

Art that echoes the cries of a revolutionary



By [Regina Haggo](#)

You walk into a gallery. You are alone. You spot an antique porcelain vase. Its handles are broken. The bits are lying on the display stand. Moreover, someone has taken an axe to another similarly elegant vase.

Whatever you do, don't leave the room in a panic.

This mutilated body of work belongs to Laurent Craste, 48, an award-winning ceramist with a string of post-secondary education degrees after his name. A native of France who now lives in Montreal, Craste describes his art as incorporating "acts of vandalism, perpetuated with worker tools."

His work is on show in *Épuration*, an exhibition of more than a dozen recent porcelain pieces at the Art Gallery of Burlington. Denis Longchamps, one of the curators, says *Épuration* means purification, purge or refinement.

In that sense, *Épuration* echoes the cries of a revolutionary.

Craste's creations riff off traditionally proper and popular works of art such as Sèvres vases and human figure sculptures. He manipulates his prototypes, making them look broken, mutilated and smashed.

He's not really out to destroy Art. It's what Art stands for, its traditional smugness and complacency. And his creations channel cultural and social revolutionaries who reject and destroy the status quo for the sake of building anew. Revolutions, however, can lead to irretrievable losses.

In "Déco I," a pair of real metal scissors stick out of the back of the neck of a bust of a girl. Her head slumps forward in a lifelike way, a nod to the beloved lifelike style of the original, in which the head was upright.

Craste fashions the same bust for "Déco II" — and crushes the face under a big brick.

The original bust was an objet d'art, copies of which some people bought to make other people think they had good taste. It was the kind of thing revolutionaries attacked in late 18th-century France.

And there's more.

In "Ornement et Crime VI," Craste also comments on the uselessness of traditional ornament. He replaces it with ready-mades, mass-produced objects that art revolutionaries like Marcel Duchamp repurposed 100 years ago.

Craste's 18th-century-style vase stands about four feet high. It rises in layers, each one decorated with a variety of motifs, including lions' heads and vegetation.

An axe, a metal and wood tool or weapon, hangs partly embedded in the vessel's shoulder. The action of putting axe to vase appears to have been so passionate that the vase's neck has been pushed out of alignment.

Such an activity in real life lasts a mere moment. That, however, contrasts with the length of time Craste worked to create the look of a moment of destruction.

Craste's axe, scissors and brick are products of manufacturing. In "Exposition," however, nature tackles art. A life-size crow has pushed the neck of an arty white and gold vessel out of position and has poked out an eye on one of the decorative heads below.

Carcasse II, a broken vessel that hangs from a meat hook, suggests a close link between inanimate vessels and living beings, yet another idea that runs through this thought-provoking exhibition.

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Épuration

Where: Perry Gallery, Art Gallery of Burlington, 1333 Lakeshore Rd., Burlington

When: until Jan. 29

Phone: 905-632-7796

Admission free