



## QUINTESSENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE

**FINE JEWELLERY MAKES AN IMPACT ON FINE ART IN THE SURREAL 'PRECIOUS' COLLECTION BY BOUKE DE VRIES, FINDS SOPHIE WALKER**

Still, yet exploding violently in perpetuity, the signature reclaimed-ceramic artworks of Netherlander Bouke de Vries are intriguing, poignant and tinged with a wry, knowing sense of humour. By suspending the broken elements of what was once whole together, but permanently apart, he questions the value of this new 'broken' object, makes a comment on our collective obsession with perfection and artifice, and celebrates the piquant pleasure of destruction. It's a Dutch thing, he says, citing the macabre romanticism of memento mori, 'dead nature' and vanitas paintings that were so popular in his homeland during the 17th and 18th centuries, the decaying visions of which became a hugely fashionable artistic export around the world and now inspire the curious emotion of his work.

Look around and you'll see that De Vries' work is certainly a hot Dutch export in fashionable London right now. You'll see his sculptures in trendy new gallery space Shizaru on Mount Street in Mayfair, and adorning the walls of Roland Mouret's elegant boutique across the road from the Connaught, not to mention gracing the pages of multiple style magazines on newsstands all over. Perhaps it's the way his work chimes cleverly with self-referential fashion types fully aware of their own 'vanitas', and the current vogue for Victorian-style curiosities, but his special relationship with this world was nurtured before he even began to focus on art, when he worked with the likes of John Galiano, Stephen Jones and Zandra Rhodes as an undergraduate at Central St Martins.

Now, having left fashion to train as a ceramic restorer and thence moved into the realm of fine art, he has come full circle to work with the industry again. Guided by the nurturing hand of 'business academy for the art world', Debut Contemporary,

De Vries has collaborated with hyper-luxe jewellery designer Annoushka on a series of sculptures displaying her own surreal pieces called 'Precious'. The playful and sublimely decorative works extend De Vries' themes and obviously exercise his craft, but also, most interestingly, they've inverted the function of artwork which usually takes pride of place on its own pedestal, and become a fabulous display-case for the jewellery itself. 'I've always felt its such a shame that jewellery is put away into a cupboard and then comes out on special occasions,' explains Annoushka. 'It should be displayed and seen – not just as a static, decorative accessory, but as art.' As Debut Contemporary intuited, the two creative minds shared a number of inspirations and ideas. 'As we started working together, I discovered a lot of elements present in Annoushka's work that are also present in mine, such as butterfly and dragon motifs – so it was a good fit,' adds De Vries.

If all this sounds a little serious, we urge you to look up the artworks themselves. You'll find a pair of ducks handing each other a brace of pearls on a plate between their beaks, a sage-looking baby doll wearing a pair of ornate spectacles, a 'Chimera Chihuahua' sporting golden horns and a rather fetching dress, whilst the Venus di Milo has been reinstated with more arms than she probably had in mind. There are deeper reflections at work in this play, if you care to look for them, but as De Vries points out, 'There's lots of fun in the work. Humour is very important. A good joke is much harder to execute than trying to be really serious about something.' In the highbrow worlds of art and fashion, surely that's a sensibility worth encouraging.

*boukedevries.com*  
*annoushka-jewellery.com*

