

Crafted Lives

Mixed Media

Artist Brigitte Bouquet blends the natural and handcrafted in her home and in her work.

INTERVIEW BY *Liz Logan*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *John Midgley*

IN HER LARGE SCULPTURES, artist Brigitte Bouquet often combines objects from nature with intricately handcrafted ceramics and textiles, so it makes sense that her home is also something of a hybrid. Her five-floor townhouse in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn mixes a modern, minimalist aesthetic with cozy antiques, flea-market finds, and her own handcrafted details. In 2013, the largely self-taught artist started Arthouse480, an annual event in which she opens her home to the public as a sort of gallery. (The 2015 event took

place in March.) We talked to the Dutch-born Bouquet about how she crafts the space where she lives and works.

Who lives here, and how did you come to live in this house? I live here with my husband, Dick De Lange. We've been together for 20 years, since back when I was living in the Netherlands. We moved several times for Dick's job in advertising; we lived in Chicago, then Australia, and landed in New York in 2007. A few years later we bought this brownstone, and it was a dump! We fixed



The Brooklyn home of Dick De Lange and Brigitte Bouquet is a haven for flea-market finds, antiques from around the world, De Lange's hand-made furniture, and Bouquet's art.

Bouquet's favorite spot is the studio: "It makes me want to work."



An antique candelabra from Bouquet's native Netherlands, a pair of marriage dolls from Australia, and art by European friends are among the couple's worldly possessions.

TOP: Bouquet designed the gray tiles that grace her ground-floor studio. Her husband built the worktable.

it up; Dick is incredibly handy, and every weekend we work on the house.

In the kitchen, you have your pottery and then you also have your sculptures, which combine ceramics with wood, fabric, and other materials. How do you manage your different interests?

In Amsterdam, I was focused solely on pottery and had my own lines. I learned traditional Dutch ceramics by apprenticing with a Delft blue bisque painter in the mid-'90s, and then I came up with my own modern take on Delft blue. When we moved away, it freed me up to experiment, and I started combining ceramics with other materials and doing the large-scale pieces that are on display here. I don't make pottery so much anymore.

How do you describe your decorating aesthetic?

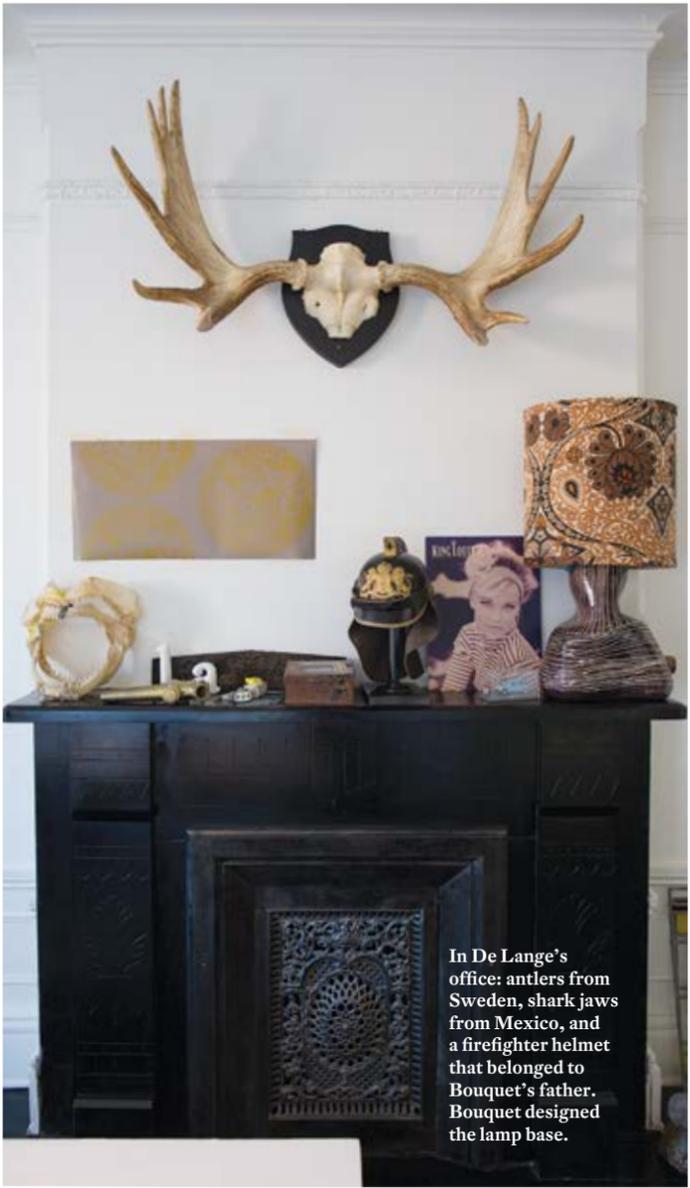
With my work, I often find something in nature – like



LEFT: Bouquet embellished her handprinted *Wool Quilt* (2013) with embroidery, small feathers, and ceramic pieces.

"A kimono is so serene, and I wanted to make a whimsical but also kind of decayed thing," says Bouquet of *Bird's Nest Kimono* (2014), which hangs in her studio.

They don't like to have too many things; "our aesthetic is sort of minimalist."



In De Lange's office: antlers from Sweden, shark jaws from Mexico, and a firefighter helmet that belonged to Bouquet's father. Bouquet designed the lamp base.

Bouquet made *Tulip Fields* (2006) as a gift for her husband. The hundreds of ceramic clogs are an homage to the neatly aligned fields of flowers that bloom in the Netherlands in the spring.

RIGHT: De Lange built the kitchen cabinets out of old doors and reclaimed wood. Bouquet designed the hand-stamped dinnerware.

beautiful gray driftwood, which I find by the river here in Brooklyn – and then start creating based on the shape.

Our house is kind of like that, too. Our style is handmade and bohemian. In addition to handmade things, we have design pieces from flea markets, like the different lamps hanging above our dining room table.

At the same time, our aesthetic is also sleek, contemporary, and sort of minimalist; we don't like to have too many things.

How are your sculptures, ceramics, and textiles incorporated into the house?

On the main floor of the house, we have a black washroom in which the walls are covered in glossy black ceramic tiles that I made, and Dick and I designed and made the chandelier. You can also see my ceramic tiles in my studio and the kitchen. I recently started designing wallpaper that's similar to my printed textiles, and I wanted to have some wallpaper up for the next Arthouse480 this



spring. My finished sculptures are hanging in the public spaces of the house. Then my "quilts" – made of upholstery fabric that I printed on and then embellished with ceramic pieces and other things – are hanging in our bedroom and the guest bedroom, because I like to look at them; some of them are still in progress.

What's your favorite spot in the house?

My studio, on the ground floor. It makes me want to work! Sometimes we'll have breakfast or a drink down there. We knocked down walls to make the floor into one big space, and the walls, floor, and ceiling we painted white, so it always feels light and airy. There's a garden out back, and it's super-quiet. Dick built my big work table and my storage bureau. I keep everything in drawers; I'm very orderly.

Do you have a favorite piece that's on display in your home right now?

My Bird's Nest Kimono (2014), which recently came back from my fall solo exhibition at the Hammond Museum in North Salem, New York. My mother is an expert seamstress, and she helped me sew the kimono out of linen that I ripped into strips and printed on. On top of the fabric, there are these little birds' nests that I make with ceramic pieces and crocheted copper wire.

Bouquet's Circle series represents the undulating surfaces found in nature.



De Lange built this storage unit, a home for supplies and little treasures, for Bouquet's studio; she calls it "the magic cabinet."

TOP: De Lange designed and built the desk in his office. The room also features works by Bouquet.

A kimono is so serene, and I wanted to make a whimsical but also kind of decayed thing.

Tell us about some of the other key pieces in your home.

With my Circle series, the idea is to zoom in on scenes in nature – grass, a frozen river, coral, the reddish colors of the earth, the ocean – and recreate their undulating surfaces with thousands of tiny textured pieces of ceramics. Close up, the pieces look totally different from when you're far away. *Eyes in Disguise* (2007), which is hanging in Dick's study, is meant to look like fish skin. It's made up of ceramic pieces shaped like eyes. I like to experiment with different glazes; that piece looks brown, but when the sun shines in, it turns brilliant copper. In the stairwell is my blue-green circle, *Watching Waves* (2009). I'm working on an orange and firecracker-red circle now. The circles are time-consuming and monotonous, so I take breaks and work on other things.

Your piece *Tulip Fields* (2006) is such an imposing centerpiece in the main living area; tell us about it.

When we open the house for Arthouse480, everything is for sale except for that piece, which was a gift for Dick. It's made out of 464 ceramic Dutch clogs in 32 different colors, each hand-painted with traditional Dutch imagery of windmills and tulips. I'm fascinated by the tulip fields in the Netherlands and their glorious colors. They're so straight and geometric. I started in ceramics because of the glazes. I just love color.

✦ brigittebouquet.tumblr.com
Liz Logan is a Brooklyn freelance writer whose work has appeared in ARTNews, O, the Oprah Magazine, and Martha Stewart Living.

RIGHT: Thousands of tiny ceramic pieces make up the textured ripples of Bouquet's *Watching Waves* (2009).

