



**THE ARTS OF HERI DONO**

**FEAT.**  
**HERI DONO / ENTANG WIHARSO**  
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**PLUS: AI WEIWEI / DAVID ZWIRNER**  
**UTE META BAUER / CHARLES LIM**

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**HE MAY BE CALLED THE ENFANT TERRIBLE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, BUT WIM DELVOYE IS MUCH MORE THAN THE SCHOOLYARD PRANKSTER, PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF ART AND ETHICS VIA HIS DARING METHOD OF REVEALING THE TRUTH – MAKING VISIBLE WHAT IS HIDDEN TO RENDER TRANSPARENT THE ART WORLD. BY Y-JEAN MUN-DELSALLE**

## No Fear



**Above: *Tim*, 2006-2008, Wim Delvoye. View of the exhibition *Au Louvre Musée du Louvre*, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli.**

**Facing page: *Pergola*, 2012, Wim Delvoye. View of the exhibition *Au Louvre Musée du Louvre*, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli.**

Wim Delvoye is shameless and defiant. In 2000, he made faeces officially labelled as art. ‘Cloaca’ was a bio-machine that, through a system of tubes and jars filled with gastric juices, simulated a digestive system, transforming food like Belgian fries with mayonnaise into excrement that could be vacuum-packed and purchased – an exploration of the relationship between art production and human production in a way that was indiscriminate, taking a jab at the art world and the triviality of contemporary art production. At the Louvre Museum, he juxtaposed taxidermied carpeted pigs with crystal chandeliers in Napoleon III’s majestic apartments, placed ‘Suppo’ – a monumental 11-metre-tall phallic Gothic spire resembling a steel corkscrew suppository – under the museum’s glass pyramid, and displayed Tim Steiner, the man who sold his body for art, in freak show style. A living, breathing work of art with his back and arms tattooed by Delvoye, Steiner’s skin will be harvested and framed upon his death, already paid for by a collector, and can be bought and sold like a commodity in the future.

Cheeky and subversive, Delvoye thrives on making people feel uneasy although it is not his main goal. His works have won him his fair share of devotees as well as detractors who are uncomfortable with his non-conformist approach and showmanship. Love him or hate him, what’s certain is that he makes art that alters our ideas of beauty, constantly associating the attractive with the repulsive in work that embodies inherent contradictions where the viewer doesn’t know whether to stare, be captivated or look away. Provocative, his works may take some three years to make, criminal in today’s fast-paced art world where time is money and artists don’t have the luxury to take their time. Criticising art production while manipulating and exploiting it at the same time, he is always willing to play the game. His website entitled ‘Wim City’ invites viewers to enter a wonderland with a church, mosque, castle, factory, foundry, garage, farm and tattoo studio – all the art forms that populate his universe – and features an array of ‘art products’, including a puzzle, Wim action doll, pencil case and colouring book. He finds it important to work without secrets, to explain and make transparent acts of producing, selling and exhibiting art.

Born in Wervik, Belgium, in 1965, Delvoye grew up in museums as a child, where he discovered artists like Bosch, Brueghel, Duchamp and Warhol. At times a schoolboy up to mischief, at times philosophic, he believes that art should entertain. Yet his work isn’t about telling jokes – viewers must read between the lines. He is the kind of artist who follows an idea through to its completion even if it stirs up controversy. With ‘Art Farm’, he bought a pig farm in a Chinese village near Beijing, sedated the pigs, tattooed them with hearts and skulls, Snow White, the Louis Vuitton monogram and religious images, and kept them until they died of old age before removing their hides and handing them over to collectors who had already purchased them. It

was his way of questioning the commodification of artworks in a globalised context, a way of speculating as the pigs gained in value over time. He tattooed small drawings on young pigs, then waited for them to grow to harvest large drawings, as it was only after their deaths that they became artworks.

Nonetheless, it was not the first time that Delvoye had tackled cultural iconography: he signs his name in Disney characters, has transformed the famous Warner Bros. logo into his own initials ‘WD’, owns the largest collection of Laughing Cow-processed cheese boxes and labels, has taken on the appearance of KFC’s Colonel Sanders and his coat of arms depicts himself as Procter & Gamble’s Mr Clean in a kind of commentary on how consumers are bombarded daily by brands, logos, images and messages.

Delvoye has always had the ability to shock people. At arts school in Ghent, he learnt that showing skilful work incorporating traditional crafts was a no-no in the art world – it was viewed as kitschy and relegated you to the status of a ‘lowly’ craftsman. But that didn’t deter him. Debuting his career in the late 80s, his early works with carpet weaving and tapestry perturbed people because it infringed on the sphere of the traditional arts and artisanship. Today, his works continue to show off artisanal skills: weaving, tattooing, carving, embossing,



This page, from top to bottom: *Chapelle (Maquette)*, 2012, Wim Delvoye. View of the exhibition *Au Louvre Musée du Louvre*, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Photo courtesy Galerie Perrotin; *Suppo*, 2010, Wim Delvoye. Photo courtesy Galerie Perrotin

Facing page: *Kashan & Mughal Jail & Mashed*, 2010, Wim Delvoye. View of the exhibition *Au Louvre Musée du Louvre*, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Photo courtesy Galerie Perrotin.

stained glass-making and steel-working. Though nudity as subject matter was fashionable in the art world when he was at school, he didn't think much of it. Sex just isn't as interesting as religion, faeces, the market or the economy, which are actually much more taboo.

His ornate, filigreed and laser-cut Cor-ten steel and stainless steel Gothic cathedral trucks displayed expert craftsmanship. Though an immensely popular series, Delvoye isn't one to rest on his laurels and feels the need to move on although the conservative art market would want him to continue this work, repeatedly producing the same things for collectors. However, he doesn't want to be the artist making variations on the same theme for the rest of his life, believing it's imperative to be flexible and want his work to evolve. Thus, his eclectic oeuvre exposes a wide range of themes. Enjoying working on many projects at once, he mixes genres, categories and periods. By referencing the past, appropriating art history and deforming existing motifs that influence him, he gives a unique take on contemporary society. His work spreads out like a fan, moving in all directions simultaneously and incorporating new techniques and ways of working. He wants to free himself from the art market while reaching the maximum number of people.

Art Republik caught up with Delvoye in Paris at the opening of his most recent solo show that ended last October at Galerie Perrotin, where Delvoye presented 'Suppo (Karmanyaka)', featuring a giant mediaeval-style marble tower twisting upwards from a tree's roots, car tyres that have been twisted into knots resembling serpents or hand-carved into a kind of rubber lace, aluminium Rimowa suitcases embossed with Persian motifs and nickelled bronze figures of Jesus on the cross cast as a double helix. Currently, Delvoye is busy expanding on his embossed luggage series in Iran and carved tyres in China. Chatty, expressive and



extremely friendly, he spoke candidly about the state of European politics, his pigs and contemporary art.

#### **You're exhibiting once again in Paris. What are your thoughts on Europe?**

In Paris, you're constantly in danger. You never know what's going to happen. There is justice and law and order, but here you see graffiti and it's dirty. The French don't like Dubai. They say it's too much of a plastic world. But there's nothing wrong with the plastic world. Give me the plastic world. I really like Singapore for that reason. I've been speaking with the government about living there. They say I'm welcomed. Belgium is the Italy of Northern Europe. It's a very corrupt country. I'm now a resident of Brighton, England, to be a bit away from the European community because here they only want to make war and tax people. It's a very bad situation here. The Happiness Index is very low. And we think we are the free world. We are not a free world. I think Singapore is a much freer world.

#### **How did you become an artist?**

My parents were very art-minded. Every weekend, we went to visit museums and historical places. My father was always drawing. He decided that I should go to art school because he didn't get a chance to. I enjoyed art school but I was much busier preparing my future. For me, school was not an end in itself. A lot of people, when they go to school, they want to get points. I didn't want to have points. Now when I employ people, I don't want to know what they studied. They just go on the computer and show me what they can do. I don't believe too much in the school system.

#### **Describe your work process.**

Usually we make a computer drawing, then we look for the best person. So we have creation, negotiation, delegation. I can get ideas or think about art all day while I'm doing something else like driving my car. Then, wherever I am, I can delegate through the telephone. Supervision is a big problem but I also like the way I work, which allows me to do different things and innovate quickly. I want to see a difference every year. If you say I'm this type of craftsman or I'm a painter, then you define yourself already by a technique. I prefer to wait for an idea, then the technique will follow. It can be marble, aluminium, anything. First, you need the idea – you want to know what you want to do and why, and if you solve this, the other things are easy and fun. With my way of working, you don't define yourself by a material but by a way of thinking and working. This allows me to be very free and to do very different things. Many people who are maybe more commercially successful cannot change their work. If they change even the size of their paintings, they're in trouble because the market is conservative and always wants to reference the past.

#### **How do you see beyond the critiques and follow through on your ideas?**

I like when something is difficult; I get more excited. By tattooing pigs, if I get into trouble with animal rights activists, I think it's more interesting. It adds another layer to the thing. For example, why would they not be happy? Why can you kill to eat and you cannot kill for art? They say, "You can kill it to eat, not for art." It's like a war on utilitarianism. Everything has to be necessary. Basically they have a problem with art. You should not tattoo a pig if you're not hungry. As soon as you're not hungry, you think of art. It's a human activity that you cannot completely justify, so these people play a theatrical role but they're basically trying to work out answers for something more general about art, something deeper than their concerns. When they attack me, it's to be in the limelight because otherwise they can go to a slaughterhouse and stand there and protest. A slaughterhouse kills around 400 cows or 1,000 pigs per day and nobody is there protesting. If I tattoo 10 pigs a year, they protest. But what's interesting is that by doing this, they automatically add to the discussion about art. Is art necessary? Is art good if it's not necessary and what happens with something that's not necessary?

#### **What do you want the viewer to take away from your art?**

In 1977, I was 12 years old and I went to see a Rubens show in Antwerp. After four hours, my parents begged me, "Please can we go?" I was not finished. I hope I can do shows like that. Some shows when I was 10, 11 or 12 years old influenced me a lot and later in school, some artists or movements made an impression on me, which was very important, otherwise I would not have continued to study. If I hear the same thing, I would be very happy that I stimulated people to pick up the brush or the pencil, because I was going to stop when I was a student. The teachers talked about Dadaism and all of a sudden I thought, no, let's continue to study. So I got engaged just in time. A lot of art doesn't engage you.

#### **What are your views on the contemporary art world?**

The art world is a very dirty house and I feel like I'm Mr Clean coming in sometimes. This is one reason why I like Mr Clean. The second is it's not Mr Clean; I've made him very dirty, transforming his legs into his bowels. I also like that he's a global brand that you cannot avoid. Wherever you go, you see Mr Clean smiling at you. So I like the daily reality of Mr Clean. The art world is like a religion, so I have to change my views every day but my interests are very broad. My views are a bit different from most people, a bit sicker. They say I have a twisted mind, but I feel I have a free mind. I'm not very afraid. I want to make fearless art. Most artists are afraid. You have to overcome your fears. 📧