



# WIM DELVOYE

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**Visitors  
guide**

## ***Intro***

**This exhibition, entirely devoted to Wim Delvoye, has three fundamental axes. First, it presents a selection of recent works demonstrating the artist's interest in online video games. Here, this very specific universe is approached like a true social phenomenon. Then, it offers a vast panorama of Wim Delvoye's production over the past twenty years, a tribute to the artist's endless exploration of various areas. Art and craftsmanship meet science and technology. East meets West, while past and future intertwine—and humour is always in the offing. Finally, we wanted to offer Wim Delvoye—who is passionate about ancient culture—the opportunity to dialogue with the great masters of the history of art: several of his pieces are set up in the rooms of the Old Masters Museum, a presentation that completes the course of the exhibition.**

**Enjoy the tour !**

**Michel Draguet  
General Director**

## ***Bas-reliefs Counter- Strike and Fortnite***

[2018]



*Untitled (Fortnite 01)*, 2018  
Marble  
Studio Wim Delvoye

Presented for the first time in Belgium, these bas-reliefs reflect Wim Delvoye's interest in a topical subject: online video games. These pieces, based on screenshots of matches played on *Counter-Strike* and *Fortnite*, evoke archaeological objects such as steles representing combats and erected in memory of ancient wars. Yet, these bas-reliefs represent modern conflicts, particularly in the series drawn from *Counter-Strike* where the action takes place in the Middle East. The various elements of the setting refer to the images that have sadly inspired world events for decades.

The universe of *Fortnite* is very different: on a desert island dotted with abandoned buildings, players are free to choose their own equipment and their ever whimsical clothing. The specificity of this game is also due to the fact that it is possible to make constructions to flee the enemy—in short, a game where one destructs as much as one constructs. *Fortnite* was first released in 2017 and enjoyed an explosive growth, progressively relegating *Counter-Strike* to second rank.

These video games have not only made fortunes for their creators: audiences can follow—live on the Internet—the feats of the most gifted (young) players who earn fortunes in advertising

revenue and enjoy international fame. This aspect caught the attention of Wim Delvoye, who is always on the lookout for new social phenomena. In a more or less distant future, these bas-reliefs may perhaps be seen as monuments to “Ninja”, “Gotago” or “Myth”, the video game professionals who became international stars.

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## Love Letter I

[1998-1999]



*Love Letter I*, 1998–1999  
36 Cibachrome prints behind plexi glass  
Parlement bruxellois | Brussels  
Hoofdstedelijk Parlement

*Love Letter I* is part of a series of seven compositions made using the same method: photographs of potato peels on a white background are assembled in series of various sizes (*Love Letter V* only has eighteen frames, whereas this version contains thirty-six). These variations are due to the very nature of the works: they are love letters, of varying lengths, sent to Caroline by Mohamed. The peels are cleverly arranged to make words in classic Arabic, and each ensemble composes one fragment of a love story in seven paintings, from the initial passion to the sorrow of the breakup.

*“My very dear Caroline, I was so happy to receive your letter. I thought about you restlessly night and day. I still feel the heat of your burning lips against mine. How could I deserve your love, you who are so pure and so beautiful? I cannot believe it. I love you. Tomorrow will be a great day. Thank you my love. I love you. Mohamed.” (Love Letter I).*

This work emerged in the difficult context of the November 1997 riots that shook up northern Brussels’ poor neighbourhoods regularly subjected to drug trafficking. The death of a young dealer shot down by the police triggered three days of urban guerrilla

warfare and led to the arrest of 158 rioters. Since the latter were mostly individuals of foreign origin, an entire community found itself stigmatised. Struck by the images of these events, which enjoyed wide media coverage, Wim Delvoye reacted by opposing love to violence and imagined a story that would unite the Arab and the Western European worlds, and more specifically Belgium, the potato peel being intrinsically linked to our culinary traditions. Commissioned to be exhibited in the offices of the Flemish Community Commission of the Brussels Parliament, *Love Letter I* was subject to vigorous opposition from some political actors. The official reason was that the use of potato peels could be offensive to the Arab community – unless showcasing this culture in the heart of the Brussels power posed a problem.

## Cloaca New and Improved

[2001]



*Cloaca New and Improved*,  
2001  
Mixed media  
Studio Wim Delvoye

## Étui pour une mobylette

[2004]



A few years ago, Wim Delvoye said about *Cloaca*: “I tried to find something complicated, difficult to make and without purpose”. Produced in ten versions since it was created, it is probably the artist’s best-known piece. Wim Delvoye is not the first artist to work with faeces: we can mention Jacques Lizène (°1946), who created paintings with his or even Piero Manzoni (1933-1963) and his cans of *Merda d’Artista*. But *Cloaca* goes beyond the realm of art to encompass that of science and technology, as well as world economics. The artist even attempted to list *Cloaca* on the stock market. This irony vis-à-vis the capitalist economy (Wim Delvoye evokes Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* on this subject) also targets the art world: the machine’s “products” are vacuum-packed and authenticated before being sold as art works by Wim Delvoye. Regularly exhibited all over the globe, *Cloaca* still provokes a wide range of reactions depending on the context in which it is presented. These comments say a lot about their audience: perhaps it is even their *raison d’être*.

The process of transfiguration is at the heart of Wim Delvoye’s oeuvre, where the artist takes old works and gives them a new form (*Twisted Works* series) or uses everyday objects without any great aesthetic or mercantile value (a shovel, gas canisters, circular saw blades...). The *Étuis* fall within that same approach, albeit with one major difference: the objects themselves (a watering can, a chainsaw, wheels, an old motorcycle...) are not transformed. It is the way in which they are presented—in luxurious tailor-made lacquered aluminium casings—that

## Étui for a Castor Wheel

[2018]

*Étui pour une Mobylette*,  
2004  
Peugeot Vogue, aluminium,  
lacquer, flocking  
Studio Wim Delvoye

confers them a new value in the eye of the spectator. While the container is more precious than the content, both must be presented for the work to function. The series appears as a metaphor of the art world: in the same way that the faeces of *Cloaca* owe their value to the context in which they were produced, the objects protected by the *Étuis* are propelled to the rank of art works for having been chosen by the artist.



## Sybille II

[1999]



*Sybille II*, [1999]  
Video-installation  
Studio Wim Delvoye

Cloaked in golden light, images go by in slow motion to the sound of treacly music. Although the subject is not instantly identifiable, a feeling of unease quickly creeps over the spectator. At second glance, all doubt is gone: shot in high definition and in extreme close ups, blackheads are slowly being extracted from greasy skin. Wim Delvoye made this video in an ironic reference to the ethereal aesthetics of the films of David Hamilton (well before he was accused of sexual harassment by several of his models and committed suicide in 2016).

To find his model (who, contrary to what the title seems to indicate, is a boy), the artist carried out a casting of a special genre with young students from various art schools with the aim of finding

a subject whose passage into adulthood had rendered them particularly unphotogenic. The artist pops the blackheads himself, although it would have been no trouble to find someone else to replace him. *Sybill II* is ranked among the top YouTube videos on excoriation disorder, which is characterized by the repeated urge or impulse to pick at one's own skin to rid it of all its impurities.

With this video, Wim Delvoye questions the issue of repulsion and/or fascination that we feel regarding to our bodily discharges, an inquiry that finds its full realisation with *Cloaca*. *Sybill II* also reflects the artist's interest for medical imagery, which can be seen in various series of stained-glass using X-rays [*Chapel Stained Glass Windows*, 2001; *Nine Muses*, 2001-2002; *Days of the Week*, 2008].

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## Carved Tyres / Twisted Tyres

[2010-2014]

Rotation plays a central role in the oeuvre of Wim Delvoye. The first *Twisted Works* were created in the mid-2000s (*Pieta Twisted*, 2005) and replicated ancient sculptures by distorting them with a twisting motion. In their own way, *Carved Tyres* (2010-2014) and *Twisted Tyres* (2013) prolong this reflection on rotation and distortion. Here, the artist draws inspiration from a mundane everyday object (in this case car and bicycle tyres) that conveys a strong symbolic and historical meaning (a 19th century invention that remains indispensable as today's most widespread individual modes of transportation). The *Carved Tyres* are sculpted tyres transfigured through a rich ornamentation evoking the East, the Renaissance or Art Nouveau. The work is entirely done by hand, but with such attention to detail that we could mistakenly think that it was made by a high-precision machine: could



*Dunlop Geomax 100/90-19  
57M 720° 2X*, 2013  
Polished and patinated stainless  
steel  
Studio Wim Delvoye

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## Days of the Week

[2008]



*Monday*, 2013  
Steel, etched glass, lead  
Studio Wim Delvoye

these be limited editions produced in a Dunlop or Pirelli manufacturing plant? The artist voluntarily enjoys the confusion, just as he does with the *Twisted Tyres*, albeit the other way around: these assemblies of bicycle tyres are in fact complex stainless-steel sculptures made from 3D prints before being carefully painted and chromed with the aim of perfectly imitating the original model. Here, Wim Delvoye plays with our capacity to spot the difference between real and fake, and puts craftsmanship and cutting-edge technology on an equal footing.

The stained-glass windows of *Days of the Week* perfectly illustrate Wim Delvoye's curiosity for technology combined with his personal taste for past artistic forms. These stained-glass windows fall within the scope of his researches on Gothic architecture and ornamentation (he made a real Corten steel chapel for Mudam of Luxembourg) but were produced using various sophisticated medical imagery techniques. In the same way that a portraitist entertains in his studio, the artist invited his different models to join him, every day for one week, in an X-ray cabinet where he experimented with various machines to represent them—literally—from the inside.

Through its visual affiliation with radiology, stained glass was the perfect medium for this project. However this is not just an aesthetic choice: by using the vocabulary of religious architecture (more specifically, Christian architecture), Wim Delvoye questions the sacred aura that sometimes surrounds the practice of medicine. Are doctors the new priests from whom we seek a meaning

to our lives? The series draws its origins from the theory of the “weight of the soul” put forward by American medical doctor Duncan McDougall in 1907. His experiments consisted in weighing humans just before and right after their death and led him to state that the body does contain a soul, which weighs exactly 21 grams. As unfounded as it may be, McDougall’s theory remains popular and finds various echoes in the art world (notably in Alejandro González Iñárritu’s film: *21 grams*). The advances of medical imaging have not always made it possible to solve the mystery of the soul, but as Wim Delvoye cleverly reminds us, science is often at the root of our disillusion. Did Copernicus not teach us that the Earth was not the centre of the universe and did Darwin not say that mankind was not the ultimate goal of evolution ?

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## Helix DHAACO / Holy Family (2009-2011)

In this series, Wim Delvoye broaches the representation of the Christ on the cross. Here, the crucifix is simultaneously envisaged as a symbol of the Christian religion and as a simple object that everyone—believer or not—can see on a daily basis. From a formal perspective, the artist’s reflection focuses on the symmetric shape of the cross, onto which he imprints a circular movement in such a way that it coils around itself, with the body of Christ turned inwards (*Inside*) or outwards (*Outside*). Originally static, the object becomes dynamic and unbalanced, as though animated by an inner force. Despite this spectacular transformation, the original motif remains perfectly identifiable.

This series was the occasion for Wim Delvoye to question the connections between art, science, and religious beliefs. *Dual Möbius Quad*



*Ring Corpus Inside*, 2011  
Polished bronze  
Studio Wim Delvoye

*Corpus* is a complex piece where two crucifixes are intertwined, evoking a Möbius strip or the encounter between two symbols of the infinite—one relating to the divine, the other to the area of mathematics. *Helix DHAACO* falls within the same scope: the artist uses a string of crucifixes to form a double DNA helix (to which the title refers), uniting the scientific symbol of life on earth with the religious sign of eternal life. But, says Delvoye, this union placed under the sign of art must not make us forget what is at stake in the debate between science and religion. In a country such as the USA, it is not rare to see the theory of evolution on the same footing as creationism—the current Vice-President being a staunch supporter of this doctrine.

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## Rorschach

(2012-2018)



*L'Étincelle Divine Rorschach*,  
2012  
Patinated bronze  
Studio Wim Delvoye

Elaborated by psychoanalyst Hermann Rorschach in 1921, the “Rorschach test” consists of a series of boards presenting symmetrical shapes, the interpretation of which is left to the patient’s choice. It is one of the best-known personality tests and occupies a place of choice in popular culture, particularly in Hollywood films (*Armageddon*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Batman Forever...*). While the test inspired many plastic artists (amongst whom Andy Warhol, who based an entire series on these tests in the mid-eighties), Wim Delvoye is one of the only artists to have approached it sculpturally. The *Rorschach* series falls within the scope of the *Twisted Works*: an original model, usually a 19<sup>th</sup>-century sculpture, is copied before being radically transformed by the artist to produce a new work. While the *Twisted Works* radically accentuate the movement present in the original model (see for instance the twisted version of Jef Lambeaux’s

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## Art Farm China

[2003-2010]



*Art Farm*, 2005  
Videoinstallation, 3 screens  
Studio Wim Delvoye

*Dénicheur d'aigles* produced for this exhibition), the *Rorschach* series aims to impose a form of stability through symmetry.

Wim Delvoye's tattooed pigs are some of his most emblematic work. He began this project in the late nineties using pig skin collected after slaughter, and then tattooed live animals that became a sort of richly adorned mobile sculpture (and required specific conditions for exhibiting). Once the animal had died, its skin was tanned and framed, and it became a fully-fledged artwork. The wide repertoire of tattoos comprised patterns from biker culture, Walt Disney characters or even luxury leather goods manufacturers (Vuitton, Chanel...). Sometimes contradictory universes coexist on the animal's skin. But the interest of these pieces also lies in their economic and sociological dimension. As Wim Delvoye wittily summed up: "The pig is the poor man's piggy bank—art is the rich man's one!"

Although the tattoos were always made on pigs anaesthetized by veterinaries, a Belgian animal welfare association condemned the project in 2003 and Wim Delvoye moved his production in China to create the *Art Farm China* (2003-2010). In a vast farm near Beijing, the tattooed pigs lived a comfortable life guaranteed by their status as art works, an existence more enviable than that of their peers that were destined for the food industry.

### Forum

## Maserati 450s

/

## Ferrari Testa Rossa

[2015/2017]



*Untitled (Maserati 450S)*, 2015  
Embossed aluminium  
Studio Wim Delvoye

With its 420 horsepower, the Maserati 450s was the most powerful sports car of its era and only ten copies were made between 1956 and 1958. Produced at the same time, the Testa Rossa is one of today's highest quoted Ferrari on the market. Wim Delvoye tackled these legends of the automotive world to create these two pieces. Obviously, these are not the original cars; the Maserati is an identical copy and the Ferrari a scale model. Originally, the 450s was equipped with an aluminium chassis, an ideal material for embossing. The motifs used are drawn from the ornamental repertoire of Islamic arts and were placed on the cars by Iranian craftsmen. Elements of calligraphy—such as "Isra and Mi'raj", which describe two episodes of the life of the Prophet Muhammad—join geometric forms and flower style motifs on the chassis of the Maserati. The artist invites us to experience an encounter between the East and the West, and between technology and craftsmanship.

Exoticism always held a central place in the work of Wim Delvoye. In the early nineties, he used furniture made in Java in a style imitating that of early 17th-century Dutch furniture (*Installation with 2 gas cannisters and 29 saw blades*, 1990, collection of the RMFAB). He also commissioned several pieces made by Indonesian craftsmen before settling in China in the early 2000s. The project with the Maserati 450s and the Ferrari Testa Rossa reflects his interest in a new destination: Iran. The artist recently settled in the city of Kashan, 200 kilometres south of Tehran, where he is renovating a set of old houses.

# Twisted Works

[2009/2019]

These works are part of several series where Wim Delvoye made radically modified copies of nineteenth century sculptures. *The Twisted Works* are “distorted” versions that accentuate the circular movement that can be found in the original model. In another series, the *Rorschach*, the artist conversely plays with stability by reproducing the works symmetrically.

For this exhibition, Wim Delvoye made three *Twisted Works* based on pieces shown in the collections of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium: *Le Dénicheur d'aigles* by Jef Lambeaux (1890-1892) and *La Danse* de Raoul Larche [circa 1900; on deposit of the Brussels Capital Region]. The latter is named *La Loïe Fuller* after the dancer (1862-1928) who became renowned for spectacular choreographies where she whirled her wings illuminated by coloured spotlights. In his interpretation of Larche's sculpture, Wim Delvoye amplifies the movement in two different ways: *Clockwise* or *Counterclockwise*. Although they rely on the use of digital technology, the *Twisted Works* are made according to old casting method. The original model is scanned from all angles in high resolution, then the file is modified and printed in 3D to reproduce the sketch that is used to make the final piece.



*Daphnis & Chloë*  
[Counterclockwise], 2009  
Lacquered bronze  
Studio Wim Delvoye



> *Le Secret*, 2018  
Patinated bronze  
Studio Wim Delvoye

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# **Tapis- dermy**

[2010]



*Arak*, 2013  
Silk carpet on polyester mold  
Studio Wim Delvoye

The pig—celebrated for the opulence it symbolizes or despised for the dirtiness it incarnates—is Wim Delvoye's greatest interest, as his work is often based on the union of opposites. In the late nineties, the artist tattooed tanned pig skins, that he then framed and exhibited like paintings. He also tattooed live pigs (anaesthetised for the operation), a project developed by the artist in a pig farm near Beijing between 2003 and 2010 (see the Art Farm China project).

The *Tapisdermy* series is the continuation of this work. Here, not the animal's body, but only its representation (a polyester mould) is used in the ways of taxidermists. Each form is covered in an Oriental carpet and is designated by a first name to underline its specificity. The motifs and colours vary from one model to the next, and each seems to have their own personality. Wim Delvoye takes great pleasure in emphasizing the similitude between a sitting pig and a lion that takes the same posture, as the animal often appears in the field of heraldry. The king of animals dethroned by a domestic pig who is promoted to the rank of art work? In this room dedicated to Baroque painting, the colours of Rubens, Jordaens or van Loon dialogue with the hues of the silk carpets covering the pigs. Attentive observers will even recognise the Oriental fabric represented in one of the large paintings.

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# **Installation with 2 gas canisters and 29 saw blades**

[1990]

In the early nineties, Wim Delvoye used gas canisters and circular saw blades that he decorated with blue-enamelled Dutch landscapes evoking 17th-century Delft faience. These objects amalgamate seemingly contradictory notions, such as the apparent fragility of ceramics and the robustness of the objects decorated, or even ancient craftsmanship and modern technology.

For this installation, the artist used a “Dutch”-style carved cabinet made in a Java workshop specialising in copies of European furniture. The artist referred to the history of the island and its colonisation by the Dutch while demonstrating that craftsmen preserved their cultural frameworks in their interpretation of decorative elements (the sculpted motifs evoke lotus flowers instead of roses).



*Cabinet*, 1990  
Wooden cabinet with 2 enamel  
painted gas cannisters and  
29 sawblades  
RMFAB, Brussels, inv. 11375

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# Coccyx double

[2018]

*Coccyx Double*, 2018  
Norwegian Pink Marble  
Studio Wim Delvoye

The *Coccyx Double* series is a continuation of the *Rorschach* series: the artist splits an originally symmetrical element to give it the appearance of a three-dimensional inkblot. Since the coccyx is a fundamental element of the human skeleton, the pieces in this series tie a link between Wim Delvoye's researches on medical imaging (X-rays) or the functioning of our bodies (the *Cloaca professional* logo forms a coccyx), and his sculpture work with bronze or marble. Wim Delvoye takes pleasure in reminding that, when he was a student, symmetry was a notion banned from art school programmes.

## Workshop

Tattoos, prints, drawings, transformed logos... Take your time to capture Wim Delvoye's art in our "Free-Workshop". Turn art, life and the world upside down with creations from the trivial to the sacred, from the functional to the decorative, a mixture of past and future.



## Colophon

We wish to warmly thank the Studio Wim Delvoye, the public and private institutions as well as the sponsors, patrons and partners who made this exhibition possible.

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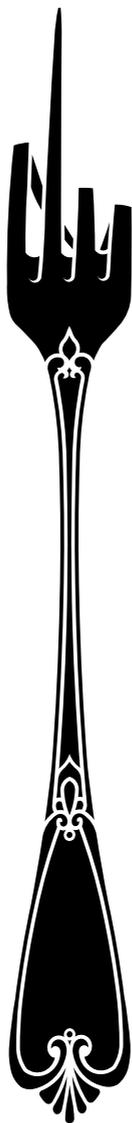
This workshop as well as numerous other activities are organized by the Public Mediation Department of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

Find us on

[www.fine-arts-museum.be](http://www.fine-arts-museum.be)

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