



WADDESDON  
Rothschild Collections



## **Joana Vasconcelos: Wedding Cake**

### **Opening 8 June 2023, The Dairy at Waddesdon Manor**

*Wedding Cake* - a 12-metre-high sculptural pavilion in the form of a three-tiered wedding cake, clad entirely in ceramic tiles - is a major new work by celebrated Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos (b 1971) opening at Waddesdon this summer.

Almost five years in the making, *Wedding Cake* was commissioned by the Rothschild Foundation for Waddesdon, prompted by the relationship between visionary collector Lord Rothschild and Vasconcelos.

Part sculpture, part architectural garden folly, *Wedding Cake* is an extraordinary, enormous, fully immersive sculpture which combines pâtisserie and architecture. Gleaming and icing-like outside and in, it offers an intricate and richly sensory experience – glazed in pale pinks, greens and blues, beset with sculptural ornament and complete with the sounds of trickling water and a site-specific lighting scheme. *Wedding Cake* is Vasconcelos' most ambitious commission to date, described by the artist as “a temple to love” that celebrates festivity and marriage.

The history of the wedding cake is long and varied, full of symbolism and tradition. From Ancient Rome where bread was broken over the bride's head to bring good fortune to the couple, to contemporary confections that embody celebration and social status. Vasconcelos' *Wedding Cake* is a playful addition to this rich history. Inspired by the exuberant Baroque buildings and highly decorative ceramic traditions of Lisbon - where Vasconcelos lives and works - the work is also a contemporary response to the great Rothschild traditions of hospitality with echoes of 18th-century garden pavilions.

At Waddesdon, a “must see” cultural landmark rooted in artistic creativity, *Wedding Cake* will stand in a grove of trees alongside the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Dairy, built by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild to entertain and charm

guests at his famous house parties, and described by contemporaries as “*a treasure house of what is beautiful, curious or ancient*”. It reminds us of the long European history of placing fanciful buildings in gardens and landscapes, and forms part of a growing collection of significant contemporary and historic sculpture, brought together by Lord Rothschild. Today, the Dairy is still a much sought-after entertaining space, and the presence of the *Wedding Cake*, a symbol of love and happiness, is a perfect complement.

*Wedding Cake* is emblematic of Vasconcelos’ practice. She is deeply influenced by the artistic traditions of her home country, and the way in which she combines her materials reflects international influences on Portuguese culture over centuries - born from a history of exploring and seafaring, from Chinese and Japanese ceramics to Brazilian carnival, incorporating colour and light. Her work is often playful, manipulating scale to dramatic effect and using familiar daily objects in surprising, charming and inventive ways. On a deeper level, her work explores notions of domesticity, femininity, empowerment and the tension between private and public realms.

Vasconcelos’ work often challenges the assumptions of traditional hierarchies of ‘noble’ materials, such as marble, used frequently to embellish grand structures, often set above more everyday substances like ceramics and textiles. Her practice champions traditional, hand-made objects and techniques, and the ceramics for *Wedding Cake* have been made by the Viúva Lamego manufactory, which has been operating in Sintra for 170 years. Their standard 14 x 14cm tiles determined the size of the overall structure of *Wedding Cake*, whose 11m diameter is the smallest circle that can be made with whole tiles.

At Waddesdon, this combination of materials and the exploration of scale and technique is a perfect fit. The house is famous for its ceramics, particularly Sèvres and Meissen porcelain. The fashions and traditions of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century dining, entertaining and festivity are also deeply embedded in the collections, whether a silver dinner service made for King George III, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century book recording the festivities laid on to mark a royal wedding, or a manual illustrating sugar sculpture. The sumptuous decoration of the *Wedding Cake* also speaks to the architecture of the house, itself covered in ornament and designed to complement the collections inside it and the carefully laid out garden and landscape. These include the fanciful buildings in Waddesdon’s grounds like the Dairy, Flint House and the Aviary, all designed to surprise and delight visitors.

According to Joana Vasconcelos, “*An enormous project such as this one could only happen with the vision and encouragement provided by a generous and extraordinary patron such as Lord Rothschild. He could see its dreamlike potential, believe in it and provide the means to make it come true. I have been addressing the subject of love through my career for almost 30 years now, but this is my biggest challenge so far. Many artists have the ‘impossible project’ and this is mine. I wanted people to have three different approaches to it: looking from the outside, enjoying the surroundings from the different levels or balconies and rising to the top, finally completing the artwork with their presence. Above all, I always thought of it as a temple to love.*”

Lord Rothschild says, “*We are delighted to be collaborating again with Joana Vasconcelos, whose work is already magnificently represented at Waddesdon by her giant candlesticks, Lafite. The vision, imagination and ambition exemplified in the Wedding Cake is a perfect match for the passion which drove Baron Ferdinand, the creator of Waddesdon, to build the Manor and the Dairy, where he intended that his many friends would be surprised and delighted at every turn. I am sure that the Wedding Cake will have just as great an impact on visitors and wedding guests today.*”

Pippa Shirley, Director of Waddesdon says, “*Waddesdon was built to entertain, so what better way to mark the continuity today of that spirit of hospitality, artistic creativity and Rothschild family patronage than through the commission of this magical object, an emblem of love and celebration. Projects like this require a leap of faith from both artist and patron, and we are proud to have been a partner in this innovative work.*”

## **Recipe for *Wedding Cake***

- 1 creative artist
- 1 visionary patron
- 2 international teams
- Pinch of experts
- 3500 wrought iron parts
- 21,815kg iron sheet
- Circa 25,150 Viúva Lamego ceramic tiles (99 different types) and 1,238 Viúva Lamego ceramic pieces (52 different types). Ceramic tile area: 365 m<sup>2</sup>
- Plethora of ornaments – mermaids, dolphins, candles, globes etc
- Indoor and outdoor lights - 350 glass flames receiving optical fiber (circa 3.000 meters)
- 592 light points
- Rivers of glaze
- Sprinklings of water
- Hope, belief and effort

Blend the circa 50 tons with generous amounts of creativity and patience. Bind into different panels; raise tier by tier to height of 12 meters. Assemble at Waddesdon. Serve with love.

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

[IMAGES – High resolution images for press use can be downloaded here](#)

Artists Impression of *Wedding Cake* © Atelier Joana Vasconcelos

## **Wedding Cake guided tours**

Visitors will be able to visit *Wedding Cake* on a guided tour which will also include the chance to explore the impressive collection of contemporary sculpture situated in the Water Garden at the Dairy.

*Wedding Cake* tours will run 8 June – 26 October on Thursdays and selected Sundays. Tour tickets must be pre-booked and normal grounds admission applies. For full details and booking information, please visit:

[www.waddesdon.org.uk/wedding-cake](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk/wedding-cake)

**Waddesdon Manor** was built from 1874 by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in the style of a French early 16th-century château. Ferdinand was an inspired collector, and the house was designed to showcase his exceptional collection of English portraits, French 18th-century furniture, Sèvres porcelain, and other decorative arts. When he died in 1898, he left Waddesdon to his sister, Alice. Upon her death, the house passed to her great-nephew, James de Rothschild, who inherited a substantial part of his father, Baron Edmond's great collection. In 1957, to ensure its future in perpetuity, Waddesdon was bequeathed to the National Trust. The Rothschild family continues to run the property through a family charitable trust under the leadership of Lord Rothschild. [More here.](#)

The ornamental Dairy was built from 1885 for Baron Ferdinand to house his award-winning dairy herd, but although part of the working farm, no visit to Waddesdon was complete without a visit to see the cattle, sample the cream and milk and enjoy the romantic setting, which includes a lake and an immense array of artificial Pulham rockwork. The Dairy and its surroundings were carefully restored in the 1990s and has just been refurbished again so that today's guests can enjoy the charming building and sculptures, both historic and contemporary, inside and out, and vistas of water, rocky grottoes and winding paths.

**Joana Vasconcelos at Waddesdon** - Vasconcelos' *Lafite*, two giant candlesticks made of illuminated Chateau Lafite Rothschild magnums, commissioned in 2015 by the Rothschild Foundation are moving to the Dairy and celebrate the family associations with the world of great Bordeaux wine. In 2012, her *Pavillon de Thé*, a giant wrought-iron tea pot, was the focal point of *House of Cards*, a contemporary sculpture exhibition in the gardens, and in 2016 her *Cup Cake*

(2011) was exhibited on the North Front. Joana Vasconcelos's work is also represented in major collections around the world, such as those of Calouste Gulbenkian, François Pinault and Louis Vuitton's Foundations. She has exhibited regularly since the mid-1990s. Her work became known internationally after her participation in the 51<sup>st</sup> Venice Biennale in 2005, with the work *A Noiva* [The Bride] (2001-05). She was the first woman and the youngest artist to exhibit at the Palace of Versailles, in 2012. Other highlights of her career include a solo exhibition at Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 2019, the project *Trafaria Praia* for the Pavilion of Portugal at the 55<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2013); the participation in the group exhibition *The World Belongs to You* at the Palazzo Grassi/François Pinault Foundation, Venice (2011); taking part in *Un Certain Etat du Monde? A Selection of Works from the François Pinault Foundation* at the Garage Center for Contemporary Culture in Moscow in 2013; and her first retrospective *Sem Rede* held at the Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon (2010). In 2014 her solo show *Time Machine* was on view at Manchester Art Gallery; she exhibited at Royal Academy of Arts' *Summer Exhibition 2018* in London; and was given a major show at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, *Beyond* (running to 2022).

For more information on Joana Vasconcelos - <http://www.joanavasconcelos.com>

For more information on Viúva Lamego tile factory - <https://www.viuvalamego.com/en>

For more information on Waddesdon and its exhibitions, visit [www.waddesdon.org.uk](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk), like [WaddesdonManor on Facebook](#), follow @WaddesdonManor on Twitter and [waddesdonmanor\\_nt](#) on Instagram.

Construction of Wedding Cake is facilitated by Westgreen Construction <https://westgreen.com/>  
Architectural support by Peter Inskip of Inskip Gee Architects <http://www.inskip-jenkins.co.uk/>  
Exterior lighting design by Charles Marsden-Smedley <http://www.charlesmarsden-smedley.com/>

*Wedding Cake* is commissioned in collaboration with Michael Hue-Williams and Albion Barn.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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