"Art is a whetstone for thinking." – Bart Verschaffel (1)

Anthony Duffeleer can be described as an 'artist of thought'. His thoughts and reflections, which he constantly notes down or sketches, form his primary working material. As he puts it himself: *"My mind is my studio."*

Communication (2) is essential for Duffeleer, but before engaging in dialogue with an audience, he first conducts it with himself. It therefore took considerable time before he exposed his work to the public. He aims to hold up a mirror to this audience, a mirror into which he himself has gazed long and hard, questioningly. He is not the artist of answers, but of questioning, of posing the question, which he shapes with thoughtful precision. Duffeleer engages in dialogue with himself, the viewer, and society.

All meaningful art relates to its time. In his work, Duffeleer explicitly speaks about himself and his relationship to the world in which he lives. He does so tentatively, critically, and with nuance, sometimes provocatively. His art is never without consequence. With humor that often quickly shifts into seriousness, he critiques themes such as human vanity, arrogance, religious or political fanaticism, and dogmatism.

Duffeleer was trained as an architect, a profession he still practices. In addition, he is active as a product designer, entrepreneur, and artist. That last identity may be his most important mental disposition. While this versatility might seem atypical for a contemporary artist, the interplay between his different roles combined with his position as a family man nourishes his artistic practice. These roles keep him firmly rooted in daily life, which in turn provides him with both content and form.

A key characteristic of his work is the use of archetypal objects, whose inheriting connotations he profoundly manipulates. Through acts of appropriation and subtle (or not so subtle) repositioning or intervention, he transforms found and familiar objects. With his use of objets trouvés, readymades, and assemblages that create a sense of estrangement, he places himself in the tradition of artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Mariën, and Guillaume Bijl.

Duffeleer undermines the familiar and sometimes speaks in riddles. His artworks almost always have titles, which are essential to the work and often offer clues to its meaning. Sometimes the title is highly directive, as in his earlier piece '*Falling Man*' (2017): a figure of Christ falling downward. In contrast to classical depictions where Christ ascends to heaven, this work refers to the iconic photograph of the falling man from the Twin Towers (Richard Drew, 2001). Duffeleer uses an existing corpus but adjusts the posture to mirror that of the man in Drew's photograph. Miraculous salvation is not for everyone. The artist merges two powerful images, and overlapping meanings collide: the centuries-old iconography of the crucifixion and the contemporary tragedy of 9/11. In a subtle manner, Duffeleer gives form to his skeptical view of the world. This modus operandi is consistently present in the exhibition '*DEADLINE*'.

Another example is '*Gij*' (an archaic form of "you"): a blindfolded lamb placed on a church pedestal, with a brass plaque with the title '*Gij*'. The title resonates on multiple levels: as the formal counterpart to "you" in colloquial Dutch, as a biblical reference to God, and more broadly, it carries an archaic tone. Despite the blindfold, the innocent creature seems to directly address the viewer, feelings of guilt are never far off. This work is currently on display in Sint-Denijs-City and will also be shown at the gallery

during the finissage. The works '*Them*', original 1922 Larousse encyclopedia pages modified by Duffeleer, in which the depicted sheep breeds are blindfolded with pen, reside within the same conceptual context.

In the recent work '*Pain*', Duffeleer plays with layered meanings. The word was manually pressed, letter by letter, into cheap, non-nutritious, white industrial bread. In French, '*pain*' means bread, while in English it means pain. The English '*pain*' is etymologically related to the French '*peine*' (effort, sorrow, punishment), both deriving from the Latin '*poena*'. Duffeleer thus exploits a phonetic overlap between two languages that evokes divergent but suggestive meanings.

The work also alludes to the phrase often attributed to Marie Antoinette, "Qu'ils mangent de la brioche" ("Let them eat brioche"), uttered when the people had no bread. While historians agree she never actually said these words, the phrase has become a powerful symbol of elite indifference to the suffering of the people. That tension echoes in Duffeleer's piece: is it a punishment (*poena*) to be forced to eat cheap bread, because one cannot afford better? Thus, '*Pain*' becomes an image of the ongoing struggle to obtain both literal and metaphorical daily bread.

Perhaps '*Mind the step*' best encapsulates his vision of art and society. The phrase was carefully hand-carved into Belgian limestone (Petit Granit), just a little higher than a typical doorstep. Visitors must literally cross a threshold to enter his world. Art demands effort: not just looking, but feeling, thinking. The viewer is challenged to peel back layers and critically re-examine their position on art and society.

This piece also marks a milestone in Duffeleer's trajectory, signaling a departure from playful, humorous gestures toward more layered artworks born from profound reflection on form and content. For Duffeleer, art is a serious, but also poetic, attempt to share his skeptical, often pessimistic worldview.

Somewhat outside his usual body of work, Duffeleer presents a series of recent drawings titled '*Studie voor een zelfportret' (Studie for a Self-Portrait)*. Ten variations that also led to a series of sculptures, *'Monade'* . In these self-portraits, the artist does not search for deeply individual traits, but rather reduces himself and by extension, humanity to generic forms, without facial expressions, reminiscent of chess pawns: not the king or queen, but the weakest pieces. The series emphasizes the general over the individual and thus counters Willem Kloos' famous maxim: *"The most individual expression of the most individual emotion".* Duffeleer's work relativizes the idea of the artist as genius, replacing it with a more skeptical stance.

Within the layered nature of much of his art, Duffeleer also reveals much about himself, but the viewer must first peel away the outer shell.

Anthony Duffeleer says he does not create art for eternity; everything has an expiration date. It is in this context that the artist has chosen '*Deadline*' as the title of his second solo exhibition at Rik Rosseels Gallery. He approaches art in a down-to-earth manner, just as he critically and inquisitively views our contemporary society. Certain societal developments leave Duffeleer feeling pessimistic. Perhaps we are indeed nearing an expiry date.

For this artist, there are no certainties; nothing is set in stone, except '*Mind the step*'. Any meaning can shift. This allows us to continually revisit his artworks, each time discovering new meanings and insights. In doing so, Duffeleer keeps our minds fresh and alert, helping us to remain critically engaged with life, though very often, with a smile.

"Si le monde était clair, l'art ne serait pas." Albert Camus

Johan Vansteenkiste

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1. Bart Verschaffel, Over kunst, ontroering en kritiek, De Witte Raaf, edition 60, March-April 1996.
2. In an interview with Wouter Van den Eijkel, Anthony Duffeleer discusses interaction with the viewer and, by extension, with society.