

FRANÇOIS DE CONINCK

OF ART AND PIG

The past is an immense body whose present is the eye.
Pascal Quignard

The Belgian eye has the insolence of the microscope.
Charles Baudelaire

Art is a force of the past.
Pier Paolo Pasolini

Wim Delvoye is a *tribal* or *ethnic* artist – such is his creed. It must first be understood in the sense that, from the start of his career, the artist deliberately chose to restore the reputation of a hackneyed provincial iconography fallen into desuetude, and downgraded to the well-ordered register of the decorative pleasures of domestic happiness. Rooting his art in his motherland, Wim Delvoye thus reclaims his regionalism and draws symbols, objects, materials, and techniques from the aesthetics of the Flemish working class and petty bourgeoisie – their traditions, their folklore, their craftsmanship and know-how, but also their rustic materialism, stony Catholicism, pronounced taste for ornaments, sense of the farce and the grotesque, appetite for the macabre, and natural inclination for saucy tales and faecal humours. Without any irony or mockery towards this popular world. In contrast to many artists of his generation who refused to use the distinctive signs and emblems of their culture of origin, deeming them unworthy of their art if not unfit to launch their international careers, Wim Delvoye immediately and successfully submitted the serious, civilised and sterilised world of contemporary art

to the pollination of his popular phantasmagoria and to the powerful transmission of his rascally imagery.

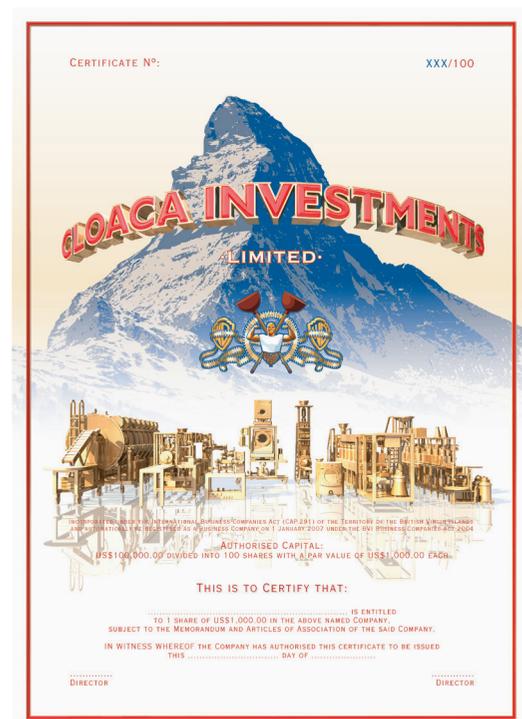
This is nothing short of a tour de force: using a provincial and vernacular alphabet, Wim Delvoye managed to develop a global and universal language accessible to everyone. He therefore built this strangely cosmopolitan and vigorously interethnic oeuvre by honouring his Flemish roots. Wim Delvoye roamed the earth to find the best artisans to make these hybridisations of complex forms born from his imagination and hand-drawn with virtuosity. His fascination with materials and with craftsmanship integrated in everyday life led him to experience other cultures before anyone else, far away from a tired and culturally lost Western world, encumbered with useless things and luxury products. His nomadic and exotic life as an international ‘folklorist’ artist started well before the creation of his *Art Farm* in China in 2003, where he reared and tattooed pigs for several years – an endeavor that made him renowned beyond the frontiers of the art world. Indeed, his nomadic existence began in the late 1980s when he settled in Indonesia: a country whose

language he learned, and where he commissioned the sculpting of his concrete mixers and construction engines from local craftsmen whose craftsmanship commands the admiration and respect of an artist in search of something else to materialise and reveal many unconsidered forms. None of these artisans had heard of Picasso or Duchamp, but the Jakarta wood sculptors managed to preserve the woodcarving techniques they learned from the Dutch: an iconographic tradition stemming from European high culture but fallen into disuse is thus perpetuated and revamped via exotic artisan objects devoid of any artistic nobility. These ordinary objects carefully chiseled by these humble craftsmen are nothing less than relics of the Flemish Baroque style. In this sense, his concrete mixers finely crafted in the Louis XVI style as well as his carved teak trucks are monuments of multiculturalism: 'My work is the fruit of an interracial marriage!' said the artist. And it's an arranged marriage: a counter-cultural union between materials and techniques whose improbable crossing gives birth to incongruous works with a fascinating materiality. The forced cross-breeding to which Delvoye submits the materials he uses to give life to his ideas provokes the transcultural migration of objects, trades, and functions that he convenes in his mental laboratory, ripping them from their historic and identity genealogy. His Creole, cross-bred art pieces thus depolarise cultural identities whilst simultaneously revealing the factualness of our representations: there is no cultural authenticity in this world, the object being proof. His 'homemade bombs' with their perfectly arranged and thoroughly adjusted forms all refer to his impure vision of the world. Nothing seems to please the artist more than to inconvenience the aesthetic conformism of good taste by stirring the mud of noble sentiments from which he draws. For example, the arabesques decorating the thirty-six panels of *Love Letter* : made up of potato peels photographed and replicated by the artist, they handwrite in Arabic a letter addressed to Caroline by Mohammed. This piece was meant to adorn

the walls of the Brussels Parliament's Flemis Commission: it was initially rejected by its retching patrons.

Among his weaknesses, which he claims to use as a power, the Wervik-born Fleming also asserts his identity as a Belgian artist. His subversive humour, self-mockery, scabrous dimension, brazen freedom and above all his capacity to develop the 'secret potential' hidden in everyday objects bring him into the realm of the Surrealists, particularly the Belgian ones. His ability to surreptitiously sneak into the banality and the normality of things to mimic them from within does indeed reveal an attitude closer to Magritte's gang's 'tactical conformism' than to the provocations and spectacular actions favoured by the Paristocrates from the court of André Breton. In his own way, Wim Delvoye reinvents the incongruous object theme, a pivotal point of the Surrealists' desire to decommission the language of objects and the objects of the language from their old functions, to assign them new missions in the field of vision and thought. Connecting dissonant realities, combining distinct visual regimes, taking the contradiction between materials and techniques to its pinnacle, pushing the ornamentation to the extreme: the stupefying hybridisation of the forms the artist explores in his plastic machinations rips objects from their ordinary frame of reference, mundane significance, functional or decorative assignation to bizarrely re-inject them in reality by regurgitating them into innovative forms – as a critical means of subverting reality. His wacky works disorientate our points of reference and revive our astonishment at those things that alone encourage us to think. Although, like Surrealism in its era, the work of Wim Delvoye disturbs the *nette buurtje* of the predominating aesthetic climate of the time, the artist stands apart from his predecessors through a radically different attitude in the world arena. Rather than brutal confrontation, he chooses the soft incursion into the system: ruse is chosen over provocation, indirect strategies are preferred to the criticism and conflict that are so characteristic of modern

artists wanting to be rebellious and refractory. Furthermore, Delvoye plays, in all seriousness, with the ambiguities of post-modernism. Mischievous and nonchalant, he multiplies projects and paradoxes, devises artistic products in series rather than unique artworks, reintroduces low culture into high culture, puts high technology at the service of archaic craftsmanship, enjoys his commercial success and widespread notoriety without blushing whilst ironically playing his part as the Zwarte Piet of contemporary art. His oeuvre does not aim for the social disalienation of the individual for his ethos is not moral: it is strictly visual and plastic. And most of all, he is no iconoclast, unlike the Dadaists and Surrealists in their era. Because he does not seek to undermine artistic tradition – quite the contrary: he never stops drawing from its source, seizing motifs, forms, and techniques from the well of classical art to transform and upend them in his own way, and give rise to a new form of art where it is least expected. An art of affirmation rather than an art of negation. Because Wim Delvoye is a dynamic optimist who says yes to the system, he abides by its rules, values, and codes – to better thwart them. He also operates from within: it is by the instillation in the order, in the globalised government of things that he treats the objects, that he declutters them from their usual function and disinfects them from their ordinary meaning. Hiding behind his inoffensive air of entertainer building a universal, smooth, and superficial show, he surreptitiously thwarts the pantomime of contemporary materialism. And his art is unimpeded with compromises since compromise – that of art with money, merchandise, vulgarity, advertising, popular imagery, democratic and mundane objects – is precisely his field of action. His tactic is that of the Trojan horse, his technique that of the chameleon. He enters the normality of a world filled with objects subjugated to the reign of shiny and smooth merchandise. He takes its appearance, embraces its contours, colours, and shapes. He borrows its signs and codes, adopts its visual conventions and appropriates emblems known by all. On the clearly defined territory of



Cloaca Investments Ltd. Share, 2009
 UV-security print
 29.7 X 21 CM



Concrete Mixer (Lisbon), 1993
carved wood, enamel and gold paint
184 X 190 X 130 CM

the world's commodification, he chooses mundane objects and existing mechanisms for their use value or images for their universality, then flips them by hijacking them: with cold irony, he defuses their functioning, empties them of their content, offloads them from their logic to transform them into prestigious artworks with an unstable and shifting identity – turning them into post-modern artistic products. The ambivalence of these objects jeopardises the categories and hierarchies that structure artistic thought, 'indecidable things' to use Glenn Andamson's wording.¹ The works of Wim Delvoye are both sculptures *and* real objects, art *and* craftsmanship, handmade *and* industrially manufactured items; they are both 'serious and idiotic, useful and treacherous, precious and cheap, superficial and elusive'.² In short, they are *things per se*, things that resist the heavy cement of language and therefore rebel against all registration. It is art *and* pig: the notorious finger that the artist gives taxonomists.

Hence, the fascination, often mixed with consternation, his works exert on our retinas relies on their deep ambivalence, their perfect ambiguity: a cleverly dosed formal instability that plunges the spectator into indecisiveness regarding what is really represented in what they are seeing. 'An artwork is only interesting if it disrupts the spectator' said the artist. The ambivalence of their form is their strength – and it's a Mr Clean type strength: concentrated in the matter, it is slowly diffused inside the eyeball and puts the sense on hold, or even in disarray. Faced with the vertiginous staging of all the paradoxes of the sense, the eye is transfixed and thoughts spiral out of control – *Jesus Twisted!* All interpretations are open but none can exhaust these unclassifiable objects whose ultimate sense remains elusive. Wim Delvoye is therefore a great master of ambiguity: a *master artisan* in the sense that he masters, with astonishing technical virtuosity, the applied art of the encounter of forms and volumes as much as the concrete science of the equilibrium of opposing forces at work in these monstrous hybridisations.

It is a genuinely speculative thought of the crossing of forms by themselves that the series designed by the artist explore and materialise in amazing objects, using the same *modus operandi*: two forms occupy the same space, crossing one another, interpenetrating without alteration or without melting into one another. Kept at a simmering point just below their melting point, they nevertheless become foreign to themselves at the end of the process of contagion and alienation of their identity that constitutes their conception and manufacture.

To characterise the elements at play in his art, Wim Delvoye resorts to the world of chemistry: his work is always the result of the implementation of a principle of emulsion – different from the notion of mixing, he specifies. “Coffee and milk, sugar and water can be mixed. But in an emulsion, the elements must be agitated to be mixed. Just like water and oil for example.” Therefore, the emulsion does not produce a mixture: actually, its particularity lies in the fact that these ingredients never mix together completely. And this is what makes the subtle ambiguity of the artist’s hybridisations: they materially and visually make contradictory universes coexist as an entity where any mixture is *de facto* impossible. The Delft-style gas cannisters and the circular saw blades, the shovels and the ironing boards with the heraldic motifs drawn from the coats of arms of Belgian cities and provinces, the stained-glass football goals, the butchers’ marble blocks, the faeces-patterned ceramics, the tattoos on pigskins, and the Gothic trucks or chapels made of Corten steel are not mixtures between two formal and cultural realities: they are emulsified ensembles where each visual regime that is executed contaminates the other whilst retaining its own qualities, by remaining identifiable as itself. Sometimes, the artist even carries out a double emulsion: his pornographic stained-glass windows, where the emulsion of the art of stained glass and of x-ray technology is intensified by the emulsion of pornographic and medical imagery. The emulsion is therefore not exclusively material and physical.



Butagaz 52 Shell N° 764805, 1990
enamel paint on gas cannister
Ø 31 x H 55 CM

Wim Delvoye not only applies it to volumes and forms, materials and techniques, but to symbolism and time as well. On the one hand, the operation is symbolic: indeed, the registers of luxury and poverty, of the noble and the vulgar, of excellence and the mediocre, and of the ideal of beauty and the ignoble are in constant emulsion in his oeuvre. 'I love transforming my art, which is mostly made out of poor subjects, into prestigious objects' said the artist whose formal experimentations invariably focus on peripheral cultural objects drawn from what he calls his *plebeian niches*. Concrete mixers, trucks, shovels, saws, gas canisters, irons, shit, football goalposts, pigs, watering cans, tyres, cars, and mopeds are humble, proletarian objects associated with work or related to domestic triviality, vernacular, provincial, and suburban culture. They are outside of the intellectual discourse; they possess a simple 'street credibility'. The artist thus chooses neutral and insignificant objects – or at least objects whose sense or function is depleted by their ordinary use – that are recognisable and identifiable by all, across all cultures. He is fascinated by the imaginary and poetic potential that lives inside these objects that do not pretend to be artistic and are not associated with great art in the collective imaginary. They present a neutral ground for experimentation: their ordinary appearance is more propitious to their conversion into artworks by applying to their surface either artisanal and obsolete technologies, or cutting-edge ones. Lastly, this choice of objects is in perfect congruence with that of neglected references, of visual registers discredited by the contemporary art world. It is because the decorative, the folkloric, the Gothic, the pornographic, and the scatological are heterogeneous with regards to the aesthetic norms and puritan values of the dominant artistic culture that they are so fittingly and efficiently emulsified with plebeian objects. Moreover, this principle of emulsion to which Delvoye has always compared his art also has a temporal dimension: an emulsion between historical moments is superimposed onto the interpenetration of forms and volumes in space, onto the reciprocal contagion of antinomian symbolic

registers. Because the artist intersects techniques and objects that all have an agenda, a finality, their own historical intention that nothing predisposed to an untimely cross-breeding: between the Delft Blue and the gas canisters, the heraldic motifs and the ironing boards, the Baroque style and the cement mixers, the tattoos and the pig skins, the stained glass and the pornographic x-rays, the Arabist ornaments and the suitcases or the bodies of luxury cars, the Gothic interlacing and the Corten steel towers, the marble bas-relief and the video game décors, there is an immeasurable historic gap that Delvoye's scathing irony, which is materialised in his craftsmanship, reduces and even annihilates by fixing it in the form generated by their intersection. This operation completely drains the substance out of the signs, detaching objects from their historic purpose, leading the thus-*Delvoyed* techniques and forms to lose their own genealogy. In a Brownian movement, this collusion between historical moments – like in a particle accelerator – produces syncretic forms in an intentional disorder, a sort of mental room of bubbles that reflects the symbolic state of our contemporary societies rather well – the absolute relativism of post-modern thought.

The artist's capacity to renew and breathe new life into weakened aesthetic languages is nothing short of tremendous. As Bernard Marcadé shrewdly noted: 'transforming a shovel into a medieval crest, tattooing a pig skin, transfiguring a cement mixer into baroque furniture or disguising a Caterpillar excavator into a Gothic edifice are operations that open up a space for a reinterpretation of forms and functions depleted by their usage' –³ beyond their provocative, blasphemous character towards decoration and the decorated object alike. This is particularly true of the Gothic style, which took an endemic importance in the artist's oeuvre over the past twenty years. By seizing this formal language with pure forms, the significance of which has either been forgotten or gotten lost in the passing of time, never has the artist played so much with a

system of signs, unexpectedly making it regain its vigour in a 'romantic, dramatic, and imaginative version of the past, a sort of superior fiction'.⁴ For his proliferating Gothic style only has the appearance of the flamboyant Gothic style of Renaissance Flanders: in reality, it is a *sui generis* Gothic style – a pure construction, an autonomous architectural language detached from history. It is a transformed, digested, improved, vitamin-rich neo-Gothic style cloned by computers. A generically modified organism whose frantic interlacing devours an industrially laser-cut steel-laced architecture. In this sense, Delvoye's Gothic style constitutes the most complex and the most advanced of the artist's emulsifier systems: pure incarnation of the matter in a form, he achieves the absolute convergence of appearance and structure. And in this ornamental multiplication pushed to excess, in an outrageous profusion of details, the decorative overload is an undeniable insult to good taste. The artist thereby reconnects with the criminal nature of ornament in so-called 'barbarian' cultures. Doing so, his *argothic* architecture regains the acceptance of the style preceding the noble classic architecture whilst rejoining the marginal contemporary cultures that he likes so much.

Delvoye's recourse to computers – from graphic design software, to the digital engineering of 3D technologies, to Computer-Aided Design programs – gave additional magnitude to his thought on the interpretation of forms and volumes, thereby opening unsuspected possibilities to apply to the materials of his principle of emulsion. The artist has always wanted to include all that is new in his work, which is characterised by a constant anticipation. Indeed, he integrates every technological innovation that is of interest to the flows of thoughts he wants to materialise in his works. He pays constant attention to the way in which science can improve the formal perfection of the ideal physical expression of his ideas. Recall that, as early as 1996-1997, well before the use of Photoshop became generalised in the art world, Wim Delvoye made a series of rocky landscapes



Marble Floor # 8, 2000
Cibachrome print on aluminium
125 X 100 CM



Untitled, 1988
enamel paint on ironing board
140 X 35 CM

where he integrated short trivial messages – texts that, due to computer manipulation, looked like genuine monumental inscriptions carved into the rock. Digital design techniques enabled the most considerable increase in power in his field in the real three-dimensional space. Wim Delvoye loves all that rotates and spins. The sculptures he scans in 3D, manipulates and then distorts using a computer before restoring them to the world, albeit upended but cast in a classic bronze shape or in polished silver. The same applies to the torsions, contortions and distortions generated through the use of digital technologies, and that he prints on his spiraled crucifixes, which all share the matrix of his mother's crucifix: a humble object that only has a sentimental, intimate value. Whether he folds a crucifix to turn it into a circle around which Jesus coils or whether he applies to it more complex operations by combining several crucifixes into circles, spirals, Möbius strips or DNA helices endlessly spinning on themselves, these geometrical distortions cause Christ to contort himself in pain and are only made possible through the use of sophisticated Computer-Aided Design software. 'In this work, half of my interest focuses on geometry, said the artist, these are almost scientific investigations on space, the helix, the circle, the Möbius strip. Regarding the other half, these works are about the symbol of Jesus, which is so popular it has become a logo. We no longer see a suffering man with a beautiful anatomy.' Finally, the Gothic style too is put through the mill of 3D technology. We think of this sumptuous 12-meter-high spire made of woven steel that looks as though it was twisted by the hand of a giant and that Delvoye placed in the Louvre Pyramid in 2012. By naming it *Suppo*, the artist ironically reminds us that 'shit and ornaments are all excesses of the same order', as he likes to say. In fact, these two Gothic towers are assembled in such a way that they form one twisted object with two sharp ends. Another technological wonder in the same vein is his *Nautilus*: the spiral-coiled shell designed in a twisted Gothic style. Its fabrication required two years of work: Delvoye and his teams of specialists started off from the

digital drawing of a Gothic tower, inspired by the Cologne Cathedral, which they twisted using a computer program. Every element and ornament were drawn and then individually laser-cut before being welded together to create a form coiling around itself. In the three above-mentioned registers – the rolling sculptures, the twisted crucifixes, and the coiled Gothic architectures – the visual result made possible through computer engineering is vertiginous.

We could dare hypothesise that, for great contemporary sculptors, 3D technology represents a historical technical invention comparable to that of perspective in the field of painting during the Renaissance:⁵ a technological advance that allowed Wim Delvoye to multiply the fantastic power of his imagination in the designing and refining of new shapes, which prove to be mind-blowing. 3D technologies create a phantasmagoria of the artist that precedes his seizing of that technology: whether two forms interweave and interpenetrate or whether one form turns around and coils to the extent that it crosses itself, it allows Delvoye to materialise and articulate, in a physically realised shape, a pure operation of thought that was simply not achievable or visible before. We thence witness a unique emulsion, between the registers of the *never seen* and the *never able*. These twisted, distorted, and rolling objects are in reality pure visual statements. What the artist shows us in each 3D work that he throws at us is a *thing in itself*: the literal translation of an idea into a form, the physical materialisation of a thought in a material, not a metaphor or a symbol of something else. ‘Imagining means turning up the volume of reality’ said Clément Rosset. This is true, but imagination alone does not suffice: there must be laborious conquests demanded by any veritable art in the sense of craftsmanship, whether artisanal or technological – and it is even truer when it is a question of joining both.



Anal Kiss B-51, 2000
lipstick print on hotel stationery
A4-format

For Delvoye, the technical realisation of a piece of art is more important than his idea. And it is at the cost of unrelenting efforts and the contribution of the best artisans and experts that today Delvoye masters like no other the hybridisation of forms and volumes, the cross-breeding of materials and techniques.

We know that Wim Delvoye's fame was also forged around his obsession for faeces and anality: in the Flemish and Dutch lineage of Bosch, Bruegel and Rembrandt, his recurrent use of scatology signals a particular fondness for the humours and representations that provoke disgust, in an artistic tradition specific to our country. In 1990 already, *Mosaic* showed a composition of white tiles with motifs of faeces – his own – to an aghast audience. The artist has always claimed to be fascinated with waste but is even more subjugated by the ambiguity of the body and all that is obscurely hidden in its orifices. Hence the tandem of the mouth and the anus, two openings that enjoy secret and doubtful intestinal relations. In 1992, his *Rose des Vents* staged four naked men forming a circle and covering their eyes while a telescope went through their insides from anus to mouth – the work hence achieving the visual triangulation of scopic, oral, and anal drives. In 1999, the fusion of mouth and anus found its most frontal culmination in the *Anal Kiss* series: imprints of sphincters made using lipstick on the letterheads of the luxury hotels frequented by the artist. In 2000, the invisible circuit between our fundamental orifices found its most unlikely physical expression and artistic form in *Cloaca*: a computer-controlled machinery that technologically reproduces the mechanism of digestion and defecation. With this bodiless digestive tube that produces real faeces, we shifted from the area of emulsion to that of assimilation: sophisticated technology made their fabrication process visible along a 12-meter-long metallic structure fitted with six reactors playing the role of stomach, small intestine and large intestine. 'I looked for something complicated and difficult to make, expensive and without purpose', the artist

said ironically. The result, after years of research in which scientists and technicians of all persuasions collaborated, is an ambiguous oeuvre, a 'socialist machine' that materialises the absolute equality of all humans before shit, the universal waste that is most indifferent to skin colour, gender, and social class – along with death. Because death and shit level out differences, putting us on an equal footing in this world. In a sense, our daily faeces simultaneously offer a *vanitas* and a *memento mori*: the vanity of our pride when we expel our foul-smelling organic matter – with an almost forbidden, Orphic glance behind – in the antechamber of our *post mortem* putrefaction represented by the privies operates a completely new rapprochement between the philosophical registers of *ars defecandi* and *ars moriendi*.⁶ In Rome, the Latin word *reliquiae* – which is also at the root of 'reliques' and 'déréliction' in French – designated all that survives the dead and the excrements of the living, writes Pascal Quignard.⁷ The unease concerning anything that emerges from the body – 'macule, waste, saliva, urine, tear, blood, milk, sweat, sperm, milk teeth, nail clippings, cut hair, cadaver'⁸ – marks the uneasiness that we, as human beings, feel before the form that deforms and shifts into the formless state: shit and death alike. Such embarrassment, continues the author, is thus a clue of culture, which always defines the clean and the dirty, the neat and the discarded, the attractive and the repulsive, before decreeing the true and the false, the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly. Thence: 'All that is dirty is cultural.'⁹ Wim Delvoye understands this perfectly: our moral and cultural values are intimately linked to this power relationship between the trivial notions pertaining to the body – individual and then social. The world (*le monde*) – arranged, ordered, adorned, clean – opposes the foul (*l'immonde*): Delvoye knows this and constantly plays with it, in this art work in particular. 'Human excrement is the most cosmopolitan, most universal image, even more so than Jesus Christ and Coca-Cola' said the artist. The logo of *Cloaca* is a hybridisation of the brands of the car company Ford and Coca-Cola, which was merged with the logo of

Mr Clean, whose hips are prolonged by the anatomical drawing of an intestine. More than an artwork, *Cloaca* is a true company, and a sprawling one. In total, ten machines were created and exhibited around the world. The only difference between the machines is the amount of kilos of shit excreted (300 kilos per day for the *Super Cloaca*), or their adornment (very chic for the *Cloaca N°5*, a pastiche of Chanel's renowned perfume range), or their size (the *Cloaca Travel Kit* fits in a suitcase), or the number of meals eaten throughout the day (the *Personal Cloaca* only eats once a day). It is also a financial company that issues bonds: it offers loans to be repaid in faeces, thus concretely achieving the symbolic equivalence between faeces and money theorised by Sigmund Freud. Finally, *Cloaca* is a parody of the merchandising that flourishes in our spectacular and mercantile society and that the Wim Delvoye studio develops through a plethora of derived products: certified faeces, drawings, scale models, T-shirts, toilet paper, dolls representing the artist, View-Masters.

This is an oeuvre that coldly and technically lays bare our bodily mechanisms. For the greatest pleasure of his own eye, Wim Delvoye uncovers the world – as he would pop a blackhead. He likes to make the closed structures of our bodies and of our goods transparent: '(...) from the use of stained glass and x-rays right up to the clearly visible functioning of *Cloaca*, to the wrought iron of his cathedrals and machines – we can clearly see through things from end to end. As though he was going through the body layer after layer, from the skin he uses as canvas for his tattoos to the chemical digestion process carried out by *Cloaca*, to the bones exposed via x-rays, Delvoye makes his way down to the very essence of the physical and metaphysical identity',¹⁰ concludes Adrian Dannatt. Quite frankly, the transparency of his art and the frontality of his attitude both respond to a retinal pragmatism: 'I only believe what I can see, he affirms. In my world, there is no soul and there is no love... I've never seen a soul and I've never seen love. With x-rays,



Lick 3, 2000
Cibachrome print on aluminium
125 X 100 CM

I can see skeletons, teeth, dicks, lungs... But I've never seen love.' Some may be quick to see here an expression of the artist's cynicism. Yet, as ironic as he may be, Wim Delvoye is no cynic – certainly not in the sense that he would mock the public or – even less – the subjects, objects, and techniques that he brings into play in his art. As Bernard Marcadé recalled, 'contemporary cynicism is arrogant, often sarcastic and always comfortably situated outside the system that it stigmatises. Wim Delvoye is completely immersed in the forms and references he manipulates. He is artistically and financially compromised in the conception of his artworks and always physically involved in the fabrication processes.'¹¹ If Wim Delvoye is a cynical artist, it is in the sense of Diogenes, the thinker of the Antiquity who found

value in everything that was deemed low – sex, excrements, nakedness – and who preferred the existentialism of the body to Platonic idealism. Indeed, Delvoye directly refers to the famous olibrius who farted as he listened to Plato, masturbated in public and defecated in front of everyone. 'Diogenes is very important to me, because he is a philosopher who never wrote. Diogenes did not believe in ideas or in souls, he only believed in life. And his life became his philosophy.' Wim Delvoye's attitude in life has become his art, a rebellious art through which he opposes the perfect insolence of his grotesque forms born from his fantasy to the ideal comedy as well as to aesthetic and moral farce of the world.

*François de Coninck was born on April 14th 1969 in Kinshasa, on the shores of the Congo river.
He lives in Antwerp, near the shores of the Scheldt, working here and there, at the shores of language*

- 1 Glenn Adamson, 'Substance Abuse: Making the post-modern object', conference given at the Yale School of Architecture, New Haven (CT), November 2009; quoted by Bart Verschaffel, 'Tempus ridendi?' in Wim Delvoye, *Introspective*, Fonds Mercator, 2012, p. 241.
- 2 B. Verschaffel, *ibid.*, p. 241.
- 3 Bernard Marcadé, 'L'argoth de Wim Delvoye', in Wim Delvoye, *Introspective*, Brussels, Fonds Mercator, 2012, p. 45.
- 4 Adrian Dannatt, 'Le sublime inversé ou Deux ou trois choses que je sais à propos de lui', in Wim Delvoye, *Introspective*, Brussels, Fonds Mercator, 2012, p. 339.
- 5 This hypothesis is that of my friend, painter Alain Rivière, whom I thank for the fruitfulness of his views: our discussions about the subject of Wim Delvoye's oeuvre supported and fed the writing of this text.
- 6 I borrowed this beautiful analogy from my friend Roger Bertozzi.
- 7 Pascal Quignard, *L'Enfant d'Ingolstadt*, Paris, Grasset, 2018, p. 66.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- 10 A. Dannatt, 'Le sublime inversé...', *op. cit.*, p. 336.
- 11 B. Marcadé, 'L'argoth de Wim Delvoye', *op. cit.*, p. 72.