



WIM DELVOYE

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Wim Delvoye is an artist renowned for his unprecedented experiments in neo-conceptual art. His projects are ironic provocations that combine philosophical depth, unconventional use of materials, and meticulous craftsmanship. Drawing on the history of art — from 19th-century Gothic cathedrals, Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel to Andy Warhol's Pop Art — Delvoye blurs the boundaries between tradition and modernity. He creates mathematically precise, aerodynamic sculptures in which visions of new architecture merge with the subtlety of form and impeccable execution.

Since the early 2000s, Delvoye has explored the aesthetics of monumentality and historical references through a series of Gothic-inspired sculptures made from laser-cut corten steel. These works reimagine transport vehicles — excavators, dump trucks, and other industrial machinery — using ornamental motifs

from medieval architecture. With the help of digital modeling, 3D printing, and laser cutting, he transforms these objects into intricate, lace-like constructions where the weight of metal is counterbalanced by the illusory fragility of the ornament. In these works, architectural elements — from Gothic arches and rosettes to buttresses and pinnacles — are fused with industrial forms originally devoid of artistic ambition. Ornament becomes more than decoration; it serves as a symbol of continuity and value of art amid a rapidly changing world.

This logic of combining the incompatible continues in Delvoye's customized aluminum Rimowa suitcases, adorned with traditional ornamental patterns, and in his *Twisted Tyres* series (2013) — bicycle tires twisted into Möbius-like ribbons. Brilliantly precise yet purposefully "misapplied" mathematical calculations transform these objects into geometrically flawless, visually

seductive forms, entirely stripped of functionality. Once practical and utilitarian, they are recast as autonomous artistic statements — paradoxical emblems of motion rendered motionless, aesthetic perfection devoid of purpose. The transformation of the everyday into something emblematic is a recurring gesture in Delvoye's oeuvre.

One of Delvoye's most controversial projects began in the 1990s, when he started tattooing live pigs. The animals were raised on a specially created farm and tattooed under anesthesia with imagery drawn from Western visual culture — from Louis Vuitton monograms to Disney cartoon characters. In doing so, the artist stripped iconic symbols of their original commercial meaning, while the artwork itself accrued artistic and market value, becoming a paradoxical model of capitalist aesthetics. As the pigs grew, the tattoos expanded along with them, metaphorically increasing the "value" of the living artwork. After the animals' deaths, their taxidermied bodies became part of the exhibition process.

The project provoked intense debate on both artistic and ethical grounds. On one hand, the pigs, elevated to the status of art objects, were provided with better living conditions and longer lives than their counterparts in the industrial food chain. On the other, it posed a fundamental dilemma: to what extent can a living being be used as part of an artwork? Delvoye would later return to this theme in his widely discussed collaboration with Tim Steiner.

Delvoye's *Cloaca* (initiated in 2000) is perhaps his most emblematic critique of consumer society. This intricate machine replicates the human digestive system in full, complete with tanks of acids, enzymes, bacteria, and digestive fluids, all kept at 37.2°C. Cloaca processes gourmet meals — from haute cuisine to fast food — and excretes waste, turning digestion into a visible and ironic metaphor for economic cycles. The machine is indifferent to taste, presentation, or the delicacy of the dish — everything that might lend it added value. The outcome remains invariably the same. This paradox, Delvoye explains, demonstrates the absence of any real difference between how people are "wired": regardless of income, preference, or social status, all humans are biological systems governed by the same processes. Yet the machine's byproducts — its waste — are collected, packaged, and sold as conceptual art, pushing the logic of commodification to absurd extremes.

The logo emblazoned on the machine is a grotesque hybrid of Mr. Clean and Coca-Cola — another ironic jab at mass-market branding.

The Spud Gun installation takes its name from potato-firing toy guns familiar to many from childhood. "Every piece has something boyish and handmade about it," Delvoye notes. "But these guns really shoot. They're beautiful, shiny, and a bit reckless — like little Cloacas — made in a bricolage style." These works evoke both the ingenuity and danger of homemade inventions, blending nostalgia with menace. Echoing this theme are Delvoye's recent marble bas-reliefs featuring imagery from the iconic video game *Counter-Strike* — a nod to imagined battles and the universal narrative of self-defense. These sculptures can be seen as metaphors for the enduring human instinct for protection, fairness, and play, which persists from childhood into adult life. With irony and affection, Delvoye engages the visual language of a generation for whom the virtual world has become an intrinsic part of cultural experience.

Over the years, Wim Delvoye's work has been exhibited in major institutions worldwide, including the Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy (2009), Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (MAMAC) in Nice, France (2010), Musée Rodin in Paris, France (2010), Palais des Beaux-Arts (BOZAR) in Brussels, Belgium (2010–2011), the Louvre in Paris, France (2012), the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart, Australia (2012), the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, Russia (2014), the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in Iran (2016), and MUDAM in Luxembourg (2016).

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