



## Interview with the artist: Damien De Lepeleire

by François de Coninck | Translated from French

Damien De Lepeleire, known for his thematic series and refined minimalist style, is the cover artist for our 2024 edition. His watercolor work, which often transforms everyday objects into captivating art, perfectly aligns with the magazine's blend of high art and contemporary culture.

**François de Coninck:** Before diving into this new series of paintings, I want to highlight this: you are the painter of series, in the sense that for thirty years now, you have been producing paintings that work in series—sometimes figurative, sometimes abstract, or at the boundary between the two. These series are all different—in terms of subject, format, and technique. It's the very first time I've seen you paint cars—using watercolor, no less: a particularly demanding technique because it does not tolerate retouching. The slightest mistake in the act of painting and the artwork is ruined! But when the painting succeeds, watercolor reveals and magnifies the object: you make us see these cars as works of art. What made you decide to start painting cars?

**Damien De Lepeleire:** It goes back a long way, to my beginnings! My first drawings were of cars. As far back as I can remember, I've always loved cars: their shape, their curves, their color, their design fascinate me. As a child, I was passionate about beautiful cars: I knew all the brands and their different models. They are real gems: they shine before our eyes, they draw our gaze. They feed our fantasies, stimulate, and shape our aesthetic taste. They are "fetish" objects, and I completely understand why they remain so as we grow older—their beauty does not fade with time, on the contrary: it continues to grow. In hindsight, I can indeed say that it was my first encounter with works of art, and that beautiful cars also gave me a taste for art—just as beautiful classical and modern paintings did.

### INTERVIEW Damien De Lepeleire



#### FRANÇOIS DE CONINCK

Author, art critic (member of AICA), editor, independent exhibition curator, and art school teacher (ENSAV La Cambre and Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels). By founding Klet & Ko editions in 2006—which he led for ten years—and Anima Ludens editions in 2014, François de Coninck facilitated numerous collaborations with artists and writers.

**More information:** [www.francoisdeconinck.be](http://www.francoisdeconinck.be)

**FdC:** Why did you title this watercolor series Beautiful Landscape?

**DDL:** Because every summer, during family vacation trips, I was bored in the car. My parents kept repeating, kilometer after kilometer, "Look at the landscape!" but I only looked at the other cars on the road. It was a kind of daydreaming that helped me endure the long journeys.

**FdC:** Whether one is a seasoned car enthusiast (as a collector, etc.) or not, it's striking that everyone has a particular aesthetic connection to this object: indeed, everyone has their favorite cars, most often linked to childhood memories.

**DDL:** Yes, it's a universal object that everyone has emotionally invested in at least once in their life—to varying degrees, of course. There's something surprising when you look at the painted image of a car: it inevitably evokes something precise and personal for everyone. A beautiful car is a reservoir of imagination. Probably because it is one of the very first objects that, in childhood—at least for us boys—we engage with visually, particularly in the form of toy models we could play with for hours. In this sense, our Dinky Toys were already vehicles for our imagination.

**FdC:** This makes me think that this is not the first time you've captured a universal object in your painting—I'm thinking of book covers, football, the iconic album covers you've painted, among others. The car is also an iconic modern object, and a major one at that.

**DDL:** You're right! In a way, it's very close to the series of record covers I painted 20 years ago. It's a subject that doesn't just belong to me. It belongs to all the people who love what I paint. So, there's a kind of 'moral' obligation to do it well. Therefore, I paint these cars as best as I can—I put all my technique and skill into it. In other words, doing it well is a moral responsibility since this subject doesn't belong to me alone: I might as well do it well or not do it at all. Watercolor, as you mentioned, is a technique that requires a lot of mastery because it does not allow for retouching, unlike oil painting where you can always cover up what was done poorly and start again. This makes the exercise all the more difficult and exciting.

**FdC:** Indeed, you can immediately see what's wrong in a watercolor: the slightest flaw, the slightest mistake jumps out at you.

**DDL:** That's true. It's like typography: when you paint a word freehand, you immediately notice if a letter is not well-proportioned or if a line isn't right. It's the same with the curves of cars. To be honest, we're all experts in car shapes just as we are in letterforms. If my hand shakes a bit, it will be directly noticeable in the painting.

**FdC:** I find them all very successful, knowing the technical difficulty of capturing the particular character of this or that type of car in watercolor. They are especially very refined: their lines stand out distinctly against the white background of the paper, which, in my opinion, helps to highlight the uniqueness of each one of them.

**DDL:** These are images. I like a painting where the first impact is simple and direct, immediately imprinted on the viewer's retina. Then, I try to give details, shapes, and colors that extend and enrich the experience of looking at my painting, to give a taste and desire to stay a little longer in front of it.

**FdC:** In any case, the models, styles, and design types—German, Italian, French—are immediately recognizable. Do you personally have any preferences in this area, linked to your personal history?

**DDL:** Some models are, of course, linked to my personal history, others less so. I'm Belgian-Italian and for a long time had a second studio in Italy, in Naples: you can infer some of my inclinations from that... I would certainly have painted different cars if I were American.

**FdC:** You're broadening your audience with this series, in the sense that you're reaching not only lovers of fine painting, including those who follow and collect your works, but also enthusiasts of beautiful cars, who aren't necessarily art collectors. You mentioned that you've already received commissions.

**DDL:** Indeed, I've realized that I'm reaching other people besides private collectors or museum institutions that have acquired some of my works from previous series. Probably because I show them the object of their desire in a different light! It's one of the rare series for which I accept commissions.