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AMY BESSONE: THE RELUCTANT FIGURIST

"I'm just a painter who paints objects," confesses Amy Bessone, as she sits in her Boyle Heights studio. "I guess you could say I paint still-lives." Perhaps, but such descriptions do nothing to convey the complexity, importance or humor of her practice, which translates ordinary, common objects into luscious, large-scale figurative paintings, each playing with that translation process and turning it inside out.

Bessone's last series, for example, began with photos of small porcelain figurines—say, a nude woman tussling with a serpent. When transformed into 9-foot paintings, they became strange, slightly perverse meditations on myth, sexuality and painterly abstraction. "I like it when the work fluctuates between illusion and the breaking down of that same illusion," says the L.A.-based, New York-born artist, whose high-profile patrons include L.A.'s Blake Byrne, Miami's Rubell Collection, Vancouver's Rennie Collection and London's Saatchi collection.

Most importantly, by rendering lowbrow and kitsch objects with the same loving intensity as she employs with highbrow subjects, she manages to question the very nature of figurative painting and highlight the universal propensity for idealization. "It's the Shakespearean idea of the

...CONTINUED play within the play, finding truth through artifice," she said recently. "And it gives me a little distance from the human or emotional narrative." Her current series looks at mythic masks, which may be priceless antiques or cheap souvenirs. "They're primitive-ish," says Bessone, who previously studied in Paris and Amsterdam and worked in Brussels. "And that *-ishness* is really fascinating to me."

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