

The god within

Wim Delvoye's first major solo exhibition in Belgium in a decade is a small and intimate affair

Last month Wim Delvoye placed a neo-gothic tower, "Tour (Bruxelles)", on the roof of Bozar, a harbinger of his exhibition *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*. It build up great expectations, especially as it's Delvoye's first exhibition in a major space on Belgian soil since he revealed, 10 years ago, his self-described "poop machine" called "Cloaca" – a contraption that takes in sustenance, processes it through a digestive system and spits it out the other end – at M KHA in Antwerp.

Knockin' on Heaven's Door was announced as a retrospective of Delvoye's Gothic works of the past decade, plus some new creations. It isn't – it's just a selection of all of that. The minimal approach is a pity, since the luxurious catalogue *does* show what's not display, but could have been: Delvoye's Gothic-themed cement truck and concrete mixer, to name but two.

And the exhibition certainly should not be compared to the prestigious overview of his work at the Musée Rodin this summer in Paris, although it would be great to have such a retrospective in his home country, rather sooner than later.

So, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*. Half an hour, and you'll be out again. And believe me, you'll have had plenty of time to look at all the works carefully.

Once one accepts the small scale of the exhibition, there is still much to admire. You'll have to use Bozar's entrance at Koningsstraat (the upper entrance), and you'll be welcomed in the rotunda by a contorted sculpture, "Daphne & Chloe (Counterclockwise)", carried out in glimmering bronze. The embrace of the two mythological figures has never looked as twisted and forbidding.

There are some smaller, though just as shiny, sculptures but more remarkable are constructions, in the rotunda's anterooms, with titles such as "Double Helix CCI 180 0" and "Double Helix DS 360 90". They're crucifixes but contorted, stretched out and twisted according to the structure of a double helix – a spiral-like space curve. (DNA has the same structure.)

It results in a crucified Christ showing

extreme suffering. The acquiescence Christ often shows on a classical crucifix has evaporated completely. But even more interesting are the coloured preparatory drawings that adorn the walls of the rooms. Sometimes they just show a double

helix against a neutral background, but on others the construction is placed against a cityscape or landscape. The result is as troubling as the appearance of the monolith in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Sadly, some of the drawings hang way too high, so it's almost impossible to see them. Is this carelessness of the curator or did Delvoye think: "They're only preparatory drawings, if you've seen one, you've seen them all?" (Either way, it's a pity.)

Incidentally, all those helixes don't look very Gothic, but in other anterooms, you'll find work that does harmonise with "Tour (Bruxelles)", such as a huge panoramic view of a medieval but stylised Brussels in which Delvoye's pontifically placed tower dominates the skyline, overshadowing the city hall and the cathedral.

But the most fascinating and complex works are two large-scale models of a chapel that, like "Tour (Bruxelles)", is made from corrosion-resistant Corten steel. Thanks to the laser cutting technique used to create them, the Gothic motifs are much more pristine than in real ancient Gothic buildings.

This strong contrast between detailed execution and bygone visual motifs creates an intriguing tension, most notably in Delvoye's stained glass. No religious imagery here, but x-rays of people performing sexual acts.

Blasphemous as it might feel to Christians, it's an acerbic comment on the difficult relationship Christianity seems to have with sexuality. It even ties in with the recent scandals in the Belgian catholic church, from paedophilia to archbishop Léonard labelling AIDS as "immanent justice" – though it was created before all of that news broke.

"Mama, put my guns in the ground / I

can't shoot them anymore / That long black cloud is comin' down / I feel like I'm knockin' on heaven's door", sings Bob Dylan in one of his most famous songs. But this exhibition shows that Delvoye is stronger than ever. No long, black cloud is darkening *his* sky, that's for sure. Delvoye recently stated that he wanted to

start a new religion, so I supposed it's us who will be knocking at Delvoye's door. At least, that's my guess how *he* sees it. Surely, with his oeuvre, there must have been some kind of god living in his deepest self for quite some time. As long as his art stays as interesting as it is now, it's all fine with me. ♦

Knockin' on Heaven's Door

Until 23 January

Bozar, Koningsstraat entrance
Brussel

→ www.bozar.be



Grimly Gothic: Delvoye and his tower

