

David Huycke

Born Belgium, 1967

Even by the labour-intensive standards of other silversmithing techniques, granulation is a fiendishly difficult and time-consuming process, in which vessels or objects are created from thousands of silver granules – little bead-like balls or discs of metal that are effectively soldered together to build up a three-dimensional object. Dating back to the Bronze Age, it originated in the Middle East, reaching an unprecedented

level of intricacy under the Etruscans, who used it to make fine jewellery.

More than two millennia on, David Huycke is using the technique with even greater sophistication, making bowls that seem perfectly rounded on the outside, but give the impression of having grown almost organically within, creating a sculptural form that represents ‘the tension between order and chaos’. His 2012 work *Edge of Chaos* incorporates



Portrait: Claudia Hoppe. Photos: courtesy of Caroline Van Hoek Gallery, Brussels. © David Huycke



Right, David Huycke,
Edge of Chaos, 2012.
Below, the artist
holding *Pearl Globe*,
2012. Opposite,
Fractal Piece, 2007



23,850 tiny granules of silver, each just a few millimetres in diameter, and weighs nearly 4.5kg.

The granules are made using special tile-like ceramic moulds, in which Huycke melts little pieces of silver. These are then tumble-polished and electrolytically copper-plated. When they are heated, a process that takes place in a fireproof concrete mould, the copper melts and becomes the soldering agent that fuses them together. The application of a flame turns the copper to copper oxide, which is then dissolved in the 'pickle' – the name given to the diluted sulphuric or nitric acid used to remove the oxidised surface from metal after soldering.

These creations are not merely receptacles, but objects of beauty and wonder. Pieces such as Huycke's polished or black-patinated silver *Pearl Globes*, or his *Fractal Piece* (2007), call to mind infinitely intricate molecular models. But although his practice extends to tumblers and bowls in hand-hammered silver that are, in essence, functional, he is a thinker as well as a craftsman. The title of the PhD thesis he finished in 2010 at Hasselt University and KU Leuven was *The Metamorphic Ornament*. As he puts it himself, what fascinates him is 'how and in what materials things were constructed, and what these things communicated in the way they were made'.

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