

UNBROKEN - Bouke de Vries

5-07-2025 - 16-08- 2026

## Major retrospective exhibition on the oeuvre of Bouke de Vries

The Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics in Leeuwarden (NL) is proud to present the major retrospective exhibition UNBROKEN, dedicated to the internationally acclaimed artist Bouke de Vries.

Opening in the summer of 2025, this exhibition offers a unique perspective on the work of an artist who transforms broken ceramics into new and unexpected artworks in innovative and multifaceted ways. De Vries, born in Utrecht and now based in London, was originally trained as a restorer. His craftsmanship forms the foundation of an artistic practice that centres on fragility, impermanence, sustainability, and repair.

***Bouke de Vries: UNBROKEN*** runs from 5 July 2025 to 16 August 2026.



*Memory Vessel with wax seals, 2020, Bouke de Vries, 46 x 23.5 cm, courtesy of Adrian Sassoon Contemporary Works*

*Horsey, 2024, Bouke de Vries, 119 x 67 cm, Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics Collection, acquired with support from Club Céramique*

## **Decay and repair**

*UNBROKEN* features a selection of highlights from Bouke de Vries' career, in which he experiments with the theme of decay and repair. This retrospective includes still lifes, relics, and monumental installations: in total, some 95 objects and installations, 11 of which are new works created especially for this exhibition.

Many of the works on view are based on historical objects, yet they also engage with a wide range of contemporary cultural phenomena and elements from the artist's personal world. Playful references, such as a porcelain sculpture of Marge Simpson as Guan Yin, and other childhood memories appear alongside tributes to the artist's father and husband, as well as allusions to drug culture and war.

In total, the solo exhibition *UNBROKEN* features around 95 objects and installations, including eleven new works created especially for this show.

## **From Muses to Memory Vessels**

Visitors are guided through five rooms showcasing the oeuvre of Bouke de Vries. The works are displayed in thematic clusters. In **Dutch Stories** De Vries's Dutch heritage takes centre stage. Especially for this exhibition, he created a life-sized state portrait of King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima using 17th- and 18th-century Delftware – a regal tribute and, at the same time, a playful reflection on national symbolism and ceramics as cultural heritage.

Next, **Early Chinese** delves into the deep historical roots of Chinese ceramics, with works from the Han, Tang, Ming and Qing dynasties. Some of the pieces were originally funerary offerings, intended to accompany the deceased into the afterlife, while others surfaced through maritime archaeology – remnants of VOC trading ships that lay undisturbed on the seabed for centuries. In this space, De Vries reveals not only his fascination with the fragility of objects, but also with the fragility of context and meaning. Displayed in tall vitrines, the works evoke the atmosphere of a historical cabinet of curiosities, or *Wunderkammer*.



*Majesteit, Bouke de Vries, 2024, Life-sized double portrait of King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima, fragments of 17th and 18th century Delftware, 183 x 204 cm, courtesy Bouke de Vries*



*Deconstructed Neolithic Machang, 2019, Bouke de Vries, Neolithic (600-1000 BC) Chinese earthenware on bronze base and mixed media, 50 x 55 cm, courtesy Bouke de Vries*

The **Memory Vessels** theme room displays shards of broken ceramics in glass moulds. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these Memory Vessels struck a powerful emotional chord with people. The works resonated so deeply that people around the world had them tattooed on their bodies. For this exhibition, De Vries responds to this unexpected tribute with a new series of 'flat' ceramic Memory Vessels, onto which a tattoo artist re-applies the original designs in ink.

**Muses** brings together sculptures of De Vries's muses – from the Virgin Mary to figures from popular culture, with a focus on contemporary themes. Highlights include his (unbroken) homage to the late Princess Diana, celebrated as an icon within the LGBTQ+ community.



*Marge Simpson as Guan Yin  
goddess of compassion, 2014,  
Bouke de Vries, 42 x 23 cm, courtesy  
Bouke de Vries.*



## War and Pieces

The exhibition ends grandly with **War and Pieces**, an eleven-metre-long installation offering a contemporary take on the opulent table centrepieces once favoured by European aristocracy in the 17th and 18th centuries.

At the heart of this chaotic battlefield of shards stands a dramatic and inevitable centrepiece – the ultimate act of war: a nuclear mushroom cloud composed of countless fragments of white porcelain. The cloud is formed from ghostly cherubs, skulls, and decapitated or distorted porcelain dolls – or “Hummels gone wrong,” as De Vries calls them. Christ on the cross and Guan Yin, the Chinese goddess of compassion whose name means “One who hears the world’s cries,” witness the death and destruction; atop the cloud, an angel weeps.

In stark contrast to the whiteness of the porcelain, other figures have mutated into cyborgs, adorned with brightly coloured bionic limbs and heads fashioned from fragments of plastic toys. De Vries refers to these plastic additions as “modern invaders.” He notes: “The ever-increasing ubiquity of non-biodegradable plastic, supposedly indestructible, brings the installation into our own, more toxic age.”

The work has already received significant international acclaim and powerfully captures both the fragility and resilience of ceramics. Since 2012, War and Pieces has toured across Europe, Asia and the United States, with De Vries subtly adapting the installation to each location.



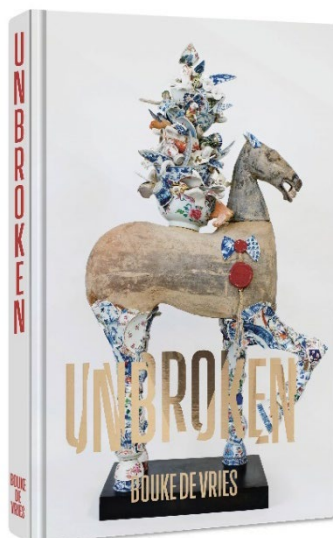
*War & Pieces, displayed in Charlottenburg Berlin, courtesy of Bouke de Vries*



*War & Pieces (details), 2012, Bouke de Vries, 110 x 1000 cm, courtesy of Bouke de Vries.*

## Publication

A book entitled *Bouke de Vries: Unbroken* will be published to accompany the exhibition. Edited by Princessehof ceramics curator Wendy Gers, it features a selection of the finest works from the British-Dutch artist's oeuvre. Internationally renowned art experts such as former Design Museum director Alice Black, gallerist Adrian Sassoon, head of applied arts at the Rijksmuseum Femke Diercks, director Xa Sturgiss of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and many other prominent figures have contributed essays and entries on Bouke de Vries' art and works. Former Dutch Design Award winner Sybren Kuiper is responsible for the graphic design of this first and only overview of De Vries' work.



Details: Price €34.95. 176 pages in colour. Bound. Bilingual (Dutch and English). ISBN 9789462626287.

## **Sustainable to the core**

Sustainability is a central thread running through both the work of Bouke de Vries and the exhibition UNBROKEN. The artist transforms broken and discarded shards into meaningful works of art, prompting reflection on themes such as value, impermanence, and reuse. The exhibition itself is also built around the principle of sustainability. Existing display cases are repurposed, and circular choices have been made regarding exhibition and print materials.

Sustainability has long been a key pillar of the Keramiekmuseum Princessehof's programming. With exhibitions such as Sustainable Ceramics #1—the first in a series focused on sustainability in ceramics—the museum actively engages with pressing ecological themes in contemporary ceramic art. In recent solo exhibitions by artists such as Yoon Seok-Hyeon (2021–2022), Humade (2022), and Keeley Haftner (2023), the Princessehof has deliberately showcased artists who experiment with questions of sustainability in ceramic production and society at large. UNBROKEN fits seamlessly within this vision.

## **Bouke de Vries: innovator in ceramics**

Bouke de Vries, who is based in London, is known for his unique approach to ceramics. He transforms broken and discarded shards into extraordinary works of art that evoke reflections on beauty and perfection. His background in fashion and textile design, as well as his training as a ceramic restorer, make his work a joy to behold.

This combination of craftsmanship and creativity makes his art both visually impressive and conceptually stimulating.

De Vries' work is included in many important international collections and is represented by leading galleries in the UK and the Netherlands.



*Bouke de Vries. Photo by Felix Mueller*

## **Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics**

The Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics is honoured to be the first museum in the Netherlands to present a major retrospective of Bouke de Vries. With *UNBROKEN*, the museum offers a comprehensive selection of his most iconic works and demonstrates the power of broken ceramics in new, unexpected forms. This exhibition, curated by dr Wendy Gers, underscores the museum's mission to exhibit world-class contemporary ceramics.

*The exhibition has been made possible with the support of the Municipality of Leeuwarden, Van Achterbergh-Domhof, and Stichting Het Nieuwe Stads Weeshuis.*

*The acquisition of works was supported by the Mondriaan Fund, Club Céramique, and the Van Asperen – Van der Linden Fund.*

Note for editors: For more information and visual material, please contact the Marketing and Communications Department of the Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics. Bouke de Vries regularly visits the Netherlands and is available for interviews upon request. These can be arranged by contacting Janke Vlas:

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