War and Pieces

Bouke de Vries’ first large-scale installation, War and Pieces, offers a contemporary interpretation of this tradition. According to de Vries, it 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.”

The artist had read William Thackeray’s Vanity Fair and was struck by the scene of the Duchess of Richmond’s ball, held on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. During the ball, the Duke of Wellington and his generals were suddenly called away to fight Napoleon, who had just crossed the border into Belgium. And so de Vries decided to stage a battle on the table, not to celebrate war but to expose its inevitable chaos and futility.

In the center of a twenty-six-foot table is a nuclear mushroom cloud composed of miniature porcelain figures and fragments. Porcelain skulls and broken figures of the Chinese Buddhist goddess of compassion, Guanyin, join unfinished Hummel porcelain figures of children. Fragments are brought together that are sourced from dealers and flea markets, or found in containers of wasters at the old German Hummel factory site and sold on eBay (figs. 4–5). Porcelain figures of the crucified Christ hang from two sides, and the top is a figure of a crying angel. For de Vries, the mushroom cloud is the ultimate centerpiece, an image that is both beautiful and horrible at the same time.

War and Pieces, Glass de Lyon. Bridgetown installation of a contemporary interpretation of the tradition. According to de Vries, it 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.”

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sculpted sugar table decoration and its porcelain successors, especially at Meissen, Germany, fascinated artist and ceramics conservator Bouke de Vries. Elaborate figural ensembles decorated banquet tables during the dessert course. Knowledgeable dinner guests would have been familiar with the complex narratives and political messages that they often conveyed (fig. 2). One ornate example is the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Meissen The Judgment of Paris table center (fig. 3), which was originally part of an ensemble that included other mythological figures.

War and Pieces, Glass de Lyon. Bridgetown installation of a contemporary interpretation of the tradition. According to de Vries, it 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.”

The artist had read William Thackeray’s Vanity Fair and was struck by the scene of the Duchess of Richmond’s ball, held on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. During the ball, the Duke of Wellington and his generals were suddenly called away to fight Napoleon, who had just crossed the border into Belgium. And so de Vries decided to stage a battle on the table, not to celebrate war but to expose its inevitable chaos and futility.

In the center of a twenty-six-foot table is a nuclear mushroom cloud composed of miniature porcelain figures and fragments. Porcelain skulls and broken figures of the Chinese Buddhist goddess of compassion, Guanyin, join unfinished Hummel porcelain figures of children. Fragments are brought together that are sourced from dealers and flea markets, or found in containers of wasters at the old German Hummel factory site and sold on eBay (figs. 4–5). Porcelain figures of the crucified Christ hang from two sides, and the top is a figure of a crying angel. For de Vries, the mushroom cloud is the ultimate centerpiece, an image that is both beautiful and horrible at the same time.

War and Pieces, Glass de Lyon. Bridgetown installation of a contemporary interpretation of the tradition. According to de Vries, it 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.”

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sculpted sugar table decoration and its porcelain successors, especially at Meissen, Germany, fascinated artist and ceramics conservator Bouke de Vries. Elaborate figural ensembles decorated banquet tables during the dessert course. Knowledgeable dinner guests would have been familiar with the complex narratives and political messages that they often conveyed (fig. 2). One ornate example is the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Meissen The Judgment of Paris table center (fig. 3), which was originally part of an ensemble that included other mythological figures.
Hague (2016–17), de Vries created custom cutlery with resin handles fashioned like the new centerpiece and one of its historic precursors. At the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, pieces made at the Derby Porcelain Factory in England (figs. 6–7). Yet there is something much the value of porcelain has changed being sucked up into it mass-produced in China. The irony of how the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

While MATRIX 180 is simply a creative site-specific installation, the battles in the figures have mutated into cyborgs with colorful, plastic “bionic” effects of this non-biodegradable material. Whichever side wins, the white sugar and porcelain and signal that the battle is between sugar, porcelain, or Sèvres [French, 1756 to the present]—can so modern interlopers on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

The reflective nature of the porcelain underscore the toxic invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. Matrix 180 was created from 2015 to 2018. The MATRIX program is generously supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Contemporary Coalition. The artist has been working with porcelain for many years. The findings in this work and his intention to reuse and repurpose are expressed as a dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object, “the beauty of destruction.” instead of hiding the evidence of “this most dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object,” he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

In his process, de Vries has been faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. In the role of conservator, he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

When MATRIX 180 or War and Pieces is on view in a new location, the artist changes the display to fit the venue, working with the curators and collection, according to the artists’ requirements. It is a site-specific installation, where the porcelain is a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

In the 2010s, the porcelain has become a meta-material. Through the lens of the artist, the fragility and fragility of porcelain is highlighted. The new porcelain has become a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

“JUST DUCKY,” BOUKE DE VRIES, 2016 (DETAIL). Acrylic, steel, aluminum, gilded brass, and mixed media on porcelain, 6’ x 10’. Became a centerpiece of the collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the artist’s first American museum. BOUKE DE VRIES/MATRIX 180/LOMBARD 43, 1207。“JUST DUCKY,” BOUKE DE VRIES, 2016 (DETAIL). Acrylic, steel, aluminum, gilded brass, and mixed media on porcelain, 6’ x 10’. Became a centerpiece of the collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the artist’s first American museum. BOUKE DE VRIES/MATRIX 180/LOMBARD 43, 1207.

Nicholas de Vries was faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. For the artist, being sucked up into it mass-produced in China. The irony of how the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8). While the MATRIX program is generously supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Contemporary Coalition. The artist has been working with porcelain for many years. The findings in this work and his intention to reuse and repurpose are expressed as a dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object, “the beauty of destruction.” instead of hiding the evidence of “this most dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object,” he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

In his process, de Vries has been faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. In the role of conservator, he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

When MATRIX 180 or War and Pieces is on view in a new location, the artist changes the display to fit the venue, working with the curators and collection, according to the artists’ requirements. It is a site-specific installation, where the porcelain is a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

In the 2010s, the porcelain has become a meta-material. Through the lens of the artist, the fragility and fragility of porcelain is highlighted. The new porcelain has become a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

“JUST DUCKY,” BOUKE DE VRIES, 2016 (DETAIL). Acrylic, steel, aluminum, gilded brass, and mixed media on porcelain, 6’ x 10’. Became a centerpiece of the collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the artist’s first American museum. BOUKE DE VRIES/MATRIX 180/LOMBARD 43, 1207.

Nicholas de Vries was faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. For the artist, being sucked up into it mass-produced in China. The irony of how the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8). While the MATRIX program is generously supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Contemporary Coalition. The artist has been working with porcelain for many years. The findings in this work and his intention to reuse and repurpose are expressed as a dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object, “the beauty of destruction.” instead of hiding the evidence of “this most dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object,” he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

In his process, de Vries has been faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. In the role of conservator, he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

When MATRIX 180 or War and Pieces is on view in a new location, the artist changes the display to fit the venue, working with the curators and collection, according to the artists’ requirements. It is a site-specific installation, where the porcelain is a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

In the 2010s, the porcelain has become a meta-material. Through the lens of the artist, the fragility and fragility of porcelain is highlighted. The new porcelain has become a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

“JUST DUCKY,” BOUKE DE VRIES, 2016 (DETAIL). Acrylic, steel, aluminum, gilded brass, and mixed media on porcelain, 6’ x 10’. Became a centerpiece of the collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the artist’s first American museum. BOUKE DE VRIES/MATRIX 180/LOMBARD 43, 1207.

Nicholas de Vries was faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. For the artist, being sucked up into it mass-produced in China. The irony of how the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8). While the MATRIX program is generously supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Contemporary Coalition. The artist has been working with porcelain for many years. The findings in this work and his intention to reuse and repurpose are expressed as a dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object, “the beauty of destruction.” instead of hiding the evidence of “this most dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object,” he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

In his process, de Vries has been faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. In the role of conservator, he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

When MATRIX 180 or War and Pieces is on view in a new location, the artist changes the display to fit the venue, working with the curators and collection, according to the artists’ requirements. It is a site-specific installation, where the porcelain is a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

In the 2010s, the porcelain has become a meta-material. Through the lens of the artist, the fragility and fragility of porcelain is highlighted. The new porcelain has become a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

“JUST DUCKY,” BOUKE DE VRIES, 2016 (DETAIL). Acrylic, steel, aluminum, gilded brass, and mixed media on porcelain, 6’ x 10’. Became a centerpiece of the collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the artist’s first American museum. BOUKE DE VRIES/MATRIX 180/LOMBARD 43, 1207.

Nicholas de Vries was faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. For the artist, being sucked up into it mass-produced in China. The irony of how the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8). While the MATRIX program is generously supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Contemporary Coalition. The artist has been working with porcelain for many years. The findings in this work and his intention to reuse and repurpose are expressed as a dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object, “the beauty of destruction.” instead of hiding the evidence of “this most dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object,” he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

In his process, de Vries has been faced with issues and contradictions that he uses his skills as a restorer to take broken ceramics, invisible hairline crack, a tiny rim chip or a broken edge. In the role of conservator, he gives it a new status, instilling new virtues, and moving its stories forward.4

When MATRIX 180 or War and Pieces is on view in a new location, the artist changes the display to fit the venue, working with the curators and collection, according to the artists’ requirements. It is a site-specific installation, where the porcelain is a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

In the 2010s, the porcelain has become a meta-material. Through the lens of the artist, the fragility and fragility of porcelain is highlighted. The new porcelain has become a modern interloper on the artist. He shares that with the present moment, the ultimate status symbol (fig. 8).

“JUST DUCKY,” BOUKE DE VRIES, 2016 (DETAIL). Acrylic, steel, aluminum, gilded brass, and mixed media on porcelain, 6’ x 10’. Became a centerpiece of the collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the artist’s first American museum. BOUKE DE VRIES/MATRIX 180/LOMBARD 43, 1207.