



Photograph: Tim Higgins

BOUKE DE VRIES MEMORY VESSELS

Bouke de Vries' proposal for artSOUTH provided an opportunity for multiple collaborations. The curatorial team at Southampton City Art Gallery immediately recognised the strength of the idea in relation to their important collection of ceramics, and hosted the main installation, complemented by two 'satellite' commissions, at Aspex, Portsmouth and St. Barbe Museum, Lymington with thanks to Portsmouth Museums, the University of Portsmouth Faculty of Creative & Cultural Industries and Hampshire County Council.

The idea of 'memory vessels' had been simmering in my mind for a while and I had done some earlier experiments around it. Fortuitously, artSOUTH provided the perfect opportunity to develop the idea, including collaborating with Dixon Glass and choosing objects from three collections across the region.

Although each of the different geographical sub-divisions of the project took a slightly different approach they all fit around the same themes of memory and loss.

Bouke de Vries (Artist)

MEMORY VESSELS

Southampton City Art Gallery

Collaborating with Southampton City Council Museum Collections and Dixon Glass, Bouke de Vries selected damaged pieces of ceramics and created glass vessels, using the original shape of the broken object. These 'ghost' vessels hold the fragments of the original pieces and create a conversation about the history, value and beauty in something that may be perceived by some as worthless.

The fragments were excavated from a spot near Bargate in the centre of Southampton and are dated back to the later 18th century. They are part of Southampton City Council's Designated Archaeology Collection. The pit from which these fragments were dug was full of pottery including lots of Chinese and English porcelain, as well as tin glazed, Verwood, salt glazed and creamware. There were a lot of chamber pots, and it's been suggested that there was an inn nearby – the sort of place which would need a regular supply of pots.

I reassembled fragments from the selected objects as best as possible to give the glassblowers sufficient information to produce a glass copy – or 'ghost' – of the original. Then I took the fragments apart again and cleaned them to a conservation standard, though leaving evidence such as the original archeologist's writing intact. Finally I arranged the latter within the former.

Bouke de Vries (Artist)

It's always interesting to create a piece of work for Bouke, each item is different and has its own personality. If he is in the workshop watching while I'm blowing one of his objects I can feel his excitement as the piece gradually takes shape and I can feed off his creativity. We often share a bit of banter and laugh if something goes wrong and Bouke always gives plenty of feedback with words and photographs of the finished piece of art.

Dave Goodier (Glassblower, Dixon Glass)

It has been incredibly exciting to see ceramics from our archaeology collections re-interpreted by Bouke. Each artefact has a unique story to tell – we wonder who made it, how and where it was used. By creating these ghost vessels containing original, tangible fragments Bouke encourages us to think about the histories and memories contained within them.

Like me, Bouke has a conservation background, so I appreciate the careful consideration given to the reversibility of the processes used, so that in the creation of new art works, archaeological significance has not been compromised or lost.

Karen Wardley (Collections Manager, SCC Arts and Heritage)

Photograph: Tim Higgins



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Photograph: Tim Higgins

MEMORY VESSEL

Aspex, Portsmouth

Commissioned for artSOUTH by the University of Portsmouth's Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries, Bouke de Vries selected a single broken glass from the collections of Portsmouth Museums and created a 'ghost' vessel, using the original shape of the glass.

It is a wine glass made in the mid to late nineteenth century imitating earlier Venetian examples from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Facon de Venise glass, glass in the style of Venice was made in several European centres including London.

It is made of soda glass with marvered inclusions of purple glass. It is finely blown in three parts: bowl, stem and foot. It has applied trails with tooling and prunts and is partially gilded to highlight areas of the design.

The Glass entered the museum's collection in 1972. It is recorded as having been broken prior to entering the museum and repaired with animal glue which had since failed.

Rosalinda M.C. Hardiman (Collections Manager, Portsmouth Museums and Visitor Service)

For the Portsmouth glass I used a slightly different approach, while still basically the same idea, to create a single object with strong references to the Vanitas tradition of Dutch still-life painting.

Bouke de Vries (Artist)

MEMORY CORE

St Barbe Museum, Lymington

The fragments of pottery and glass in the jar all come from Lymington and are now in the collection of Hampshire County Council Arts and Museums Service. They were found by searching the ground when sites were being redeveloped in the town. Pottery of all ages back to Saxon can be found in the disturbed soil. These fragments come from several different sites, many of them from 113 High Street, which was the Red Lion Inn from the 1990s back to before 1840, and some from 4 St Thomas Street, now Marks & Spencer.

All these fragments date to the 19th and 20th centuries. They show us just what sort of pottery, china and glass was being used in local households then. It is remarkable how similar the finds are from different sites in the town. The brown pieces at the bottom are mostly Verwood pottery, strong kitchen ware made in east Dorset, usually storage jars, jugs and such useful items. At the top are china fragments from tableware, often willow pattern.

Blue and white was the most popular colour. The finds from the Red Lion mirror its use as an inn, including fragments of water jugs, washing bowls and chamber pots from the bedrooms, and bits of drinking glasses and bottles from the bar. Glass ink bottles are frequent finds from all sites, when people used dip pens to write.

Dr Joanna Close-Brooks (Archaeologist, formerly St Barbe Museum, Lymington)

For the St Barbe Memory Core, I took yet another approach. For this object a glass laboratory jar was layered with chronologically arranged archeological fragments from the Lymington area sorted by type. Like a drill-core through unrecorded local history.

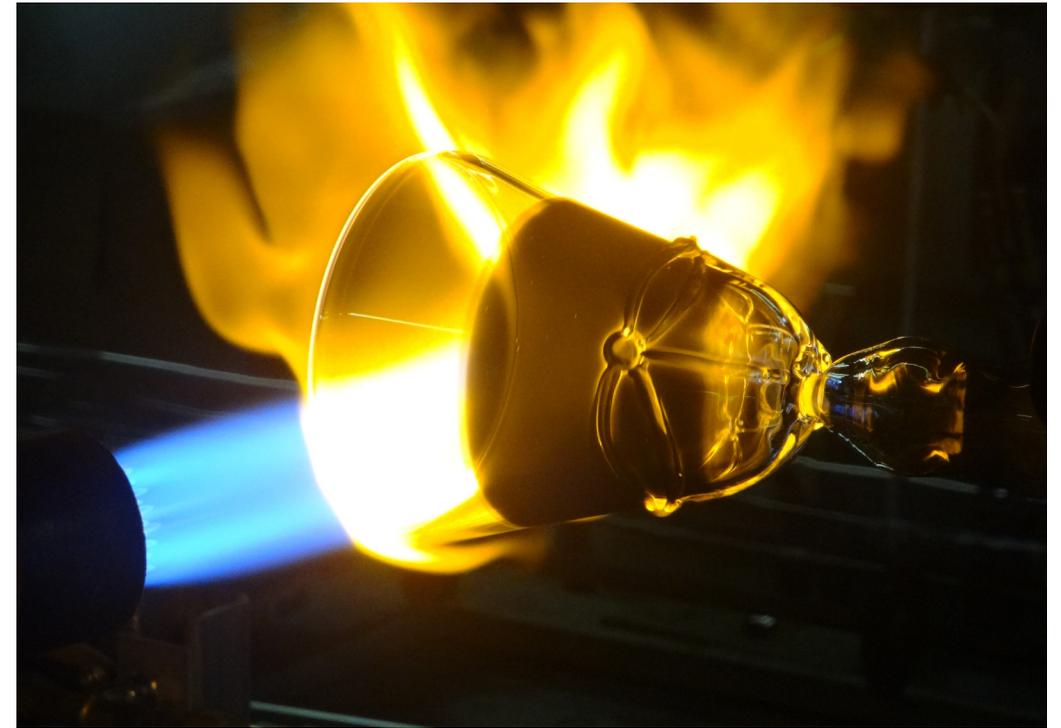
Bouke de Vries (Artist)



Photograph: Tim Higgins

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Photograph: Bouke de Vries

Bouke de Vries Having trained as a ceramics conservator, in which he was regularly faced with issues concerning imperfection and worth, Bouke de Vries began to create pieces, taking an object's damage as a starting point and placing it in a new context, taking its story forward. Often exaggerating the nature of the damage and accentuating the most traumatic episode of the object's history, these sculptures are frequently imbued with art historical and contemporary references.

Dixon Glass was founded in the 1920s. They manufacture and supply a full range of bespoke and standard scientific and non-scientific glassware. The vessels for this project were all blown by Dave Goodier, a master glassblower for 34 years with extraordinary skills and expertise.

Southampton's archaeology collection contains artefacts illustrating Southampton's past from the Palaeolithic to the 20th century, and includes over half a million items resulting from excavations carried out within the city over the last 50 years. Particular strengths are the finds from Saxon Hamwic, and the impressive range of luxury imported ceramics and glass from the homes of merchants trading from the medieval port. The collection was awarded designated status in 1997, confirming its national and international significance.