



From Wood to Steel
1974-2003

Michel DELAERE

Sculptor

WOOD :

« Laying positive »



cedar on plexiglas 35 x 120cm

« Take off négative »



Cedar on zinc 30 x 90cm

« So we are two »



Cedar on fabric 80 x 60cm.

« Penchée négatif »



sipo sur aluminium 40 x 40cm

Self taught Sculptor, Michel Delaere was born in Buvrinnes (Hainaut), Belgium in 1943.

Those sculptures, as an example, are from the periode from **1974 to 1978**. It is the moment, where Delaere's work leaves the ground to hang on the wall. His « Mural Sculpture » is born. It is also as he says : « *my academic period* » or else : « *the epoch of negatives* ». He did nevertheless step over a landmark by transferring his small cedar sculptures to panels, most of the time covered in fabric « *my sculpture until then, was missing air, generosity* ».

We are facing astonishing work. En effet, is the woman is present, she is there as a chinese shadow most often visible thanks to the fabric ; the carved wood delimiting the line that traces the subject. Delaere hides the figure and courts unconsciously a future abstraction. The seeds are in.

« Femme »



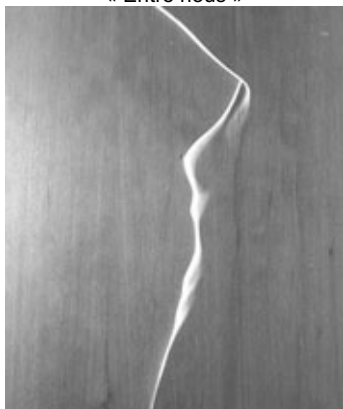
Samba 100 x 70cm

« Revenant à ce moment »



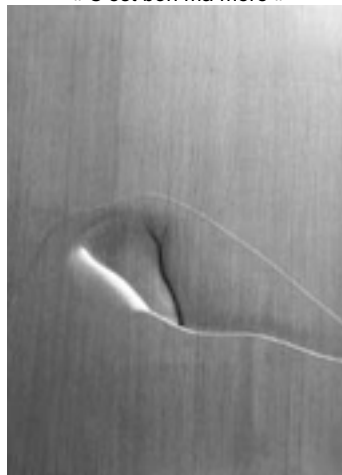
cèdre 90 x 60cm

« Entre nous »



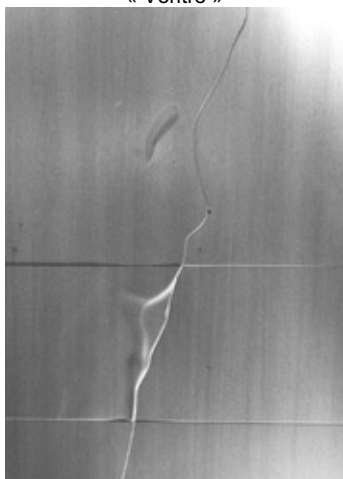
cèdre 90 x 70cm

« C'est bon ma mère »



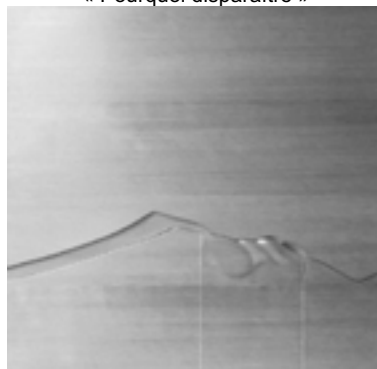
cèdre 80 x 60cm

« Ventre »



cèdre 80 x 60cm

« Pourquoi disparaître »



cèdre 90 x 90cm

M N'Diay in 1981 :...He brings alive the curves of the feminine body with an incredible sensitivity for this medium that he has purified, polished to the extreme, to the point that wood seems to have become a malleable matter, supple and docile as the roundnesses of the flesh itself to the caress of the hand or the gaze.

From 1979, Fabric gives way to panels of solid wood that he dedicates to Woman, presenting her in totality. Using Cedar, he progressively reduces this body to accentuate only a few lines or fragments. It is in 1979 that he has his first exhibition in Grimbergen (Flanders). First step of a lengthy sharing with the public. The art critics are unanimous in recognizing the strong artistic appeal of his work.

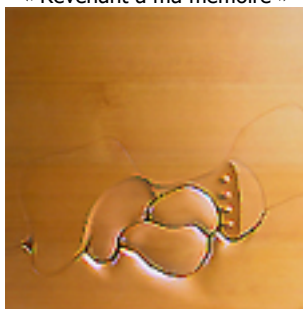
M N'Diay in 1983 :...The lines, the precious graphics on which the sculptural composition is based, remind us with an elegant perfectionism and a great balance in construction, the mouvement of a backside, the outline of a breast, the volume of a hip but most often without losing the magnetism of their carnal sources, these elements become the sublimated component of brilliant abstract games.

« D'un souffle »



cèdre

« Revenant à ma mémoire »



cèdre

« Et se tire le temps »



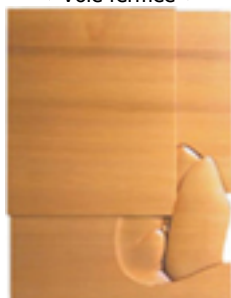
cèdre

« Débarrassé de mes scories »



cèdre

« Voie fermée »



cèdre

Stéphane REY in 1984 : We imagine that one realizes such items through the technique of modeling where a pliable matter obeys the pressures and strokes of the hand. But one is flabbergasted by the dexterity of the wood carver who extracts from his pounced and polished material, a life that expresses itself in contours, in extremely soft hollows, in a tenderness almost fleshy. These fragments borrowed from life's warmth with the appearance, here of a shoulder, there of a breast, a hip do not however work toward figuration based on a concrete reality, but digested and assimilated by abstraction, they bring something delicate, provocative and extremely fascinating.

Since 1985, we witness this evolution that brings Delaere to progressively abandon the figurative. His Cedar panels will place themselves in a palette of non figurative creations certainly very sensual and sometimes in opposition with geometric forms that encroach on them. That way of working together with the coming of steel and concrete in his work are preliminaries of a « Constructed Art » that will mature and that we shall discover way later.

Paul CASO in 1986 :...All of that is realized with a admirable mastery of the arabesque and the polishing. It is easy to compare to the canvasses of Fontana, mais le bois travaillé de Michel DELAERE est à lui seul un trésor de la nature, un luxe qui se plie aux exigences savantes et métaphoriques de l'esprit. Il y a dans cette exposition une noblesse de l'intention qui frappe et enchante..

Anita NARDON in 1986...The new works, carefully lacquered according to the best traditions of the Orient, show a different shine. The reaction of the public to some of these exquisite materials is "that's plastic". But no!

The works of Delaere are like poems one would send to foreign peoples. The bawdiness of the sensual allusion, the tender folds, come together to create a song to life, a hymn to love, to the fraternity of forceful lines which constitute a great movement towards the others, a sort of cosmic harmony exemplifying the mood of the whole....

- LE DRAPEAU ROUGE -

Janine LAMBOTTE in 1988...Wood fascinated the young boy he was in the 50's, to the point of modeling old crates into mysterious caves where he hid his dreams. His path seems as natural as the wood that inspires him: from sculpted furniture, original (which he still does if he likes the commission), he arrives first at the ronde-bosse, then the flat panel and finishes – but can an artist every speak of finishing? – to monumental sculptures. An inspired artist, fervent, generous, he loves music and most of all the classical composers, Beethoven, not surprising, the same whisper, the similar taste for grandeur which is close to the genial composer. He likes Brel too: normal, isn't it? Always the grandeur.



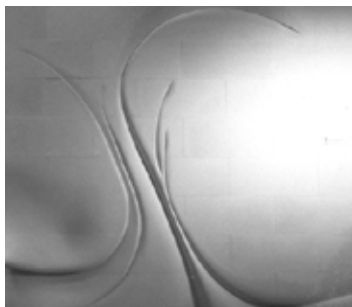
« A la fenêtre du temps »



acier et fonte d'acier
100 x 130cm
1988

Tôles et fonte d'acier Metals and steel: Steel attracts Delaere. He senses it in a state of fusion, liquid as water, clings to the ground and escapes into the slightest curve or corner and yet the top parts remain horizontal. Thus, between two sheets of steel, he inserts a piece of sculpted wood which becomes the heart of the piece. The lateral metals have been deformed earlier, thus creating a depression that the steel in fusion will flow in to precipitously. The pouring of the steel is done in open air, which the artist controls by lifting or closing the metal, all within a few seconds before the steel hardens. This, he says... »*Spill on the ground the lava of this improvised volcano...fix the wave on its assault on the beach... »*

Roger. FOULON in 1988 : ...Michel DELAERE then poured the molten metal into his molds. The sculptor completed the filling with a ladle. The spectacle was truly prodigious. In a shower of sparks gushing everywhere, the asbestos-clad sculptor directed the casting. The metal ignited the woods, which gave the castings irregularities that generated surprising shapes...-LA NOUVELLE GAZETTE-



Concrete: Delaere pursues the idea of transforming the expression "mural sculpture" into "sculpted wall". He will therefore imagine and sculpt a few concrete blocks that he will incorporate into the wall when it is built.

Jacques COLLARD in 1986: The wall should be a limit, a closure. It should imprison. Delaere opens it to the Eternal Feminine, better, makes it disappear like our magical past, inscribing in the clay or the walls of Lascaux, Altamira or Tassili, the object of Desire which worked the dark consciousness, origin and distant source of the refinements of love.

"The walls of Lascaux..! What amazes me the most in these disturbing paintings are these geometric shapes that no one has been able to decipher to date. These signs - it is said - necessarily have a meaning that we do not know, and fortunately, because it is indeed this mystery that gives these works a still thrilling life even today.

Pierre-Jean FOULON in 1986: ... Yet another direction: vast surfaces in cellular concrete. The goal, we urge it: monumentality, integration. Go beyond the panel, the lake, to sculpt the ocean, infinity, space. The wall finally opens with the DELAERE chisel. And the vast cosmic undulations generate the folds of the earth. DELAERE, we feel, expand his vision.

-LE SPANTOLE-

« En toute abondance »



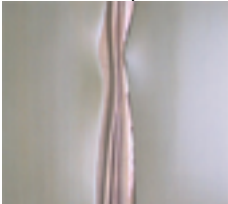
cèdre 110 x 80cm 1986

« Au creux d'un souffle »



cèdre 55 x 60cm 1986

« Sous tes draps blancs »



cèdre 55 x 60cm 1986

Since 1985, Delaere gropingly seeks a conversion to color. We discover here and there works in cedar colored with a light veil of delicate dyes which accentuate the sensitivity of his work. This approach will quickly push him into strong color through the use of lacquer, which will lead to superb monochromes in the rich and muted colorings of blue, gray, black and more rarely red.

Jacques COLLARD in 1986: His transit through figuration made him understand a profound truth which all his current art is impregnated with: sparing of forms, nature models everything from identical elements, whether it is a mountain range, moving ocean waves, amoeba or giant species, sinuosities of wood texture or woman body. Born in 1943, his debut on the picture rails dates from 1979: that is to say that he was not quickly satisfied with himself and that he wanted to mature his approach for a long time before facing the public.

Note the titles that the artist attributes to his works. Borrowings from poetry he is attentive to this: *"The signature of a work is certainly necessary, but its title is essential for me. It's the last gesture, the cutting of the cord, leaving her, wishing her good luck in her life, her journey"*.

« Il s'en est fallu de peu »



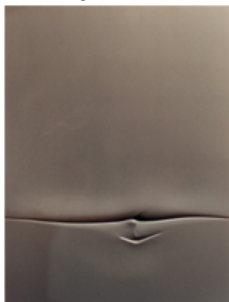
bois laqué 180 x 180cm-1987

Sans titre



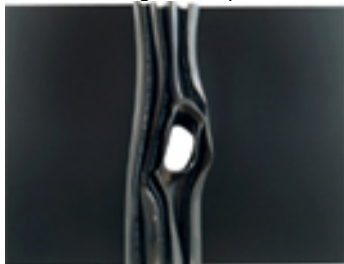
bois laqué 60 x 40cm-1988

« Quand gonfle la brume »



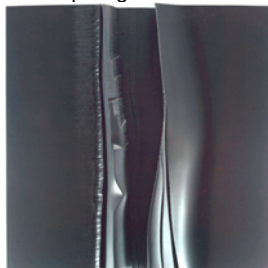
bois laqué 80 x 60cm-1988

« A ronger le mépris »



bois laqué 150 x 210cm-1991

« Au plus gros des vents »



bois laqué 120 x 120cm-1991

In 1987, he gave up all other professional activity and devoted himself totally to his art and to many creative researches which would culminate at the end of the following decade.

Wim TOEBOSCH (AICA) in 1988: ...His works enliven flat walls, with reliefs charged with a vitality borrowed without violence from nature, and with a double breath: that outside, by large serene surfaces and that, more intimate, from organs that gently throb and penetrate each other with great discretion, to a discovery imbued with silent surprise and wonder....

Flat panels he will amplify them in the central part before sculpting them (*A ronger le mépris*). He therefore also becomes a modeler by gluing extra thicknesses to the edges of the cutouts of the panel, specifying to us: "My first gesture is to split the panel in two. This gesture is without possible return and intervenes only after many hesitations. Faced with these two scratched lips, I apply myself without measure to soften, conceal or make the trace of this violent gesture disappear, as if to make myself forgiven for it.

Pierre-Jean FOULON in 1986: ...Then, with the gouge, the chisel the gesture is sovereign, to deepen the size, to bulge the volumes, to dig the folds, to hem the falls. Then, as one caresses a flesh, as one touches a skin, endlessly purifying the shape with sandpaper, shading the curves, asserting the edges. Such is the force of the artist: to control his gesture to the point of making it forget, to reach the pulpy where one expected the blow, to define the curve where one suspected the brilliance. Once the size and the sanding are finished, a lacquering job stifles under its homogeneity any reference to the material, any reminder of existence. The form is there by light more than by relief, by image more than by solid. Final stage of the perfect? Contempt of meaning? Dead end of the object? We will love these disincarnations of the work resulting in the images of the sign.

« A la louange de l'inutile »



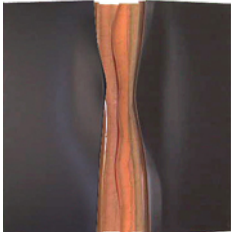
bois laqué 120 x 120cm-1991

« Aux frissons d'un souffle »



bois laqué 90 x 90cm-1992

« Au mutisme d'un cri »



90 x 90cm-1992

« A l'insu du temps »



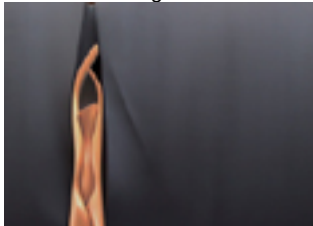
bois laqué 60 x 60cm-1996

« Au murmure des sables »



3x 90x30cm-1998

« De cet étrange nécessaire »



90 x 120cm-1999

Jo VERBRUGGHEN in 1998: Michel Delaere creates. Artist, he carves wood and treats it like nature. It also hurts, softens, breaks and consoles. It coils in the faults, creating erosion. Like nature, he searches the solid, cracks the trunk, creates sinkholes to bury his thought, a sentence, a word, a breath of life.

Nothing engenders revolt in this world where everything breathes tranquility. The dazzled forms cover themselves with night. The deep gray will again be the crowning achievement of the shade. The mystery clings, then reveals itself like a sheet that covers a loved body, or a mist that rises discovering an immensity imprinted with spells. The crevices open up, gaping, soft, inviting caresses, whispers, inaudible murmurs. Make visible. To unveil. This wood has become curved. The wound became hollow, bed, layer; or this valley so similar to the one where Arthur Rimbaud as a poet let the Sleeper of the Valley die.

This way of doing is still current, although in many cases, he will embed elements of natural or tinted cedar of which he said "one can be both firm and tender, strong and fragile". This intimate reflection, Delaere will let it manifest in his works, where wide sensual beaches are interrupted by furrows dug with a chainsaw whose violent marks of the tool remain as they are; and confides to us: *"The bringing together of human beings concerns me. My sculptures are most often composed of two walls separated by a more intensely sculpted slice. These walls can be two people separated by this slice, it brings them together or separates them. I would prefer that it brings them together, become one"*.

Delaere will amplify the play of light by incorporating components into its lacquers that will sometimes make it shiny with a thousand reflections, satiny and soft, matt or structured, absorbing light, thus increasing the richness and depth of the volumes.

In January 1997 Delaere discovered Egypt with wonder *"I would have liked to spend the night in each site visited to better imbibe it, associate myself with it, smell it, breathe it, live its mysteries by letting myself slip into a gentle sleep..."*. On his return, curiously, this trip will deeply shake our artist sculptor. For three months, he will take refuge in reading and his thoughts, abandoning any tool, any project. There is no doubt that deep within him, this art and these refined, geometric constructions stirred him and revived what he had carried within him for a long time: "Constructivism". He will wake up and quickly reveal it.

From 1999, Delaere implemented the product of his research. Matured, tested over the last ten years, he will release his works in steel for outdoor use, his jewellery, his papers, his natural woods. It is a real explosion in which we find it difficult to follow the artist, but he affirms: *"An artist is first of all a creative spirit, the greatest of which in my eyes is Leonardo da Vinci. This reflection and this example broke my last restraints."* We will therefore follow Delaere in his approaches, his achievements, including those which have not met the public, in the company and with the advice of Pierre-Jean FOULON, Curator at the Royal Museum of Mariemont, Lecturer at the University Faculties Notre- Lady of Peace in Namur and member of the Acquisition Commission of the French Community of Belgium.

« Au rythme du temps »



Acier Corten et laqué
130 x 130 x 50cm
2000

« Par la force des vents »



Acier Corten et Inox
280 x 110 x 70cm
2000

Steel

"I aspire through sheet metal, to create volumes that are not closed in on themselves like a cube can be; although, if I needed a cube, I would use concrete or stone, materials that are perfectly suited"

It is therefore the sheet of steel that interests our sculptor. His apparent lightness, the sometimes fragile aspect of his artistic research in this delicate expression led him to abandon many projects for technical reasons. The meeting with Mr. Guy Gerlement, professor of the Chair of Mechanics of Materials and Structures at the Polytechnic Faculty of Mons, will quickly evolve into a close collaboration and support of high technicality for a good number of projects, whose stability was close to breaking. Delaere was thus freed from a good number of constraints, pushing his projects further to the limits of balance and the very resistance of the material. *"The wind is the enemy of stability and yet, what emotion when a sheet metal bends under its violence, and obediently takes its place the past anger"*.

Pierre-Jean FOULON in 2000: ... Metal is very present today in the monumental work of Michel Delaere. A lover of reliefs (low or high), the artist works more with sheet steel than solid volume. His work on metal is thus an itinerary of cuts and not modeling and casting of masses. With Delaere, sheet metal is, as he says himself, a "skin" that he works by spreading out its lacerated surface from the start, to leave the plane and open it up in three dimensions. From then on, welding, curving, freezing while nevertheless keeping a share of mobility to certain elements, he gave his sculptures new spaces where expressionism was absorbed into the lines and simplicity was exacerbated in the treatment of spaces. And nothing is also more convincing than this desire to use most of the time a raw corten steel whose red and brown skin takes on a patina and reveals itself over time and according to the nature of the place. LE SPANTOLE

« Au gré des vents »

« Aux lisières du passé »



Acier laqué
200 x 250cm-1988

« Au creux d'une ride »



Acier laqué
310 x 50 x 50cm-2001

« A tous vents »



Acier laqué
80 x 110 x 80cm-2001

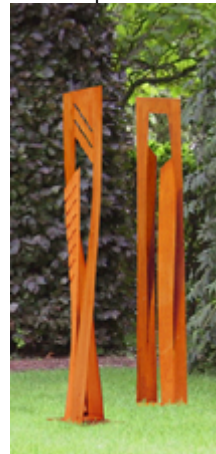


Acier Corten
380 x 420 x 80cm-2001

Ville de Charleroi

Nominée au Concours National de l'acier 2002

« Les penseurs »



Acier Corten
2x 200 x 30 x 30cm-2000

« Sous le vent »



Acier corten
240 x 220 x 40cm-2002



In the sculpted work of Michel Delaere, however, metal exists elsewhere than in his monumental sculpture. Jewellery designer, Delaere shapes them like his miniature sculptures, judiciously balanced and carrying the same visual messages as his large-scale works. At the edge of large shiny and polished areas, folds, hollows, sutures are born which are as many unforeseen accidents as the scars within the large reliefs. In these jewels, small marvels of finish and delicacy, the care and precision of the artist dazzle and signify. We are conquered by the sharpness of the gesture and the rare brilliance of the metals. LE SPANTOLE

"...it is a moving sculpture. Suspended from the woman's neck, on her skin she captures its warmth: physical union. Participates in its adornment at a specific moment: renewal of a choice or a desire. I carry these emotions within me during these creations and this intimacy conditions all my gestures. In the practical realization, the most exhilarating moment is that of polishing, where little by little the grainy surface of the cast metal fades to gradually reveal the sensuality of the object supported by the brilliance of the material, in the manner of the photographer who sees his image coming immersed in the developer".



In 1994, his first approach to paper was the one by which he made this material from newspapers, which he crushed, kneaded and poured onto small wooden sculptures. He presses this paste to extract the water. The artist explains to us: *"What pushed me here was the idea of imprinting it on a fragile and ephemeral material, keeping only this skin like the trace of a moment, a memory. It also amused me to have in my hands an image of the volume of the material that had been removed from the wooden sculpture..."*. It is undoubtedly also and unconsciously, a reminder of this positive and negative aspect of his first wall sculptures.

In 1999-2000, he became interested in the sheet of paper. We think there is a connection with the sheet of steel he is working on at the same time. Respect for the material. The leaf is not diverted from what it is. Pierre-Jean Foulon specifies:



... Even more astonishing is this new material now introduced by Delaere into his work: paper. White, and therefore very "minimal", the paper, in these constructivist compositions, accumulates in sheets that the sculptor cuts, twists, notches, superimposes in thin reliefs installed behind the glass of a frame which serves as their place of deployment and closed universe. There, under the glass, the papers overlap in rhythms of light and shadow and mark out, with their endlessly repeated fringes, spaces where empty and full fade into sharp lines or dynamic strata. Precious, intelligent, subtle, these paper reliefs are strong works raising Delaere to the rank of those lucid creators aware that art is formed in the rigor of the subject and the relevance of the gesture. LE SPANTOLE



Delaere, in turn, confides to us: *"The paper, the white sheet of paper is overflowing with strong emotions. It far exceeds its dimension by the dreams that surround the imagination of a drawing or a text that will be deposited there with palpitation. It's generosity is disconcerting: fragile, it awaits us there, discreet, available at our whim, or under hand, only with a pencil, a simple line will rock it's whole universe, it's life. It is magic " !*

« Repoussant l'inutile 1 »



acier doux et inox 2001
75 x 55cm

The artist transposes the same approach to sheets of mild steel and stainless steel that he will cut with a laser like a puzzle. Rigor is required, powerful. He adds: *"The sumptuous gray and natural color of hot-rolled steel, sometimes haloed with magnificent blues, a blatant trace of the bright heat of the fire of its birth, calls out to me and moves me. This sheet is the basis of the work in which elements of stainless steel, cold and impersonal, are intertwined and confront each other in opposition to the warm and soft oxidized steel, the latter somewhat softening the rigorous composition".*

« D'un mot distrait »



acier doux et inox 2001
60 x 60cm

In his "constructed" works, Michel Delaere addresses the central themes of the strength of the simple and the power of the spirit. A few lines, few strokes, elementary volumes are then enough to tie within the materials a conceptual tension and a salubrious purity.

« De la caresse de l'aube »



bois d'ayous teinté 2002
90 x 90cm

Wim TOEBOSCH

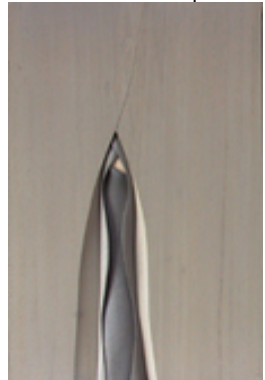
The works of the sculptor Michel DELAERE testify to a matured talent, a sureness of inspiration and execution which combines the sensual simplicity of the forms carved in wood with a musical and refined perception of faults, swellings, voluptuous stretches of earth's crust or the essence of a precious wood. Emotion, in his works, seems to slip between light and shadows, and to be captured only with the assurance of a shared affinity with the viewer. ARTS ANTIQUES AUCTIONS

« A l'émoi d'un souvenir »



bois d'ayous teinté 2002
90 x 60cm

« A la douceur de cette promesse »



bois d'ayous teinté 2002
90 x 60cm

cinq colonnes



bois d'ayous teinté 2002



...One might think, given all this, that the artist Michel Delaere offers several faces, several manners, several styles. It is not so. Because, in this nuanced work, violence and construction, expressionism and minimalism mingle most of the time, within a frank, contrasting dialogue, but singularly unifying in its evolution, and one cannot help thinking, therefore, that Michel Delaere is well in tune with his post-modern era which, rejecting all stylistic dogmatism and all uniqueness of thought, finds its forms and discourses in a multiplicity of networks and, fundamentally, in a fruitful mixture of language and of creations.

...Preoccupied with public art and the integration of sculpture into the urban space, Delaere now thinks of cold cities that claim art to refuse inhumanity. And we like to think that certain beautiful steels chosen by Delaere could be a quality alternative to the appalling banality of too many sculptures in parks, roundabouts or fountains. Delaere, in fact, is one of those artists who have grasped the requirements of art and creation and face them beyond fashions, unreason or privilege. LE SPANTOLE

Pierre-Jean FOULON, Conservateur au Musée Royal de Mariemont