

# STUART N°35

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Flavien "Mambo" Demarigny was born in Chile to a Hungarian mother and a French father. He grew up in Latin America, then lived in Paris and Los Angeles and now lives in Provence. To this mixed profile, we can add a social context from a bourgeois family with many friendships woven in the South American favelas or the cities of the Parisian suburbs. The open-mindedness inherited from his family rubs off on Mambo as a person but also as an artist, influencing his work to the point of leading him to create bridges, between modern, contemporary, minimalist and graffiti art, to create a practice and style of his own. Chronicle of a journey necessarily announced, but whose variety of experiences made him the accomplished artist we met.

It all started in 1985, at the age of 15. Rocked by new wave, punk pop, and especially jazz culture, inspired by the album cover arts of records and video clips of artists such as Grace Jones, Kid Creole, B52's, he chose this Afro-Latin name tinged with white magic and created his own form of advertising, with a bomb, on the walls of the cities of Les Ulis and line B of the Parisian RER. It was a friend of his, Jens, alias Scribe, who frequented the London punk scene, who put his first spray-can in his hands: "*It was like walking on a new planet,*" says Mambo, "from then, I knew it would be for life." From the beginning, Mambo also painted paintings, clothes and found objects at home. Quickly, he met Asphalt, who lived in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, across the street from Bando, and through him, he joined the Force Alphabétique and then met the entire Parisian graffiti scene. That's when he discovered the *Subway Art* bible. This was followed by years of frescoes in many cities, creations in the workshop of the Hôpital Éphémère, live frescoes, with Radio Nova, FFF, Cosmic Wurst, Malka Family and many others, with his *partner in crime* Sib One but also André and Dzine, from Chicago. The highlight of this period was the fresco *Say Mars, c'est Yeah* realized in 1991, in the heart of the Panier, in Marseille, at the request of the museum of the city, finished during a great mythical concert of IAM jazz version, with the brass of Accoules Sax. The sudden death of Asphalt in 1995 sealed the fate of the collective, which gradually crumbled after winning the Prix de la Fondation 3 Suisses.

While conducting his studio research throughout the 90s, Mambo is Sol Lewitt's assistant for nearly two years, he joins the 9th Concept collective with whom he creates the exhibitions "Sang Neuf", and participates in the collectives on graffiti art of the time, at the Museum of French Monuments, at the CRDC of Nantes or at the Laiterie de Strasbourg. He ended up doing his first solo show in a gallery in 1999 in Chicago. This was followed by exhibitions in Paris, notably at Magda Danysz, agnès b., but also in Tokyo, Los Angeles, Geneva and Barcelona, during which the artist refined his style and language. He also became the visual creator of the show Groland, on Canal+, which he accompanied for ten years, and led several collaborations in the fields of fashion, music, and cooking, which allowed him to expand his creative field, notably with Guts and the label Pura Vida, Prada, Moynat, Vans, agnès b., Thierry Marx, Snoop Dogg, Laurent Garnier, the Louvre Museum or Paris St Germain...

Rich in this creative enthusiasm, it is in 2007 that he considers to have become the artist he has always wanted to be, during the exhibition "Peinture Fraiche", created with 9ème Concept for the Centre Pompidou. In this exhibition the artists set up their studio in the museum for three months. This experience proved to be an incredible trigger for Mambo, who created a series of 40 paintings and then converged all the ideas explored for more than ten years, including the birth of his *Brainology series*. Mambo was looking for his own writing, a language that he could develop throughout his life, in the manner of Jean Dubuffet, Roy Lichtenstein, Piet Mondrian, Yayoi Kusama for the visual arts, but also Prince, Gainsbourg, Almodovar, Woody Allen, Jean Paul Gaultier in other creative fields. From this period, Mambo will produce many solo shows from his workshop in Los Angeles, shipped to New York, Tokyo, Osaka, London, Paris, Zurich ... or exhibited in his new California homeland. This dynamic will once again extend over a ten-year period and will extend into the Covid years. A key moment that Mambo chose, with his wife, to return to France and settle in Provence by creating a new place, Villa Bam Bam, where he opened his house and his new workshop to create a place of living art.

Throughout his career, Mambo has developed three main abstract series which we think make sense to spotlight: *Brainology*, *Mindsapes* and the *Strokes*.

### ***Brainology***

Mambo describes *Brainology* as a brain mapping, emotional snapshots of our skull. The works are built in two stages, which he calls "Sauvage" (wild) and "Sage" (wise) in reference to the reggae group Sai Sai. The wild part is made quickly, by a choreography of gestures, which clearly borrow from his past as a graffiti artist, both in the street and on his paintings of the early 90s. The network of thick lines thus created, opens a series of windows, boxes, in which Mambo comes to draw, with a fine brush, patterns and drawings, in an automatic and intuitive way – this is the wise step. The first pieces are made in series, letting come a maximum of desires, emotions, memories. After a few months, Mambo begins to write down his dreams and realizes how much his unconscious speaks to him in his paintings... This is how the concept of *Brainology* was born. These first years were rather figurative, with a recurrence of black and white, accompanied by some colors, an intuitive narrative, then, over time, they became more and more abstract, colorful, organic and full of nods to modern painting and art brut, which Mambo loves so much.

One of the most striking works in this series will be the fresco *Positivity* painted in 2009 at the Galerie du Jour agnès b., in Paris, just after the death of his father and, by a combination of circumstances, while his mother was in intensive care, struck by a severe and irremediable stroke. This event pushed him to study the brain, to better communicate with her. He then discovered even more correlations between his painting and neurology.

It is from 2017 that he created large three-dimensional pieces, in wood, with the support of New York collectors and added an additional level of expression to the series. Mambo still produces some *Brainology* works but the new series took over.

### ***Mindscapes***

This second series, started in Los Angeles in 2019, is an offshoot of the *Brainology* of 2015, without contours, very colorful and abstract, which are reborn here in a very refined version, centered on dreams. The starting point is the memory of delirious dreams he had as a child, when he had a fever. He saw himself in colorful and undulating landscapes, which he recreates in a minimalist and expressive form. Over time, memories of places that have marked him are added, in the deserts of Arizona, on the California coast, but also some feminine curves that merge into the landscapes. This quote from Agnès Varda gives full meaning to this approach: "If we opened people, we would find landscapes."

### ***Strokes***

While practicing complex narrative painting for years, Mambo had, in the back of his mind, the desire to find a unique and personal concept, totally abstract. We can find snippets of this research in some paintings of the years 2002/03 but in reality, it was Sol LeWitt, whose assistant he was during the years 94/95, who lit the fuse. His radically conceptual approach inspired Mambo's *Strokes*, which focused on a simple gesture: a vertical brushstroke. Begun in 2015 in his studio in Echo Park, the series explores geometry, color, perspective or texture, repeating this simple gesture. Mambo then decided to sign these paintings with his first name, Flavien, to differentiate them from his first works labeled Mambo and facilitate reading.

The idea behind these compositions is to describe the world, the universe through the accumulation of simple entities. Whether in micro or macro vision, these *Strokes* can be perceived as atoms, synapses, people, megabits or planets. The idea is to demonstrate how connected these entities are, as we are in our societies, our economic, political, urban, computer systems as well as in ecology, biology, the cosmos or simply the universe. The idea that Flavien loves above all else is that *"We are all interdependent. Whether we like it or not, our destinies are linked. »*

When Mambo explains his painting, he borrows a lot from scientific vocabulary because he is convinced that artists and scientists have very similar approaches and lifestyles. The link between all the creations of Flavien "Mambo" Demarigny is the quest for impact and balance both visually and emotionally.