



This art's not easy to digest, but MONA has the stomach for it

MICHAELA BOLAND

DESPITE his flair for publicity, Belgian artist Wim Delvoye is largely unknown in Australia.

His most famous artwork is a series of machines that mimic the human digestive system, taking in food and producing faeces. Another is *Tattoo Tim*, the body art tattooed on 35-year-old Swiss-born Londoner Tim Steiner. A German collector paid \$205,000 for the "work" and intends to sell "when the art market improves".

Some of Delvoye's works have been displayed at the Art Gallery of NSW, others were included in Sydney biennales but no Australian collectors or museums have taken the next step and actually bought an item. Except, that is, millionaire gambler David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart, which owns a faeces-producing Cloaca machine, the only one Delvoye has agreed to sell from a series of nine. He has retained all the others.



PETER MATHEW

Artist Wim Delvoye

It is fitting, then, that the first Australian survey exhibition of the 46-year-old's work is being staged at the sprawling Tasmanian gallery, which celebrates its first birthday in January.

Tattoo Tim is one of 100 works loaned to MONA for the exhibition, which opened to the public on Saturday and closes on April 2. *Tattoo Tim* will take tour groups through the exhibition, which include a sterile, mirrored Cloaca room displaying five of the digest-

ing machines. In one room, tattooed pig skins hang from the walls, in another, framed lipstick "bum kisses" appear on hotel stationery. There is also a collection of exquisite metal sculptures displayed under mock cathedral stained-glass windows.

Sydney gallery owner Roslyn Oxley believes there is a market in Australia for such sculptures, so in February she will stage the first commercial exhibition of Delvoye's work in Australia.

"I think our collectors are ready for Wim," she said at MONA yesterday, just moments after finalising details of the exhibition with the artist. "It will be pared back and different."

Walsh, who generates an undisclosed fortune from his international gambling syndicates, hasn't taken a pared-back approach to this show. A fact for which Delvoye could not be more grateful.

"I think he's doing more for Australian art than all the other Australian museums," the artist said.