

# THIS IS NOT A COMEBACK!

D.D. Trans talks exhibitions,  
experiences and expectations



The Belgian visual artist D.D. Trans is known for transforming daily objects into artworks by minimal gestures, which emanate a sense of surrealism, humour or poetry. DAMN° met up with the artist before his solo show, *Sur Place*, at Loom Gallery in Milan.

TEXT

SAM STEVERLYNCK



Roze, 2016



Heart (Black XL), 2016

**DAMN°:** You operate under the pseudonym D.D. Trans. Where does that name come from?

**D.D. Trans:** When I started painting in my twenties, I used my own name, Frank Tuytschaever. Little by little, I moved on towards more conceptual art and left painting behind. When I had my first group show in Tielt (Belgium), curated by Dirk Snauwaert the current director of Wiels in Brussels in 1990, I was looking for a pseudonym. I was really into music, and a lot of musicians used pseudonyms. I just picked up a phone book and went through dozens of company names. In the end, I chose D.D. Trans, the name of a transport company. I liked it because it sounded much more international than my real name, which doesn't work too well abroad (laughs). And the word 'trans' refers to transformation, which is crucial in my practice.

**DAMN°:** In 2003, you left the art world. Why was that?

**DDT:** The drive was gone. And when the drive is gone, you start forcing yourself and the result will be disappointing. In order to make good work, you really have to believe in it. I was quite young when I got picked up by Richard Foncke, which was one of the best galleries in Belgium at the time. I started having the feeling I had done everything I wanted to do. There was also a new generation of artists that immediately went international. I had the impression I got a bit stuck in Flanders. It felt as if I didn't really move on. That is why I am really happy with my solo show in Milan now. As opposed to the early 90s, I get the impression the audience is much bigger and younger. Back then, not so many people went to galleries. Thanks to the internet, it is much easier to reach an international audience. In the early 90s, there were also not so many curators. If they didn't happen to like your work, you were screwed. Now I work harder than ever. I also have more experience. I am more motivated than before, as I notice a growing interest from collectors and gallerists.



Infidels, exhibition view, Gallery Valerie Traan Antwerpen, 2017  
Z.t., 2016 / Pour V., 2016 / Sabre (Noir), 2016 / Flow, 2016



Tambour, 2015

**DAMN°:** In 2013, you got back in the game and started working with Galerie Valerie Traan (Antwerp), a gallery known for operating on the crossroads between design and art. She also edited a series of mirrors you made from lids of paint-pots, that she showed at various design fairs. You feel comfortable in both worlds?

**DDT:** I see art in a broad way. You have museums that show art but also design and clothes, like MoMA in New York. I don't really believe in the term 'design'. I don't see the set of mirrors I made as a piece of design. It is more a way for people with a limited budget to be able to afford a work of mine. Now I am also working on a tablecloth for Verilin. I see it rather as a sculpture, just like I consider a Ferrari or a chair by Maarten Van Severen as a sculpture. I don't like to pigeonhole things and make too strict labels of art, design, architecture and fashion. For me, everything is art.

**DAMN°:** As you often work with daily objects, where do you get most inspiration from: by going through a museum or walking around hardware stores?

**DDT:** As an artist, you are constantly busy with your work. Everywhere I go, especially places like Supra Bazar a chain of Belgian shops that sells everything from baby clothes to car oil, I see interesting stuff. In a way, you could see my work as a kind of tribute to anonymous designers of objects like toothpaste tubes, a clothes peg or a potato peeler. Nobody knows who designed these but they are so well done!

**DAMN°:** You could say by transforming such ordinary items, you deprive them of their functionality and they become art.

**DDT:** Yes, there is a kind of provocation in that. There is also a lot of surrealism in my work. I think it is a typical Belgian thing. But some of my works also have something poetic and humorous. What makes my work unique is the combination of surrealism and minimalism. Marcel Broodthaers also has something surrealist, but with him the language is more baroque. With me, it is more minimal.

**DAMN°:** You disappeared from the art world for ten years. In your recent shows, you combine old and new work. You see a continuation or evolution in your work? Or is it a break?

**DDT:** I do show old and new work together. I compare it to a musician who also plays old and new songs on concerts. I think my work is a bit fresher now than before. I also started working with plastic, which I sometimes melt. I almost see it as clay, which you can bend and melt. I think it is a beautiful material. But besides that, I also started making very small pieces. In general, I rather see it as a continuation. I still work in the same line.



Self-portret (Noir), 2015



Saucisse (en tabac), 2015 / Surplace, 2015 / Pleurer, 2015

Smoke, 2017



**DAMN°:** Your work is very minimalist, clinical, the typical stuff that fits well in a white cube. Yet, you also like to exhibit in rather atypical venues. Can you give some examples?

**DDT:** Yes, I had a show in Coffre-Fort, which must be one of the smallest artist-run spaces in Brussels. The exhibition space is literally an old safe. But I also had shows in a goodbye centre/mortuary; the recording studio En Frente Arte in Ronda of the Belgian band dEUS, where Madonna also used to come; or the shop of fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck. I also like doing residencies. I showed my work in a brutalist villa by Juliaan Lampens and a house designed by the architect/artist René Heyvaert. I am a big fan of Heyvaert so it was great to feel his presence in the house. Though we were both showing in the same gallery [Richard Foncke], I never met him, as he was already dead by then. Every time I make a new work, I ask myself: 'What would René have thought of it?'. I still see him as a point of reference.



Patatoes multi-use, 2017

Sur Place by D.D. Trans, Loom Gallery,  
Milan, 25 January until 25 February 2018  
loomgallery.com