

Cover Image

Untitled (Branding Belgium)

2006

Digital Photo

Prompting passersby to "taste the Coke side of Belgium," this culturally and geographically situated vending machine visualizes the pro forma (yet often problematic) convergence of high and low culture in contemporary advertising discourse. The appropriation of the famous Brussels landmark *Manneken Pis* and the graphic translation of the fountain's waterworks turn the spectacle of the golden shower into an offhanded metaphor for the cyclical nature of consumption and waste. The nation is readily made over into a signpost for active commerce that bridges multiple industrial signifiers—including tourism and travel—under the rubric of loosely inflected cultural patriotism. The nation may seem to be pissing all over Coke's image, but it is actually complicit in this system of exchange. In much the same fashion, the statue of the little boy has been the subject of several distinct origin stories, and has been purposefully re-appropriated many times over. Locals regularly dress him in a variety of costumes, attaching the boy to a number of distinct trades, professions and nations.

—Eric Freedman
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