

NUALA Creed

by Diane Chin Lui

Nuala Creed's sculptures of precious babies and sweet children draw our attention and entice our interest. Their innocence and helplessness draws out our humanity. The gas masks and weapons strapped to the babies startle and pique our curiosity. Her children pose lovingly with animals while endangered insects and birds swarm their heads as protective headgear. Babies bearing arms and children cradling endangered species challenge our sensibilities and force us to consider the impact of our present actions on future generations.

Nature Child, 43 in. (109 cm) in height, stoneware with stains, underglaze, and glaze, fired multiple times to cone 4, 04, 06, and 017, metal stand, 2008.



In 2002, the White House invited Creed to create an ornament for the White House Christmas tree. She created a hummingbird ornament, which can now be seen on her website (www.nualacreed.com). She wanted to express her feelings of opposition to President Bush's policy on the war in Iraq but felt that was not the appropriate venue. And so, Creed created a *Presidential Squadron* series that features hummingbirds wearing different uniforms and toting weapons. This led to her *Babes in Arms* series, which further articulates her strong feelings against war, yet quietly challenges us to think about the serious topic of war. These handbuilt ceramic babies have beautiful wide-open eyes that dare you to look away from them. Some people may do just that—avert their eyes and back away in disgust at the thought of using babies to open a discussion about such a violent topic.

For those who dare to think about war and the effects on babies, Creed starts a dialogue about children who may accept war as an everyday occurrence because they have never experienced a day of peace. Is this what children of the future have to look forward to? One rosy-cheeked baby squeezes a doll in her sleep and lays her head on a missile used as a pillow. Another baby, with a bomb strapped across his back, holds a doll with a gas mask on its face. Weapons and war paraphernalia become toys and accessories to their everyday routine.

Creed's ceramic sculptures cut through the political rhetoric and appeal to our sense of responsibility to future generations of humanity. In their innocence, the babies do not know that weapons are lethal to themselves and others. A sitting baby in blue holds a rifle and stares out with wide-eyed wonder. A black and white target has been painted on his back, above the belt of bullets that he wears. Young babies cannot defend themselves; that's a job for adults. Babies are meant to be cuddled and loved. On the back of the baby's blue helmet, "you are special" has been printed above a pair of hands in a gesture of prayer, which Creed places here as a hope for the baby's safety and protection.

With that same hope, Creed gently approaches the subject of the environment and childhood with her *Eco Children* series. Her commentary remains clear and centered on the future generations. As with the *Babes in Arms*, she continues to urge us to focus on ethics and values of cooperation and concern for others. With frogs, insects, and birds forming the children's hair, Creed's boys and girls unite with nature to form a single force as advocates



Frog Boy (detail), 20 in. (51 cm) in height, stoneware with stains, underglaze, and glaze, fired multiple times to cone 4, 04, and 06, 2008.

for a green future. Also, earth-tone glazes color their clothing, carrying the theme forward.

All of Creed's *Eco Children* are comfortable with their charges and form engaging portraits. *Nature Child* proudly stands with her bird and animal friends. Colorful birds flock together to form her hairdo and playfully peer at the world around them. An owl and other birds nestle in the pockets of her dress. A family of squirrels and a rabbit sit in her back pockets. With a contented and peaceful countenance, she appears to enjoy nurturing and protecting her woodland friends.

In contrast, Creed's *Frog Boy*, in yellow rain boots, crouches low to the ground, with a look of concern on his face. With sad

***Babe in Arms*, 9 in. (23 cm) in height, stoneware with stains, underglaze, and glaze, fired multiple times to cone 4, 04, 06, and 017, metal stand, 2007.**



eyes, he studies a mutated brown frog with five legs instead of four. Brightly-colored rainforest frogs crowd and form his head-dress, as if they are constantly on his mind. The endangered frogs may represent the boy's thoughts and distress about the amphibians. In this way, Creed outlines her concerns about the environment and the effect current conditions will have on children and animals; namely, that it will be the job of today's children to address issues of environmental destruction and biological extinction.

Whether depicting babies as future warriors or children as future stewards to our world, Creed appeals to a wide audience with arguments and questions about our actions in the present

and perspective on the future. Through their presence, the children force us to think about the consequences that await future generations. They also pull us back to the present and make us think about the human practices that may perpetuate a violent and polluted environment.

Through her babies, dressed in cute clothing and pajamas, carrying oversized weapons, and children, who joyfully commune with their insect and animal friends, Creed expresses her concerns with urgency. With clarity and passion, Creed's ceramic art openly confronts and provokes us to think about our past and present actions and their affects on the future of humanity and on the environment.