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Coup de Théâtre. A Play of Clay

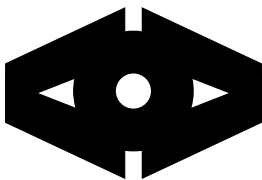
(03.04.2026 - 13.09.2026)

Abby preserves an important and extensive historical ceramics collection. Much of it was not made merely for practical use, but also to be seen, displayed, and admired.

From imposing table pieces to highly stylized little vases, from beer-bellied pitchers to fragile genre scenes, from stunning trompe-l'oeils to grotesque caricatures: for centuries, ceramics have brought theatre to the shelves—and today they are enjoying a full revival.

In Coup de Théâtre, Abby highlights the theatrical character of ceramics through a selection of remarkable historical and contemporary pieces. Peeping potters welcome!

The exhibition combines 90 pieces of historical ceramics and works by Athos Burez and Gustave de Jonghe from Abby's collection with contemporary ceramics by Uģis Albiņš*, Nick Cave, William Cobbing, Ilke Cop, Eric Croes, Lou Cruard*, Maen Florin, Bart Gielen, Daan Gielis, Béatrice Guilleman, Helena Hafemann, Jessica Harrison, Kato Herbots*, Beate Höing, Eléonore Joulin, Mirthe Klück, Joke Raes, Augustas Serapinas, Wieki Somers, Roeland Tweelinckx, Sharon Van Overmeiren, Jonas Vansteenkiste, Goedel Vermandere, and Anne Wenzel.



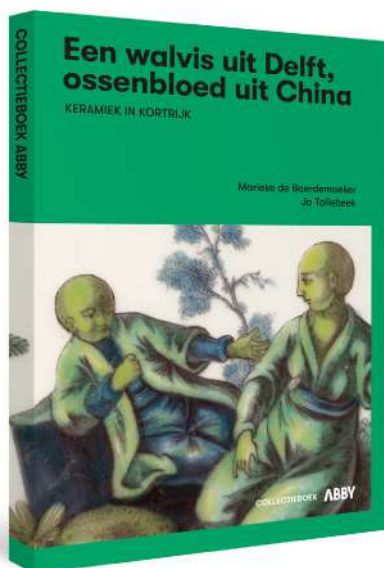
*** During this exhibition, in collaboration with Designregio Kortrijk, Abby presents the results of the creative process of three young international designers, who, in the autumn of 2025 as Designers in Residence, were inspired by the region's rich ceramics tradition and the transformative power of ceramics.**

About the ceramics collection

Abby manages one of the most important and extensive ceramics collections in Flanders. The collection encompasses all types of ceramics—unglazed earthenware, faience, majolica, stoneware, and porcelain. It spans from prehistory to the twenty-first century and offers an overview of the major production centers worldwide, with pieces from China and Japan, the Persian and Arab worlds, and the largest (Western) European centers.

The collection was thoroughly appraised and studied in 2022–2023. From more than 3,000 items, a core collection of 360 objects was selected. This was done from three perspectives: the world in time and space (a fascination with history, the discovery and ordering of the world); the fullness of life (religions and rituals, animal and human behavior, food culture); and a focus on identities (nature and culture, the view of the other, political identities).

You can read all about it in the collection book *Een walvis uit Delft, ossenbloed uit China* (Marieke De Baerdemaeker and Jo Tollebeek, 2025), available at Abby Shop.





Anne Wenzel – Bright Solitude (Chandelier) (2007)

Metal and ceramics; 270 x 165 x 168 cm / Collection Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch/NL

This nearly three-meter-high sculpture resembles a blackened Baroque chandelier that has collapsed and toppled onto the floor. The work of artist Anne Wenzel (Schüttorf/DE, 1972) connects historical tradition with contemporary relevance. On one hand, the installation evokes a candle-covered chandelier in the Baroque style. On the other, it is a direct reference to the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005: Wenzel based it on a photograph of a fallen chandelier in a stately home in flooded New Orleans. The imagination of violence and decay, and how it can be expressed through beauty, is a recurring theme in Wenzel's work.

Lou Cruard – Étoffe et les Murs (2025)

Curtain of handmade and hand-glazed bricks and polyamide rope; 5.5 m x 1 m /
Developed as part of the Designers in Residence program of Designregio Kortrijk,
with the support of Flanders State of the Art

Mockup © Lou Cruard



Nothing evokes the image of theatre as strongly as a dramatic red curtain. For this exhibition, Lou Cruard (Paris/FR, 1996) translated this iconic image into a monumental installation with a surprising twist. Instead of fabric, the curtain is made of hundreds of individually shaped and partially glazed ceramic bricks. Using a 'vanissage' technique she developed herself, she wove the bricks together into a flowing, undulating whole. In this way, she transforms the brick wall—a symbol of division and boundaries—into something that can also open and connect. Will you step inside?

GANG

Roeland Tweelinckx – To the Left (2025)

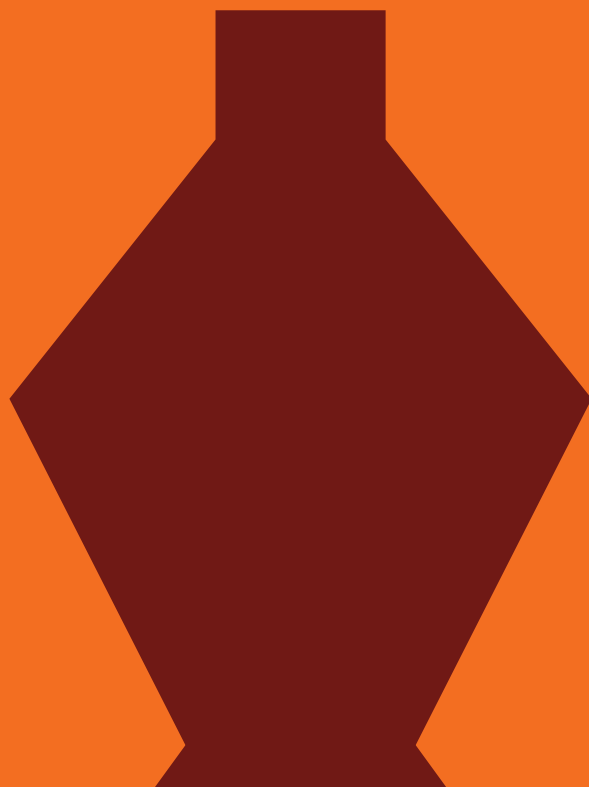
Ceramics, glaze; 40 x 40 x 5 cm /
Collection Paul en Marie-Rose Declercq-Benoot, Kortrijk



Photo Paul Declercq, © Roeland Tweelinckx

Act I

ROLE PLAY



ON LEADING AND SUPPORTING FIGURES, CARICATURES AND GROTESQUES

Not only on stage is there acting—your porcelain cabinet is teeming with characters, too. Figurines and statuettes are not mere “objects”; they do something—they play meaningful roles. Often, they depict recognizable types: elegant ladies, sturdy men, exotic figures, humble artisans, or grotesque fools. From charming to caricatural, they always tell a story.

Graceful motifs, theatrical poses, expressive colors, and stereotypical attributes disguise the material and give each figure a distinctive identity. The maker also plays a role: by imitating, exaggerating, or interpreting, they consciously or unconsciously translate ideas about class, culture, gender, beauty, and status into faience and porcelain.

The ceramic pieces in this exhibition are actor, narrator, and mirror of the world around us. They appear in thematic scenes, with display cases and pedestals as their stages. As a visitor, you are both spectator and co-player—in the gym installation by Augustas Serapinas, even literally. After all, an exhibition is never neutral; it is a lively play in which roles and meanings constantly shift.

Art or kitsch? Beauty, in the end, lies in the eye of the beholder.

LEADING FIGURES

ART COMMISSION

Augustas Serapinas – Apollo and Company (2026)

Augustas Serapinas (Vilnius, 1990) is one of Lithuania's most internationally active contemporary artists. With subtle humor and participation from local communities, he tells stories about culture and memory. This work originates from his training at the M. K. Čiurlionis National School of Art, where he had to copy classical plaster models from Antiquity and the Renaissance. In his gym installations, these classical heads take on a new form as fitness weights—a reference to Western ideals of perfect art and the ideal body. For this exhibition, he designed three new gym machines with ceramic weights. The true leading role belongs to the visitors: they are invited to activate the gym themselves every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Join in the play!



Jonas Vansteenkiste – Subdural (2021-2022)

© Jonas Vansteenkiste



Jonas Vansteenkiste (Kortrijk, 1984) explores the relationship between body and space in his work. In his Subdural series, he places ceramic arms, adorned with subtle drawings and keyholes, on metal supports above mirrored floors. He draws inspiration from ex-votos: offerings or gifts given in gratitude or as a plea. The sculptures balance between assertiveness and aimlessness; the

material and the suspended arrangement enhance their fragility. Mirrors and keyholes invite reflection, both literal and psychological, and explore the underlying layers of body, mind, and memory.

Manufacture Höchst – Hercules (Germany, ca. 1760)

© Collection Abby Kortrijk



In the theatre of ceramics, mythological figures were particularly suited for leading roles. A beloved character was Hercules, whose extraordinary strength had been the subject of countless stories since antiquity. The demigod defeated the gigantic lion that terrorized the valley of Nemea and was thought to be invulnerable. In fragile ceramics, the imposing Hercules appeared sometimes threatening, sometimes fighting, with club and lion skin, as in the Höchst figure. It was a portrayal that reflected a

deep eighteenth-century fascination. Hercules was a barbarian, a hero who was above all a wild man. At the same time, his primeval strength seemed capable of rejuvenating a weary culture.

SUPPORTING FIGURES

Noseda (replica) – Bridal Procession in Three Parts ⁽²⁰⁰³⁾

Not everyone could claim a leading role or be equally heroic. No image better captures the role of the extras than this melancholic bridal procession, which struggles to get underway. The guests trudge forward, deeply bent, across the Kortrijk countryside. It was Alfons Noseda who created this bridal procession, a typical example of early twentieth-century figurative ceramics from Kortrijk. The textile workers, musicians, and other figures, produced in large numbers, were very popular. This early twenty-first-century replica illustrates the lasting appeal of such earthenware pieces, which always carried a strong local color.

© Collection Abby Kortrijk



Johann Joachim Kändler – Woodcutter with Saw and Axe ^(Meissen/DE, ca. 1750)

In the mid-eighteenth century, the world of ceramics was also populated by the army of craftsmen who brought color to the streets: shoemakers, copper-smiths, porcelain restorers, street sweepers, and many others. This figure of a woodcutter in hard porcelain was possibly made by Johann Joachim Kändler in Meissen, one of Europe's major porcelain centers. The woodcutter comes from a successful series of eighteen figures—fifteen men and three women—depicting various trades. Kändler was a sociologist avant la lettre, with a particular interest in human relationships, social groups, and classes. A colorful world in which everyone was assigned a fixed place.

William Cobbing – The Kiss 2 (2017)

William Cobbing (London/UK, 1974) challenges traditional ideas about ceramics through sculpture, video, and performance. In his performative works, we see people working with shapeless clay: pushing, cutting, and manipulating the masses of mud in repetitive, almost meditative gestures. In his work, clay is not merely a material, but a living, flowing element that blurs the boundaries between body, object, and environment. Cobbing explores the tactile and emotional power of clay—not as a static object, but as a living experience in which the material itself becomes art. In this exhibition, you can also see his videos in *Ceramic Circus* and *Hall of Mirrors*.

© William Cobbing

**Nick Cave – Devil Takes a Bride** (2020-2024)

Nick Cave (Warracknabeal/Australia, 1957) is globally known as a musician, writer, and frontman of Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds. Less well known is that he also creates visual art. In *The Devil – A Life*, he tells the life story of the Devil—from birth to death—through seventeen handmade ceramic figurines, inspired by Victorian Staffordshire figures. Rather than a frightening monster, this Devil is a human, complex character grappling with themes such as love, struggle, loss, and forgiveness. The series is loosely inspired by Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man' from *As You Like It*, poetically portraying the contrasts of the human condition.

CARICATURES AND GROTESQUES

Toby Jug (Staffordshire/UK, 19de century)



© Collection Abby Kortrijk

The ceramic stage was also historically populated by more eccentric figures, often caricatural in appearance. Among them, the Tobies took a prominent place. Toby Jugs are likely named after a popular English drinker from the mid-eighteenth century. They immediately inspire affection. The seated men with large bellies hold their beer mugs, ready to raise another toast. The Tobies were mainly produced in Staffordshire, England. They were

eagerly collected and often used in pubs and homes. These are humorous figures, not least because they were often modeled after well-known men. Highlander Scotsmen, Quaker men, or even Winston Churchill could appear on stage.

Sharon Van Overmeiren – Retired Summoner (2021)



© Ruben van Vliet

The work of Sharon Van Overmeiren (Antwerp, 1985) reflects the abundance of visual information in our time. By removing shapes from their original context, Van Overmeiren blurs classical hierarchies and highlights the playful and poetic character of everyday and cultural imagery. In her ceramic sculptures—which are at once elegant and grotesque—she copies, pastes, and combines recognizable elements into uncanny, hybrid beings.

Eric Croes – Big Key Mirror ⁽²⁰²⁴⁾, Muscoloman 02 ⁽²⁰²⁵⁾ & Muscoloman 03 ⁽²⁰²⁵⁾

Eric Croes (La Louvière, 1978) lives and works in Brussels. In his ceramic and bronze sculptures, humans and animals come together in colorful, playful compositions full of cultural references, from mythology to folklore and historical figures. Croes combines traditional craft techniques with modern production methods, transcending the tension between craft and art, tradition and modernity. The result is poetic, imaginative universes full of symbols, stories, and wonder.



LEADING FIGURES


Augustas Serapinas – Apollo and Company (2026)

Ceramics, glaze, stainless steel; dimensions variable/

Courtesy of the artist

ART COMMISSION


Jonas Vansteenkiste – Subdural (2021-2022)

Ceramics, metal, mirror; 150 x 100 x 100 cm / Courtesy of the artist, with

thanks to the European Ceramic Work Centre


Manufacture Höchst – Hercules
(Germany, ca. 1760)

Hard porcelain; 30 x 16 x 12 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk


Anonymous – Hercules and the Nemean Lion (Andenne, 18th century)

Hard porcelain; 61 x 35 x 19 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk


Anonymous – Dish with Bathing Woman
(Montelupo/IT, 17th century)

Faience; Ø 35 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk


Pieter-Jozef Laigneil – Tanagra (1900-1925)

Unglazed earthenware; 25 x 7.5 x 6 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

SUPPORTING FIGURES



Noseda (replica) – Bridal Procession in Three Parts (2003)

Glazed earthenware; 26 x 150 x 21 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Noseda – Spinner (ca. 1920)

Glazed earthenware; 14.5 x 10 x 12.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Caesens, Man with Pipe and Woman with Stick (first half 20th century)

Glazed earthenware; 26 x 9 x 10 cm (2x) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Johann Joachim Kändler – Woodcutter with Saw and Axe (Meissen/DE, ca. 1750)

Hard porcelain; 23 x Ø 9 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Meyer – Allegory of Fire (Berlin/DE, 1765)

Hard porcelain; 24 x 10 x 8 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Pair of Figurines – Musician Couple (Niderviller/FR, second half 18th century)

Faïence; 18 x 8 x 9 cm (2x) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Pair of Figurines – Fishmongers (Liège, third quarter 18th century)

Stoneware; 24 x 7 x 11 cm (2x) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Sculptural Group – Boy with Bird's Nest and Little Boy (St. Clement/FR, 18th century)

Faïence; 21 x 13 x 10 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Pair of Flower Holders in the Shape of a Man and a Woman (Chantilly/FR, ca. 1750)

Soft porcelain; 28 x Ø 10 cm (2x) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Pair of Figurines of the Prince and Princess of Wales (Staffordshire/UK, 1862)

Stoneware; 24.5 x 17 x 7 cm (2x) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Nick Cave – Devil Takes a Bride (2020-2024)

Ceramics, glaze; 39 x 19.5 x 11 cm / Xavier Hufkens



William Cobbing – The Kiss 2 (2017)

Video; 6'04" / Courtesy of the artist

CARICATURES AND GROTESQUES



Philippe Mombaers – Drinking Fountain with Bacchus (Brussels, 1850-1900)

Faience; 67 x 40 x 45 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



'Jacquot' – Jug in the Shape of a Drinking Man (Echternach/LUX, 1864)

Sandstoneware; 26.5 x 10 x 14 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Jug in the Shape of a Man (Neuvillette/FR, 1900-1950)

Glazed earthenware; 20 x 9.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Toby Jug (Staffordshire/UK, 19th century)

Stoneware; 26 x 11 x 12.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Vinegar Jug (Vindfontaine/FR, 19th century)

Glazed earthenware; 55 x 32 x 18 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Anthropomorphic Jug (France, 18th century)

Faïence; 19,5 x 8 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Frères Caesens, The Seven Deadly Sins, Pipe Rack (Kortrijk, ca. 1920)

Glazed earthenware; 8 x 38 x 6.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Sharon Van Overmeiren – Retired Summoner (2021)

Ceramics; 180 x 50 x 25 cm / Courtesy of the artist



Eric Croes – Big Key Mirror (2024)

Ceramics, glaze, mirror; 35 x 33 x 7 cm / Courtesy of the artist and Sorry We're Closed

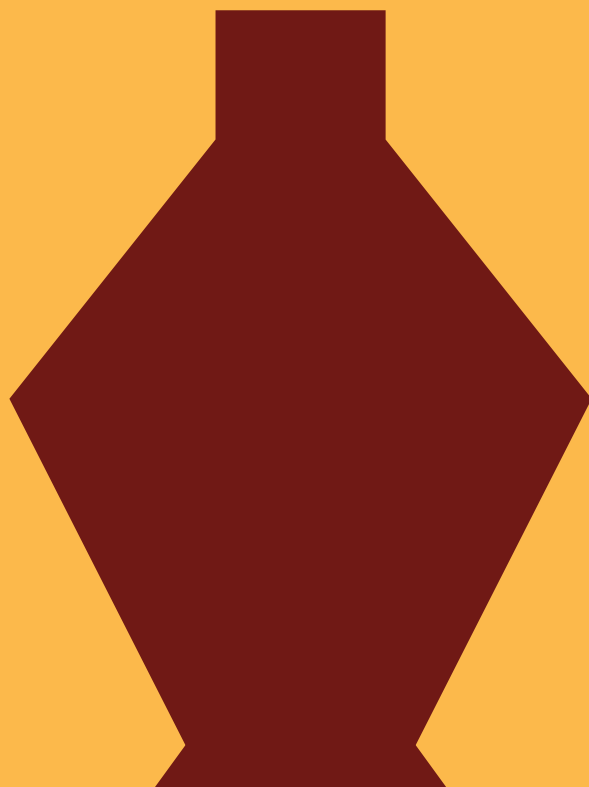


Eric Croes – Muscoloman 02 & Muscoloman 03 (2025)

Ceramics, glaze; 40 x 16 x 12 cm and 36 x 16 x 11 cm / Courtesy of the artist and Sorry We're Closed

Act II

SHOW & DISPLAY



ON MANTELPieces, TABLEUX VIVANTS, SHOWPIECES AND SETS

For centuries, plates, vases, and figurines have been displayed in glass cabinets, on mantels, or on tables. They are admired for their beauty and craftsmanship, but behind this aesthetic appearance lies world history. Ceramics is closely linked to trade, colonialism, and cultural exchange. A piece is never just a piece.

Famous Delftware emerged in the 17th century as a Dutch imitation of Oriental porcelain. With European motifs and techniques, the exotic became familiar. On the “fireplace stage” of Delftware, pastoral scenes and popular chinoiserie decorations were performed, reinforcing a sense of national identity.

The discovery of the world brought European collectors into contact with other cultures. These were often arranged in a hierarchy of civilizations: their own Western culture was naturally placed at the top, while newly discovered cultures were quickly stereotyped. Yet everything foreign and exotic fascinated them. These showpieces brought the distant world into European homes, displaying power, status, and cultural curiosity.

In charming tableaux vivants, biscuit figurines have performed their own little plays since around 1800. Biscuit, delicate and unglazed, was originally used as an imitation of marble and perfectly suited the neoclassical taste. Production flourished in the 19th century. Pristine white scenes of dancing shepherd children, flute players, and romantic couples conveyed a nostalgic ideal of simplicity, calm, and innocence.

With the rise of urbanization and industrialization, the demand for personalized tableware grew. Sales representatives went door to door with sample plates, allowing customers to compose the decorations on their dinnerware to their own taste. Patterns, fonts, and motifs show the versatile possibilities—each plate a graphic stage for shifting aesthetic preferences.

MANTELPIECES

Petrus van Marum ('De Romeyn') – Two Lidded Vases, Baluster Form (Delft/NL, 1740-1760)

These 18th-century Delftware vases do not lack impact. Standing on a mantel or in a cabinet, they are part of a larger ensemble. Such a “garniture” formed a focal point in the interiors of bourgeois homes and royal palaces. These sets of vases showcased the exclusive wealth of their owners, until they were democratized: by the 20th century, nearly every grandmother’s inheritance included a Delftware cabinet set. Delft blue-and-white was long considered the finest faience in Europe and inspired many production centers elsewhere. “Delft” became a household name, and the “garnitures” were its ambassadors.

Folded Plate (Frankfurt/DE, early 18th century)



© Collection Abby Kortrijk

European earthenware emerged from a desire: to rival—and perhaps surpass—the brilliance of Oriental porcelain. Chinese and Japanese forms inspired, decorations were copied and appropriated. This blue-and-white folded plate, made in Frankfurt at the beginning of the 18th century, is decorated with Chinese-style scenes and floral motifs. The aim was to reproduce the Chinese originals as closely as possible. It was a complex game: on

one hand, a distant, exotic world appeared, accessible only to the powerful; on the other hand, the exotic became familiar, stripped of its strangeness.

Helena Hafemann – Untitled (Fadenschein Nr. 1) (2026)

© Helena Hafemann,
courtesy Jarmuschek + Partner



In her series Fadenschein (2016–present), Helena Hafemann (Wiesbaden/DE, 1997) explores what happens to the value of everyday objects when their function disappears. The series began when a beloved porcelain plate shattered. Rather than discarding the fragments, she connected them with hundreds of fine threads, “freezing” the moment of collapse. Using colorful threads

between the shards, Hafemann investigates loss, transformation, and the meaning of material things.

TABLEAUX VIVANTS

Ilke Cop – Grace II (2025)

© We Document Art



In her Grace Grit Grin series, Ilke Cop (Brussels, 1988) works with damaged porcelain figurines of women, whose heads or limbs are missing. Once intended as decorative objects, they depict women in roles we all know too well: mother, caregiver, lover. Their bodies are silent, yet their hands continue to speak—small, practiced gestures of

giving, carrying, enduring. Cop chooses not to restore the figurines, but to re-make them. Using polymer clay, she fashions new heads and limbs in her own likeness. The resulting figures are expressive and grotesque. Their smiles—once symbols of politeness and subservience—become grins of self-determination and defiance.

Falconet – Bucolic Scene (Tournai, second half of 18th century)

This biscuit group was fired in Sèvres in 1760 and mounted on ormolu (gilded bronze). Like an intimate chamber play, it shows a charming peasant girl milking a cow while a peasant boy feeds the animal with straw. The piece evokes gentle rural life, a pastoral ideal above all meant to convey calm. Such naturalistic scenes remained popular in the 19th and 20th centuries. The idealized peasant life appeared in bourgeois salons, among richly decorated furniture and heavy drapery, reflecting a longing for simplicity and authenticity.



© Collection Abby Kortrijk

SHOWPIECES

Gustave de Jonghe – The Japanese Figurine (second half of 19th century)

The fascination with Japanese and Chinese curiosities grew in the second half of the 19th century into an international phenomenon. After Japan reopened to the West in 1854, Japanese objects were prominently displayed at World Exhibitions, leaving a deep impression on artists and collectors. Japonisme—the Western enthusiasm for Japanese art and so-called “chinoiserie”—found its way not only into ceramics but also into painting. A striking example is Gustave de Jonghe’s *The Japanese Figurine*, in which an elegant lady in a

wealthy bourgeois interior shows off her latest exotic acquisition while her friend admires it, hands clasped.

Flower Holder in the Shape of a Chinese Man

(Lille, ca. 1760)

© Collection Abby Kortrijk



The many showpieces from the Far East in the Kortrijk museum collection reflect the widespread Orientalism of the 19th and 20th centuries. Yet the fascination with the “exotic” began much earlier. In the 17th and 18th centuries, European ceramists were inspired by trade with Asia. In decorative and extravagant objects, they translated their admiration for Eastern culture into the fashion of the time. Clichés and stereotypical motifs were by no means avoided, as shown by this flower holder, made around

1760 in Lille in the shape of a Chinese man.

SETS

Mosa – Plate (Maastricht/NL, first half of 20th century)

The 19th- and 20th-century bourgeois lived in a world in which everything seemed possible. It was an eclectic universe where, much like in the grand department stores, the range of products in all shapes and styles appeared almost endless. Everyone could make their own selection and finalize it to order. Various production centers created sample plates to showcase the many possibilities to their clients and entice them. Hotels wishing to display their logo on breakfast cups and plates, newlyweds assembling a wedding service with their favorite flowers, or local shooting clubs wanting to see their own colors represented—thanks to industrial production techniques, it was all possible.

MANTELPIECES

**Athos Burez – Untitled (Delft Plaster Cast)** (2012)

Photographic paper, baryta paper; 83 x 58 cm (framed) /

Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Petrus van Marum ('De Romeyn') – Two Lidded Vases, Baluster Form** (Delft/NL, 1740-1760)

Faience; 29 x Ø 14 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Plate** (Delft/NL, 18th century)

Faience; Ø 23 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Plate** (Delft/NL, 18th century)

Faience; Ø 22 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Plate** (China, 18th century)

Hard porcelain; Ø 22 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Plaquette** (Delft/NL, 18th century)

Faience; 24.5 x 34 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Folded Plate** (Frankfurt/DE, early 18th century)

Faience; Ø 22 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Boch Frères – Small Plate** (La Louvière, 1850-1880)

Stoneware; Ø 12.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Plate** (China, 17th century)

Hard Porselein; Ø 33 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



**Helena Hafemann – Untitled
(Fadenschein Nr. 1) (2026)**

*Porcelain plate, thread; 52.5 x 19 x 2 cm / Courtesy of the artist and
Jarmuschek + Partner, Berlin*

TABLEAUX VIVANTS



**Nicolas Lecreux – Allegory of Summer &
Allegory of Autumn (Tournai, second half of 18th century)**

Biscuit; 13 x 8 cm (2 pcs) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



**Nicolas Lecreux – Bucolic Scene
(Tournai, second half of 18th century)**

Biscuit; 35 x Ø 13 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Falconet – Bucolic Scene (Tournai, 1750–1800)

Biscuit; 19 x 29 x Ø 24 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Ilke Cop – Grace II (2025)

Porcelain, polymer clay, oil on oak panel; 25 x 25 x 24.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist & Tatjana Pieters, Ghent

SHOWPIECES



**Gustave de Jonghe – The Japanese
Figurine (second half of 19th century)**

Oil on panel; 85 x 71 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



**Representation of the Goddess Ma Kou
with a Hind (China, 18th century)**

Porcelain; 38.5 x 12.5 x 9.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Plate from the K'ang Hsi Period
(China, 1662-1722)

Porcelain; Ø 35 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Flower Holder in the Shape of a Chinese Man (Lille, ca. 1760)

Faience; 31 x 16 x 12 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Pair of Figures (Shanxi/China, 16th century)

Glazed earthenware; 44 x 12 x 10 cm (2 pcs) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Bowl (Chantilly /FR, late 18th century)

Soft porcelain; 7.2 x Ø 15 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Flowerpot (Chantilly /FR, 1725-1750)

Soft porcelain; 10.5 x Ø 11 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Lion (Canton/China, ca. 1870)

Stoneware; 39 x 57 x 35 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Monochrome Vase (China, Qianlong period, 18th century)

Hard porcelain; 34 x Ø 25.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Bottle, Red Monochrome 'Oxblood'
(China, 18th century)

Hard porcelain; 22.5 x Ø 13 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

SETS



Workshop Fleury – Sample Plate (Paris/FR, 1825-1829)

Hard porcelain; Ø 23.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



JB Capellemans – Advertising Plate (Jemappes, 1858)

Stoneware; 2.5 x Ø 23.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Plate (Limoges /FR, early 20th century)

Hard porcelain; Ø 23 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Large Plate (Arita/Japan, ca. 1900)

Porcelain; Ø 45.5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Plate Demonstrating 21 Decoration Techniques (Lunéville/FR, ca. 1830)

Stoneware; Ø 26 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Mosa – Sample Plate (Maastricht/NL, 1925–1950)

Stoneware; Ø 20.9 cm & Ø 21,4 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Plate with Rebus (Choisy/FR, 1824-1836)

Stoneware; Ø 21.7 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

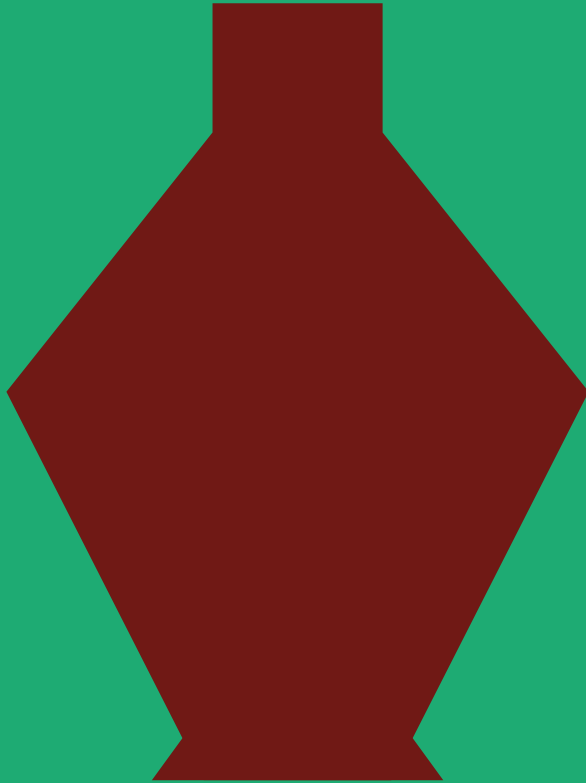


Société Céramique – Plates (Maastricht/NL, first half of 20th century)

Stoneware; Ø 25 cm & Ø 19,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

Act III

ALL THE WORLD'S
A STAGE



ON THE CERAMIC CIRCUS, THE HALL OF MIRRORS, AND NATURAL TALENTS

If Shakespeare claimed that all the world's a stage, ceramics show that it can accommodate every role. The play of characters and personas unfolded in Act I, and stories and scenes from world history took the stage in Act II. But the natural world, too—in all its beauty, wildness, and peculiarity—has always been an endless source of inspiration.

Since time immemorial, ceramics has sought to capture nature with encyclopedic discipline. It both aestheticized and educated: series of animals and plants were depicted with meticulous attention to detail. Stylized scenes conveyed a cultivated world, while organic forms illustrated nature's untamed vitality. Ceramics can bring nature indoors, shrink it, and shape it—but it can never fully encompass it.

Sometimes, the global stage becomes a hall of mirrors. The desire to render nature as faithfully as possible gave rise to *trompe-l'œil* ceramics. Fruits, vegetables, and animals appear so lifelike that they trick the eye. Faience makers obsessed over details: veins in leaves, discoloration on rinds, a fly perched on a cabbage leaf. Here, nature became hyperreal. From Brussels cabbage to French pears, or a terrine shaped like a wild boar's head, the viewer is invited to look twice.

Finally, pieces that defy categorization can always find a place under the circus tent. There, failed attempts are elevated to art, and broken pieces have their own particular beauty. This too is ceramics: a colorful procession of eccentric oddities, tamed animals, fascinating hybrids, and a hint of nudity to be admired discreetly.

CERAMIC CIRCUS

Maen Florin – Performer I, Zip (2020)



© Steven Decroos

Maen Florin (Kleine-Brogel, 1954) has always worked with clay as a sculptor—initially as an intermediate material, now as a fully-fledged medium. The layered, water-color-like glazes give her sculptures exceptional depth and intensity. Florin's performers appear inspired by the Commedia dell'Arte, but with subtle additions of hair and textiles, folded hands, and inward-focused gazes, they take on an almost shamanic presence. Balancing humor and tragedy, dream and nightmare, strength and vulnerability, these beautiful freaks evoke the uneasy

tension between observing and exposing.

Peepshow

Plate with Erotic Scene

(China and the Netherlands, 2nd half of the 18th century)

Behind the scenes of the ceramic theatre, a secretive game was played, linking power and sex. In protocol pieces, masculinity and femininity rarely bore overt sexual connotations. But on a plate in “Amsterdams bont” from the second half of the 18th century, erotic desire and sexual submission were depicted without pretense. “*I shall not resist / Nor deny you pleasure*” (*‘Ik sal mij niet versetten / En uwe genoegte niet beletten*)—so reads the invitation. In this staging, gender conventions were repeatedly reinforced. Perhaps this, too, was a shadow play?

Tattooed Lady

Jessica Harrison – Painted Lady #25 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾

© Jessica Harrison



Jessica Harrison (St Bees/UK, 1982) works with materials ranging from ceramics and marble to paint and digital collages. In her *Painted Ladies* series, she tattoos classical porcelain figurines, combining male illustrations with over-idealized female forms. This creates a “second skin” that raises questions about beauty and the roles—or “costumes”—we (must) assume. This Royal Doulton figurine was adorned with explicit erotic tattoos taken from Russian prison tattoo encyclopedias by

Danzig Baldaev. In doing so, Harrison challenges traditional representations of the female body and subverts the conventions of the male gaze.

Rarities

Uģis Albiņš – Belgian Clay, Lost Door Wedge, Found Floor Tile Fragment ⁽²⁰²⁵⁾

Uģis Albiņš (Riga/Latvia, 1988) investigates how form, function, and context influence each other. For this project, he collected found objects in Kortrijk and its surroundings. As an outsider, small cultural differences in everyday objects become particularly apparent; they form an unconscious part of our heritage and shape the way we think and live. Albiņš gives his finds—a wooden door wedge, a tile shard, a piece of EVA foam—a new skin of 3D-printed clay, transforming them into poetic, half-organic, half-digital installations with mysterious new functions.

Tamed Animals

Two Pugs (Tournai, last quarter of the 18th century)

© Collection Abby Kortrijk



On their own little stage, these pugs steal the show. Pugs had been popular pets in Europe since the 17th century: their gentle, sociable nature made them beloved companions. In the 18th century, there was even a bona fide “pug mania.” In 1740, the Masonic Order of the Pug was established. Dogs became a favorite subject in applied arts. In Meissen,

porcelain pugs were produced in the mid-18th century, a practice later followed in Strasbourg, Höchst, and Tournai. This elaborately dressed Tournai pair sits atop high, flowered hills, ready for the festivities.

Beate Höing – Buddies (2023)

© Beate Höing



Beate Höing (Coesfeld/DE, 1966) draws inspiration for her ceramic sculptures and installations from folk art, ornaments, fairy tales, myths, and traditions. She intertwines reality, memory, and association into a play of ambiguity in which reality and fiction seamlessly merge. Her cheerful porcelain creations are at once familiar and unsettling.

The same holds true for this remarkable pair of dogs: the pug is already a heavily bred breed, but in this playful duo, genetic exaggeration seems to have been taken to the extreme.

HALL OF MIRRORS

Edible Art

Artichoke-Shaped Ointment Jar with Lid

(Workshop Trou, Saint-Cloud/FR, ca. 1725)

The world of faience and porcelain makers was also one of spectacular pieces, double roles, deception, and optical illusions. The most striking examples are the *trompe-l'oeils*. Soup tureens took the form of cabbages, butter dishes had delicately modeled lapwings as lids, and fruit in ceramic was scattered as decoration on tables. The line between real and fake blurred. Making these pieces was a matter of trial and error, patient restarts, and careful building. Creating an impressive cabbage required great skill: precisely shaping the leaves, correctly setting the kiln, and carefully applying paint and glaze. At any moment, the process could go entirely wrong. This was no amateur theater.

Éléonore Joulin – Cabbage Shoes or Chou-sures (2026)



© Éléonore Joulin

Éléonore Joulin (Paris/FR, 1987) lives and works in Brussels. Inspired by art history, gastronomy, and architecture, she transforms simple everyday ingredients—bread, cheese, and vegetables—into sculptural objects, like these cabbage-leaf slippers. With her handmade glazes, she creates *trompe-l'œil* effects that cleverly mimic reality. The material adds an unexpected twist: while vegetables wilt and bread molds, Joulin's ceramic sculptures endure eternally.



Mirthe Klück – Chew III (2024)

In the versatile practice of Mirthe Klück (The Hague/NL, 1991), material exploration is central, but in recent years she has focused primarily on ceramics. She investigates how ordinary, often ephemeral materials can take on a lasting form. Klück enlarges recognizable objects such as gummy bears and chewed gum into ceramic sculptures, preserving the dented, pinched, and pressed traces of teeth and fingers. The forms are created from 3D scans that are then cast and glazed in ceramic.

Towel

Goedel Vermandere – Inertia (2023)

Goedel Vermandere works with Jan Arickx and Lonne Deliens in the Kortrijk studio Coup-de-Foudre, creating porcelain light objects where art and craft merge. Each work emerges from a dialogue between hand and material, with the porcelain—fragile and unpredictable—finding its own path. Transparency, structure, and organic forms are central, while light and shadow bring the sculptures to life. Imperfections are consciously embraced as signs of authenticity. Their work transcends functional lighting: these are poetic objects that invite gentle touch and contemplation.

Animalia

Wieki Somers – High Tea Pot (2003)

© Studio Wieki Somers



Wieki Somers (Sprang-Capelle/NL, 1976) is co-founder of Studio Wieki Somers. Her work balances between design and art, with material and poetic imagination at its core. In this High Tea Pot, a pig skull has become a teapot. The tea cozy is made of rat fur. Imagine that bourgeois ritual: the moment tea is ready, a few people

are already gathered around the small table—and then appears this furry animal skull. A delightful shock, a collision of contradictory thoughts: horror and pleasure, festivity and menace.

Tea Time

Bart Gielen – Bottle (2023)

© Bart Gielen



Bart Gielen (Kanegem, 1983) operates at the boundary between drawing and ceramics, blurring the line between image and object. He reworks historical fragments and recognizable images from fairy tales, legends, and old engravings into contemporary, mythologically charged figures full of ambiguity and doubt. By combining different materials and perspectives, he amplifies the duality of his work.

NATURAL TALENTS

Plate from the Service of the Duke of Orléans

(Tournai, ca. 1790)

The mantelpiece stage could become an aviary. In the mid-eighteenth century, Buffon attempted to describe and catalogue all the bird species of the world. Ceramic painters adopted his encyclopedic ambition. In Tournai, a 'Buffon service' of almost 1,600 pieces was produced for the Duke of Orléans, who wanted to outshine the French king. The luxurious service meticulously recorded bird species. On the front of the plates, they were painted with precision and attention to detail; on the back, each species was identified—a flamant d'Amérique accompanied by a figuier de la Caroline, a pinçon d'Ardenne, and a pie-grièche du Sénégal. The service was a porcelain encyclopedia.

Joke Raes – Mask X⁽²⁰²⁵⁾



© Joke Raes

Joke Raes (Ghent, 1985) works with ceramics and porcelain. In her Mask X series, she explores the duality of our identities—a constant play of revealing and concealing. The masks balance fragility and strength: formed from porcelain and fired at 1260°C, the delicate material becomes almost stone-like, evoking coral or vegetation. The surfaces are rich in detail, with organic structures, rhythmic incisions, and patterns that evoke inner currents and imagination. Each mask functions as an autonomous, abstract portrait of human complexity.

Béatrice Guilleman – Elevation mordante (2025)

Béatrice Guilleman (Poissy/FR, 1994) studied sculpture in Rennes and contemporary ceramics at La Cambre in Brussels. During a residency in Mexico, she deepened her passion for ceramics. Her figures and installations oscillate between childhood and adulthood, where fantasy and poetry collide with stylized architectural forms. Inspired by animal and organic motifs in Gothic, Romanesque, and Art Nouveau architecture, Guilleman creates hybrid sculptures that connect mythology, human experience, and the living world.

Daan Gielis – Black Summer Endless Bummer (2022)

© Daan Gielis



Daan Gielis (Beringen, 1988–2023) lived briefly but intensely, leaving a unique oeuvre. An autoimmune disease marked his body and life. In 2014, he underwent his first open-heart surgery. On his chest, he had a paradisiacal jungle tattooed, knowing doctors would first have to destroy this

paradise before it could be revived. Gielis's entire oeuvre flirts with the boundary between light and dark, resilience and decay. In this ceramic sculpture of a scorched jungle, the looming threat of destruction drapes over the natural beauty like a thick, suffocating layer of tar.

Kato Herbots – Terra Formata (2026)

Kato Herbots (Velm/BE, 2001) is fascinated by the interaction between humans, material, and environment. For this project, she focused on the clay pits around Kortrijk. After extraction, these sites are often used as dumps, later remediated and transformed into recreational areas. Herbots investigated whether the contaminated soil could serve as a new raw material. By firing the earth into ceramics, metals present are safely encapsulated, while surprising colors and textures emerge, revealing the hidden geology of the site. She thus connects ecological and material research with innovative aesthetics and reclaimed functionality.

CERAMIC CIRCUS

**Maen Florin – Performer I, Zip** (2020)

Ceramic, hair, wool, pearls; H 123 cm / Private collection, Leuven

Hybrid Beings**Plate** (Antwerp, first quarter of the 17th century)

Faience; Ø 38 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Bottle** (Lyon/FR, second half of the 16th century)

Faience; 29,5 x 21 x 13,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Tile** (Netherlands, 18th century)

Faience; 12,7 x 12,7 x 1 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

Video**William Cobbing – Will.ni.naiz** (2022)

Video; 1'02" / Courtesy of the artist

Tamed Animals**Two Pugs** (Tournai, last quarter of the 18th century)

Faience, 22,3 x 17,5 x 11 cm (2pcs) / Collection Abby Kortrijk

**Beate Höing – Buddies** (2023)

Glazed ceramic; 32 x 14 x 17 cm / 32 x 22 x 17 cm /

Courtesy of the artist



Plate (Milan/IT, 18th century)

Faience, Ø 23 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Philippe Mombaers – Beer Jug with Lid (Brussels, early 19th century)

Faience, 25 x Ø 16 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Emile Gallé – Cat (Saint-Clément/FR, 1860-1872)

Faience, 32,5 x 26 x 15 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Reclining Lion (Alcora/ES, 19th century)

Faience, 26 x 30,5 x 17 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

Rarities



Uģis Albiņš – Belgian Clay, Lost Door Wedge, Found Floor Tile Fragment ⁽²⁰²⁵⁾

*Lost door wedge, found floor tile fragment, 3D-printed ceramic;
18 x 10 x 7 cm / Developed within the Designers in Residence program
of Designregio Kortrijk, with support from Flanders State of the Art*



Uģis Albiņš – Red- and White-Colored Belgian Clay, Fragment of a Wooden Wine Crate, EVA Foam ⁽²⁰²⁵⁾

*Fragment of a wooden wine crate, EVA foam, rolled clay, 3D-printed
ceramic; 30 x 8 x 10 cm / Developed within the Designers in Residence
program of Designregio Kortrijk, with support from Flanders State of
the Art*



Misfired Piece (Rhineland/DE, 13th–14th century)

Stoneware; 24,8 x Ø 8 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Highly Decorated Jug with Applied Scale Decoration (Kortrijk, ca. 1250-1325)

Earthenware; 23 x Ø 18 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Incomplete Garden Pot (1700)

Oxidized fired earthenware; 19 x Ø 19,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

Tattooed Lady



Jessica Harrison – Painted Lady #25 (2016)

Royal Doulton porcelain, painted glaze; 18.5 x 10 x 6 cm

Collection Keramiekmuseum Princessehof, Leeuwarden

Peepshow



Plate with Erotic Scene

(China and Netherlands, second half of the 18th century)

Porcelain; Ø 23 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Plate, The Judgment of Paris

(China, Qianlong period, 18th century)

Hard porcelain; Ø 23 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Sigrid Claude Hilpert-Artes, Lidded Pot in the Shape of a Fish with Female Figure (Dresden/DE, 1977 – 2007)

Glazed earthenware; 17,6 x 24 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Sigrid Claude Hilpert-Artes – Spherical Lidded Pot with Female Figure (Dresden/DE, 1977 – 2007)

Glazed earthenware; 16,7 x Ø 10,9 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

HALL OF MIRRORS

Edible Art



Mirthe Klück – Chew III (2024)

Porcelain; 60 x 20 x 20 cm / Courtesy of the artist and FRED&FERRY



De Porceleyne Claeuw, Three-Part Butter Dish (Delft/NL, 1700-1750)

Faience; 9 x 18 x 15 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Pear (Delft/NL, 18th century)

Faience; 6 x 12 x 8,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Terrine with Lid (Attert/LUX, late 18th century)

Faience; 17 x Ø 19 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk

Edible Art II



Artichoke-Shaped Ointment Jar with Lid (Workshop Trou, Saint-Cloud/FR, ca. 1725)

Soft porcelain; 8 x Ø 6 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Asparagus Dish (probably Sarreguemines/FR, ca. 1875-1890)

Stoneware; 27,5 x 25 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Philippe Mombaers – Terrine with Lid (Brussels, 1724-1754)

Faience; 23 x 26 x 16,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Éléonore Joulin – Cabbage Shoes or Chou-sures (2026)

Ceramics and glaze; size 37 EU / Courtesy of the artist

Towel



Goedel Vermandere – Inertia (2023)

Porcelain and oil paint; 60 x 28 x 12 cm / Courtesy of the artist

Video



William Cobbing – Inner Horizon (Porthcew) (2024)

Video; 1'46" / Courtesy of the artist

Animalia



Philippe Mombaers – Teapot (Brussels, 1700-1750)

Faience; 15 x 14 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Boch – Terrine in the Shape of a Wild Boar's Head (Luxembourg, 19th century)

Glazed earthenware; 15 x 31 x 19,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Wieki Somers – High Tea Pot (2003)

Porcelain, muskrat fur, stainless steel, leather; 25 x 47 x 20 cm / European Ceramic Work Centre

Tea Time



Bart Gielen – Bottle (2023)

Charcoal and pastel on ceramics; 22 x 13 x 7 cm / Unframed Gallery



Teapot (Niderviller/FR, 1774)

Hard porcelain; 12 x 18 x 11 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Cup and Saucer (Tournai, 1790–1795)

Soft porcelain; Cup 6 x Ø 6.8 cm – Saucer 2.9 x Ø 13.3 cm /
Collection Abby Kortrijk

NATURAL TALENTS



Albert Dubosq, Asian Forest (Set Piece), Side Screen Foreground, Stage Left (1921, Reproduction)

Canvas, wooden frame; 696 x 460 cm / Schouwburg Kortrijk



Joke Raes – Mask X (2025)

Ceramics; 56 x 55 x 11 cm / Courtesy of the artist



Firebasket with Lid in the Style of Old Torhout Ceramics (1997)

Glazed earthenware; 24,5 x Ø 20 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Béatrice Guilleman – Elevation mordante (2025)

Fountain, ceramics, stoneware; 185 x 65 x 65 cm / Courtesy of the artist



Scent Vase (Vincennes/FR, 1745–1750)

Soft porcelain; 13,5 x 9 x 6,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Potpourri (ca. 1760)

Faïence; 22 x 16,5 x 14 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Pair of Reclining Cows (Delft/NL, 18th century)

Faïence; 11,5 x 12,5 cm (2 pcs) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Plaquette (Delft/NL, 2nd half 18th century)

Faience; 35,5 x 27,8 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Three Cups (Amstel/NL, early 19th century)

Hard porcelain; 5,5 x Ø 7,5 cm (x3) / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Plate from the Dinnerware of the Duke of Orléans (Tournai, ca. 1790)

Soft porcelain; Ø 23,5 cm / Collection Abby Kortrijk



Daan Gielis – Black Summer Endless Bummer (2022)

Glazed ceramics; 74 x 57 x 57 cm / Private collection, Paris



Kato Herbots – Terra Formata (2026)

Clay, glaze made from contaminated earth; material experiments and series of stackable objects / Developed within the Designers in Residence program of Designregio Kortrijk, supported by Flanders State of the Art