



# THE ORDER OF THINGS

OPEN INVITATION TO WIM DELVOYE

MUSÉE

D'ART

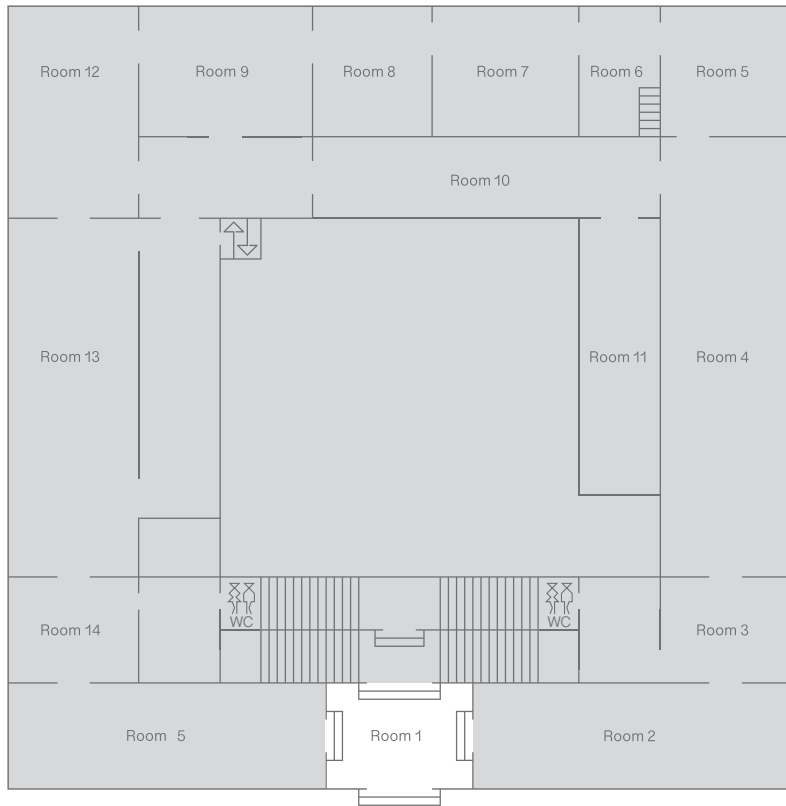
D'HISTOIRE

# VISITOR'S GUIDE

What does it mean to be attached to things, objects and works of art? How do we see them? How can we let them leave their mark on us, influence us, captivate us and question us? In *The Order of Things*, the fourth Open Invitation XL exhibition on view at the MAH (January 26–June 16, 2024), Wim Delvoye (1965) has chosen to explore our relationship to artefacts, whether ordinary or from the heights of art history. The objects talk to us and are in dialogue with each other, shaking our certitude and hierarchies in a dance of references that are choreographed by the delighted eye of the Belgian visual artist.

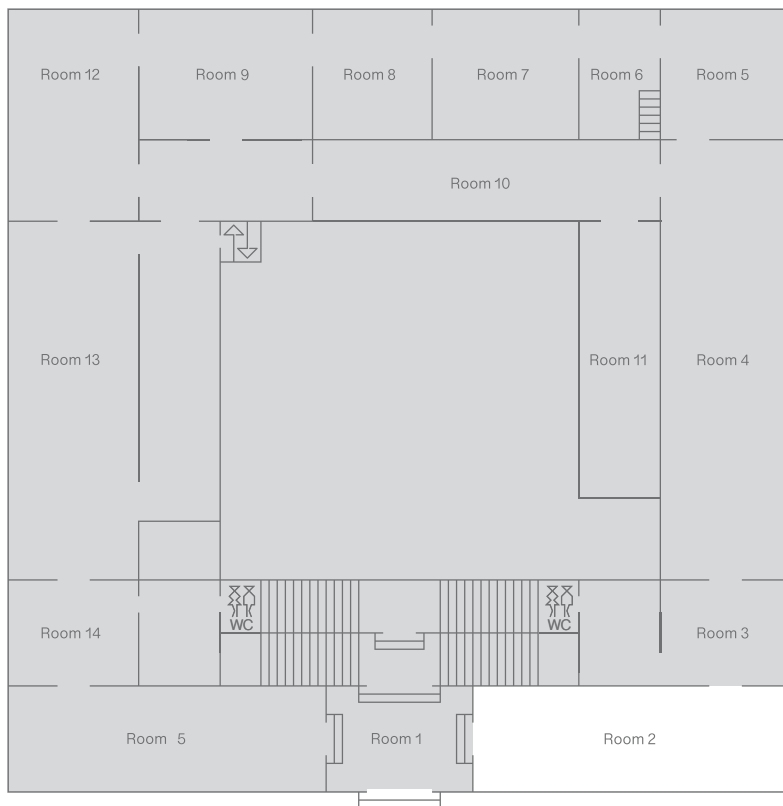
Wim Delvoye has explored the museum's storerooms, drawn on his personal collections, and redeployed iconic and also unknown artwork. As such, his work converses with Tinguely, Canova, Picasso and many others. Cases, helmets, stained glass windows and relics from the distant past play their part in a striking play of mirrors and echoes.

The result is a richly curious and unique exhibition revolving around the collection's concepts of deviation and reversal, which centre the perspective of the viewer, who is invited to move and keep moving. Even than our relationship to objects is our use of the museum itself, which is reinvented by an ingenious circuit mechanism, offering an unusual experience between a playful wink and elegant vandalism.



## Room 1 – Vénus et Adonis

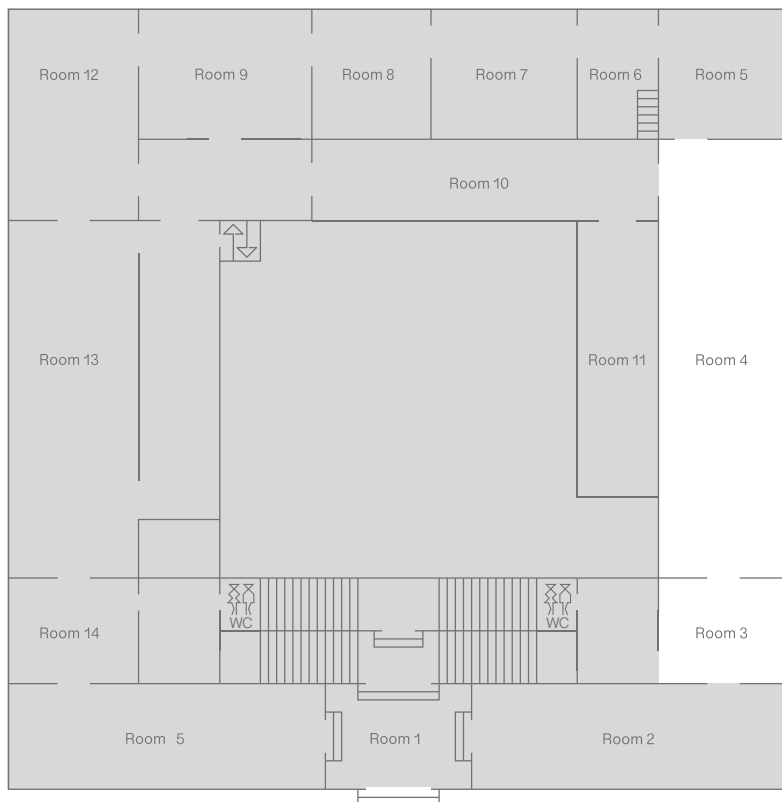
Wim Delvoye immediately begins in the museum's main hall by reinventing one of the collection's highlights at the Beaux-Arts entrance, *Venus and Adonis* by Antonio Canova. Here, the mythological couple is twisted by the artist. Their bodies contort and turn as a way to better topple our references. This twisting sets our eye in motion, following the lines and finding the beauty of the Neoclassical sculpture while being hypnotised by its new form. We are compelled to make our way around the object, let it redistribute our attention, and cast us into a game of resonances orchestrated by the artist.



## Room 2 – *Vénus Italica*

Sculpture is again given the place of honour in this gallery through Canova, Pradier and even Praxiteles. However, Wim Delvoye's intervention is quickly felt when our eye attempts to follow a marble traversing Venus's body, which has become a circuit. A dynamic is set in motion, one that is again adopted and reorchestrated prominently in the following galleries. Echoing *Venus and Adonis* in the entrance hall, the artist plays with incorporating the movement through the sculpture openings. Usually, we walk around sculpted bodies to better discover them, but here, a marble and its movement vibrate the body of the goddess of love. Classic statuary becomes the site of a dance between reverence and irreverence, admiration and subversion.

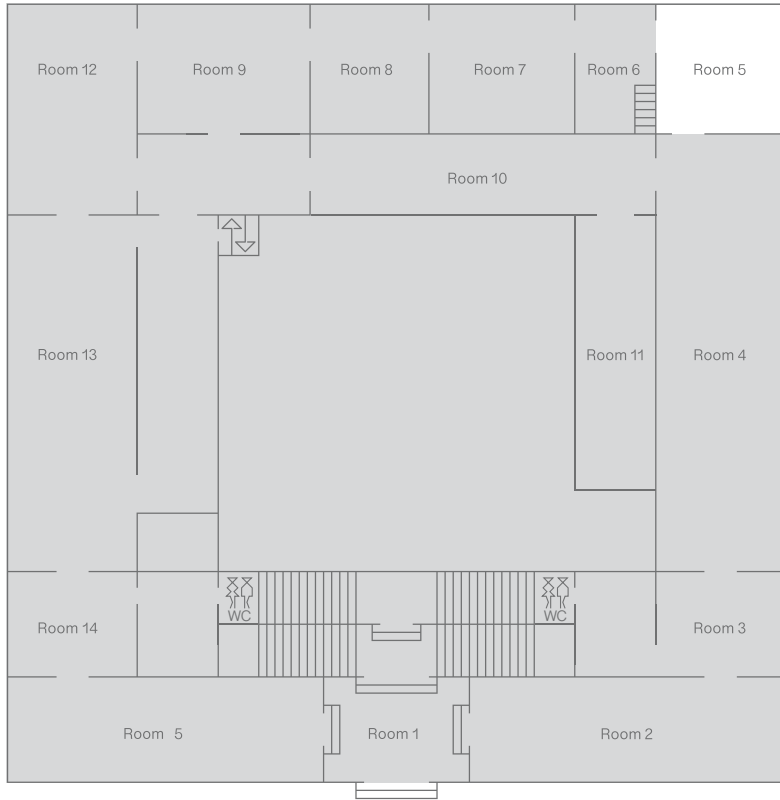
The sculptures reproduced by the artist denote the heart of a classical installation. These sculptures—which are brought to life by these marbles that seem to be paving their path or are twisted—become emblems of Delvoye's ever-mobile and surprising aesthetic.



## Rooms 3 and 4 – Le juste retour des choses

By bringing together old paintings from Delvoye's own collection, remarkable paintings from 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 the vast marble circuit that traverses the room and even through some of the pieces (that do not belong to the MAH). Its playfulness verges on the destructive; nothing stops its advance.

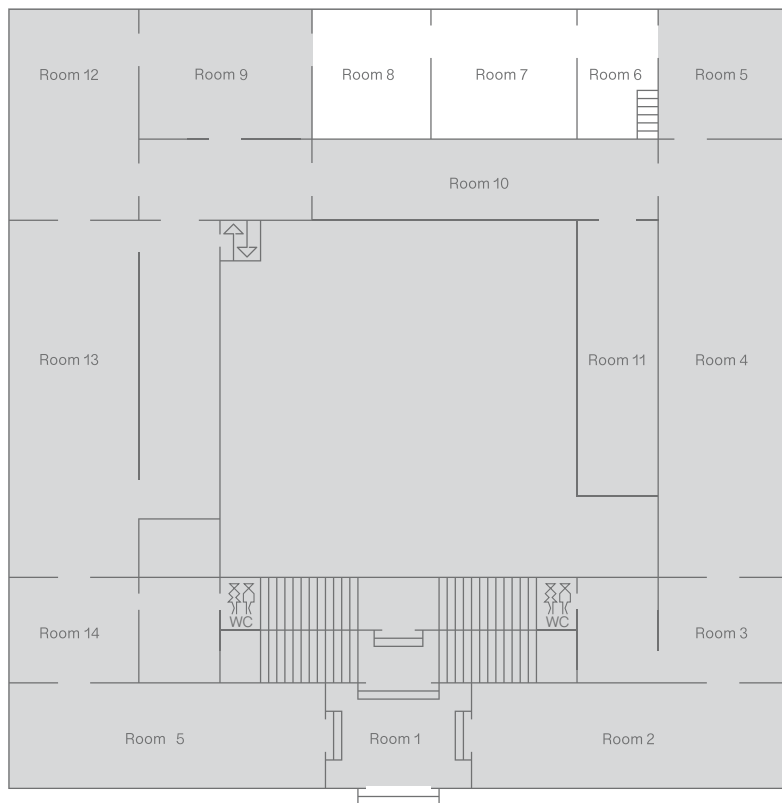
Once again, the eye is guided into a movement the artist sets in motion. He plays with making holes in art history, all while inviting us to do the same by watching the marbles as they jump joyfully from one era to another.



## Room 5 – 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. Our eye is again tested and attempts, from one twist to the next, to unknot the coil and find the crosses and bodies.

After excitement and speed, here is a gallery that seems to encourage contemplation and spiritual retreat instead. However, in using the stained-glass windows from the fifteenth century, the artist deepens 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. Finally, there's the movement from the artworks themselves, which passes through us with their powerful inquiry.

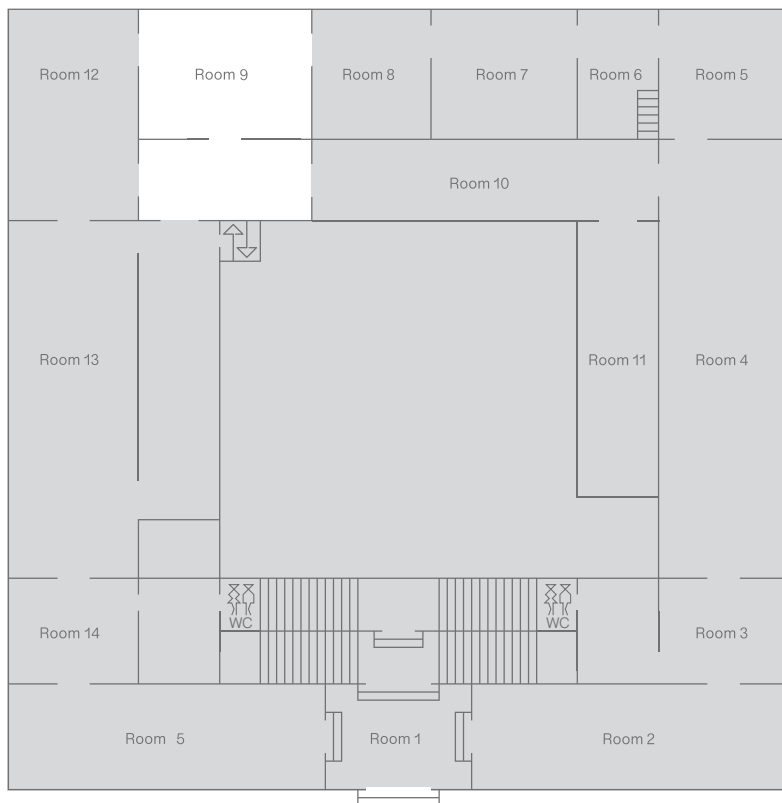


## Rooms 6 to 8 – Perspective: Madame Récamier

These three rooms refer to the famous icon of Napoleonic high society, Juliette Récamier, whose portrait by René Magritte *Perspective: Madame Récamier by David*, 1951, can be seen in the books presented in the display case. The Belgian Surrealist artist reinterpreted the portrait of the young woman, replacing her seated body with legs extended with a coffin in the same pose. The suite of rooms explores another temporal and aesthetic dimension: the bourgeois salon, whether a private room or a social space where one represents oneself. The furniture recreates period rooms that are raided by the artist's mischievous associations. One glides from one object to the next, from simple cases that have become works of art to Ancient Egyptian coffins to pigskins tattooed with popular images. These enigmatic pieces fill a new kind of cabinet of curiosity, rendered in a spirit reminiscent of Belgian Surrealism.

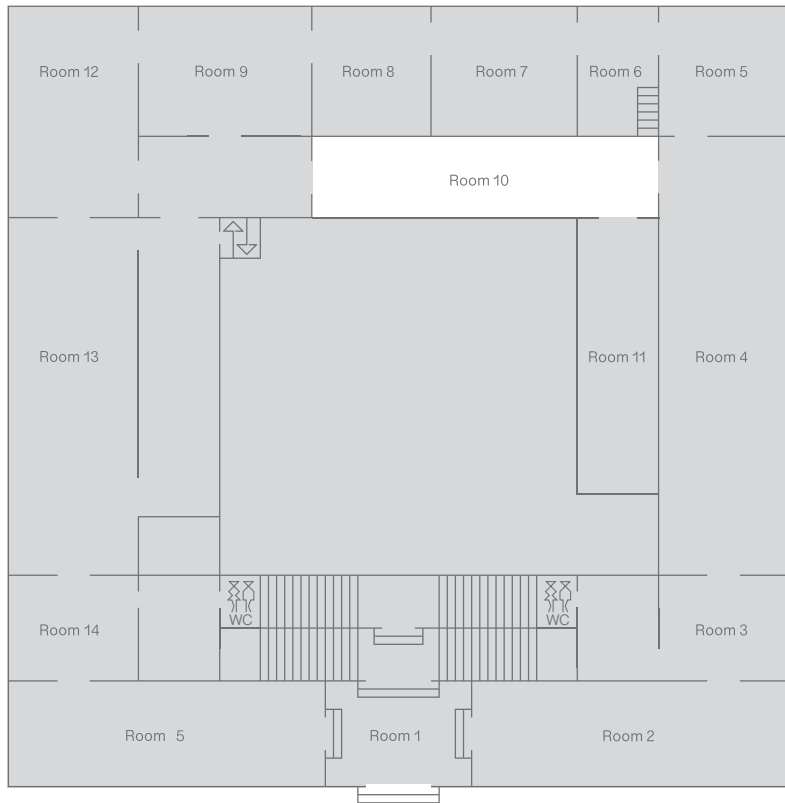
Which is the art object, which is the functional object, and how can the artist transgress the subtle line that divides them? This is one of the fundamental inquiries of the exhibition.





## Room 9 – L'ordre des choses

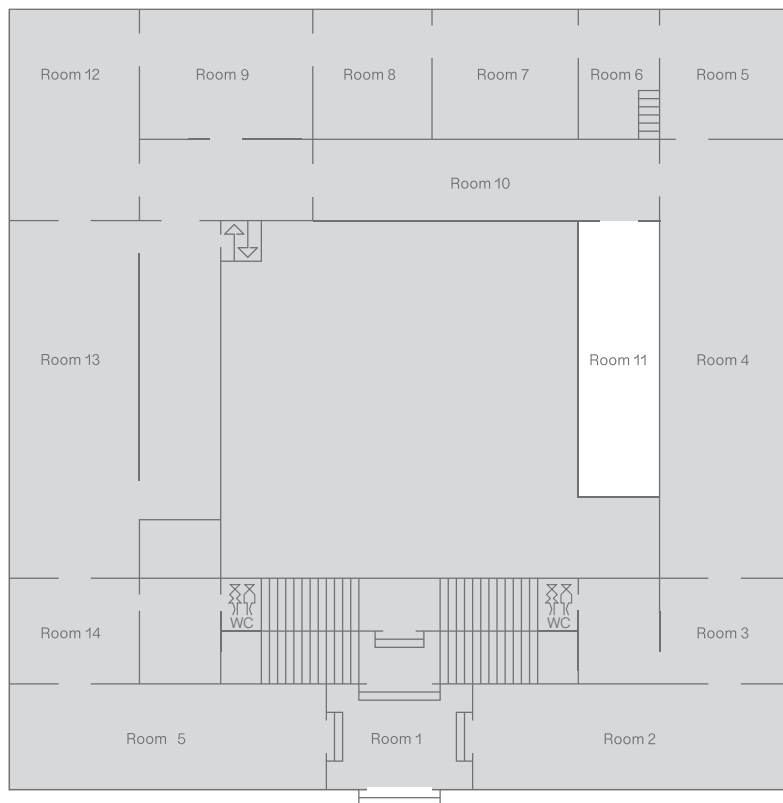
This part of the installation, which borrows the exhibition's overall title, returns to the passion of collecting and immerses us in the artist's personal obsessions. Here, we find Delvoye's collection of *Vache qui rit*<sup>®</sup> cheese box labels and four display cases that combine the artist's and the museum's coin collection. 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? 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. The invitation here is to explore detail, variation and change within a collection that appears homogenous.



## Room 10 – Game Over

Behind this title lies one of the most humorous and boyish galleries that the museum conceals. One finds steles and bas-reliefs from Ancient Egypt, gateways between the kingdoms of the dead and living, 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 modern scenes and, therefore, recall the screens from which these images are taken, inviting us to enter anew.

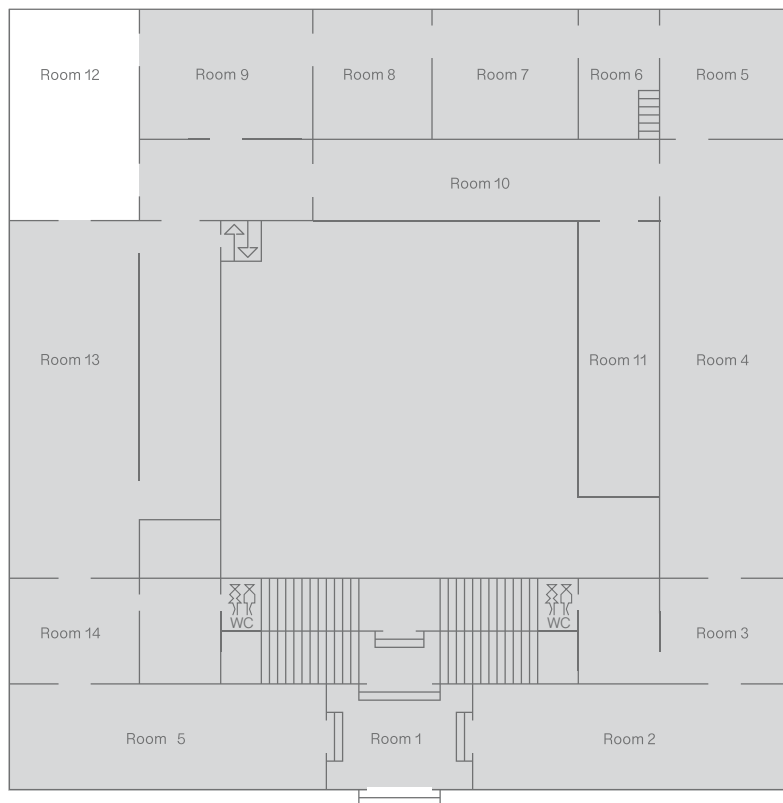
Once again, our looking oscillates from one period to another, from symbols of eternity to symbols of devastation, the distinction blurred by the similarity of techniques used. Between the call to destruction and the claim to an afterlife, which themes and temptations appeal most to our emotions and desires?



## Room 11 – Fait à la main

Plunged into darkness, this gallery plays an impressive perceptual and conceptual magic trick. With detonators alongside their *madrier* planks designed to blow open doors during a military siege and hand-carved tyres (again among Delvoye's iconic work), the artist seems to be playing with the museographic codes reserved for contemporary and conceptual art. Here, we encounter the subtle play of contemporary installation techniques that tend to erase the reality of exhibited objects, whether they belong to our collections or are the delicate and precise work of the artist.

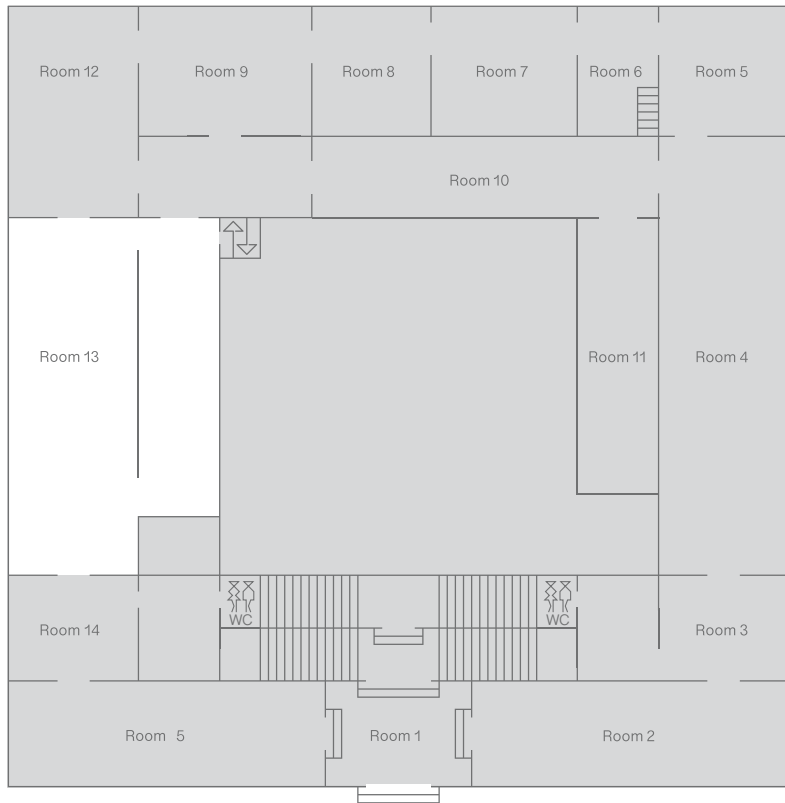
Here again, the object's status seems overturned: how can a functional object so easily resemble a piece by a fictional disciple of the American Minimalists? Where do Delvoye's tyres, with their incredibly patient and precious carving work, fit? The artist is at the centre of the most marked and fascinating contrasts of our modernity.



## Room 12 – 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 themes of verticality, the dynamic of ascension and the Promethean (or religious) hope of reaching the sky or immortality are at the heart of this installation. In this period room of the museum, the Castle of Zizers’ Ceremonial Room, the tower is alongside a model of the Scaligeri funerary monuments in Verona, which inspired the Brunswick Monument. Our eyes examine the model and then look up to observe the top of the tower and the room’s ceiling; from narrow to wide angle, the artist invites us into a subtle game of visual adjustments.

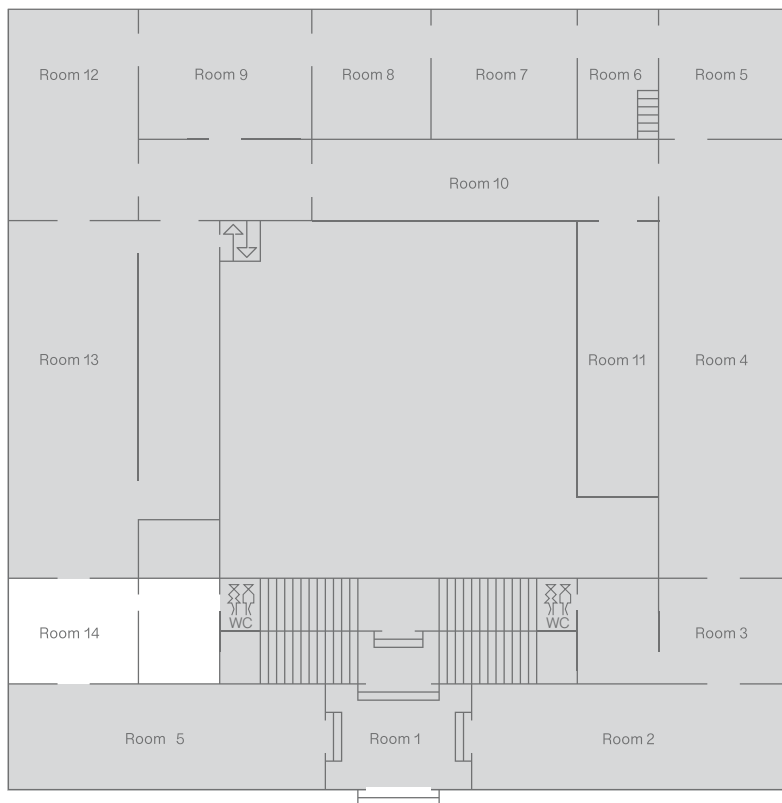
The matter of ostentation, excess and expense is raised in immediately perceptible terms. The reduced dimensions of the objects themselves don’t conceal the sense of the spectacular but seem to underline it through contrast.



## Room 13 – La peur du vide

As the name indicates, this room explores the artistic repercussions of the phenomenon of *horror vacui*, which refers to an ornamental practice aiming to fill the totality of a surface or an object with features and details to replace the empty with the full. The installation reveals our culture's passion for ornamentation to decorate and fill the surface of both noble and functional objects from many areas. Car bodies, shovels and suitcases emerge as symbols of a full arsenal of protection. From historical helmets to fire extinguishers, from dishes to cars, ornamentation distinguishes functional objects as unique pieces. Wim Delvoye tricks our eyes: is this shovel from the museum's collection, or is it one of the artist's works?

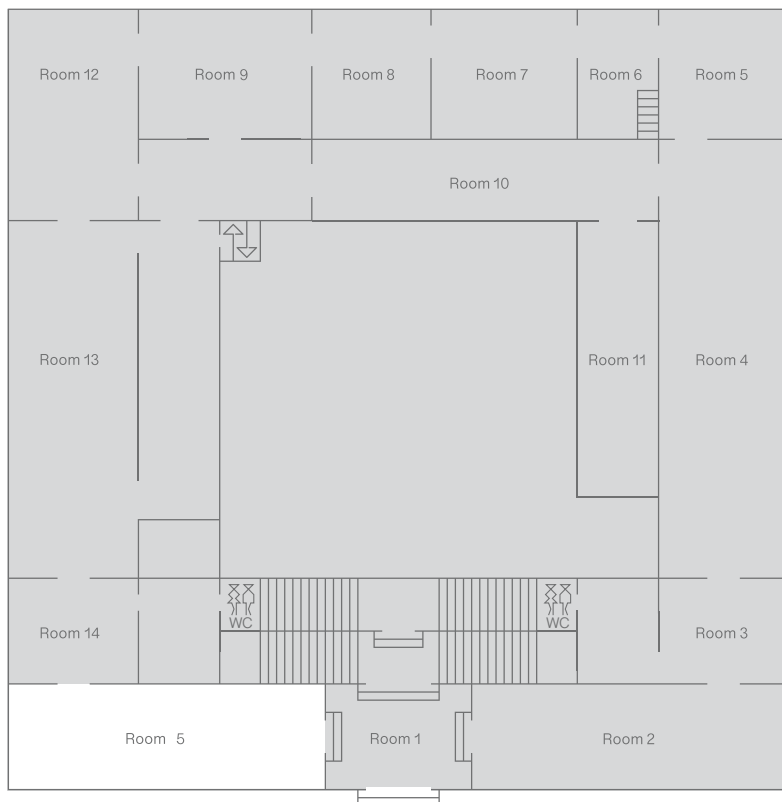
What compels us to fill space with our graphic, allegorical and aesthetic obsessions? What curious fear prompts us to ward off emptiness? In attempting to keep the chasm at bay, all these objects perhaps tap into one of humankind's primal fears.



## Room 14 – 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 process and progression of any productive undertaking, whether technical or artistic. In exploring different chain reactions with humour and inventiveness, the artist's team had already succeeded in granting objects a strange and independent life, blurring the line between agency and passivity. Here, Delvoye 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 or the production of a thing, for example, the portable version of his famous machine *Cloaca*.

From the group to details, the eye is drawn in by the complexity of certain drawings, their purpose unknown, all while fixating on moving details—a fingerprint, a bit of residue or grime—the only marks of the human behind the machine being made. These technical drawings, plans and sketches become pieces in their own right, even if they seem only to be objects in the making.



## Room 15 – Par la force des choses

We penetrate a strange metallic ballet in this room. Our eye goes from bell tower clocks to mechanisms that are at first unidentifiable and then form various kinds of timepieces. At the heart of this immobile mechanical choreography is Jean Tinguely's *If It's Black, My Name is Jean*, which is in dialogue with a part of the original *Cloaca*, the emblematic Delvoye work that itself investigates the line between the living 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 machines and their interaction with human bodies become points of inquiry for the artist. In this way, we might feel pulled to suspend our sense of time by letting our feet lead the way through the museum, from one thing to the next.

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