

## Benny Van den Meulengracht –Vrancx

### Chair

2019

52 pages

235 x 330 mm

offset, riso, silk screen

100 copies of Chair were produced and hand signed by the artist.



The story of Chair begins with an exhibition. ABC Klubhuis, art space and an artist run initiative located in the city of Antwerp, was organizing a group show involving as many as 40 artists, where the idea was for each artist to create a functional object. The result would be a living room/bar setting in which events would happen over the course of the exhibition, fittingly called ABC Lounge Klub. To decide which object an artist would make, they did a raffle. One jar containing an artist's name, one jar containing an object. As follows, Benny Van den Meulengracht-Vrancx was given the assignment to make a chair.

Having never made a chair before, he started out researching what kind of chair he would like to make by first looking at other chairs, drawing them in order to understand them, before designing his own. The second step was distilling his artistic practice into a recognizable shape, which could then be applied to the chair. Many drawings and maquettes later, the first

technical sketch was made, featuring a distinct shape which can be seen again in Van den Meulengracht-Vrancx's ceramic sculptures. The final ceramic maquette of the chair was used to make promotional images for the exhibition, featuring a figma figurine from the manga Gantz. The copy would be something like: "Wanna see the real thing? Visit the show!".

The chair was produced and stood in the exhibition. During the show, the idea came to bundle some of the documents created to make the chair into an artists book and from that, the idea to recreate the promotional images of the maquette in life size. The artist approached design bureau Vrints-Kolsteren to, together with him, give shape to the book. To recreate the shoot, Van den Meulengracht-Vrancx asked photographer Stig De Block to take the pictures and he borrowed a latex suit from designer Kjell De Meersman, then in his final year at the Royal Fashion Academy of Antwerp, fitted on model Karina Zharmukhambetova, coincidentally resembling the Gantz figurine, with the set design done by the artist himself. Together with pack shots and close ups of the chair, all of these images would comprise the book.

It was Vrints-Kolsteren's idea to work with different types of print. As such, the book is filled with separate sheets of riso prints, silkscreens and offset prints, with the cover being debossed. A custom typography based on the chair's shape was made by Christophe Synak, who was an intern at the time, in collaboration with Vrints-Kolsteren. The book is bound by an elastic band with the idea that each print can be seen as an autonomous piece to be taken out of the book or changed in its order. The final result is an artistic publication about a chair, but more importantly, the book brought together different artists from different disciplines.

## Deviant

28 pages  
297 x 200 mm (portrait)  
printed in quadri  
on maco matte 200 gr  
400 ex.



The Deviant publication shown at 'Intermarket' in Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel, Switzerland. The show was curated by Elin Gonzalez & Friedmann Heckel and featured the work of Pennacchio Argentato, Yannick Val Gesto and myself, Thomas Julier, Lukas Müller, Jaakko Pallasvuo & Kimmo Modig, Jeff Rossi and Max Stocklosa.

When scouring the internet and browsing through endless streams of images and virtual interpretations/mirrors of reality and social concepts, some more known than others, it's easy to lose sight of your true identity. We constantly create different personas within these virtual worlds. Our alter ego's exist next to each other and are connected through the sharing and migration of content via different social networks, which are constantly and preferably linked to each other. This kind of recreation of the self has more to do with the creation of some sort of ego, rather than creating a shared experience worldwide. It's more about promotion of the deep egocentric self and building a fake self assurance, through online spamming and at some times mindless, endless scrolling possibilities.

However, some of these platforms for self recreation are not entirely about throwing your own life stories online for thousands to overlook, but combine the appeal of social networking with a database of user generated material, such as in the case of deviantArt.com, where registered users are given the power to show, share and comment on each others artworks. There are other, different and maybe more successful social websites evolving around art, but what sets deviantArt apart is that it is ruled by the amateur artist and, even more so, the fan artist. This website is filled with outcasts, deviants, rejects, who found themselves a place where they can come forward with their creations, undisturbed, and where they are able to create their own set of social rules. There's numerous image boards that share a similar amount of artistic freedom when it comes to creative output, however, deviantArts' content is uncensored and massive in scale and variety. What's worth noticing is the literal name of deviantArt, it calls itself 'deviant art', meaning rejected or aberrant art, and using 'art', already stating that all things posted on deviantArt, are in fact to be viewed as art. There are no qualifications or standards which you have to fulfill, it doesn't matter if you went to art school or whether or not you've achieved anything related to the world of contemporary art, simply create an account and start uploading. You choose a name, profile picture and add some short information and background to your new artistic persona and what you'll soon notice is your "gallery" (the icon seems to depict a miniature Mona Lisa painting), this is where your works will be displayed. Again straightforward naming, referring to the art context. Next to uploading your own works, there's also the compulsory behavior of favoriting other people's works (similar to the "like button" on Facebook). The deviantArt community is very thankful and whenever you engage in favoriting works, people will comment on your profile, thanking you for the "fave" or the "watch", creating some sort of pressure for whenever people "favorite" your work, you have to return that favor. DeviantArt also adds the option of selling prints of your works, focusing more on 2 dimensional work, but even though this feature is available, it's quite noticeable that the emphasis is never on the selling of the artworks.

As mentioned before the deviant community is ruled by the fan artists, creating fan art, which can be viewed as derivatives of original art, always referring to an original or already existing image, which as a concept can be viewed as a consensus in today's visual, virtual society where all originality has faded and where the creators of images are forgotten. DeviantArt is perfect for those who see through, or ignore, the ideas of copyright and just take images to create new ones. This idea is the most visible in Japanese otaku culture, where dōjinshi create their own illustrations and manga, derived from, or based on an original manga or anime. It's even so accepted that they have a separate convention for fan art only, called 'Komiketto' or 'Comiket', short for 'Komikku Maketto' or 'Comic Market', the largest in the world and held twice a year in Tokyo, Japan. As follows, a lot of Japanese dōjinshi, and dōjinshi worldwide, have established themselves on popular image boards and communities such as deviantArt.

The works of Yannick Val Gesto and Benny Van den Meulengracht-Vrancx touch on these subjects of originality, copyright and the found image. Immersing themselves into the virtual world of image boards and social media, they use these websites as a source of inspiration for their own work, copying certain techniques, stealing and hiding images, responding to the idea of a massive, endless, fleeting and intangible, database of visual content.

Like a lot of fan art, the pieces by Val Gesto are attempts at capturing the essence of entertainment-related intellectual properties, mainly of those that are heavy on the eye. His semi-abstract 3D renders we're constructed through the usage of game-fonts, 2.5D painting,

found imagery and multiple image-editing programs. The working process is based on intense visual research, speed, production and trial & error.

Van den Meulengracht-Vrancx masks himself as one of the dōjinshi artists and tries to fade away in the deviant world by creating a series of app-generated, uncanny selfies, which share similarities with the works of the amateur and fan artists, communicating with them and functioning inside their social and artistic image-based communities.

Fueled by the ever growing amount of diverse web- and otaku-based outsider art, 'Deviant' identifies itself as an experimental artist publication and homage.