare's Sister, 2009. Ceramic. 130 x 50 x 100 cm (51 x 20 x 39.5 in). Photograph by Sussie Ahlburg.
4 The Danish Hare's Sister (detail), 2009. Ceramic. 130 x 50 x 100 cm (51 x 20 x 39.5 in). Photograph by Sussie Ahlburg.



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What has been your most significant experience as a ceramic artist?

The most challenging and significant experience of my ceramic career was the invitation to make a body of work for Wapping Hydraulic Power Station, a restaurant and arts centre, in 2000. The resulting show, Fragments of Narrative, was the first time I had the opportunity to make work for a specific site and to repond to the nature of that site. The show took two years to make and comprised several life-size figures, smaller scale figures, wall pieces and archaeological fragments. The show changed the way I saw my work and broadened my thinking both in terms of installation and context.

5 The Uncanny Playroom, 2010. Ceramic and mixed media. 150 x 65 x 23 cm (59 x 25.5 x 9 in). Photograph by Sussie Ahlburg.

What are your major influences?

Contemporary art has always been of more interest to me than contemporary ceramics ... My main figurative influences, however, are from contemporary sculptors such as Ana Maria Pacheco, Antony Gormley, Juan Munoz, Thomas Schutte and Louise Bourgeois.

Cinema has played an important role in my ideas about narrative and archetypal characters more than theatre, because cinema seems to have an aura which live performance doesn't possess. Cinema is the ultimate fantasy spectacle in both scale and content. Particular references have been the films of Czech surrealist Jan Švankmajer and the filmmakers the Quay Brothers in informing my ideas about animation and the hybrid figure. But other more mainstream movies such as *Bladerunner*, *Edward Scissorhands* and *Frankenstein* can also feature in my canon of influences as they deal with transgressive myths of creation.