

News Release

Barnaby Barford: The Tower of Babel

8 September – 1 November 2015

#vamtowerofbabel



A six metre high ceramic installation created for the V&A by artist Barnaby Barford is displayed in the Museum's Medieval & Renaissance Galleries until 1 November 2015.

The Tower of Babel is composed of 3,000 individual bone china buildings, each measuring 10 – 13cm tall and depicting a real London shop. Barford has photographed over 6,000 shop fronts in the process of making the tower, cycling over 1,000 miles to visit every postcode in London. The photographs were created as ceramic transfers and fired onto fine bone china in Stoke-on-Trent, manufactured by 1882 Ltd, to produce the individual shops.

The Tower reflects London's society and economy, inviting visitors to view themselves as consumers. At its base the shops are derelict, while at its pinnacle are London's exclusive boutiques and galleries, with the Tower appearing more precarious towards the top. Standing as a monument to the British pastime of shopping, Barford's ceramic Tower likens efforts to find fulfilment through consumerism with the biblical Tower of Babel's attempt to reach heaven.

The Tower of Babel depicts London's streets in the early 21st century, cataloguing a variety of types of shops, including independent shops, department stores, and charity shops and those that have been left derelict. Each of the unique ceramic pieces are available to purchase through the V&A Shop, blurring the lines of art and commerce. More affordable properties are situated at the base of the tower and the more prestigious but less affordable towards the top.

Describing the installation, Barford said *"This is London in all its retail glory, our city in the beginning of the 21st century and I'm asking, how does it make you feel? I am overjoyed to be exhibiting in one of the world's greatest museums, it is fantastic to have the opportunity to explore our contemporary society in such historic surrounds."*

Alun Graves, Senior Curator of the Ceramics and Glass collection at the V&A says of the work; *"Part-sculpture, part-shop display, The Tower of Babel is an act of curated commerce. It's about retail as a pastime, and the idea of shopping as a means (or not) to attain happiness. It is about how we identify ourselves as consumers and how we construct our sense of self through the choices we make"*

when buying. Ultimately it's about who we are, and where we position ourselves in the extraordinary metropolis that is London."

Artist Barnaby Barford (b. 1977) works primarily with ceramics to create pieces which explore all aspects of society. Graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2002, he has since exhibited his work internationally and more recently had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Virginia, USA. Barford is currently represented by David Gill Gallery and since 2004, Barford has taught as an associate lecturer at Central St Martins, London.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- This FREE installation takes place in the V&A's Medieval & Renaissance Galleries from 8 September – 1 November 2015 and forms part of the Museum's programme for London Design Festival (19 – 27 September 2015). www.londondesignfestival.com/va-museum
- Each of the 3,000 individual shop fronts that feature in *The Tower of Babel* are available to purchase from Barnaby Barford through the V&A Shop. Handmade in Stoke-on-Trent by 1882 Ltd and signed by Barnaby Barford, the bone china shop fronts are priced between £90 and £6,000. www.vandashop.com
- The V&A is open daily from 10.00 to 17.45 and until 22.00 on Fridays

For further PRESS information about the exhibition, please contact Laura Mitchell (l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk) and Lucy Hawes (l.hawes@vam.ac.uk) in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2502 (not for publication).

A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>