

Reinventing Porcelain

A FRAGILE MEDIUM REVEALS
ITS INNER STRENGTH IN
ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS

By Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop

Dutch sculptor Bouke De Vries uses
shattered and chipped tea pots to
create his works of art. Seen here,
a detail from one of his works titled
Culture Repudiated, c. 2014.





Left to right: From Dutch painter Jan de Vliegher's *Plates* series; *Translated Vase* in ceramic fragments, epoxy, and gold leaf, c. 2013, by Korean artist Yeesoookyung.

Set up in 2003 with an aim of broadening the use of porcelain beyond tableware, Fondation d'Entreprise Bernardaud has been actively supporting artists and other creatives in their exploration of the material as an artistic medium.

Through regular artist residencies, as well as annual exhibitions, the Fondation gives a platform to artists using ceramics, especially those who are under-represented in France, explains Michel Bernardaud, CEO of the family-owned porcelain maker that set it up.

"We want to showcase how much ceramics is used around the world by artists, and how creative the medium can be," adds H  l  ne Huret, director of the foundation.

My Blue China — Blue and White, the Colors of Globalization, an exhibition that opens this month in Limoges, offers examples of versatility of the medium. It brings together the works of 12 internationally renowned contemporary artists who make explicit references to blue and white porcelain in their work.

"The exhibition is curated around the theme of cultural globalization and its different readings whether it's a question

of imperialism, ethnocentrism, cultural integration, clash of civilization, hybridization, or glocalisation. The two essential components in the development of cultural globalization were the circulation of knowledge and the evolution of consumption," explains curator Laurent de Verneuil.

"But this exhibition is not about ceramics. It's about a more universal theme, cultural globalization, explained through blue-and-white. The artists presented here don't fit in because of their use of ceramics but because they epitomize the phenomenon of cultural globalization in their works through the reference of blue-and-white," he adds.

One instance of this is Korean artist Yeesoookyung's practice, who uses salvaged fragments of ceramics made by Lim Hang-Taek, a traditional Korean craftsman who shatters pots he assesses to be a failure. Those fragments are glued together and bonded with gold leaf to form a new work that becomes an anthropomorphic sculpture. To join the fragments, Yeesoookyung employs a technique similar to kintsugi, the Japanese art of fixing broken pottery with gold-lacquer resin and rather than disguising the repairs, the technique aims to enhance the modest object,

HUGO MAERTENS, TIM HIGGINS

THE EVENT

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embracing the cracks as part of its history.

“Every time, I create a piece, I have to have a long conversation with each fragment. I never break any pieces myself; I’m very strict with that, I only use pieces already broken. It’s like a long journey as I try to see how they can fit into each other,” the artist explains.

“With the use of gold I want to emphasize the broken parts that most people would want to hide,” she adds, “I want to reveal these, because in life I’ve learned a lot from difficulties.”

Like Yeeseokyoung, the London-based Dutch sculptor Bouke De Vries works with imperfections, using shattered or chipped tea pots and Limoges figurines to create humorous new works created out of “floating shards” (held in place by clear Lucite spines). *Dead Nature 4*, 2009, is a Chinese porcelain bowl exploded in mid-air and filled with dried fruit — a nod to 17th and 18th century Dutch still life paintings.

Other artists, such as the Dutch painter Jan de Vliegheer and the Korean digital artist Kim Joon, do not use porcelain directly as a medium, but are inspired by it. De Vliegheer has created a series of monumental oil paintings, *Plates*, based on six different types of ceramic plates — Japanese Imari porcelain, Ming porcelain, Iznik ceramics from Turkey, S  vres ceramics, Austrian Imperial court ceramics, and the Italian tin-glazed majolica — using loose strokes and drip-marks to transform and somehow abstract his subject matter; while Kim uses porcelain in his digital prints, creating compositions of tableware, porcelain dolls, cars, etc., juxtaposing old and new with a mixture of traditional Asian motifs and pop culture imagery in part as a commentary on today’s society.

“When people come to Limoges they have preconceived ideas about ceramics and porcelains. Here they realize the potential of the material and its richness. Ceramics is a big family, under which you will find pottery or fired clay, stoneware, faience, and





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Facing page: *Blue Jeans Blue* by Kim Joon. This page: Bouke De Vries' *Dead Nature* (right); *The Suffolk Conversation* by Claire Partington (below).



“We want to showcase the tremendous vitality of ceramic art,”

porcelain ... and you don't do the same things with each,” Huret says, adding, “We want to showcase the tremendous vitality of ceramic art and spotlight porcelain as one of the most innovative mediums.”

First founded in 1963 in Limoges, which was then a center for porcelain making in France, Bernardaud remains one of the most important French fine porcelain makers though its production has moved outside of town. Through its foundation, Bernardaud has welcomed numerous artists in residence, such as James Brown, Pae White, Christina Doll, Jonathan Hammer, and Sophie Calle and has also organized annual exhibitions around various themes, ranging from a look at Celadon over the centuries, popular Brazilian ceramic figurines, white contemporary ceramics to ceramics as table décor or as light fittings. Some exhibitions have travelled internationally, such as *A Bit of Clay on the Skin* that was dedicated to new jewelry in ceramics and went on to be shown at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, the Yingge Ceramics Museum in Taipei, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, along with museums in The Netherlands, Canada, and Korea.

“I think the foundation now has some standing in the small world of ceramic artists. They know it's really the opportunity to present a piece that hasn't been seen in France before, and we're approached by many artists,” Huret says. ◀