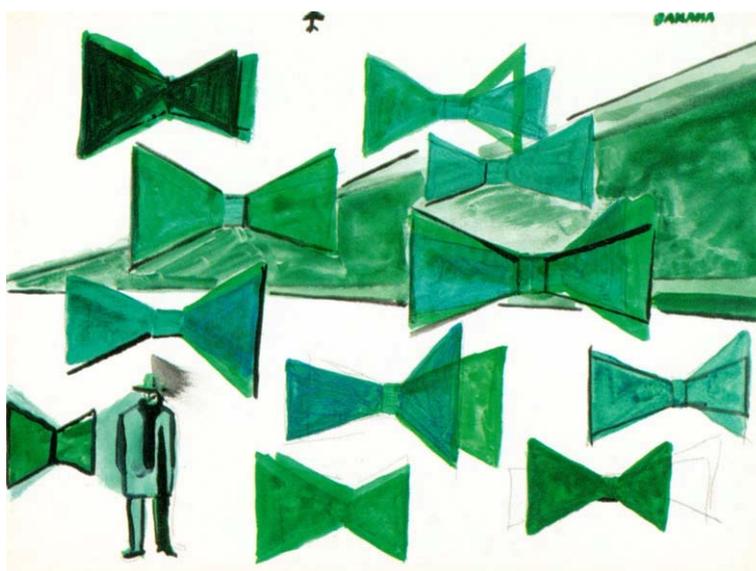


## René Daniëls *An Exhibition is Always Part of a Greater Whole*



Sin título (Panamá), 1987  
René Daniëls Foundation. Eindhoven (Holanda)

<b>DATES:</b>	20 October 2011 – 26 March 2012
<b>PLACE:</b>	Palacio de Velázquez, Parque del Retiro
<b>ORGANISED BY:</b>	Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven
<b>CURATED BY:</b>	Roland Groenenboom
<b>COORDINATED BY:</b>	Rafael García
<b>ITINERARY:</b>	Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum (May-September 2012)
<b>RELATED ACTIVITIES:</b>	Conference about <i>René Daniëls</i> Participating: Roland Groenenboom and Dominic van den Boogerd 21 October 2011, 19:30h

René Daniëls (Eindhoven, Netherlands, 1950) began his personal exploration of the possibilities of painting as a medium in 1976, on completing his art studies. He linked the visual arts and their rich history with literature and everyday life. Ambiguity and double meaning play a crucial role in his work, showing evidence of a relationship with predecessors like Francis Picabia, René Magritte, Marcel Duchamp and Marcel Broodthaers. Indeed, Daniëls saw himself more as an heir to these artists than as a contemporary of the neo-expressionist painters who found fame in the period when the first phase of his highly original work was developing, even though he was sometimes misleadingly associated with them by exhibition curators and critics.

He exhibited at important international shows like Westkunst (1981) and Documenta 7 (1982), and had a retrospective at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in 1986. A year later, when he was thirty-seven and already regarded as one of the foremost Dutch painters of his generation, Daniëls suffered a stroke which prevented him from returning to work for a very long time. Hundreds of drawings, sketches and notes, together with more than ninety pictures from his studio in various stages of completion, then fell to the care of the René Daniëls Foundation. At the Foundation's request, this material was recorded, documented and preserved by the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. The wealth of images, ideas and cross-references in the works is immense. In the current exhibition, these materials play an important role in showing Daniëls' work in a new light.

Through a **broad selection of paintings, gouaches and drawings, together with a wide-ranging compilation of other materials from the René Daniëls Foundation**, this exhibition opens a perspective onto the versatile nature and the complexity of the artist's work within the framework of the 1970s and 1980s underground culture which was so decisive for Daniëls, including punk, new wave and 'no wave', and also within the neo-liberal and commercial context of the (art) world at that time. Unlike most of the other painters of his generation, Daniëls' work can be regarded as allegorical in the broadest sense of the term, as employed by Walter Benjamin in many of his writings. For Benjamin, allegory is a concept with implications that are simultaneously philosophical, religious, aesthetic, political and historical, all of which appear to be very important aspects of Daniëls' art.

Although the artist always attached great importance to the production of sketches and texts, painting was always his ultimate objective. Everything else is preparatory work, a process leading towards his complex and multi-layered pictures. By presenting a selection of this "preliminary work", the exhibition allows a revelatory glimpse of part of his creative process and the numerous sources of inspiration characteristic of his work. Above all, the artist always made sure his work remained open to interpretation at as many levels as possible. By surprising viewers, he allowed them to discover its complexity little by little for themselves.

While Daniëls was at first influenced stylistically by painters like Polke and Baselitz, it was Duchamp who played a fundamental role in his growth as an artist. "Duchamp's achievement," Daniëls asserted, "is undoubtedly based most on the expansion of the possible ways of making art, [...] of using everything life offers us. Of using what was once a

no man's land between literature, visual art and life." And it is precisely this "no man's land" which Daniëls explores through his work.

Although Daniëls had recourse to expressionist brushwork in these early pieces, **his painting from the early 1980s** onwards is characterized by transparent layers of thinly applied paint, often leaving portions of canvas completely bare. The works may be unfinished, inviting viewers to conclude them in their heads and discover new meanings in them again and again. Their titles range from 'Untitled' to enigmatic and poetic names, adding a further stratum to the complexity and ambiguity of the work. In this way, Daniëls literally allows words and phrases to penetrate the canvas itself, broadening the poetic qualities and possible significances of the piece still further. Literature, visual art and everyday life, the trinity which he places at the forefront of his oeuvre, have played a leading role ever since.

In **his works from 1985 to 1987**, abstract walls of what are supposedly exhibition spaces start to appear. Taking the form of bow ties, they often contrast with colored pictures that look like paintings hanging on the supposed gallery walls. These spatial diagrams could equally well be seen as settings for performances or events, and are mostly characterized by lack of action. The suggested space is waiting for something to happen, and Daniëls thereby adds an implication of change and opportunity to his paintings, where what is not visible becomes as important as what is.

One of his last groups of works before suffering a stroke in December 1987, **Lentebloesem ('Spring Blossom')**, takes the idea of abstract space as a motif even further. The paintings consist of monochromatic fields contrasted with red, white or brown branches, or with networks of streets, flanked by words and phrases. They look like plans or maps, and the words next to the painted lines refer to places, times and objects. The first painting in the series contains the titles of all the works that Daniëls had produced in the ten years and more that had gone by from his art student days to the moment when he created this singular piece.

In 2007, after producing no work for nearly twenty years, René Daniëls started to paint pictures again, this time in a small format. At first sight, these images seem far removed from the skilfully painted canvases of the mideighties, which is perfectly understandable in itself. However, they could also be interpreted as a return to the clarity and immediacy of his work of the late seventies and early eighties. What has changed is the form, partly as a result of the artist's physical limitations, since he now has to paint with his left hand. He has had to find a new language with which to express his ideas, one which is perhaps basic but never superficial. His work remains enigmatic and full of double meanings.

From the start, Daniëls has sought to offer a critique of the unilateral vision of art historians, who frequently isolate the work of art from society, situating it solely within tradition and the history of art itself. Daniëls' work therefore adopts an unusual stance within the visual arts of the late 1970s and 1980s, and although his international career took an unexpected turn in 1987, his work has been shown in numerous exhibitions and continues today to influence younger generations of artists.

To conclude, here are a few clues that were given by the artist himself regarding the possible meanings of his work: "Where I am concerned, if there were a secret, I wouldn't reveal it. But undoubtedly the work is an extension of a cultural inheritance in which one maintains a jovial relationship with reality and the profound significance it contains."

## CATALOGUE

The title of this book, *The Words Are Not in Their Proper Place*, and that of the exhibition, *An Exhibition is Always Part of a Greater Whole*, are both taken from an undated text by the artist. The book consists of two parts. It opens with a series of images in which the works are presented in chronological order. This series is supplemented with illustrations that show the process of creation and the exhibition history of the oeuvre, as well as the personal history of the artist and his environment. The text section is also chronologically arranged and turns the floor over to the artist in three interviews from 1983. The text section continues with essays by critic Dominic van den Boogerd, French art historian Paul Sztulman, artist and author Pam Emmerik and organizer of the exhibition and editor of this book, Roland Groenenboom.

## RELATED ACTIVITIES

### Conference *René Daniëls. An Exhibition is Always Part of a Greater Whole*

Presented by Roland Groenenboom, curator of the exhibition, and conference by Dominic van den Boogerd, art critic and director of De Ateliers (Ámsterdam).

**Date:** 21 October 2011

**Time:** 19:30 h.

**Place:** Nouvel Building, Auditorium 200

**Tarif:** Free Entrance until full capacity

## FTP ACCESS DETAILS:

<ftp://77.226.250.242>

Login: DanielsExpo

Password: 743DHG588

### For further information:

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Press Department

[prensa1@museoreinasofia.es](mailto:prensa1@museoreinasofia.es)

[prensa2@museoreinasofia.es](mailto:prensa2@museoreinasofia.es)

Phone: (34) 91 774 10 05 / 10 06

<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/prensa/area-prensa.html>