

# BAZAAR

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## THE ART OF HOPE

SAFWAN DAHOUL  
AND HIS  
DREAM-LIKE  
CANVASES





*Etui pour une Mobylette.  
2004. aluminum, lacquer,  
felt, Peugeot Vogue. 175 x  
115 x 70 cm.*

# THE WORLD of WIM DELVOYE

*Belgian artist Wim Delvoye is  
showcasing his whimsical works in  
Tehran. Dr. Shiva Balaghi writes on the  
artist's innate connection to Iran*

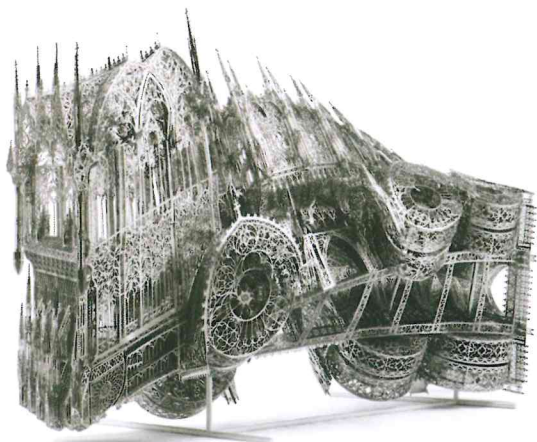
*Right: Dunlop Geomax  
100/90-19 57 M 720° 2X.  
2013. polished & patinated  
stainless steel. 78 x 79 x  
23 cm.  
All images © Studio Wim  
Delvoye, Belgium (www.  
wimdelvoye.be)*

Wim City is an imaginary place, a cartoon city with its own roads and gardens, its own library and bank, its own football pitch and tattoo parlor. It's the website Wim Delvoye has created, offering a whimsical, interactive journey through his artworks. It seems especially fitting, given that Delvoye himself is a traveler—and his art takes shape through his deep immersion in various cultures. "I don't feel I belong anywhere," he explains in an interview. "I feel like a nomad. So I take inspiration from different cultures, whilst being very respectful of the places I go to." Wim City is a reflection of this aspect of Delvoye as an artist. His





Guests admire Wim Delvoye's work during his exhibition opening at Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai



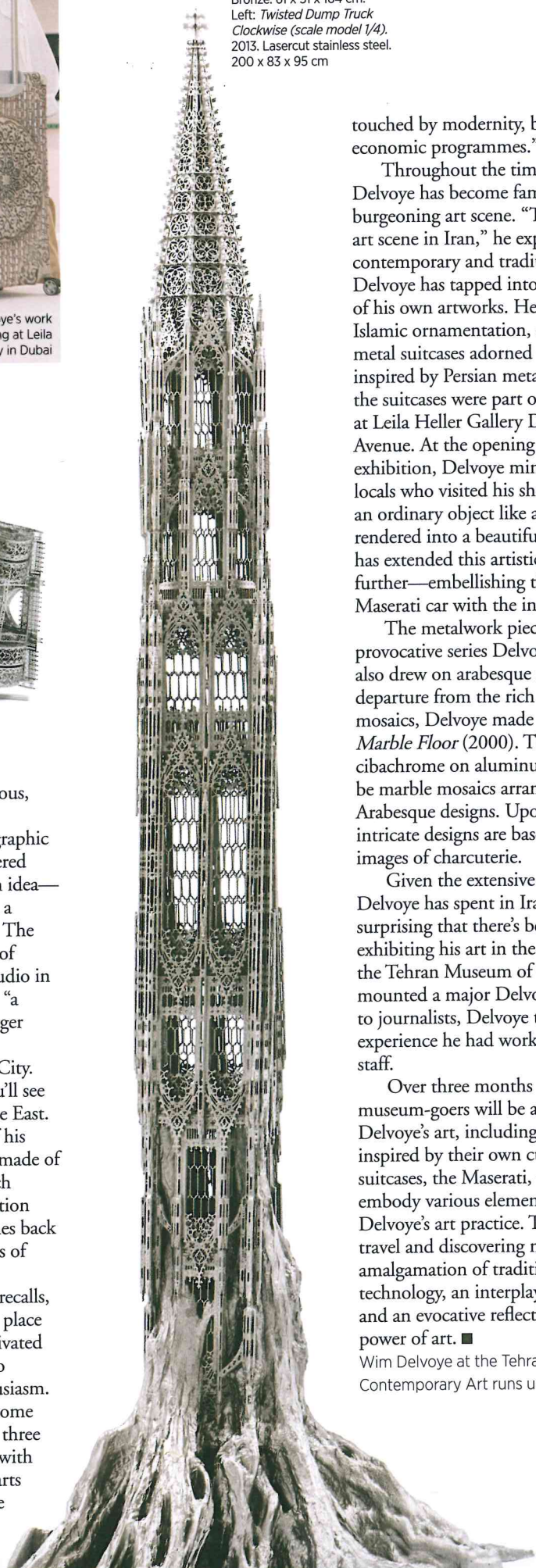
creative approach is at once playful and serious, respectful of tradition and yet innovative.

Delvoye's artistic impulse has an ethnographic bent. He describes it as a form of multi-layered appropriation art, always beginning with an idea—then the materiality and design are built on a physical manifestation of that original idea. The process of making his art becomes a fusion of materials and themes. Speaking from his studio in Ghent, Delvoye explains his art stems from “a strange mix of my own personal life and larger geopolitical perspectives.”

This “strange mix” is reflected in Wim City. On the website, tap onto a mosque and you'll see images of Delvoye's artworks inspired by the East. It's here that you'll find installation shots of his calligraphic work, *Love Letter I* (1998-99) made of 36 cibachrome prints behind plexiglass, each featuring an Arabic word. Delvoye's fascination with the cultures of the Middle East stretches back decades. Early in his career, he made a series of paintings on Persian carpets.

“I've always felt connected to Iran,” he recalls, but more recently his engagement with the place has deepened. He became particularly captivated by the ancient city of Kashan. “Kashan is so beautiful,” Delvoye says with a giddy enthusiasm. A few years back, Delvoye decided to buy some historic buildings in the city. Over the past three years, he has been carefully restoring them with the idea of perhaps dedicating them to an arts center. “I couldn't believe I could own these buildings,” he says. “Perhaps in some way poverty saved this city. It hasn't been

Suppo Karmanyaka. 2012.  
Bronze. 61 x 51 x 164 cm.  
Left: *Twisted Dump Truck*  
Clockwise (scale model 1/4).  
2013. Lasercut stainless steel.  
200 x 83 x 95 cm



touched by modernity, been destroyed by economic programmes.”

Throughout the time he's spent in Iran, Delvoye has become familiar with its burgeoning art scene. “There's a very interesting art scene in Iran,” he explains. “There's a mix of contemporary and traditional cultures.” Delvoye has tapped into this sensibility in some of his own artworks. He has recast traditional Islamic ornamentation, creating a series of metal suitcases adorned with beautiful carvings inspired by Persian metalwork. This past fall, the suitcases were part of an exhibit of his works at Leila Heller Gallery Dubai at Alserkal Avenue. At the opening of his Dubai exhibition, Delvoye mingled comfortably with locals who visited his show, marveling at how an ordinary object like a suitcase had been rendered into a beautiful piece of art. Delvoye has extended this artistic direction even further—embellishing the entire shell of a Maserati car with the intricate carvings.

The metalwork pieces recall another provocative series Delvoye created in 2000 that also drew on arabesque designs. Taking his departure from the rich tradition of Islamic mosaics, Delvoye made a series he called *Marble Floor* (2000). The works are cibachrome on aluminum, but they appear to be marble mosaics arranged in various Arabesque designs. Upon closer inspection, the intricate designs are based on photographic images of charcuterie.

Given the extensive amount of time Delvoye has spent in Iran, it's perhaps not surprising that there's been a growing interest in exhibiting his art in the country. This March, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art mounted a major Delvoye exhibition. Speaking to journalists, Delvoye told of the positive experience he had working with the museum's staff.

Over three months this spring, Iranian museum-goers will be able to delve into Delvoye's art, including those sublime pieces inspired by their own cultural heritage. The suitcases, the Maserati, the marble floors embody various elements that animate Delvoye's art practice. They reflect a passion for travel and discovering new cultures, an amalgamation of traditional crafts and modern technology, an interplay of ideas and materials, and an evocative reflection on the transcendent power of art. ■

Wim Delvoye at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art runs until 13 May. [tmoca.com](http://tmoca.com)