



mambo

MAMBO

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"Mambo, an Ordinary Man."
Video portrait by Tracy Phillips (4 min.)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qitQcZlOLRE>

Flavien ‘Mambo’ Demarigny was born in Chile in 1969, from a French father and an Hungarian mother. He lives and works in Los Angeles, California since 2011.

He grew up in Latin America (Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia) before moving to Paris and start his artist career in the mid-eighties.

He became a creative mind by doing graffiti, paintings and installations, inspired by music and 80's Pop and New Wave cultures. He was part of 'La Force Alphabétique' collective from 1986 to 1996, as well as 'Le 9e Concept' from 1999 to 2011. Mambo did intense graffiti mostly from 1985 to 1992 but always had a simultaneous studio practice. Mambo studied at Les Gobelins Animation school for a brief moment before joining Ellipse Studio in 1990 and work there for one year, he then returned to Mural art. He spent many years working as professional muralist and became Sol LeWitt's assistant in France for his Wall Drawings in 1994/95. His murals took him all over Europe (France, Italy, Spain, UK, Czech Republic, Holland, Belgium) to India, Senegal, New York and Chicago. He also contributed the satirical French TV show 'Groland' on Canal +, from 2002 to 2011. Since 2009, Mambo is part of Pura Vida music label, where he collaborates with producer Guts by creating cover art for all albums and compilations, which are distributed by Heavenly Sweetness. On top of his Art Shows (see full list below), Mambo occasionally collaborates with other artists (Snoop Dogg, Laurent Garnier, Thierry Marx...) as well as brands (Prada, Moynat, Agnes B, Samsung, Vans, Paris St Germain...) to expand his vision and reach new audiences. His studio production was sporadic in the early years and became full time since 1998.

VISUAL LANGUAGE

Mambo is a polyglot artist, capable to pick what he needs on his languages palette to express his feelings in the moment. His different artworks series go from semi-abstract graphic interplays of lines and spontaneous designs (Brainology series), to abstract action painting (Strokes series) as well as minimal portraits (Humans series) using his signature red-orange color, thus creating an expressive graphic universe, full of underlying meanings, combining observation, ambiguity and humour.

The core theme is humanity, the inspiration is our brain, our mental processes, sensations, emotions, memories, inner feelings and mechanical reactions. Human behaviors become colorful ideograms, our environment becomes a dictionary, where he picks symbols to write his own prose : visual enigmas, combining intuition and maitrise.

His three main current directions (Humans, Brainology and Strokes) are described below. These directions don't cover all of Mambo's production but help to understand it. There are also other smaller series that can be found occasionally, as well as mergers in between different series.

HUMANS SERIES

by Sandra Dubrulle, for "Dans la Peau" show's catalog, at Speerstra Gallery, Paris, 2019.

Through his work on Portraits, Mambo explores the Human and the emotions that appear in faces and attitudes. His powerful graphic language, combining observation, ambiguity and second degree, reveals what is happening inside the Self. Lines flirt with caricature, sharp colors give rise to deep emotions, symbols – hat, necklace, suit, black dress, etc. – meets puzzling clues in order to multiply the possibilities and interpretations. This minimalist pop aesthetic unveils the human comedy through a question-and-answer game between the artwork and the viewer. Mambo always leaves a certain enigma, in which the spectator becomes an actor, subject and object at the same time, question and answer.

With this new series, Mambo explores even further intimacy and the relationship that takes place between the artwork and the viewer, through a close-up approach. It captures, in the manner of a photographer, what the eye alone cannot see – a brief moment of doubt, a feverishness that escapes us as we finish speaking and that reveals a deep emotion made of doubt and desire. A buried feeling of loneliness facing the city's waves, a haunting need to exist, to be loved and recognized by the other. Faces and gestures challenge us because they tell of our own vulnerability. Mambo does not put any darkness into it, on the contrary, this fragility reveals our humanity and opens a dialogue with ourselves made of cultural projections and personal stories. Of the reason for these portraits, the artist will not give us any keys. This lies in the interpretation of each one of us on these mirrors open to ourselves. One thinks here of the philosopher Levinas and the language power he confers on the face in *Ethics and Infinity*: "Face and discourse are tied. The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begin all discourse". This new series of Portraits tells us about this experience of the other and reflects our own emotions, a form of nudity without the addition of explicit words. The close-up and portraits of this new series whisper our truths, and the silent discourse between the artwork and the viewer becomes connivance. This is what makes Mambo's strength, his ability to disappear behind an aesthetic bias marked by his signature, to let us take it over.

(...)

From the railway lines he began to tag at the age of 15, to trips abroad (Senegal, India, Chicago) during which he collaborates with local muralists, Mambo experimentes with different forms of expression. The strength of the collective is for him a source of encounters, exchanges and sharing. He was part of the "Force Alphabétique", then joined the "9th Concept" in 1998, while exploring more freely his own imaginary in the intimacy of his studio. The *Peinture Fraîche* group exhibition in Centre pompidou in 2007, which he curated, acted as a real catalyst: the live creation in front of the audience pushed him to bring together all the aesthetic paths he had explored until then to converge them into a creative universe full of strength, humour and poetry.



BRAINOLOGY SERIES

by Sarah Mattera, curator at Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (samples)

I met Mambo in 2007 when he was working with 9th Concept collective and we created together 'Peinture Fraîche' (Fresh Paint) in October 2007. I offered him to choose and transform one of the existing artworks hanging in the modern/contemporary collections in the Centre Pompidou, Mambo chose 'Jardin d'Hiver' by Jean Dubuffet. Mambo's version of this work was a canvas called 'Dumbo', a contraction of the two names Dubuffet and Mambo. In the work he produced in reference to this sculpture, Mambo created a two-dimensional work, whilst retaining the foundation of the graphic principle of Jardin d'Hiver: white shapes circled with black lines, as a springboard for his own creation. The artwork that was produced at the Centre Pompidou appears as a conscious or unconscious picture of the isolationism of daily life in our world, which nevertheless can sometimes transcend its negativity to stimulate creativity.

It was the beginning of a new narrative method that would be the birth of his 'Brainology' series. Possible seeds of this graphic style may already be identified in a more stylized way as early as 1992, at a time when Mambo was doing Graffiti Art. The use of lines came from the throw-up technique Mambo was using in street graffiti, an appellation that illustrates the spontaneous nature of improvising large, sloppy, round letters that appear on many window shutters in Paris.

In an age of digital interconnectedness, we are all part of the same, large network and this is what Mambo tells us in this series. He uses the general title 'Brainology' for this series of artworks, etymologically signifying the science of the brain. The Brainology artwork could, therefore, be seen as a study of our brain's narrative.

The series recounts individual stories; some are personal and introspective and others deal with social topics where the artist is absent. To begin with, Mambo adopted this graphic technique for predominantly technical reasons; references to the human brain only became apparent to him when he was producing a mural in the Agnès B Gallery in Paris, for the group exhibition 'Graffiti - an inventory' in 2009, just after the exhibition in the Centre Pompidou. Special personal circumstances surrounded that exhibition for Mambo, as while he was painting the 7.50m x 3.70m wall, he was thinking about his father who had just died from a brain tumor. Then, while he was painting the fresco, his mother suffered a stroke that left her without the use of speech. The artist began to investigate the human brain and read articles and books on the subject, trying to understand what his mother was going through and trying to find new means of communication between them. As he read, his canvases took on a whole new meaning. It became clear that what he was drawing was none other than a map of his thoughts and feelings, the conscious and subconscious facts that crossed his mind. We do find, however, some significant elements that belong to Mambo's habitual graphic vocabulary, for instance, the hand holding an eye, the eyes watching the spectator or the work itself. The cubes, another of Mambo's recurring designs, represent neurons or mental compartments, linked directly to the brain. The title of this work 'Positivity', witnesses to a desire for rebirth, for a new story to tell, the globe on the outside is a reminder of his father who gifted him with his love of travel and the ability for positive curiosity that enables one to go towards unknown people and places. The lady at the top right-hand corner is his wife, Julie. The crown evokes his years of street graffiti around 1985 and builds a bridge between his beginnings and the exhibition theme.

The crisscrossing lines that merge evoke a storm at sea and the grill that could be reminiscent of imprisonment, here calms the troubled waters and symbolizes family protection, faced with prevailing



'Positivity' Mural at Agnès B Gallery, Paris, 2009

There are always two levels of interpretation in Mambo's work: a purely graphic level of design and a level of narrative, where the story is told, present even in the most abstract of his works. His canvases are swarming with signs, symbols and little details that lead us to explanations and causes. Mambo is an optimist, often challenged by life's misfortunes. He distills bones like an alchemist, to de-dramatize life's darkness and embraces life, despite the difficulties. His motto is that positivity attracts good fortune. The recurring presence of this sign in all his work testifies to its importance.

There is a story about one of his most abstract works, the painting of a very large chimney in Germany; Mambo painted the whole inner surface with black lines surrounding white circles; there were no signs except for one cross, a plus sign in a red-orange color. It signifies goodwill towards whoever enters. The title of this work 'Positive Heritage' has two meanings: on the one hand, this chimney is a UNESCO world heritage site; on the other hand, Mambo accepted this commission without knowing beforehand the location of the chimney; he subsequently discovered a link to his great grandfather who manufactured brick chimneys for French factories more than a century ago. The mural then became an homage to his ancestor.

There are three predominant colors in most of the 'Brainology' series: white, black and red. White signifies beginnings and potential, like a blank page, a place of freedom where everyone can express themselves. Black encloses white with unbroken curves; it is the driving force, it predominates and guides the drawing; it creates the spaces and the recognizable graphic elements in each work. Red is distributed here and there in monochrome areas, drawing the eye to where it should look. Mambo says that the red-orange color of his early work happened when he glued figures on the streets. He found a fluorescent, paper that stuck well on walls. That's when he started to draw black figures on a neon orange background, to cut them out and paste them on walls. Transposing this technique on exhibition work wasn't feasible and that's when he found 'his' color, the one he still loves so much, cadmium red from Lefranc Bourgeois. He started to paint a series of works on paper, in particular

'Brainology', incorporating this color. For him, the color brings warmth and energy to the picture. Mambo uses it in this way, red shows the important details in the narrative but, more importantly, red is used regularly to re-balance the picture. The counter color to red is blue; Mambo uses it in some of his current works according to the same graphic principle. Blue also has wisdom. When we place one of Mambo's three-colored works with red next to one of his three-colored works with blue, often slightly grey-blue, we feel the subtle presence of wisdom, as if red's passion is tempered by the greater perspective of blue.

The black, white and blue canvases, whether two-dimensional or multi-layered bring greater serenity to the spectator, as for instance the painting entitled 'Dazzle', created in 2016. This painting recalls the camouflage technique used by ships in the First World War, blurring the picture with a balanced and harmonious play of lines; some ships resembled floating music scores.



'Dazzle' Acrylic on canvas, 2016, installed at Castanier Gallery, Los Angeles.

Mambo is painting a mental map that will initially be his own, consciously or unconsciously and that will become another's as soon as the spectator sets his eyes on it. Without any explanation by the artist, who can truly know what goes on in these pictures? Wanting to decipher them is akin to wanting to own them.

In a more symbolic way, the 'Brainology' series deals with the human brain as the seat of reason; to welcome art into that space is to let irrationality intrude. These mental compartments, as Mambo calls them, are filled spaces, setting limits, like a child who wants to stay within established boundaries, yet ventures beyond.



"Visite Médicale" Acrylic on hand cut wood, 2016

STROKES SERIES (signed Flavien Demarigny)

by Tania De Brita, for 'Telegraphic' show's catalog, at Kolly Gallery, Zurich, 2018

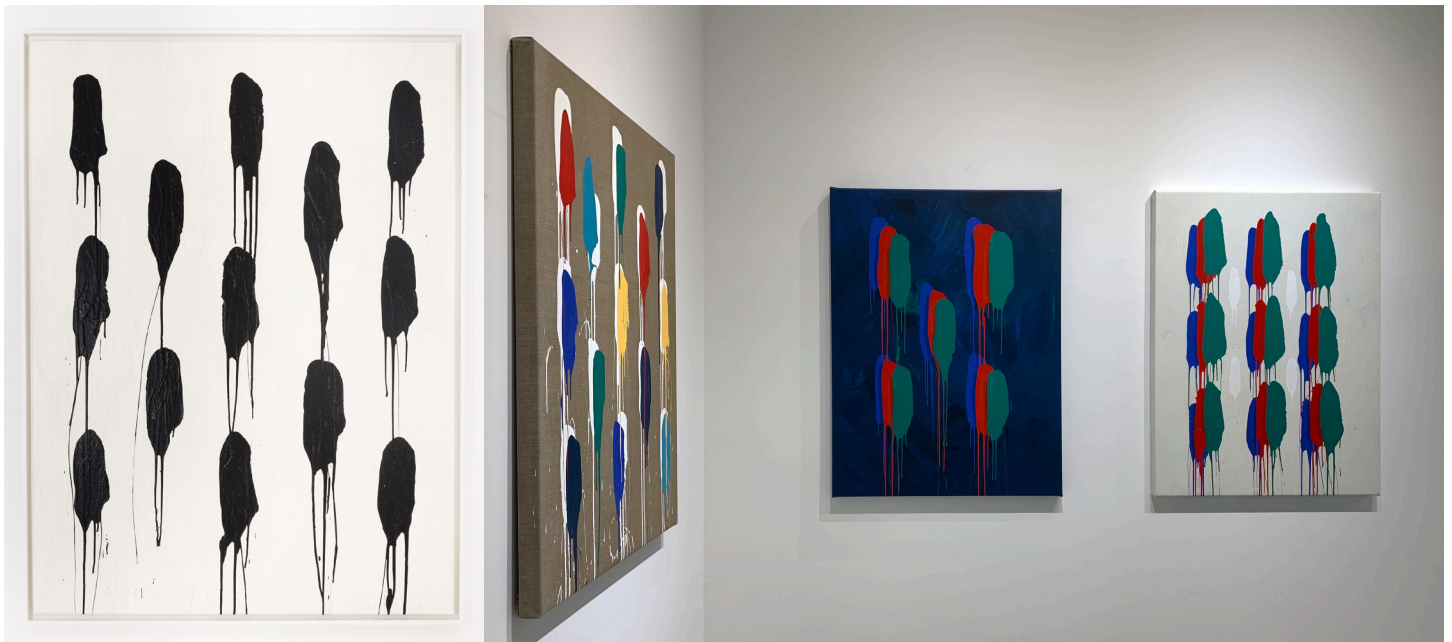
Multiple layers of simple vertical brushstrokes characterize Flavien's particular manner for his abstract paintings presented in his unique body of work.

The title of the exhibition refers to the concept of communication and graphics, which converge individual elements to connecting networks. Every single vertical brushstroke in Flavien's painting represents one element that operates through the collectivity on the canvas. Through a very minimal, conceptual and repetitive creative practice and a black-white based color range, Flavien reflects human coexistence in the world. Therefore humanity is a main concern of the artist's body of work. He is fascinated and inspired by the power, the beauty and the chaos that humanity is able to create. Especially the ingenuity of the individual versus the folly of the collectivity is a key concept that the artist visualizes in his paintings. Flavien deeply believes that only the force of nature is capable of creating long term beauty.

In 2015, Mambo started with a new series of abstract paintings. He decided to sign them with his first name, Flavien, because they appeared exceedingly different from his previous well-known paintings. These canvases consist of a rather geometrical texture and minimal color variations. Vertical brushstrokes are the simple yet effective trademark of Flavien's series. The technic is a result of a long-standing study and experience in art, but also influenced by the assistant years to Sol LeWitt, in the mid 90's. Different art movements as well as artists are still inspiring Flavien's artistic practice, such as: Franck Stella, Yayoi Kusama, Ellsworth Kelly, Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock.

"The Stroke series allow me to live my fantasies, as I build my paintings from arithmetics, geometry or organically, it requires concentration, calculation or intuition and letting things go... my painting sessions turn sometimes into meditation, sometimes choreography, cuisine or simply orgasmic in different forms. I like the paradox of having a very mechanical way of painting, that finds its beauty in the mistakes and accidents happening along the way."

"My main inspiration are humanity, society and nature. My artworks illustrate the DNA, neurones and synapses, as a metaphor for networks, could they be ecological, political, urban or technological networks. I want to show their similarities, their connexions, and how intricate, interdependent they are, just like us, Humans."



Left: '**Organic Concerto**' part of Telegraphic solo show at Kolly Gallery, Zürich, Switzerland, 2018. Right: view of '**Punch Palette**' solo show at Zimmerling and Jungfleisch Gallery, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2020.

MAIN EXHIBITIONS

Solo Shows

- * 2020: Punch Palette, Zimmerling and Jungfleisch Gallery, Saarbrücken, Germany
- * 2019: Dans la Peau, Speerstra Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2019: Recurrence, Soho House, Los Angeles, California,
- * 2019: Interactions, Kolly Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland,
- * 2018: Robot Poetry, Flavien Speerstra Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
- * 2018: Telegraphic, Flavien Kolly Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
- * 2017: Flavien, Galerie Nec 1, Paris, France
- * 2017: Mambo, Galerie Nec 2, Paris, France,
- * 2017: Mambo, Galerie Bobino Langlais, La Baule, France
- * 2017: Links, Castanier Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- * 2016: Perplexe, Galerie Marguerite Milin, Paris, France
- * 2016: Humans After All, Mondrian Hollywood, Los Angeles, California
- * 2016: Flavien Demarigny, The Standard Downtown, Los Angeles, California
- * 2016: Mambo, Mandarin Oriental, Paris, France
- * 2015: Converge, French Art Studio, London UK
- * 2015: The Wall, La Boite, Tokyo, Japan
- * 2013: Émotif, Seven Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2012: Mambo, Watanabe Gallery, Osaka, Japan
- * 2012: Mambo, The Standard Hollywood, Los Angeles, California
- * 2011: Mambo, Seven Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2010: Piece of mind, Speerstra Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
- * 2010: Pure Flavor, Seven Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2009: Mambo, Helmet Gallery, Munich, Germany
- * 2009: Mambo, Agnès b. store, Lyon, France
- * 2005: Alias Mambo, Kitchen Gallery, Bagnolet, France
- * 2004: Le Cul de la Crémère, Magda Danysz Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2003: Allover, Galerie Hixsept, Grenoble, France
- * 2001: Message from the Soul, Magda Danysz gallery, Paris, France
- * 1999: Dixit Fixit, Pi Gallery, Chicago, Illinois

Group Shows

- * 2019: Emerging to Established, Krause Gallery, New York, New York
- * 2019: Bright, pop up, Los Angeles, California
- * 2019: Unesco Urban Art Biennale, Volklingen, Germany
- * 2019: Winter Show, Bobino Langlais Gallery, Megève, France
- * 2019: Contemporary Modernism, Palm Springs, California
- * 2018: Summer 18, Avenue des Arts Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- * 2018: Summer Show, Bobino Langlais Gallery, La Baule, France
- * 2018: Untitled, Castanier Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- * 2018: Cedart Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
- * 2017: PSG Foundation Benefit, Castanier gallery, Miami, Florida
- * 2017: Unesco Urban Art Biennale, Volklingen, Germany
- * 2016: En Vie, Secret Gallery, Paris, France

- * 2016: Family and friends, Castanier Gallery, Los Angeles California
- * 2016: French Connections, Galerie LJ, Paris, France
- * 2015: Seules les traces, pop up, Paris, France
- * 2014: Go Hard or go home, pop up, London, UK
- * 2014: Scouted, French Art Studio, London, UK
- * 2013: Open the Door, outdoor show, Houston, Texas
- * 2013: Mindset, curated by Mambo, Lacen Projects, Los Angeles, California
- * 2012: Sesame Street, Known Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- * 2012: Arts Le Havre Biennale, Le Havre, France
- * 2010: Street Biennale, outdoor show, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- * 2009: Graffiti, Etat des lieux, Agnes B Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2009: Imagine, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France
- * 2009: French Cultural Year, outdoor show, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- * 2008: Peinture Fraiche, curated by Mambo, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
- * 2007: Sang Neuf, Galeria La Santa, Barcelona, Spain
- * 2006: Sang Neuf, Centre d'art en l'Île, Geneva, Switzerland
- * 2005: BLK MRKT, group show, Kinsey Desforges Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- * 2004: Planet Reef, pop up, Huntington Beach, California
- * 2003: Sang Neuf, Kitchen Gallery, Bagnolet, France
- * 2002: Sang Neuf, Magda Danysz Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2002: This is me, pop up, Tokyo, Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris
- * 2002: Le Labyrinthe, pop up, Anglet, France
- * 2002: Le Labyrinthe, pop up, Paris, France
- * 2001: Graffiti, Agnes B Gallery, Paris, France
- * 2001: Sang Neuf, Centre Européen de la Création, Strasbourg, France
- * 2001: Welcome on Board, pop up, Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, France
- * 2000: Sang Neuf, Passage de Retz, Paris, France

