

Koenraad Dedobbeleer

Kunststoff: Gallery of Material Culture

22.09.2018 – 06.01.2019

WIELS

Introduction

Kunststoff is a German word that translates as “plastic,” composed of the words “art” (kunst) and “material” (stoff). Throughout his sculptural practice, Koenraad Dedobbeleer explores the fundamentals of art and material. His work is open and generous, connecting art historical and architectural references to elements drawn from popular culture, from shapes seen in the street, to surfaces stolen from high-end design. Like the titles he applies at random to his works – song lyrics, snippets overhead in conversation or read in books and newspapers – the forms and materials he employs seem familiar. However, Dedobbeleer renders them ambiguous in the way that he combines, installs and titles them.

The question of display is central to Dedobbeleer’s work. Many of his pieces are themselves presentation devices: plinths shaped like the forms they present; a wall-mounted holder for displaying postcards back-to-back; a metal arm holding aloft a cake of soap. The display mechanism that particularly intrigues Dedobbeleer is the museum itself, in the way that confirms the value of the objects on display. He is fascinated by museological paraphernalia – stands, plinths, vitrines – and printed matter, such as the books and museum postcards that recur throughout his work. Drawing upon the museological convention of labelling as ‘material culture’ anything that cannot be otherwise classified, the exhibition’s

subtitle *Gallery of Material Culture* hints at Dedobbeleer’s ambivalence about contributing further to the mass of objects produced since the dawn of mankind.

The exhibition is structured in three parts: it opens with a dense installation of predominantly existing works, which date back to 2003. Loosely grouped by theme, they offer multiple entrances into Dedobbeleer’s way of thinking. This space is installed as an indoor sculpture park or architectural promenade: a perambulation through a space that allows you to encounter works from various points of view. In the second half of this floor, Dedobbeleer presents exclusively new works that evoke elements of a classical museum display and furniture. Here, a series of ‘vitrines’ evoke the *Gallery of Material Culture*, presenting a vast array of objects that defy specific categorisation. In the gallery on the fourth floor, he creates a more domestic environment, where you can consult a collection of books exploring the idea of the double.

The transition between each of these spaces is marked by pastel-coloured screens, titled *Repressive Tolerance* (1). These scenographic elements have an indeterminate status, somewhere between architecture and sculpture, between functional divider and autonomous artwork, acting as support structures for other works and framing devices for the exhibition.

Gallery 1

Confusion of material/confusion of value

Am I the Type That Stubbornly Waits for Something to Happen (2) resembles an ashtray of the type you might find in a corporate lobby, or the sort of collecting dish into which people empty their pockets. The coins it contains have all been altered: the artist has sanded off their denomination. By removing the imprint that gives them their symbolic value, Dedobbeleer reveals their material: alloys that ensure the production cost of the coin is not higher than its value.

The stainless steel of *Faux Blonde* (3) is painted to resemble wood veneer, often used as a symbol of luxury in design and interiors. The sculpture features several handles, giving it the appearance of a piece of gym equipment or a climbing frame. Dedobbeleer refers to the historical practice of incorporating handles into sculptures, to allow their easy manoeuvring in the studio and to enable collectors to manipulate their acquisitions to show them off to their best advantage. By including such grips, he underlines the absence today of such devices from the museum, where the focus is upon the ‘pure’ contemplation of artworks, rather than their manhandling.

Dedobbeleer has made several pieces featuring a single candle, a reference to a recurrent motif of Primitive Flemish painting. In *Pour l’art sans Police* (4) the candle becomes a sculptural object.

The way that the plinth echoes its form calls to mind the work of Brancusi, who challenged the distinction between sculpture and its support structure. In *Disruption of the Anticipated Future* (5) it looks as if roles are reversed: the plinth (laminated to resemble concrete) becomes the sculpture and the 'sculptures' (found granite rocks) become the support structure.

The plinth also plays a key role in *Neglected All Theoretical Aspects Considerably* (6). Laminated in imitation marble, it is in fact made of wood, as are the collection of round forms it presents, which echo its cylindrical shape. The work explores notions of authenticity and our desire for 'traditional' forms and techniques in this age of industrial mass-production.

Guilt is in the System (7) is a real replica of a fake rock. Made of milled limestone, it is the copy of a trap to catch vermin, originally made in plastic to replicate a rock and therefore go unnoticed. It is doubled by *Not Enough Past to go Around* (8), a limestone sphere that the artist found and placed in the gallery. Both elements become part of a landscape or a garden, man-made manipulations of nature.

Art history, art mythology

Tête (9) is a silkscreen print of photograph of a reproduction in a book. It depicts a sculpted hairpiece from an antique sculpture, which is missing a face. The fragment is at once abstract and figurative, recognizable and perplexing.

Separability and Ignorance Are Sin in a General Way (10) features a reproduction in resin of a famous head from antique sculpture, known as the Blond Boy, found on the Acropolis in Athens. The original revealed traces of yellow paint on his hair, confirming scholars' belief that ancient Greek sculptures had been painted and not rendered in white, as was generally believed. Dedobbeleer purchased this version from a museum whose shop sells replicas of works from its collection. *Pre-thought is the Immediate Past of the Instant* (11) is similarly a plaster reproduction, this time of a pre-Colombian Chimu sculpture sold in the shop of Brussels' Museum of Art and History. Made famous by the Tintin story *The Broken Ear*, in which various copies appear and create confusion, it is an icon

that has become iconic in another sense through its inclusion in Hergé's cartoon. *Painstakingly Realistic* (12) is a metal disk found by Dedobbeleer in a flea market, of unknown use and origin, presented here as if an archaeological relic.

Contemporary is the Man, not Style (13) takes as its starting point a diagram of associations between people portrayed by the French painter Ingres (1780-1867). This analysis revealed how Ingres depicted a new era of political players in France. Dedobbeleer removes all the names, leaving only the punctuation marks, and rotates the landscape diagram too become an abstract portrait in itself.

The Virtually Unrelieved Hostility of Criticism (14) is a sculpture made from silkscreens. It thus refers to questions of reproduction and originality. It appears to be the title page of a book and mentions the French sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon (1876-1918) and his highly influential Cubist sculpture *Le Cheval Majeur* (designed in 1914). After his death, the work was reproduced in bronze by his brothers, the artists Jacques Villon and Marcel Duchamp in 1930-31 and 1966 respectively. The latter made eight copies, in a move that raised a few questions (and eyebrows) for its apparently mercenary motive.

But it So Happens that the Essence of the Thing Is in the Flash (15) is a recent reproduction of Velásquez's portrait of the sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés (the original, dated 1635, is at the Prado Museum in Madrid). In the brownish stain on the bottom right corner of the painting, we see both Montañés' unfinished study in clay and the incompleteness of the painting itself, which Velásquez was unable to finish.

The Impact and the Evidence for the Impact (16) is an absurdly over-elaborate presentation system for two back-to-back postcards. *Without Foreclosing the Possibilities and the Unruliness of Art* (17) is a double slide projection showing different *versions* of an artwork or different *reproductions* of the same artwork. It draws upon the technique developed by art historian Heinrich Wöfflin, who used the comparison of two slides as a teaching method. Here, however, there is no verbal commentary: we are left to draw our own conclusions about the (in)significance of the images and the differences between them.

Displayed/contained

It's Only the Idea that Is Permitted to Generate Form (18) draws upon differences of standards and tastes. It is a humorously over-complex cigarette holder, or perhaps a smoking sculpture. Suspended from the ceiling and resting just on one point, it seems almost to hover as it delicately holds a single Lucky Strike. Unlike most global brands, where the taste of a product is the same no matter where it is consumed, Lucky Strike cigarettes for the American market are different to those sold elsewhere.

The spherical, bulbous forms of the piece are echoed by those of *Old Sacrosanct Academic* (19), which functions as a container for peanuts. The wall-mounted large yellow canvas sack titled *Ablaut* (20) holds walnuts. Its form is an enlarged, soft version of bowls that the artist saw being sold bar-to-bar in Lisbon, made from recuperated plastic sacks used to ship coffee. *Consisting an Actual Thing* (21) is perhaps the most casual and unsettling work in a show: a plastic bag full of corks that sits as if abandoned in the middle of the floor.

Man (22) features a fruit bowl containing real, industrially-farmed fruit – replaced throughout the exhibition – like a modern-day *vanitas* that raises questions of the natural and the fabricated. *Ideas can be Thought* (23) is a display board featuring a printed photograph of flowers, initially published in the 1950s in the magazine *L'Oeil* [The Eye]. And *Something Exists in the World that Is Not Mankind* (24) is a delicately presented bar of soap.

Blessedly Devoid of Morals (25) is a round, convex, wall-mounted mirror, made from polished stainless steel. It reflects the works around it, the viewer, but contains also a void in the form of a circular hole. Installed in the centre of one of the paravents, *Binary* (26) is shaped like a hand-mirror but magnified to be human in scale. Made by polishing a plate of stainless steel until it is reflective, it creates an image directly from material. Dedobbeleer describes it as a portal to another space, as an escape route for the eye (and perhaps for the artist).

Für Max und Fritz, denkmal (27) is a sculpture evoking a poster display system, of the sort one finds in many cities (known in France as Morris Columns). Usually

displaying advertising for various different events, Dedobbeleer's version is more enigmatic. Instead of showing the traces of many layers of different posters, it is pasted with identical prints, made by the artist, based on a photograph taken in a friend's garden.

Various Difficulties Entailed in the Act of Recollection (28) is a copy of a plastic beaker, made in nickel and enamel. Precariously balanced on the floor, the work transforms an iconic American party cup into a strange imposter, both familiar and alien. Its size – too large for a cup (by European standards) while rather small for a sculpture – raises questions about the standardization of measurements.

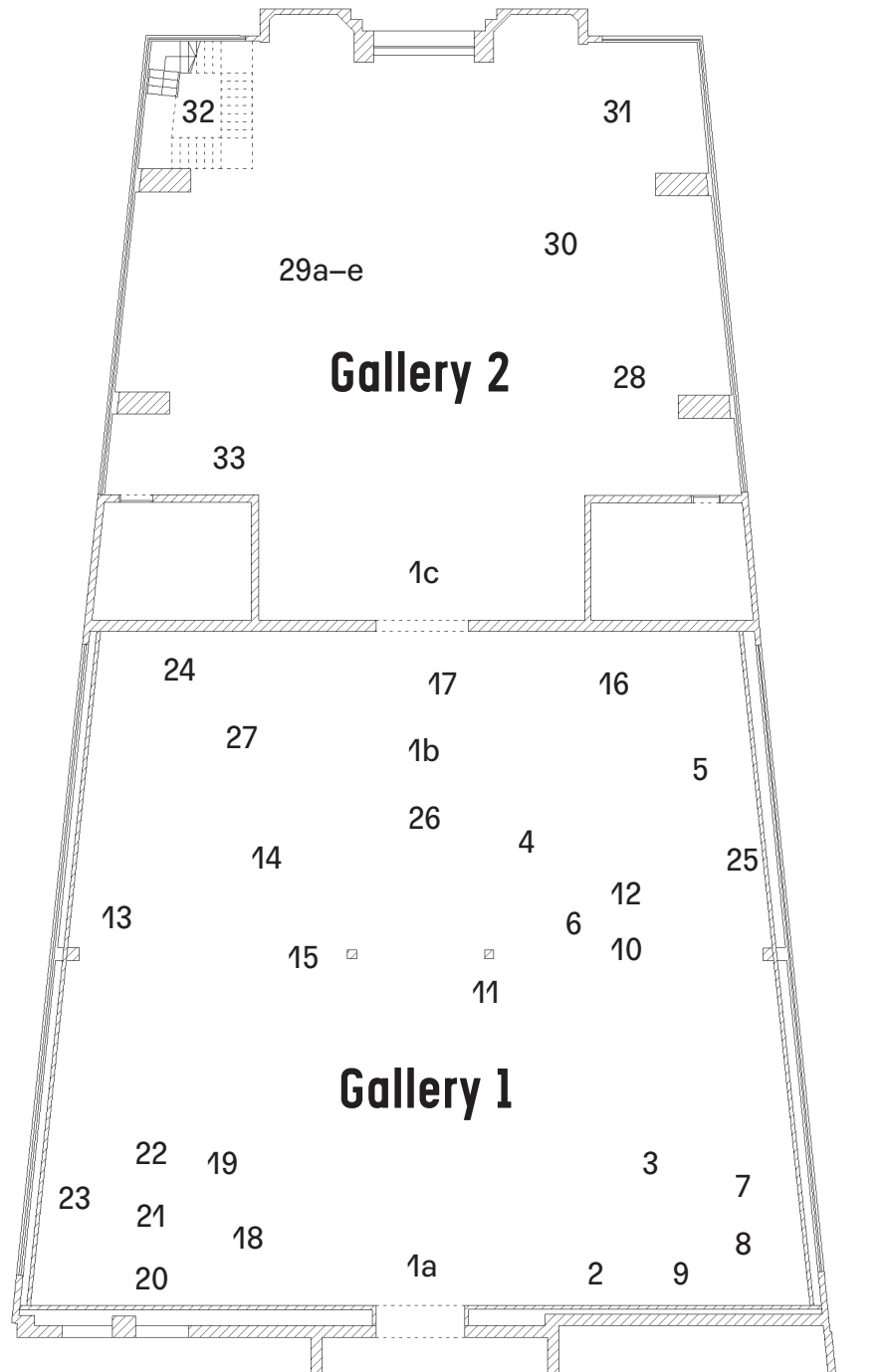
Gallery 2

Gallery of material culture

Dedobbeleer has created five works that are each trapezoidal plinths, titled *Things are Stubbornly Thinglike I-V* (29). These glass-less vitrines display a variety of made forms and found materials. They are exhibitions within the exhibition – galleries of material culture – and each element refers in some way to questions of value. Rather like the Surrealist game of the Exquisite Corpse, the combination of forms creates new associations and readings without ever becoming didactic or narrative.

A Sense of Inadequacy of One's Own Understanding (30) is another new work. A sculpture in the form of a spiral radiator, it warms the space and comments obliquely upon the circuits (financial and technical) of the institution: as we warm our hands, we may wonder what percentage of the annual budget is spent upon heating. Dedobbeleer's interest in radiators – in addition to their design and usefulness – stems from their presence in museum galleries from the nineteenth century. The spiral form of Dedobbeleer's radiator is taken from an energy-saving light bulb. He previously made a wall-mounted, neon version titled *Deliberate Intention* (37), installed on the 4th floor. Here the same form is reproduced in rolled steel, welded together and spray-painted. It is placed on a circular plinth, to reinforce its status as artwork, and to connect it to the other sculptures presented here.

One of these is a plaster cast of the goddess Diana, titled *Nominal Representation* (31). Dedobbeleer has



long been interested in the permutability of antique sculpture, which Western culture tends to consider as foundational, permanent and unchanging. For example, he was intrigued to learn that in Ancient Rome the faces of statues in public space were often changed, according to which deities were most in favour. Dedobbeleer alters the features of this plaster cast to resemble his wife, the artist Valérie Mannaerts. He thus introduces a rare autobiographical element into his work, although the gesture is more closely connected to the tradition of sculptors depicting their muse, not – in Dedobbeleer's case – without an awareness of the paternalistic potential of such a depiction.

Two photographic diptychs are also presented in this gallery. *Start with a Tangible Reality* (32) features a detail of a photograph reproduced in a book, showing the feet of a nymph sculpted by Canova seemingly dancing on a plinth designed by Italian architect Carlo Scarpa. Next to it is a photograph taken by Dedobbeleer at the Acropolis in Athens, where laser technology is used to scan massive blocks of marble in an attempt to reconstruct temple columns. The other diptych, *Ostracism from Renascent Modernism* (33), combines an image of ivory tusks presented in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris and an image of an antique hare, whose origin and function remain unknown.

Gallery 3 (4th floor)

Dedobbeleer has produced several stoves of different designs and included them in his exhibitions. On the top floor of WIELS, he has installed a working stove made from four steel I-beams, echoing the function of the radiator on the floor below. With this work, titled *Libertarian Purists* (34), the functional meets the aesthetic, creating a cosy atmosphere that contrasts with the museum-like galleries below. The space features benches designed by Dedobbeleer, titled *Transgression Has its Entire Space in the Line it Crosses* (35) and cut-outs through the walls that let in daylight and offer new views from the WIELS building.

In the same space, the artist presents his collection of books, titled *Transforming Them into Analogies* (36). He acquired these books because they were the doubles of others in his library. There is a compulsive aspect to this process and a fascination with the idea that the same content can be presented in different printed form (due to changes of design, re-printing, changing an exhibition catalogue for different venues, correcting errors).

Finally, with *Grandeur of the Old Theater* (38), Dedobbeleer offers you a cup of coffee, challenging the division created in art since Modernism between form and function.

Biography

Koenraad Dedobbeleer is a Belgian artist based in Brussels (b. 1975 in Halle, Belgium).

Solo institutional exhibitions include GAK, Bremen (2014); Extra City Kunsthall, Antwerp (2014); De Vleeshal, Middelburg (2013); CREDAC, Ivry-sur-Seine (2013); Lok/Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, St. Gallen (2012); Castillo/Corrales, Paris (2012).

Group exhibitions include: *General Rehearsal*, MMOMA, Moscow (2018); *Musée en Oeuvre(s)*, Centre National Georges Pompidou, Paris (2017); *Territories and Fiction*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2016); *Liverpool Biennial*, Liverpool (2016); *The Display Show*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham and Stroom, The Hague (2015-2016); *A Small Museum for the American Metaphor*, Redcat, Los Angeles (2014); *Der Brancusi Effekt*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2014); *Weather Permitting*, Bienal do Mercosul 9, Porto Alegre (2013). At WIELS, Dedobbeleer participated in *Rehabilitation* (2010) and *Un-Scene* (2008).

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by Dedobbeleer's first monograph, which traces the development of his practice since 2006. The book features an introduction by WIELS senior curator Zoë Gray, an essay by art historian Patricia Falguières and personal recollections of selected exhibitions of Dedobbeleer's work by 16 artists and curators who experienced them first hand.

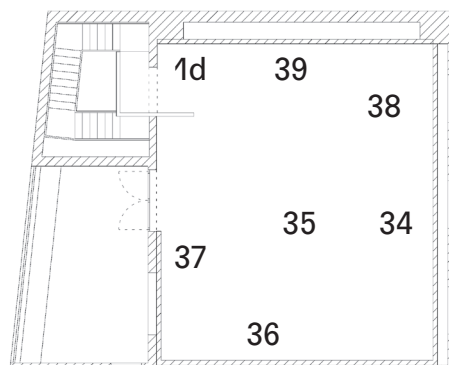
Contributors: Harold Ancart (artist), Lauren Barnes (curator, The Hepworth Wakefield), Susanne Bieri (Swiss National Library, Bern), Konrad Bitterli (director, Kunst Museum Winterthur), Phillip Van den Bossche (director, Mu.ZEE, Ostend), Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy (director, Witte de With, Rotterdam), Kris Kimpe (architect), Janneke de Vries (director, GAK, Bremen), Pierre Leguillon (artist), Rita McBride (artist), Asier Mendizabal (artist), François Piron (curator, Paris), Claire Le Restif (director, Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine), Dieter Roelstraete (curator, Neubauer Collegium, Chicago), Dirk Snauwaert (director, WIELS), Susanne Titz (director, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach).

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Gallery 3

Events

Wednesday 03.10.18, 19:00 (free nocturne)
Lecture by Patricia Falguières,
Museum of Accessories (FR)

Patricia Falguières is a critic and art historian based in Paris, where she is a professor at EHESS (L'école des hautes études en sciences sociales). Her lecture will be based upon the essay she wrote on Dedobbeleer's work for the book *Kunststoff*, in which she explored his fascination with museum display.

Sunday 04.11.18, 15:00
Look Who's Talking:
Zoë Gray (EN)

Wednesday 07.11.18, 19:00 (free nocturne)
Look Who's Talking:
Sophie Dars & Carlo Menon,
editors of *Accatone* (FR)

Accatone explores minor practices in art and architecture through the medium of the printed magazine. It is published in Brussels by two architects and two graphic designers, and has previously featured the work of Dedobbeleer.

Sunday 09.12.18, 15:00
Look Who's Talking:
Koenraad Dedobbeleer (NL)

Info

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Kunststoff: Gallery of Material Culture

22.09.2018–06.01.2019
WIELS, Brussels

Curated by Zoë Gray

Exhibition tour dates
Plastiek: Gallery of Material Culture
25.01–22.04.2019
Kunst Museum Winterthur

Sache: Gallery of Material Culture
07–09.2019
Kunstverein Hannover

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Limited edition

Especially for his exhibition at WIELS, Dedobbeleer has created a limited edition silkscreen print *Tête*. This image is presented in the exhibition, used on the cover of the accompanying book and as the exhibition poster. For more information: www.wiels.org/bookshop

