



War and Pieces Holburne Museum, Bath 2012

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #1
The Holburne Museum, Bath
03/09/2012- 03/12/2012

The installation, which is a direct intervention with the Holburne Museum and its collection, was granted a full award by the Arts Council of Great Britain. My art practise often consists of taking broken ceramics and presenting them in a new context, thereby bringing them back to life and moving their history forward. The next logical step for me was to extend this in a new and exciting direction by creating an installation, mixing my work with elements of the Holburne collection, using part of the 18th-century Chinese-export porcelain tobacco-leaf service and 18th-century English glassware, collected by Captain Holburne in the 19th century.

In the 17th century wealthy households decorated their dining tables with extravagant sugar sculptures: classical figures, architectural follies, allegorical scenes etc (which were not made to be eaten – at one point sugar was literally worth its weight in gold – but to be 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, as their first modellers.

Fascinated by this link between sugar (a real status symbol among the rich and fashionable in an age of reckless ostentation, all too reminiscent of our own 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*).

I am also including plastic elements. Supposedly indestructible, 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 I have used in earlier works: crucified Christs, Guan Yins, skulls and 'frozen Charlottes'.



Bouke de Vries: War & Pieces

Bouke de Vries: War and Pieces
1 September to 2 December 2012

Bouke de Vries first came to public attention with a series of works made from broken ceramic figures and vessels. He is a ceramics conservator, the former pupil of de Vries's transition to art is a way to give to his studio but were not considered valuable enough to be worth conserving.

'War and Pieces' is a unique installation created for the Ballroom to the Holburne Museum. It is a dramatic atonement for the destruction of the eighteenth-century displays of sugar sculptures for the display of the war on the tradition of grand balls held on the eve of battle. The installation is a dramatic atonement for the destruction of the eighteenth-century displays of sugar sculptures for the display of the war on the tradition of grand balls held on the eve of battle. The installation is a dramatic atonement for the destruction of the eighteenth-century displays of sugar sculptures for the display of the war on the tradition of grand balls held on the eve of battle. The installation is a dramatic atonement for the destruction of the eighteenth-century displays of sugar sculptures for the display of the war on the tradition of grand balls held on the eve of battle.

Generously supported by the Arts Council England and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands





War and Pieces (Detail) Holburne Museum, Bath 2012



War and Pieces (detail) Holburne Museum, Bath 2012

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In The Frame

Scenes from the ceramic battlefield

A billowing mushroom cloud made of ceramic fragments rises from the ballroom table at the Holburne Museum in Bath. The eerie installation *War & Pieces* by the Dutch artist Bouke de Vries plays on the 18th-century tradition of holding a lavish banquet on the eve of battle, complete with elaborate ceramic and sugar decorations, according to the museum's website. The disasters of war are recreated on the table itself using figures based on 1770s Derby porcelain, clashing against china soldiers equipped with cyborg prostheses taken from plastic toys, "a new and contemporary material fighting to defeat the forces of sugar and ceramic".

From In The Frame
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BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #2
Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin
11/04/2013- 02/06/2013

War & Pieces

Bouke de Vries, London 2012

Porcelain (China, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, 19th to 21st century),
sugar, plastic, mixed media

Cutlery: Porcelain (KPM), 1772

This eight-metre installation by Dutch-born artist Bouke de Vries was inspired by the sophisticated figural centrepieces that decorated eighteenth-century European rulers' banqueting tables. Displayed during the dessert course on special occasions, these figures made of sugar (as are some of de Vries's) and later increasingly porcelain told stories or conveyed political messages. The permanent exhibition in the Belvedere in the Palace grounds, for example, includes parts of a centrepiece that Frederick the Great (1712–1786) commissioned in 1769 from the Royal Porcelain Factory as a gift for Catherine the Great of Russia (1729–1796). With Russia's military strength making it an attractive ally for Prussia after the Seven Years' War, it is no wonder that the Classical gods of war played such a prominent role in the design.

Bouke de Vries draws on such traditions in his modern centrepiece, arranged around the mushroom cloud from a nuclear explosion whose force appears to have turned the entire table into a wasteland. Battle rages across this heap of shards old and new, fought by myriad miniature figures with conventional arms. Jesus on the cross and the Chinese Buddhist goddess of compassion Guanyin watch over the death and destruction.

For Charlottenburg, War and Pieces has been augmented with cutlery from the Royal Porcelain Factory that originally belonged to the aforementioned dessert service for Catherine the Great. Frederick the Great had all the handles painted with scenes from Catherine's campaign against the Ottoman Empire. So here De Vries's modern interpretation of a war-themed centrepiece encounters one of its historic precursors.

The Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation of Berlin-Brandenburg chose this installation to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Peace of Hubertusburg, which ended the Seven Years' War. One of the most destructive conflicts of the Early Modern Age, the Seven Years' War encompassed several continents and has come to be regarded as the first global war. With Frederick the Great's Prussia and ally Great Britain on one side, France, Russia and the Hapsburg monarchy on the other, more or less all the major European powers were entangled in the bloody conflict. Although Prussia emerged victorious it had, like the other parties, suffered painful losses of fighting men and civilians. The financial cost of the war was also enormous.

On 9 October 1760 the war came to Charlottenburg, when Austrian troops forced their way into the palace. The castellan was responsible for recording all losses and damage room by room. His records preserve a moving account of the events. In almost every room upholstery and tapestries were 'torn out, cut down and taken away', paintings were 'looted', 'slashed with sabres' or 'completely cut into pieces', mirrors and chandeliers smashed, and 'the eyes, hands and noses of statues broken'. 'In the Porcelain Chamber Austrian officers packed up and stole many pieces, and ruined most of the rest. They spared no effort to tear bowls and cups out of their plaster mounts ...' After the peace treaty had been signed Frederick had all the damage to the palace repaired immediately, in order to banish the incident from collective memory.

Bouke de Vries studied in London, where he still lives. After working as a textile designer (with clients including John Galliano), he retrained as a ceramics restorer. Daily encounters with the fragile and the broken in his new profession soon inspired him to make his own sculptures and installations. The exhibited installation dates from 2012 and is his first large-format piece. In the setting of Charlottenburg Palace, which was looted in the Seven Years' War and almost completely destroyed in the Second World War, his era-spanning work acquires a special meaning.



War and Pieces Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin 2013



War and Pieces Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin 2013



War and Pieces Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin 2013

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #3
Alnwick Castle, Alnwick
27/06/2013- 03/10/2013

This summer at Alnwick Castle, renowned ceramic artist Bouke de Vries will exhibit 'War and Pieces', a remarkable ceramic centrepiece measuring over eight metres in length. The installation is created from thousands of fragments of white porcelain in the form of an epic battle, culminating in a striking mushroom cloud. The remarkable centrepiece will besiege the ten-metre mahogany table in the castle's sumptuous State Dining Room from Thursday 27 June – Thursday 3 October 2013. The installation will take place on 27 June by Bouke de Vries himself, so visitors to the Dining Room on that day can witness the extraordinary structure taking shape.

'War and Pieces' takes inspiration from the tradition of grand banquets and balls held on the eve of battle, and also the 17th century custom of decorating banqueting tables with extravagant sugar sculptures. These centrepieces were carefully preserved and reused as part of lavish dining entertainment and as a demonstration of wealth and taste, before being replaced by porcelain in the 18th century.

A closer look at the installation will show that de Vries has cleverly incorporated components of brightly coloured contemporary plastic toys into some of the figurines, contrasting vividly with the pure white of the 18th century ceramics.

Bouke de Vries shares his thoughts on exhibiting his work at Alnwick Castle:

"To show my work – a contemporary take on the classical tradition of sugar and porcelain table-decoration centrepieces – amid the historic splendours of one of Britain's grandest ducal seats is an opportunity one can usually only dream of. It is wonderful of the Duke and Duchess to open up their fantastic heritage and allow the contemporary to find its place among its history. I believe that my work, which has one foot in the past and another in the present, creates a bridge between past and present."

Alnwick Castle houses one of the most important private collections in the country, accumulated by generations of the Percy family. The State Rooms, decorated in lavish Italian Renaissance style, are filled with a stunning array of fine and decorative arts. Paintings include works by masters such as Titian, Claude, Van Dyck, Canaletto and J.M.W. Turner. Furniture includes two unique, highly embellished cabinets made for King Louis XIV for his palace of Versailles. There is also a large number of beautifully decorated ceramics from one of the earliest Meissen services ever made, produced around 1740.





War and Pieces Alnwick Castle, Alnwick 2013



BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #4
Whitspace, Amsterdam
18/10/2013 - 18/10/2013

In October 2013 a series of dinners
were held around the installation in
collaboration with 'Ouset Netherlands'.



BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #5
Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan
02/05/2014 - 12/10/2014

The installation was part of the international ceramics biennale in Taiwan.



BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #6
Chateau de Nyon, Switzerland
27/11/2014 - 12/04/2015

Part of large solo exhibition at the
Chateau der Nyon in Nyon, Switzerland.





War and Pieces Chateau de Nyon, Switzerland 2015

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #7
Castle d'Ursel
Hingene, Belgium
May - July 2015





War and Pieces Castle D'Ursel, Belgium 2015

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #8
Gemeente Museum
The Hague, Netherlands
17/10/2015 to 28/02/2016





War and Pieces Gemeente Museum, Netherlands 2015/16



War and Pieces Gemeente Museum, Netherlands 2015/16

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #9
Berrington Hall
England
10/2/2017 - 28/11/2017





War and Pieces Berrington Hall, England 2017



War and Pieces Berrington Hall, England 2017

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #10
The Harley Gallery
Worksop, UK
07/11/2016 - 15/02/2017





War and Pieces The Harley Gallery, Worksop, England 2017

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #11
Belton House
England
20/03/2018 - 27/08/2018





War and Pieces Belton House, England 2018



War and Pieces Belton House, England 2018

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #12
Wadsworth Atheneum
Hartford, Connecticut
USA
04/10/2018 - 06/01/2019





War and Pieces Wadsworth Atheneum, USA 2018



War and Pieces Wadsworth Atheneum, USA 2018

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #13
Museum of Fine Art
Montgomery AL
USA
28/01/2019 - 02/06/2019





War and Pieces Museum of Fine Art, Montgomery AL, USA 2019

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #14
Hillwood Museum
Washington DC
USA
24/09/2019 - 05/04/2020





War and Pieces Hillwood Museum, Washington DC, USA



War and Pieces Hillwood Museum, Washington DC, USA

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #15
The Frick
Pittsburgh PA
USA
15/08/2020 - 31/02/2021





War and Pieces The Frick, Pittsburgh PA, USA



War and Pieces The Frick, Pittsburgh PA, USA

BOUKE DE VRIES
WAR & PIECES #16
Washington County Museum
USA
20/09/2021 - 14/03/2022





War and Pieces Washington County Museum, USA



War and Pieces Washington County Museum, USA

Bouke de Vries Artist

Born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, Bouke de Vries studied at the Design Academy, Eindhoven and Central St Martin's, London. After working with John Galiano, 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.

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 emphasises their new status, instilling new virtues, new values, and moving their stories forward.

