

Press release

Didier Trénet *Chronique d'une idole*

February 7 – April 16, 2026
[Interruption March 5–11]

Marabout...

Page after page, through a series of drawings created in a notebook, Didier Trénet wanders through the labyrinth of his thoughts, at the very heart of creation, where works are formed according to a practice that is linked as much to method, in that it seeks to demonstrate a truth, as it does to the words from the nursery rhyme *Trois p'tit chats* : "Somnambule, bulletin, tintamarre...". Images resonate, collide, merge, and give rise to one another.

Consisting primarily of sculptures and drawings, the work that Trénet has been pursuing since the early 1990s is firmly rooted in 18th-century art, with which he maintains a "liaison." Indulging in this affinity invites him to summon up motifs—often derived from ornamental drawings—and above all a mood, that of eroticism, theatricality, and pleasure derived from wit, cultivating polysemy as theorized by Sigmund Freud in 1905 in his text *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten)*.

In 2022, Didier Trénet went to the Louvre with the intention of revisiting Watteau's painting *Pierrot*, a sort of idol (as the artist describes him) of the 18th century, marked by an ever-mysterious melancholy. Discouraged not to find the painting, he asked the guards, who then told him that it was undergoing restoration for a few months.

This absence disappointed him, and his frustration led him to reinvent the work for himself. He began a long series of variations in which, along the way, Watteau's painting underwent modifications and hybridizations with other images. The process was entirely empirical. The character of Pierrot is transformed into an elephant, for example, topped with a kind of structure, itself crowned with a tree. The associations are as free as they are evocative of the sometimes strange combinations found in Rococo-style ornamentation in the decades following Watteau's painting, which employ a decorative grammar marked by formal freedom and sophisticated motifs. The pachyderm is a silhouette but also a memory, that of the marble elephant erected by Bernini as a pedestal for the Egyptian obelisk in Piazza Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome, not far from the Villa Medici where Didier Trénet was a resident in 1997.

For us, as for himself, Trénet explains the origin of these drawings: "In a way, I made one (Pierrot) for myself while waiting for him to return. I also think he attracted me because of the unavailable or impenetrable nature of his inner self, which remains quite striking and, I find, resonates surprisingly well with the contemporary period." In this, he reaffirms what Picasso said to Kahnweiler in 1934 about his relationship with artists: "In the end, what is a painter? He is a collector who wants to build a collection by painting what he likes in other people's paintings. That's how I start, and then it becomes something else."¹

What matters to the artist is not so much to appropriate the work as to seize the image, to update it through repetition and alteration. A creative mechanism is triggered by the idea of taking on this painting, which opens the way to a number of new images. At the same time, this process gives rise to ramifications, a kind of digression in which the theatrical character and his

¹ Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, "Huit entretiens avec Picasso," 29 bis rue d'Astorg, February 13, 1934, Caen, L'Echoppe, 1988.

hieraticism bring forth the motif of the mask as a commentary or ornament (in the sense of baroque music, trills, mordents, or flourishes) of representations whose meaning is not yet perceptible to us.

This journey, both formal and interpretative, leads the artist to return to the painting in a circular movement. Although knowledge of the specific subject of the painting, *Pierrot*, known as *Gilles*, by Watteau, has been just about lost, what remains today is the expression of theatricality characterized by an unusual monumentality and a frontality of the figure which mean that, like his avatars, drawn or photographed by Trénet, he remains an actor on a stage and simultaneously becomes a kind of totem.

Ultimately, the subject of these works turns out to be the question they pose, like Watteau's painting. "An actor without lines," if we are to believe the subtitle of the 2024 exhibition at the Louvre Museum. A receptacle for a narrative to which we no longer have access, it becomes a medium for projections, images, works, and titles.

The quotation is only the starting point for Didier Trénet. The work reactivates it, from rambling to wandering, and affirms its vitality as it expresses ontological complexity and doubt about its identity.

Sophie Eloy

Excerpt from a paper entitled "Pierrot vivant. Quelques réinterprétations du motif dans l'art contemporain" (Pierrot alive: Some reinterpretations of the motif in contemporary art) for the conference "Les reflets de Pierrot, de Watteau à Deburau et Prévert, et jusqu'à aujourd'hui: recherches et perspectives" (Reflections of Pierrot, from Watteau to Deburau and Prévert, and up to the present day: research and perspectives), given with François Michaud on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, at the German Center for Art History (DFK Paris).

KEY DATES

Born in 1965 in Beaune. Lives and works in Trambly.

1991 Graduated from Villa Arson.

1993 *Mille Merdis Madame* as part of "Migrateurs" at the Musée d'Art Moderne of Ville de Paris, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist.

1997 Resident at Villa Médicis in Rome, Italy.
Le Jardin de ma mère, études et ruines, Cabinet d'arts graphiques, Centre Pompidou., curator Jonas Storsve.

2006 group show *Chauffe Marcel ! (L'imitation de Marcel Duchamp)*, Frac Languedoc-Roussillon, La Panacée, Montpellier.

2007 Presents two works for *Contrepoint III. De la sculpture* at musée du Louvre.

2009 1st solo show at Galerie Papillon.

2013 Takes over the garden and interiors of château de Rambouillet.

2015 *Sous la purée le dessin*, 1% artistique, Collège de Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.

2017 Nominated for the 10th Prix de dessin d'art contemporain de la Fondation Daniel et Florence Guerlain

2019 group show *Histoires de dessins - Le hasard & le vagabond*, Frac Picardie, Amiens.

2020 Participates in "Gontierama", musée d'art et d'Histoire, Château-Gontier, curator Bertrand Godot.

2021 *Penser le paysage* (duo with Jean-Jacques Rullier), Chapelle de la Visitation, Thonon-les-Bains, curator Philippe Piguët

2022 Winner of the DRAC Occitanie public commission for his project *La langue de Najac*.

2024 Group show *PODIUM*, Le Parvis, Tarbes

AMONG THE COLLECTIONS

Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Centre national des arts plastiques, IAC Villeurbanne, FRACs Ile-de-France, Pays de la Loire, Bourgogne, Occitanie Montpellier