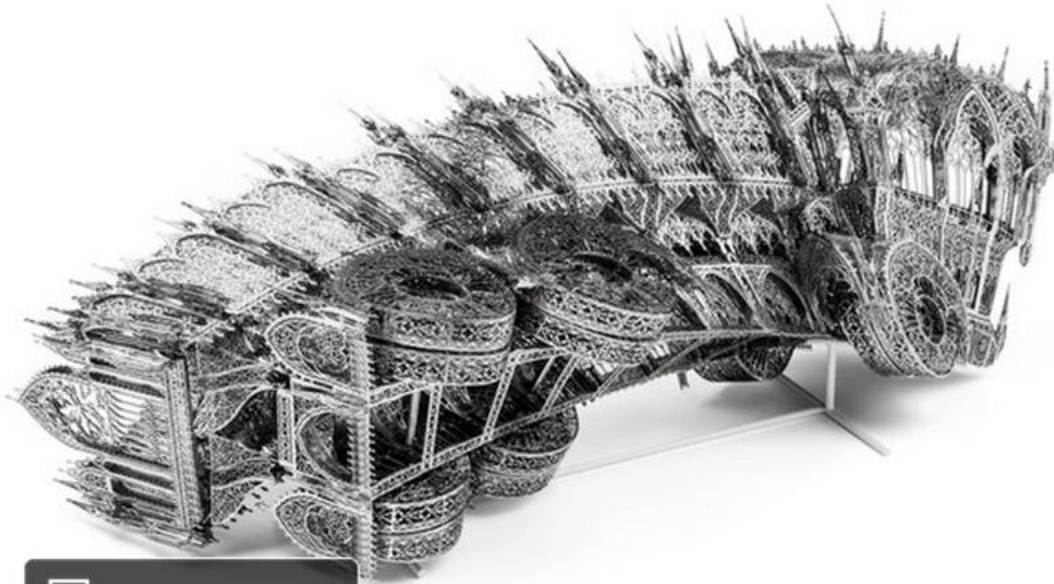


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DESIGN

Machines for Building That Serve a Higher Purpose



VIEW SLIDE SHOW

Studio Wim Delvoye

Construction, Elevated: A look at some of the pieces in Wim Delvoye's Gothic works series.

By TUDOR VAN HAMPTON

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The dump truck is bent and full of holes, but the daily abuse of a construction site is not to blame. This mass of perforated steel is a work of art.

"Twisted Dump Truck (Counterclockwise — Scale Model 1:5)" is the stainless-steel creation of Wim Delvoye, a Belgian artist whose Gothic works series blends the shapes of industrial machinery with medieval architecture. The model is on display through July 6, 2014, at the [Museum of Arts and Design](#), 2 Columbus Circle, as part of the exhibition "Out of Hand: Materializing the Postdigital."

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Built as a roughly five-foot-long tabletop exhibit, the model's steel structure is an intricate latticework of buttresses, arches and spires that resembles the facade of a cathedral. From front to back, the truck, as its name suggests, gradually twists 90 degrees counterclockwise, so the tail end of the vehicle appears to be lying on its side. A companion piece, "Twisted Dump Truck," curls in the opposite direction.

"Each work takes longer and longer," Mr. Delvoye said in a recent telephone interview from his home in Ghent. His dream, he added, would be to build a full-size version of one of the twisty trucks.

Time and patience is partly what makes the pieces stand out, Mr. Delvoye explained. "I always put in extra miles on a project," he said. "This is a notion that disappeared in the 20th century. You still have luxury products — people are happy to buy a Ferrari and admire the extra miles put into the product — but in the art world it hasn't been about the extra miles anymore."

Mr. Delvoye has often been a lightning rod for controversy: His broad portfolio includes tattooed pigs, sexually explicit X-rays and "Cloaca," a contraption that digests food into waste material resembling human excrement.

His Gothic twist on heavy machinery has been shown in galleries and public spaces around the world. He has carved lacy sculptures out of agricultural tires and assembled life-size models of excavators, concrete mixers and other fixtures of construction sites, using filigreed plates of Cor-Ten steel.

"I think people do a double take on works like this," said Nicholas Baume, director and chief curator of the Public Art Fund, a New York-based nonprofit organization. In 2003, the fund curated an exhibit of Mr. Delvoye's mechanical sculptures called "Gothic: Caterpillar and Chantier." It displayed a life-size excavator at Doris C. Freedman Plaza in Central Park and other stylized machines, barricades and traffic cones in Madison Square Park.

Partly a tongue-in-cheek statement on the art scene, Mr. Delvoye's mixture of lofty design applied to gritty or functional objects creates what Mr. Baume describes as "eccentric collisions between seemingly incompatible styles." Chantier, the French word for construction site, can also be loosely translated to mean "a mess of things."

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Mr. Delvoye, who also displayed one of his twisted-truck models at the Louvre in Paris last year, said that such sculptures take about a year to finish and required the help of artists, mathematicians, steel cutters and welders from around the world. A team of computer experts in Shanghai, for example, helps him model the figures on a computer.

“There is no freehand work anymore,” said Mr. Delvoye, who added that every angle was modeled in software that rendered each shape in three dimensions. “There are very algebraic calculations,” he said. “It’s very, very labor intensive.”

No fan of minimalism, Mr. Delvoye said he preferred to sculpt complex shapes rather than streamlined ones. Today’s technology — like laser-cutting machines — makes the job easier than in the past.

“Now we have gotten to a point where we have no excuse with computers,” Mr. Delvoye said. “You cannot just stay dumb, like in the 1960s, and think you are a great master in doing one cube or two cubes. That was maybe very cool and revolutionary, but now with the Internet it looks a bit ridiculous.”

