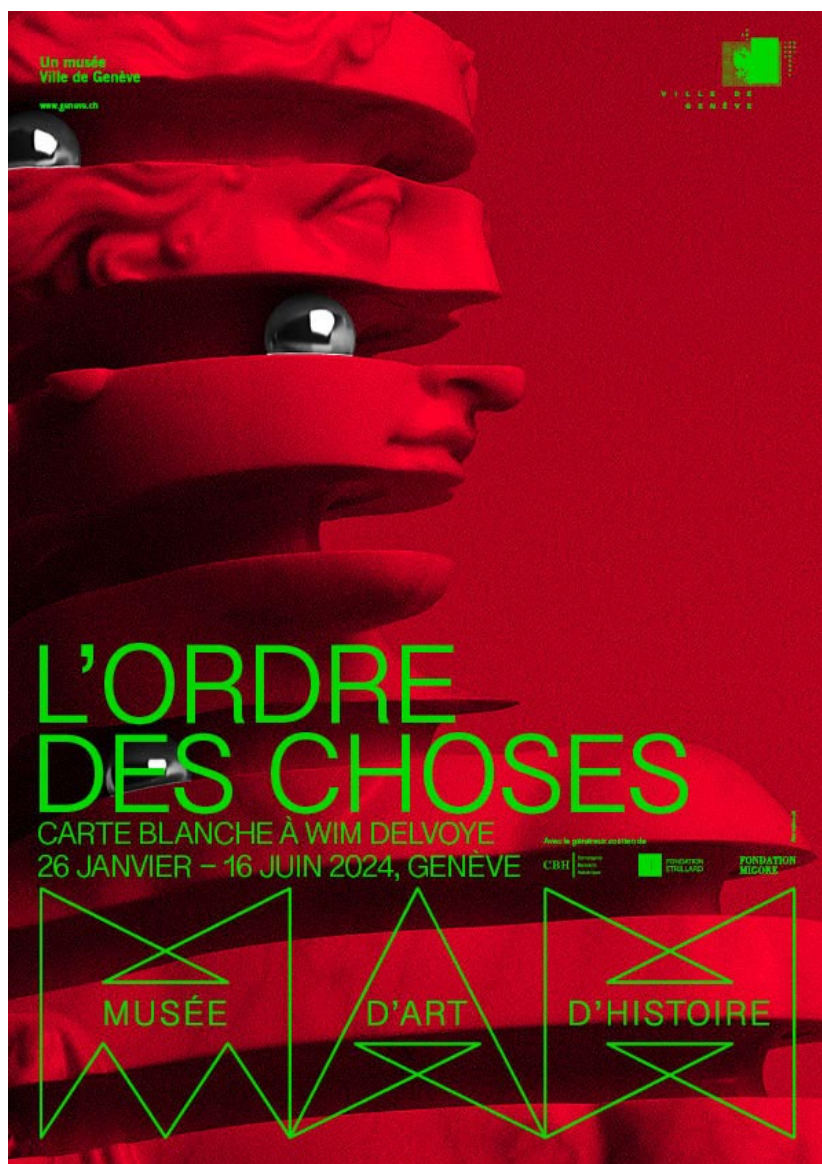


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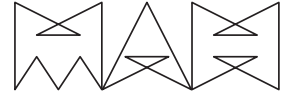
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Open Invitation to Wim Delvoye

Geneva, December 2023 – For its fourth XL exhibition, the Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève (MAH) invited Wim Delvoye (1965) to investigate the museum's connection to its collections and institutions. The visual artist will present an original artistic and aesthetic experience that deeply explores our relationship to art and the objects around us.

Following previous artists Jakob Lena Knebl (*Walk on the Water*), who examined the line between everyday objects and aesthetic objects, Jean-Hubert Martin (*Draw Your Own Conclusion*), who questioned the practice of collecting, and Ugo Rondinone (*When the Sun Goes Up and the Moon Goes Down*), who explored the idea of transformation, Wim Delvoye's visual and conceptual shocks seem to once again take up and orchestrate these issues in their own way. By bringing in both local and universal references and orientations from art history, Delvoye short circuits mental categories that sieve and narrow our judgements and perceptions, blurring the lines that limit our understanding of things.

One can say that Wim Delvoye is an artist who is passionate about things, artefacts and whether they are recognised artworks or simple objects. "He has extraordinary knowledge about art; it's deeper than that of most artists. He's a great collector, for example, of numismatics and Chinese photography," MAH director Marc-Olivier Wahler emphasises. "He's also passionate about seeking out things in hidden corners that people may have forgotten, and this fascinates me."

When the artist's appetite encountered the incredibly rich storerooms of the MAH, the idea of an exhibition arose. Pieces from the museum's collection will partake in a game of reflection and contrast with pieces by Delvoye himself. The material accumulation, the mania of collecting, and the effects of formal and aesthetic echoes that emerge through the presentation all create a very tenuous narrative that visitors are invited to weave for themselves, but which also allows for a questioning of the seemingly impenetrable boundaries that divide art objects and everyday objects. In this joyous and playful profusion of objects, references and interventions that the artist presents as what he calls "elegant vandalism," it is nevertheless possible to go down many roads.

1. Deviations

One of the constant thrusts of Wim Delvoye's work is tearing one thing from its primary logic, stripping an object of its original context and transplanting it in a quasi-magical manner to another context of reality. Icons and popular figures suddenly appear amid gates and doorways that neither enclose nor circumscribe any space. For instance, a Picasso becomes an obstacle that a giant set of marbles delights in piercing, the apparition of a strange figure suckles at the breast of polychrome religious sculptures, and cases are in dialogue with coffins. In this context, the bringing together of revolvers and *madrier* planks from the MAH's arms and armoury collection with the artist's famous tyres creates a symbolic value; it embodies the desire to detonate frontiers and certainties. Museum practices and contemporary art, our practical and aesthetic hierarchies, and our visual habits are toppled, diverted and set without direction. Deviations provoke, captivate and seize our attention, and, in the case of Delvoye, they often have massive repercussions in the media. As Wahler stresses, "It's his deep motivation that art, in his hands, comes to belong to all systems—economic, scientific, pataphysical, to popular culture and so forth."



Moreover, it's in this spirit that the MAH, Delvoye and the Laiteries Réunies Genève have partnered. Works from the museum's collection and works by the Belgian artist will soon embellish the lids of millions of small coffee *pots de crème* found in many Swiss homes.

2. Reversals

There are essentially two kinds of reversals. We notice the conceptual collapses immediately: Delvoye's obsession with everything often deemed banal, vulgar or trivial has brought about a genuine re-enchantment of the ordinary. He directly approaches this material with the most aesthetic references and skills in art history and craft. For example, a room exploring *horror vacui*, the practice that covers a surface until it's saturated, offers a way to conjure the fear of empty space. A fully engraved car's body, reminiscent of etching, creates dialogues with *morion* helmets worn by the Swiss army, highlighting several visual interpretations of the fundamental human need to ensure physical integrity. But these reversals are also physical. They create an expectation from the contents, from what must be jealously guarded and conserved, and they challenge our aesthetic hierarchies. In this way, objects that seemingly have minor or circumstantial value—our judgements of taste even disregard them—can, once placed in a new context, say a great deal about us, our fetishes and our obsessions.

3. Collections

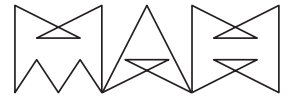
There is no set trajectory imposed through the profusion of lines, volumes, objects and echoes that the artist orchestrates; there is no "great narrative" constraining the visitor's step or eye. Instead, there is a reflection on the very idea of the collection, on the limits and beauties of the gesture of accumulation. A collection might, therefore, be motivated by formal resemblances. In this way, certain pieces by Tinguely resonate with clock mechanisms or a fragment of the original *Cloaca*, now a cult statue, returned to its primary, purely mechanical nature. In terms of accumulation, collection and possession, where does passion end and pathology begin? Delvoye asserts himself as an artist between Diogenes and Prometheus, between cynicism and the sublime, drawing on art critic Eric Bracke's formula. He is an aesthete who is forever exposing us to the ever-changing reality of nature, so fragile in certitude yet seemingly solid that it presents the same twists and distortions he applies to certain masterpieces of art history.

Born in 1965 in Wervik, in the West Flanders province of Belgium, Wim Delvoye has always been forthcoming about the regional roots of his artistic practice. Paradoxically, he reaches global inquiry by delightfully plunging into his origins. At times, his approach is aligned with conceptual art and Belgian Surrealism, yet it remains profoundly unique because of its embodied and immediately eloquent characteristics. The objects and experiences produced by Delvoye's artistic engineering are often reminiscent of ubiquitous aspects of the world that touch us very directly. These are things that surround us, that make up the very fabric of our modernity, and also define our relationship to the body. This primordial, primal and fundamental orientation runs up against unrivalled attention to detail, highlighting the very facture presented before our eyes. By collaborating with craftsmen and traditional trades, with invaluable skills that are sometimes forgotten or disregarded, Delvoye revives a collective dimension (he calls it "medieval") to his artistic work. He turns into a cathedral builder (real and symbolic), a designer of grandiose buildings



and unexpected artefacts that allow us to both dive into our roots (biological, cultural, memorial) and stage our various aspirations and projections (sometimes sublime, often ridiculous).

Curator	Wim Delvoye
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1. Introduction

For its fourth Open Invitation exhibition, the MAH invited an artist internationally known for his ability to surprise, provoke and joyfully blow up our comfortable certitudes and the reassuring assumptions that structure our relationship with the world. Through the years, Wim Delvoye has established himself as a unique visual artist with the capacity to introduce new objects and practices into the art world. He ties his artistic approach to societal and media trends that enliven our daily lives, creating work that immediately becomes iconic. Whether it's *Cloaca* (2000) or the *Double Helix* series (2007), which brings together deformed and melted crucifixes, *Twisted Dump Truck* (2011), which presents the unlikely combination of Gothic architecture and a garbage truck, or his famous tattooed pigs, Delvoye's art has a rare, unique quality—it seems to already belong to a kind of general contemporary art culture while radically questioning the way this world is organised. It's at once integrated into the culture and counter-culture, mainstream and anti-mainstream, perfectly oriented towards media and advertising while exposing these means in profoundly subversive challenges. The artist's personality is another layer; he's an avid collector, an impassioned scavenger, a seeker of the unexpected and a visual artist with a scathing sense of humour. In short, he's a perfect curator for reorchestrating the MAH collections to match his artistic perspective and bring out the extraordinary wealth of Geneva's heritage. For someone who specialises in the dialogue between the local and global, craft and high-tech, folklore and philosophy, the opportunity to delve into the museum collection could become a fascinating engagement with what art is today.

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2. Background

Marc-Olivier Wahler and Wim Delvoye's artistic and intellectual compatibility dates back to their time in New York in the early 2000s. As European expatriates, they went together to explore exhibitions, museums and various institutions while considering the particularity of their Swiss and Belgian cultures in the American melting pot. The bond between the director-curator and artist emerged from the sense of being part of a geographic and cultural periphery, which afforded them a special point of view in an increasingly polarised world. When the XL Open Invitation Exhibitions took root, Wahler naturally thought of Delvoye's ability to reinterpret entire chapters of art history and culture through his artistic practice, particularly when that history was as clearly anchored in a region and place as the one conserved by the MAH. By his own admission, Delvoye dove into the museum storerooms with an almost childlike enthusiasm and pleasure while also being aware that his exploration gave him access to a kind of anthropological wellspring: all the objects, artefacts and available pieces were charged with uses and practices, daily gestures, emotions and symbolism that remained in an almost ghost-like state—they were just waiting to be awakened and reactivated. For an artist like Delvoye, known for mounting solo shows with the feel of group exhibitions because of the range of techniques, aesthetics and gestures on view, the concentration of cultural wealth could only be a great delight. Switzerland had already appeared in small ways in Delvoye's work with Tim Steiner, the most famous tattooed man in the world, who is Swiss, and also with the *ironing boards* crests, for example. Here, the country is at the heart of the installation, a large echo chamber that attempts to blur the line between art and craft, practice and aesthetic, the known and the original.



3. Concept

a. On the Order of Things

At the heart of the artist's approach is an inquiry into the status of "things" in the broad sense, whether in the domain of art or our daily lives. The order of things is a more or less conscious consideration of our hierarchies, our automatic taxonomies and our established classification systems. Delvoye invites us to change our relationships with the world through objects we neglect or view with contempt. Whether a Canova sculpture, a small sarcophagus for animals, or a scene from a video game, the visual artist has us confront artefacts and representations whose aesthetic qualities might have been erased, hidden or never revealed. The artist-curator's work, therefore, involves casting new light on these objects, bringing out their reflections and references, and deeply shifting the implicit hierarchies that govern access to artistic representation. But his ambition goes beyond this formal and visual dimension, beyond the level of pure contemplation. To Delvoye, deviating our perspective, reversing our perception and questioning our categories also means giving ourselves the means to act in our daily lives. Questioning this "order of things," whether it be the one the objects seem to dictate or the one by which we attempt to domesticate them, also implies exercising our sense of relativity. This exhibition is conceived as an antidote to fixed, immobile and sterile lines of thought. Nothing here is absolutely set; everything moves, and everything invites movement. Industrial drawings suddenly appear in a room that contains one of the most known and controversial pieces of contemporary art; clock parts respond to engraved helmets, which themselves echo a fully decorated luxury car body, itself placed right next to shovels, which are also decorated. This is how our aesthetic attention is recalibrated, reoriented and renewed! But shaking up the order of things is also a deep shift that is sometimes provocative in its approach. It means treating a Picasso like a wall while recalling the material and tactile nature of the work of art; it means bringing into view its visual qualities and its potential to deform; it means envisioning holes, making it unholy and reconfiguring its simple gesture. It also means acknowledging things and their respective order (in terms of their ontological category), accepting them as they are, without idealising them or letting their intrinsic dynamism act as guides so as to be able to traverse the museum space in a new way.

b. The Movement of Looking

One of the recurring themes in the conversations between Marc-Olivier Wahler and Wim Delvoye is the very practice of the Museum as a place and an institution. How can the visitor be offered something else? How can traditional and fixed views be broken when an artist frames a particular window onto the world? And this frame is itself framed by labels, discourse and an installation that might constrict the free association of ideas and feelings. In other words, how can looking begin to move, and how can a new viewing experience be presented?

The installation of balls Delvoye has created as a circuit resolves this problem surprisingly, practically and intuitively. Following the course of a steel ball through the museum, but also through walls, galleries and artworks themselves, visitors feel magnetically drawn in by a new scopic desire. They discover fresh modes of circulation, corners and other sides into which the eye rarely ventures, if at all. The apparent levity with which masterpieces are approached comes as a surprise, as do new considerations of what a hole is, what a gap is or what it means to "break through"—sometimes it's subversive, sometimes it's destructive, but it's also an introduction of air, the honoring of healthy irreverence and longed-for liberty. This

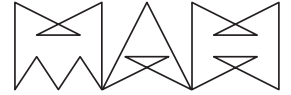


playful mechanism, reminiscent of a child's game of marbles, ultimately becomes the physical and embodied translation of the leap and bounds of looking that Delvoye orchestrates by bringing very different objects side by side throughout all the museum's rooms. They are suddenly electrified together by a formal feature, a communal use or some kind of toppling. In short, the entire exhibition is filled with the demand that looking is always dynamic, going from one reference system to another, from daily life to fine arts, from the trivial to the sublime, from the dirty to the ornamental and from the playful to the serious.

c. Philosophical Vandalism

This exhibition brings to the fore three conceptual themes in Wim Delvoye's work, with his ardent interest in deviation freely expressed. While the act of exhibiting is, by definition, tearing away from the original context, it is also the opportunity for new and original resonances; it invites the object to be repositioned to be understood in a new light. This deviation can be functional, like when the artist produces cases meant for objects that are unnecessary, for example, *A Case for a Moped* (2004). Then, our relationship to the value of things and our need to protect and make them valuable comes into question. But it can also be formal, for example, how the *Ford* logo is skewed to say *Cloaca* and how this act makes us reflect on standardised and mechanical production—whether with cars, cultural artefacts or even excrement. *Mr. Clean* overlooking this logo skews the skewed, which is characteristic of Delvoye's work. There's always more, not less, here. By piling up the codes, references and aesthetic allusions, his approach especially promotes what Marc-Olivier Wahler has called the "schizophrenic quotient" of an artwork: its capacity to present multiple and simultaneous interpretations. The logic behind the production of meaning changes radically as a result. It's no more about *this* or *that*, but rather *this*, *that* and *something else*. For example, a carefully rendered suitcase by Delvoye is still a suitcase while also the symbol of a craft tradition. It is also a medium that carries a reflection on the status of an object, depending on the context from which it emerged, providing an opportunity to consider the shift from function to aesthetic and even to statutory art (the choice of Rimowa suitcases, with their recognisable aesthetic and value, is no coincidence). As a corollary to this art of deviation, the science of reversal is also one of the characteristics of this approach. Objects that are usually neglected such as drawings, sketches and even references, considered to be scraps of art history, are legitimised in Delvoye's work. For instance, a scene from the videogame *Counter-Strike* is immortalised in a bas-relief, a technique that draws attention to its architectural context as offered to the player—stained glass windows are meant to transcend through light and the worship of religious scenes are decorated with depictions of the most trivial functions of the organism. For Delvoye, creation readily becomes disruptive, carnivalesque and charged with an irreverence that is not at heart disrespectful. Instead, it asserts an attempt to widen the aesthetic field to include all that is perceptible. This democratic and deeply subversive dimension of the artist's work culminates in a different "community of sense," to use Jacques Rancière's term, presenting the viewer with art that Belgian Surrealism might well have embraced. Where is the object's value, then? Is it in its use, in the time devoted to adorning it, in the surge of ideas and reflections it might produce in us? Delvoye clearly leaves the question open and focuses on multiplying the levels of meanings, the visual parallels and the surprises of categorisation.

Finally, the Belgian artist's practice is deeply rooted in the idea of the collection. As an impassioned collector himself, whether of old paintings, rare pieces or *Vache Qui Rit*® lid labels, he continuously questions the act of capturing and



accumulating. He continuously questions the act of acquiring and accumulating that is at the core of building a series or a group of works or even creating a small world over which the collector becomes the demiurge. Because the collection has multiple aesthetic, axiological and psychological challenges, there are many pieces and objects that are presented in a series: helmets, dishes, plates, and *madrier* planks, but also drawings, clocks, cases, rare pieces, and more. In this vein, there is symbolic value in collaborating with Laiteries Réunies Genève, launching a collection of pots de crème lids with reproductions of artworks from the museum or by the artist. This is the ultimate act of a museum outside museum walls, a democratisation of art so complete and total that it reaches millions in number (but these millions aren't, for once, a price but rather a distribution amount!). In this way, everyone can become "Delvoye" collectors—collectors in the most ordinary sense as all the various lids produced are gathered.

Every time, whether through deviation, reversal or collection, a deep line of questioning is set in motion about the object's value or how we attribute value. Wim Delvoye has always been interested in the logic of class in socio-economic relationships and in what determines our tastes, aesthetic claims and connection to the possession of things. His approach, often humorous and offbeat, stems from a contemporary cynicism—in the philosophical sense of the word—precisely because it is without contempt and a theoretical position of superiority. He is the philosopher-artist who has come to pull us out of our conceptual torpor, the unlikely Diogenes who breaks our sensorial habits, and a profound minstrel who challenges what we think we know about ourselves and the things familiar to us.

d. Curation/Exploration

At the root of all Open Invitation XL exhibitions is a challenge. How do we navigate through the MAH's rich storerooms? How do we give meaning to its abundance of objects, documents, artefacts and to all the records of artistic activities and practices that are the cultural sedimentation of the site? Wim Delvoye has imparted his love for venturing through these storerooms in search of pieces that had not yet been exploited. He is pleased about being the fourth artist-curator invited (following Jakob Lena Knebl, Jean-Hubert Martin and Ugo Rondinone); it has sharpened his sense of originality and the offbeat. This means seeing pieces not yet noticed, focusing on unexpected objects and transforming what might have been considered to be a scrap of art history or craft. The MAH collections were much more than an amazing playground to Delvoye — a natural hunter, an atypical collector fascinated by diverse things—and he approached them with passion and freedom. Readily releasing all aesthetic hierarchies and existing categorisation, he aimed to let the objects speak for themselves. From these elective affinities, a teeming universe emerged in which visitors can enjoy getting lost. They become curators of their own aesthetic experience in their own right.

4. Trajectory

a. Venus and Adonis (entrance Hall)

When the viewer enters the museum space, this liminal artwork acts as a symbol. It is a known motif, a topos of art history, rendered by an Italian sculptor who was well-known in his time. At first, Delvoye's sculpture seems to shuffle the cards and topple our usual references. Upon seeing the twisting bodies, our eye is quickly set in motion, trying to follow the lines, locating the visual beauty of the classic sculpture while also experiencing it in an accelerated fashion, as if it were itself escaping. We are naturally



led to walk around the object, allowing it to redistribute our attention and to engage our steps in the wonderful game of resonances that the artist has orchestrated from his perspective.

Venus holding on to Adonis to stop him from leaving to go hunting is somewhat parallel to our classical aesthetic conditioning taming our spontaneous responses. The young man embodies our artistic curiosity, the kind that Delvoye's interventions continuously seek in every gallery. The choice of a sculptor like Canova is also emblematic. Once famous and celebrated (Delvoye playfully noted that no village in Italy could exist without a via Canova), the sculptor is now somewhat neglected, stored away on one of art history's many shelves. He has become the symbol of an aesthetic heritage that is to be rediscovered and reinvented. This reinterpretation happens through a twisting movement, like a physical mechanism, but with profound intellectual consequences; artwork that seems intangible becomes material through the movement, all while suggesting the power of the artist's distorting and recontextualising eye on entire segments of art history.

b. Venus Italica

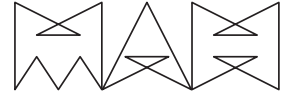
The sculpture is again given a place of honour in this gallery through Canova, Pradier and even Praxiteles. Delvoye's intervention is quickly felt, though. He has included a Venus (inspired by Canova), traversed by a strange circuit of marbles. A dynamic is set in motion, again adopted and reorchestrated prominently in the following galleries. Echoing the *Venus and Adonis* in the entrance hall, the artist again moves what is usually a symbol of permanence and immobility. Classical statuary becomes a dance between reverence and irreverence, respect and game, admiration and subversion. One also finds the twisted version of *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* and several motifs from Antiquity that have undergone the same rendering. One can again see the symbolism of this ever-mobile and surprising aesthetic as the embodiment of the energy that runs through all of Delvoye's endeavours and the proof that his work escapes all analysis that establishes limits once and for all.

c. Le juste retour des choses

This enigmatic name hides the exhibition's most impressive mechanism. The configuration of the site, the walls and the very structure of the rooms were reconsidered to maximise the staging of the whole.

One of the first installations presents the visitor with a series of Piranesi prints—the famous *Carceri*—that depict fantastic imaginary prisons. The architectural masses renew the dialectic between solid and void with vanishing points in the potentially infinite staircases and impressive stone blocks. Like a mischievous wink to the circulation of steel marbles on Venus' breast in the previous gallery, Damien Hirst's piece combining a hairdryer and a ping pong ball (*What Goes Up Must Come Down*, 1994) explores the vertical movement of another spherical and playful object as a prisoner of its position because of the other physical forces in effect.

A second installation immediately creates an echo or, in other words, introduces air. Gordon Matta-Clark's film *Conical Intersect* (1975) projects and illustrates his anarchic approach to architecture, notably through his exploration of holes in situ. He discovered a new logic for the eyes' spatial orientation and circulation. When looking through abandoned buildings, they suddenly seemed entirely reconfigured by absences and openings. This grandiose and surprising reorchestration of the play of marbles and holes and flows is hidden in the museum's second largest Palatine room.



By bringing together old paintings from Delvoye's own collection, remarkable paintings from the MAH's storerooms and famous names like Raphael, Picasso, Warhol and even Lucas Cranach, this space is immediately distinguished by the breadth of the questions it invokes. But its unique quality is still the vast marble circuit that traverses the room and even through some of the pieces. Its playfulness verges on the destructive; nothing stops its advance. Resonating with Matta-Clark's work, Delvoye also practices with holes in art history, inviting the eye to pierce the thickness of time and the sedimentation of history to jump from one era to another, from Classicism to Modernism and from a pictorial revolution to a reaffirmation of academic codes. In the middle of this impressive ballet of references, the steel marble embodies a solipsistic principle, following nothing but its own movement, only obeying the laws of physics and inertia, and thereby treating each material traversed in an equal, undifferentiated way. A curious dialectic then unfolds between our seeing, which is informed by art history and the drive to classify, rank and prioritise, and the fascinating movement of a spheric and shiny object that rouses our fantasy for joyful vandalism that is iconoclastic.

10/19

d. Quad Corpus

Dual Möbius Quad Corpus is the title of a well-known Wim Delvoye piece in polished bronze that depicts four Christ-like bodies intertwined and seeming to reinforce the strip of the same name. The rectitude of the crucifix disappears, and the passion of Christ finds new expression in this enigmatic twist. Following charge and speed, here is a gallery that seems to encourage contemplation and spiritual retreat instead. But in using the stained-glass windows from the mid- and late-fifteenth century that decorate the space, the artist is extending his reflection on movement. Firstly, the movement of light, which passes through the glass and its colouring to give it life. Then there's the movement of our eye, which explores each scene, each part of an episode in the life of a religious figure (Saint Peter, Saint Paul or Saint Mary Magdalene are among the parade of known figures presented to the visitor). But the final and perhaps most enigmatic movement is the one that goes from the works themselves to our eyes: the religious scenes, windows, paintings and statues are, in fact, often organised around a significant detail, an element that has meaning and represents a spiritual principle or a strong doctrinaire. Roland Barthes used the word "punctum" to conceptualise the striking detail that emerges from the surface, whether painted, coloured or sculpted, that "punches," pierces and moves us. Following the sculptures, paintings, walls and rooms, the viewer's body and spirit must allow itself to be traversed by a strong and often mysterious visual element.

e. Perspective: Madame Récamier

Referring to the famous woman of letters and high society icon of Napoleonic times, this suite of rooms explores another temporal and aesthetic dimension: the bourgeois salon, whether a private room or a social space where one's tastes are exhibited to represent oneself. The furniture recreates period rooms that are invaded by the artist's mischievous associations. Collections of liturgical cases are alongside unlikely cases Delvoye has imagined in the vein of Belgian Surrealism. Coffins that look like sarcophagi are then arranged in a room where the wood medallions present Delvoye's famous tattooed pigskins. *Mickey Mouse*, *Mr. Clean*, and *Disney* princesses suddenly enter this new kind of cabinet of curiosities. Permanence and impermanence, the life and death of bodies and icons and the acts of protection and embalming are some of the dialectics that emerge as one passes through these rooms. The playful frenzy of the artist's characteristic approach continues, notably



when real cases for musical instruments present forms that are as enigmatic and odd as the artist's own work. Which is the art object, and which is the functional object? This is one of the fundamental inquiries of the exhibition, pitched here anew.

f. L'ordre des choses

This part of the installation, which borrows the exhibition's overall title, returns to the passion of collecting mentioned above and immerses us in the artist's personal obsessions. This is a room that brings together 126 panels along the walls that present Delvoye's own *Vache qui Rit*® labels, making visible and palpable the dynamic of accumulation. A temporal dimension is also suggested because the collection has formed over time. In the middle of the room, four cases combine rare coins from the artist's collection and the museum's numismatics. The juxtaposition of these various collections overhauls their values and hierarchies and underscores their different content while showcasing the similarities of their constitution and function. Who is more enthusiastic, the tyrosemiophile (collector of cheese labels) or the numismatist (coin collector)? Could one say that a collector working in a museum is also a compulsive accumulator—at least in an off-set and professionalised way? And what if every collection is a personal museum in which individuals find possibilities for organisation, classification and hierarchisation, which are otherwise unavailable to them in an ever-complex, multifactorial and unpredictable world? The famous pots de crème lids echo these questions and symbolise a collection meant to leave the museum and occupy the space of the commercial circulation of objects, making it seem reactive, like liquid.

g. Game Over

Behind this title lies one of the most humorous and boyish galleries that the museum conceals. One finds steles from Ancient Egypt alongside contemporary bas-reliefs that are drawn directly from scenes from the video games *Counter-Strike* and *Fortnite*. To underline the postmodern shock, spud guns that look aggressive but whose capacity to kill is greatly reduced (they're meant to shoot pieces of potato) seem pointed at the bas-relief scenes and, therefore, recall the screens from which these images are taken. Which speaks more to our emotions and desires, the call to destroy or the claim of immortality?

h. Fait à la main

Plunged into a more accentuated darkness, this gallery plays an impressive perceptual and conceptual magic trick. With detonators designed to blow open doors during a military siege alongside their *madrier* planks (these are the bases of these devices) and hand-carved tires (again among Delvoye's iconic work), the artist seems to be playing with the museographic codes reserved for contemporary and conceptual art. Here again, the status of objects seems to have been overturned: how can a functional object, once placed in the right conditions, so easily resemble a piece by a fictional disciple of the American Minimalists? Where do Delvoye's tyres, with their incredibly patient and aesthetically precious carving work, fit into the "artialisation" process? Between the minimum and maximum interventions possible on the exhibited object, between the purity of contemporary art codes and the aesthetic saturation of certain craft practices, the artist is at the centre of the most marked and fascinating contrasts of our modernity.



i. **Knocking on Heaven's Door**

With a replica of the tower of Brussels in laser-cut stainless steel, this room hosts one of Delvoye's "Gothic" style symbols. The question of verticality, the dynamic of ascension, and the Promethean (or religious) hope of reaching the sky or immortality are at the heart of this association of objects. This tower is alongside a model of the well-known Brunswick monument, the emblematic mausoleum embodying the paradox of the will to pass into the next world and the permanence in this one. The matter of ostentation, excess and expense is raised in immediately perceptible terms. The reduced dimensions of the objects themselves don't conceal the sense of the spectacular but seem even to underline it through contrast.

j. **La peur du vide**

As the name indicates, this room explores the artistic repercussions of *horror vacui*, which refers to an ornamental practice aiming to fill the totality of a surface or an object with ornamental features and details to replace the empty with the full. In this vast space, which itself alternates between presence and absence, one sees exhibited objects and the negative space around them. These objects include a collection of dishes engraved with allegorical scenes, richly decorated plates seemingly illuminated with engraving and historical medallions adorned with known figures. There are also tankards, bottles, vases and incense burners. The installation reveals the passion for decoration and ornamentation that permeates Western culture, filling the surface of both noble and functional objects alike. Two immediately recognisable luxury car bodies (*Maserati* and *Ferrari*) are finely engraved, creating colliding symbols of capitalist success, the glorification of speed and visibility, and another, more discrete and extremely patient kind of ostentation, the ostentation of craft—its codes, the polar opposite of hypermodern society. Morion helmets from the Swiss army, along with construction hats and metal suitcases, also emerge as symbols of a full arsenal of protection. Each case presents amazing decorative control of metal, valuing the embellishment of what might have been nothing more than a quasi-disposable artefact. When faced with this armour, a reflection takes root on the dynamic of protection that all these objects embody: physical with armour, psychic and psychological with excessive ornamentation. What compels us to fill space with our graphic, allegorical and aesthetic obsessions? What curious fear prompts us to ward off emptiness, absence and the negative? In attempting to keep the chasm at bay, all these objects perhaps tap into one of humankind's primal fears.

k. **Le cours des choses**

With a title that pays homage to an experimental film by Fischli and Weiss made in 1987, *Der Lauf Der Dinge*, this installation recalls the progressive process of any productive undertaking, whether technical or artistic. In exploring different chain reactions with humour and inventiveness, the artist's team had already granted objects a strange and independent life. They presented a picture of a world in which the line between agency and passivity is blurred by the simple interplay of inertia, the kinetic, and the laws of physics. Here, Delvoye shifts the premise and enjoys suggesting that a similar process, triggered by clashes, movements and, at times, unpredictable chain reactions, is at work in the birth of a project or object. Aeratechnical drawings by Panamarenko evoking strange cars, archeopteryx and even a flying saucer motor allow for a play on the notion of the draft and a comparison between the artistic practice of the sketch and that of technical and preparatory engineering drawings. The idea of a reduction in scale between the imagined drawing



and the envisioned machine is echoed by the presence of a pocket-sized *Cloaca* in travel kit format, which is given the place of honour in the centre of the room.

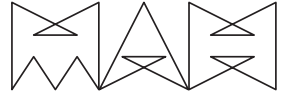
In an adjacent cabinet, finally, is the eponymous film by Fischli and Weiss. During our visit, we have seen several rooms transformed into projection spaces. Each film sequence resonates with a part of the exhibition and creates a new echo by unfolding or complicating the references and allusions disseminated by Delvoye through different galleries. One can see the expression of the artist's personal credo: the conviction that his predecessors and colleagues are facilitators, allowing him to take it further, to propose and question anew.

I. Par la force des choses

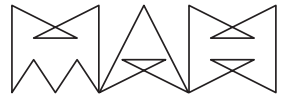
We penetrate a strange mechanical ballet in this room: bell tower clocks, mechanisms that are at first unidentifiable, various kinds of timepieces and a work by Jean Tinguely are in dialogue with a part of the original *Cloaca*, that emblematic Delvoye work that itself investigates the line between the biological and mechanical. The bringing together of these disparate objects paradoxically illuminates the proximity of their formal language. Mechanical inertia, the measure of time, the power given to mechanisms and their interaction with human bodies become points of inquiry for the artist and visitors. Our usual references are again challenged: What exactly are we looking at? A technical object? A fragment of a complex mechanism? A specialised assemblage of materials that incorporates concern about the world's mechanisation as a work of art (with Tinguely's *If It's Black, My Name is Jean*)? Each stop in front of a pedestal becomes an opportunity to ask these questions. The mind is, therefore, constantly engaged and held in suspense in this visual exercise through which the eye either notes differences or is carried away by formal and material similarities. The object's status also changes: when placed in relationship with other pieces and near other possible incarnations of human response, the object is easily pulled out of assigned categories. Nothing seems established on the conceptual level in this gallery with its mechanisms that are meant to produce or regulate movement. Nevertheless, like a basso continuo resonating in the background of this symphony of technical, artistic and industrial echoes, the massive character of particular pieces, the inexorability of the metallic and the hardness of the materials recall the weight of time and the challenge of measuring it, even as it's up to visitors to once again be led by their feet, from one thing to the next.

5. The Artist

Although the slight scent of scandal that wafts around some of his work might be disconcerting, there is no doubt that the radicality and depth of the questions raised by Wim Delvoye's work have secured him a prominent position in the landscape of contemporary art. Drawing on an obsolete regional aesthetic, he has turned it into official art, questioning its boundaries from within. He champions surprise and disorientation by playing with the visual and conceptual shock provoked by applying extremely fine and precise techniques using functional objects that are usually neglected or discredited (tyres, cases, construction machinery, for example). There is a kind of magic in how he surrenders to technical and aesthetic transformation, summoning humankind's most fundamental and archaic themes and emotions as well as the most advanced technologies and innovations (including legal ones). His work is characterised by powerful imagery, rendered masterfully in a hybrid of humour and love. His speciality is clashing traditions and contexts. Tearing the object from our



routine perceptions, giving it lustre, light and a new shine with a series of interventions and deviations is Delvoye's inexhaustible talent. He is a master agitator and tireless explorer of moral and aesthetic landscapes that are the fabric of the contemporary era.



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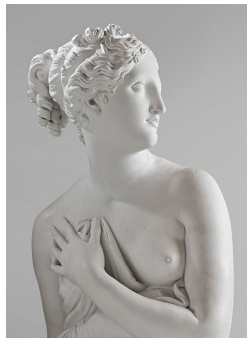
Thank you very much.

Musée d'art et d'histoire
Press Office
Rue Charles-Galland 2
CH-1206 Geneva



Wim Delvoye

© Studio Wim Delvoye



Antonio Canova (1757-1822)

Venus « Italica » or Venus Coming Out of Her Bath, 1807-1810

Plaster; H. 173 cm

Gift of the artiste, 1813; inv. 1846-0003

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photo: B. Jacot-Descombes

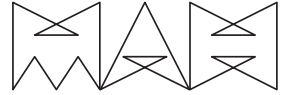


Wim Delvoye (1965)

Ball Track Venus Italica, 2023

Patinated bronze; H. 173 cm

© Studio Wim Delvoye



Frank Christian (?-1704)

Nautilus Shell Cup and Its Case, circa 1680

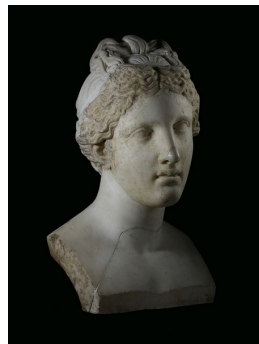
Cup; nautilus shell with openwork, engraving and vermeil, polychrome silver, H. 30 cm
Case: gilded leather with fine gilding, H. 33 cm.
Gift 1730; inv. G 0937 et G0937/bis
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photo: B. Jacot-Descombes



Wim Delvoye (1965)

Case for Moped, 2004

Aluminium, laquer, felt, Peugeot Vogue moped
H70 x 175 x 115 cm; 100 kg
© Collection Claudine et Jean-Marc Salomon



Bust of Aphrodite

Second-century, Italy (?)

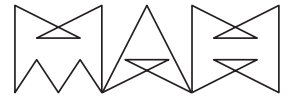
Carrara marble, sculpture in the round
H43 x 27 x 29 cm
Gift, 1871; inv. MF 1340
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève,
photo: F. Bevilacqua



Wim Delvoye (1965)

Amor Twisted (Counterclockwise), 2009

Carved marble; H 59 cm, Diam. 31.5 cm
© Studio Wim Delvoye



Ceremonial Roundel

Circa 1557-1560, Antwerp

Attributed to Eliseus Libaerts (1557-1572)

Embossed steel, engraving and gilding

Diam. 54 cm

Gift, 1822 ; inv. F 0078

© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo:
N. Sabato



Wim Delvoye (1965)

Rimowa Classic Flight Multiwheel

971.70.00.4, 2013

Embossed aluminium; H74,5 x 52 x 26 cm

© Studio Wim Delvoye



Wim Delvoye (1965)

Nautilus, 2017

Laser-cut stainless steel; H72 x 68 x 32 cm

© Studio Wim Delvoye



Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778)

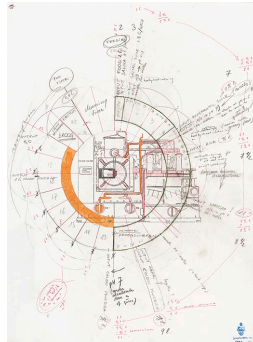
The Arch with a Shell Ornament, 1749-1761

Etching, engraving and drypoint

Plate 40.5 x 54.5 cm, sheet 48.5 x 70.7 cm

Historical collections; inv. E 86-0340

© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo:
A. Longchamp



Wim Delvoye (1965)
Untitled (Preparatory Drawing for Cloaca),
2002

Pencil, colour pencil and marker on paper
75.5 x 55.5 cm
© Collection de la Communauté flamande



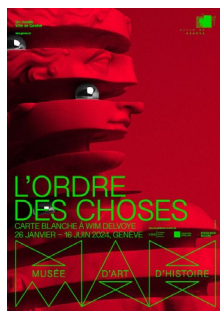
Morion
Vers 1570-1580

Engraved steel, brass, canvas, leather
H27 x 36,3 x 22.2 cm
Historical collections, 1870
Inv. C 0224
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève,
photo: F. Bevilacqua



Wim Delvoye (1965)
Untitled (Engraved Helmet), 2017

Embossed aluminium; H14 x 23 x 29 cm
© Studio Wim Delvoye



L'ordre des choses
Carte blanche à Wim Delvoye (2024)
Poster and leaflet

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