



**MAY AYRES**

# **Ceramic Pictures**

## Foreword

This exhibition presents ceramic meditations on war and peace as selected by the artist from her WAR OF AGGRESSION series made over the past seven years. The work attempts to address the question of how we might retain our common humanity and our collective memory to set as a light and a defence against the looming darkness.

In his BEYOND VIETNAM speech delivered at the Riverside Baptist Church in April 1967, Dr Martin King Jnr talked of his conversations with those who he described as the *desperate, rejected and angry* young men living in the Northern ghettos of the United States.

*"I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through non-violent action. But they asked, and rightly so, what about Vietnam? They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve it's problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without first speaking clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today; my own government. For the sake of hundreds and thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent."*

Exactly one year to the day of delivering his sermon, Dr King was silenced by an assassins bullet. The final year of his life was an isolated and desperately lonely one following his decision to take a stand against a war which he now clearly linked with the issue of poverty: *"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death ... there comes a time when silence is betrayal."*

If the speech had left a nation feeling deeply uncomfortable with itself, it had shaken the establishment more so, and thus a prophet's voice was silenced. As Martin King was bearing witness to the carnage raging in Vietnam, MIT Professor of Linguistics Noam Chomsky was doing the same in his first book, AMERICAN POWER AND THE NEW MANDARINS, published also in 1967. Writing from a place that he has since described as the *Athens of America*, Professor Chomsky spoke of the prevailing *brutal apathy*, and a *"... moral degeneracy on such a scale that talk about the 'normal channels' of political action and protest becomes meaningless or hypocritical. We have to ask ourselves whether what is needed in the US is dissent or denazification. The question is a debatable one. Reasonable people may differ. The fact that the question is even debatable is a terrifying thing. To me it seems that what is needed is a kind of denazification. What is more, there is no powerful outside force that can call us to account – the change will have to come from within."*



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**FRONT COVER**  
'AMAL' • 'SHE WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH THE SHRAPNEL IN HER HEAD' • (h: 62cm) • 2011

**BACK COVER**  
'ZERO TOLERANCE: IN DEDICATION TO JOSEPH SCHOLÉS' • (h: 162cm detail) • 2005

Ceramic sculptures:  
High fired stoneware, oxidation.