



War and Pieces - Holburne Museum, Bath

Bouke de Vries

War and Pieces was first created in 2012 as a direct intervention with the Holburne Museum. De Vries' creation of an installation including an 18th-century Chinese-export porcelain tobacco-leaf service and 18th-century English glassware, collected by Captain Holburne in the 19th century took his work into an exciting new direction. De Vries practice often consists of taking broken ceramics and presenting them in a new context, thereby bringing them back to life and giving them a future.

In the 17th century wealthy households decorated their dining tables with extravagant sugar sculptures: classical figures, architectural follies and allegorical scenes. These were not made to be eaten, sugar was worth its weight in gold – they were put away carefully and used again. From the early 18th century onwards these sugar table decorations came to be replaced by porcelain ones. This is especially exemplified by the ground-breaking work of Meissen, Europe's first porcelain factory, which employed many highly skilled confectioners, as sugar sculptors were called, to make their first models.

Fascinated by this link between the reckless ostentation of sugar, a real status symbol among the rich and fashionable, reminiscent of our own ostentatious recklessness before the present global financial crisis and the almost alchemical beginnings of European porcelain-making.

This work is a war banquet, staging a battle royal between ancien-régime sugar and revolutionary porcelain, referencing the 18th and 19th century tradition of grand banquets given on the eve of battle, such as the famous ball given for the Duke of Wellington and his officers and allies the night before the battle of Waterloo, memorably recalled in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.

De Vries introduces supposedly indestructible plastic elements. The ever-increasing omnipresence of non-biodegradable plastic brings the installation forward to our own, more toxic times. The field of battle is the seven-metre-long central table in the Holburne Museum's ballroom. The battling figures themselves are based on a pair of Derby porcelain figures in the classic 18th-century tradition – except that they are mutating into cyborgs with colourful plastic 'bionic' limbs and heads, from broken Transformer toys, in strong contrast to the whiteness of the porcelain and sugar.

The inevitable centrepiece of the installation is the mushroom cloud of an atom bomb made of a myriad porcelain shards. These include many of the motifs de Vries has used in earlier works: crucified Christs, Guan Yins, skulls and 'frozen Charlottes'. *War and Piece* has toured various international, historically significant destinations, enroute the piece has evolved to reflect the significance of the surroundings.

War and Pieces will be touring the USA and Canada, 2018 - 2019

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Alabama - September 2018 - January 2019

Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut – February - May 2019

Gardiner Museum, Toronto - Beginning of 2020



Bouke de Vries, Visual Artist

Born in Utrecht, the Netherlands in 1961, Bouke de Vries studied at the Design Academy, Eindhoven, followed by an MA at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London (before it became Central St Martin's). After working with John Galliano, Stephen Jones and Zandra Rhodes, he switched careers and studied ceramics conservation and restoration at West Dean College. Every day in his practice as a private conservator he was faced with issues and contradictions around perfection and worth and used this as the starting point for his works. Starting out, de Vries did work for the National Trust and Christies and for artists like Grayson Perry and Gavin Turk and the estates of iconic Ceramicists Lucie Rie and Hans Coper. Since 2009 he has been creating his works using broken ceramics. Using his skills as a restorer, his artworks reclaim broken pots after their accidental trauma. He has called it 'the beauty of destruction'. Instead of reconstructing them, he deconstructs them. Instead of hiding the evidence of this most dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object, he emphasizes their new status, instilling new virtues, new values and moving their stories forward, His work has been exhibited worldwide and is held in many collections.

For more information on *War and Pieces* and Bouke de Vries please contact:

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Selected presentations of War and Pieces

2017	<i>War and Pieces</i> (installation), The Harley Gallery, Worksop, UK
2016	<i>War and Pieces</i> (installation), Berrington Hall, Berrington, UK
2016	<i>War and Pieces</i> (installation), The Golden Box, Installation, Croome Court, UK
2016	<i>War and Pieces</i> (solo presentation), Gemeente Museum, The Hague, Netherlands
2013	<i>War and Pieces</i> , (installation), Outset Netherlands, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2013	<i>War and Pieces</i> , (installation), Alnwick Castle, Alnwick, UK
2013	<i>War and Pieces</i> , (installation) Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin,
2012	<i>War and Pieces</i> , (installation), Holbourne Museum, Bath, UK

For a full list of exhibitions by de Vries please see the separate selected exhibitions sheet.

Selected Press

Ceramics monthly:

<https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/ceramics-monthly/ceramic-art-and-artists/ceramic-sculpture/mirage-bouke-de-vries/#>

New York Times: <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/30/bouke-de-vries-interview/>

Christies Magazine:

http://lalehjne.com/INHALTE/PRESS_RELEASE/pdf/220_Press_Bouke_de_Vries_Christie's_2012_by_Emma_Crichton_Miller_June_July_2012.pdf

COLLECTIONS

Aberdeen Art Gallery
The Ariana, Geneva, Switzerland
Caldic collection, Netherlands
Castle Hingene, Belgium
Collection Edgar J. and Clarissa Bronfman, London
Collection Hugo Brown, The Netherlands
Collection Drake, The Netherlands
Collection Elton John, London/Los Angeles
Collection Taiq Al Jaidah
Collection Kay Saatchi, Los Angeles
Collection Frances Reynolds, London
Collection Mizuho Bank London
Drake collection, The Netherlands
Le Chateau de Nyon, Nyon, Switzerland
MIMA, Middlesbrough
MONA, Tasmania
MUDAC, Lausanne, Switzerland
Ministry of foreign affairs Netherlands
National Dutch ceramic museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden Netherlands
National Museums of Scotland
Pallant House Gallery
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem
Philadelphia Museum
National Dutch ceramic museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden Netherlands
York City Art Gallery
Zabludowicz Collection, London