

# Wall Street International

ART

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## Fractured Images

9 Jun — 15 Jul 2017 at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London, United Kingdom

23 JUNE 2017



Fractured Images. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

*China is a sleeping giant. Let her sleep, for when she wakes, she will move the world.*

*(Napoleon Bonaparte)*

Fractured pottery shards are glued together by golden rivulets, molten metal runs across fault-lines like glowing lava streams on a volcanic plain. They become map lines, raised scars, a documentation of past trauma. Where they are not glued back together, objects sit, blown apart, held forever in stasis, neither whole nor shattered, a frozen instant in time in which one single defining moment of violence and pain metamorphoses into a soulful, beautiful future. In the works of London-based Dutch artist Bouke de Vries, destruction leads not to the end, and pain does not mean failure, but, rather, a new beginning. In imperfection lie hope, strength and beauty. Fractured Images (9 June–15 July 2017), marks his first solo show at Kristin Hjellegjerde and features new works and original sculpture focusing on the ceramic history of China, the largest producer of ceramics the world has ever known.

In Fractured Images, de Vries examines the powerful role China has played not just as a major

producer, but as an influence on the art of ceramics throughout the world. From the Islamic pottery of the Middle East and Persia to the birth of the iconic willow pattern and Chinoiserie of 18th-century Britain and the art of Dutch Delftware, China has been the biggest single influence in the history of ceramics.

His work is also intrinsically linked to his experience as a ceramics conservator, imbuing historic pottery with new life. De Vries laments the underlying Western attitude that once something is broken it is only fit to be discarded; instead he chooses to celebrate the Chinese and Japanese tradition of repairing important objects so that the breakage is celebrated, rather than hidden. “I wanted to give these objects, which are regarded as valueless, a new story and move their history forwards,” he has said. “A broken object can still be as beautiful as a perfect object.”

As such, there is beautiful destruction and renewal everywhere: the breaks in a Chinese Han Dynasty cocoon jar are restored and celebrated with the golden fault-lines of the Japanese art of Kintsugi. An accompanying photograph of the vase in the broken state in which the artist originally found it lays out each fragment like an autopsy of body parts, a vision into the power of reconstruction and healing. Another such cocoon pot floats instead in a permanent state of being torn apart yet together. It is an explosion in bloom, adorned with butterflies in a nod to Dutch still lifes, with the creatures that symbolise rebirth. Similarly, Tang-dynasty figures are reconstructed on wire frames like strong, new skeletons; their missing parts only making the rest seem more solid: a horse and rider are able to carry on, and a camel, that ship of the desert upon which so many loads of ceramics were transported along the Silk Road over the centuries, stands proud.

The exhibition also has a hefty dose of humour, from rice bowls made (very literally) from rice, to a large map of China... made of china. The latter hangs on the wall, composed of shattered pieces of 18th-20th century blue and white porcelain. Their surfaces undulate to give it topography, a cheeky ‘Made in China’ stamp catching the eye from one of the shards. People also make an appearance, in the form of a Han-dynasty pottery figure balancing what looks like a precarious pile of pots upon its head. Its ceramic body survives; its once-wooden arms have long since rotted away. The curved forms of the pots give the pile the appearance of an infinity column, a Brancusian touch skipping across the centuries from ancient China via a shipwreck off the Malaysian coast: a 2000-year-old statue meets 15th-century pots to become a tribal totem for the modern world.

Importantly, this exhibition also marks the first time de Vries has created a ‘new’ piece, not comprised of salvaged porcelain, but specially sculpted. A plaster doll in the form of a delicate Chinese dancer with curving, tapering fingers is resplendent in a richly embroidered dress. Its green embellishments echo the expensive jade funerary outfits of the ancient Chinese elite – jade, of course, thought to provide eternal life. Yet closer examination reveals them to be computer circuit boards and gold wiring. Tech, modern China’s big mass export, becomes entwined with its history of ceramic production, old meeting new. This empress is a Klimt piece come to life, a kiss of a glimmering dream of forever.

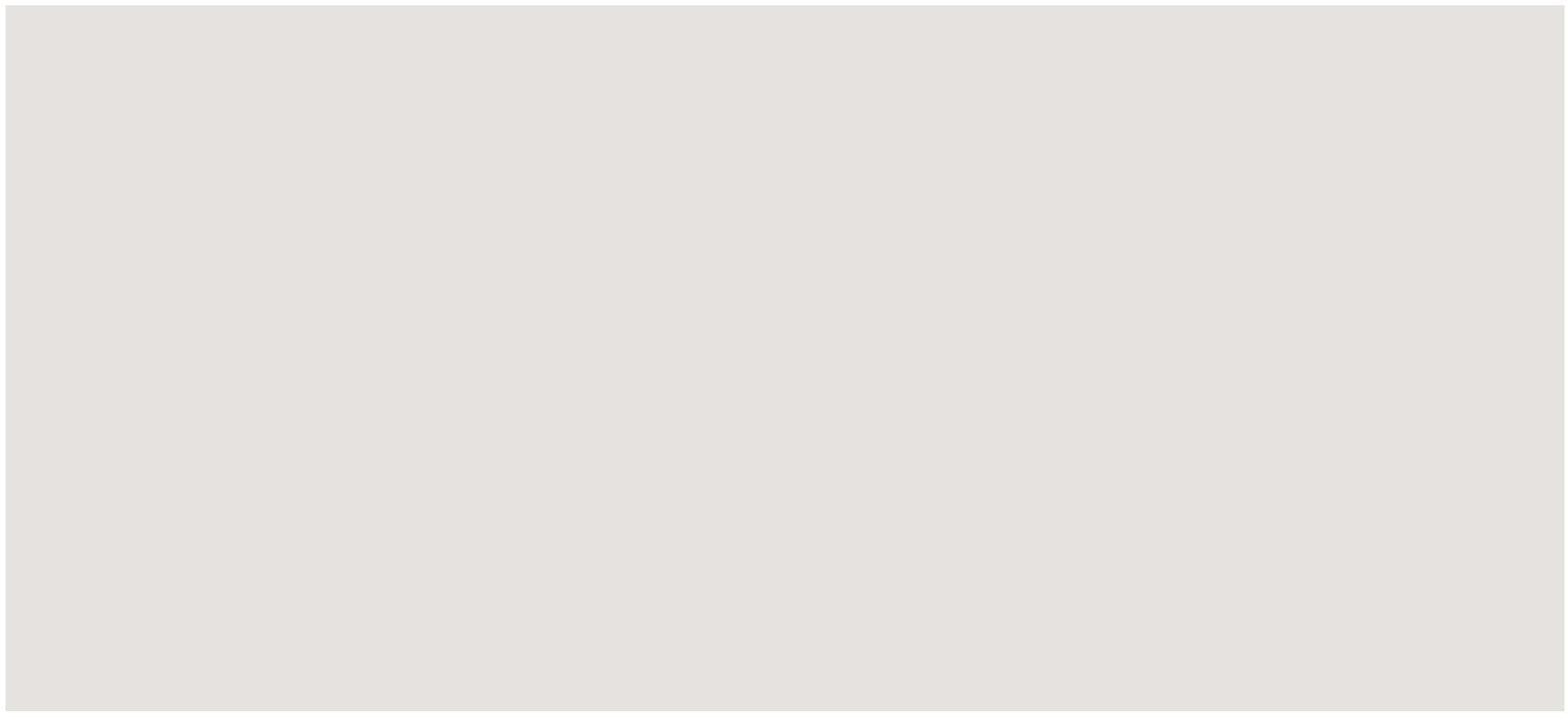
Ceramics are perhaps the ultimate contradiction. One of the most fragile materials, so easily shattered, they are also one of the more durable. They outlast the rust that eats metal, and the rot that takes over fabric and wood and flesh over the millennia to emerge as beautiful as they were the day they were created. They are frozen in time by fire, invincible yet vulnerable, a complete state of strength and tenderness. They outlast cultures, and they show us that in brokenness there is chance to be reborn and be loved anew. We are all greater than the mere sum of our parts, and de Vries reminds us that what is broken can be rebuilt, our biggest trauma can make us our most whole, and the world still turns, full of new beauty.

# Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

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## Opening hours

Tuesday to Saturday

From 11am to 6pm

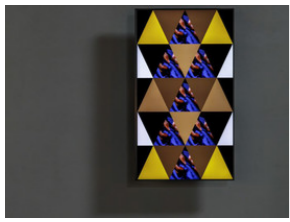
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## Captions

1. Fractured Images. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery
2. Fractured Images. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery
3. Fractured Images. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

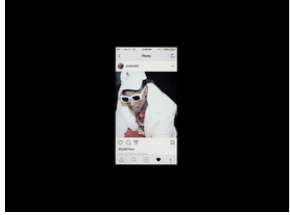
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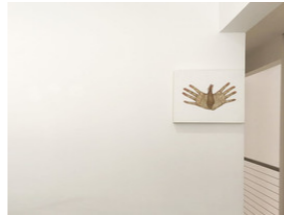
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