



# BROTHERS IN ART

Double interview with Carlos Amorales and Dick el Demasiado

By Catherine Somze

They both use a pseudonym and have lived in the Netherlands, Mexico, and many other places, but what else binds Carlos Amorales and Dick el Demasiado? Looking at their work alone, there might be no two other artists in the field today that better illustrate two opposite extremes in forms and sensibilities. The work of Carlos Amorales, aka Carlos Aguirre Morales, is sleek and always displays a high production value regardless of its medium. His starkly graphic animations, installations comprised of thousands of hand cut butterfly silhouettes, and monumental sculptures, are flawless. Some of them are even polished to the extent that their surface could function as a mirror.

By contrast, the output of Dick el Demasiado, aka Dick Verdult, revels in imperfections and is an avowed ode to ugliness. His wooden sculptures, ceramics, and installations are intentionally badly executed and appear naïve-looking. They recall the rough aesthetics of Cobra and outsider art. The two artists also enjoy different degrees of institutional and popular recognition. Whereas Carlos Amorales is becoming one of the major mid-career artists in the global system of high art, with survey shows at major institutions, Dick Verdult enjoys a cult status in Latin America with his work as an experimental musician in the Cumbia style. His “cumbia lunática,” as he calls it, is a fusion of traditional Cumbia and electronic music. He is also known to the European art connoisseur. The unlikely duo talks to ZOO Magazine about how they met, what binds them, and what is the role of music in their life and work.

**Catherine Somzé: How did you two meet?**

Carlos Amorales: I knew about Dick from a friend in Holland who was a music lover. I had asked him about his favorites, and he mentioned Dick. Then a few years later, Dick came to Mexico and he contacted my partner at the label Nuevos Ricos, which I had co-founded as part of my artistic practice. But I think we had met before, right?

Dick Verdult: You had had an exhibition in Buenos Aires and we had met there.

CA: We had this very nice walk, a whole day throughout the city, and you told me all kinds of crazy stories about playing music in unlikely places such as on an icebreaker on the South Pole. It was a very beautiful day!

DV: Other people from Carlos' circle of friends also knew me from the underground scene in Argentina.

**CS: From the “cumbia lunática”?**

DV: That's more or less how we met, I guess. Then there was another strange coincidence. He was very active in Amsterdam, whereas I was also very active in Eindhoven with an art group. I think sometimes people cross each other's paths without knowing.

CA: Actually, now that we're talking about it,

I already knew Dick when I was studying in Amsterdam, from an exhibition that had taken place at Arti et Amicitiae with his group.

**CS: You started collaborating within the frame of your work as a manager, Carlos, at your record label Nuevos Ricos.**

CA: We republished *Al Perdido Ganado*, Dick's third record. Its title has a double meaning. It means something like “those who lose win” but also “to the lost cattle,” which is quite absurd and suggests some kind of affinity between winning and being a beast or something. I especially love the song *Búho Sin Un Ratón*.

DV: Which, translated from the Spanish, has lyrics such as “if you're white and merry, kiss my bank account,” and “if you're black, want my Mercedes.” “the slime of a dead is useful to make aquarelles.” Very ugly texts, and then the song starts. [Laughs]

CA: Besides the music, what I also loved from that record and about Dick was his ability to write songs and the poetic impact of the words. I thought that was a very strong contribution to Nuevos Ricos because most of the songs we had recorded until then had been about banality and a certain irony, but also about detachment and

being cool. Artists who had recorded with the label had a certain attitude. There was a much more poetic dimension to Dick's work, and to me, that was very important. I mean, I love the music, I love the drawings and his artworks, but suddenly there was also a poet, and I think that's a very interesting position. What does it entail to be a poet as an artist? What is the poetic side of the art? Its poetic resonance? I also often wonder about how it comes. Dick is Dutch and learned Spanish, he found this strange way to apply maybe a Dutch mentality to the Spanish language that creates poetry. Or did it just happen by chance? I can very much relate to that process. My own grandfather was French-Basque. He spoke a terrible Spanish and was almost handicapped in this regard. Then my father learned Spanish from him and, in turn, I learned Spanish from my own father. So, in my family, we have a very tough time expressing ourselves with words. We are not good at it, we are good with drawings and with visuals, but we have a very basic vocabulary. And then I met this guy, Dick, who was able to turn that shortcoming into a poetic strength. I was struck!

DV: I also write very well in Dutch you know! [Laughs]

**CS: You were also invited, Dick, to spend some time in residency with Nuevos Ricos.**

DV: They licensed the CD, and then we did a tour with my Argentinian band, and it was wonderful. We had our rehearsal room on the rooftop of a building that was on one side a nightclub and, on the other, a golf training course. Executives would come there to train to golf. And it felt very cosmopolitan, on the fifth floor overlooking all of Mexico City, in a heavy neighborhood actually.

CA: At that time, we used to find old nightclubs and we just rented them for an evening. This was the basis for what later became the Mexican night scene. And the approach was to find a run-down nightclub, rent it very cheaply, and do a rock concert there. These nightclubs were normally for salsa music or something completely different. It was almost like appropriating these places and that became a standard for how things were done later by others in the nascent music scene in Mexico City at that time.

DV: Standard procedure, gentrification! [Laughs]  
CA: Didn't you know? That's on my business card, "We gentrify!" [Laughs]

**CS: Rock concerts in Mexico had been prohibited in the 1980s.**

CA: Yeah. And then in 2000, there was a change in politics. We had had a party for 71 years and then they lost. A new government started and it was a very rightwing, neoliberal party. So, that's why we called our record label Nuevos Ricos, because everybody wanted to become rich! [Laughs] But it was a great moment as well because there were a lot of new places and media, new magazines but not much content. You could publish whatever. We had a lot of fun playing with the credulity of the media. We talked about the bands, and did the most absurd and stupid press releases with the label. People would pick the stories and publish them anyway. So it was fun, there were so many possibilities to explore!

DV: Nuevos Ricos also had a very nice site where everybody was fighting verbally, and, oh boy, Mexicans do like to insult each other. It's a local specialty! They did that very well on that website, it felt as if they had been sharpening their pencils for the most outrageous comments to be posted on that site. I was definitely impressed with that. I thought, "wow!"

**CS: What is the role of music further in your work?**

CA: I always liked music but also writing, theater, drawing. I liked all these different things but couldn't concentrate on all of these things at the same time. So I became an artist. It gives you a freedom, which you couldn't have if you'd have to specialize in any of these specific fields. You can become an amateur music company manager, an amateur anthropologist, an amateur poet, an amateur dancer but you're still an artist. So, you can say I am going to learn drums and set up a band. I don't care if the band is good or not but still I will try to do the performance, the concert, as seriously as possible. It's like being a professional tourist! [Laughs]

**CS: What do you think about that statement, Dick?**

DV: I was born like that!

**CS: Right, you were a "Philips child", weren't you?**

DV: My father was an engineer for Philips, and we got to travel through Latin America, but also to South Africa at one point. So I just moved around, not only geographically, but also in content, in disciplines, in friends and situations. It was ping pong all the time. And although I did first train as a filmmaker, and then worked in the for Dutch television in the 1980s, mainly for financial reasons, it's nice to tolerate this playing with all things. We have got this obsession of going from A to B in a straight line, but to me, it was proven that the other version goes as well, and it's much more pleasant. Accidents come to be more fruitful than if you were going into a straight line. [Laughs]

CA: My grandmother used to say to me when I was a teenager, "I'm really afraid you will become a dilettante!" And I became one! [Laughs]

DV: But a good parent always says that, so that you do become one. "Don't go near the cliff!"

**CS: In Latin America, Dick, you're most famous for your work as an experimental cumbiero. Aren't you afraid people pigeonhole you?**

DV: I don't mind as long as I have enough freedom so that I can jump onto the other side too. When I suddenly became a musician in Argentina in the 1990s, the country was in a state of disarray with the crisis. Argentina had also always been a country suffering from trying to be a European country, much more so than any other Latin American country. Argentina was one of the most explicit in it, so for some, it put the finger right on the wound. It was too much that someone coming from Europe would say that the best music they had was the type of music that was understood as being the less interesting, European, or "noble." Cumbia was, and still is, the music of the lower classes, of the housemaid and the truck driver. Many people were like, "Hey! I thought the best music we had was tango!" The crisis was also, in some regards, a blessing because it caused people to be in a much more receptive mood. I must say, I exploited that part of being a musician. I never thought, though, that being a performer, and playing night after night could be fascinating too. If you repeat a performance long enough, you can be more concentrated to the audience, and less on the music. You can single out persons, you can connect in a different manner with the public, and it's another pleasure that you would not think is yet another aspect of music too. But I did make some steps away from that scene.

CA: Now you're more of a visual artist! [Laughs]  
DV: My interest in music also comes from the discovery I once made that it was a wonderful tool to edit films. I was interested in non-linear films in which you don't have a mainstream story. Music helped to blend the scenes with one another.

**CS: Isn't that also a strategy in many of your animations, Carlos?**

CA: The music is really what binds everything together and editing very much goes hand in hand with what you are listening to. I mean, I have less experience than Dick as a musician – I'm more of a background figure, a manager – but there is also something very nice about music as opposed to art. Well, in art, you can also get into a kind of trance, but when you are playing music, you get into a very specific state of non-thinking. It's almost like with sports. It's when you start thinking

that you fail or something, and then you do fail. You should not think, you should put your mind somewhere else, and it's a big relief. It's really nice because art, at least to me, is very mental. Of course, drawing also has this certain trance and you can fall into deep concentration, but it's more about thinking. Although, it depends, of course, on how you make music.

DV: What I like about music, in comparison to the visual arts, is that art is stained by a lot of expectations. A lot of social importance is placed on exhibitions. You present your work and then you've got all this diplomatic fuzz around you, but during a concert, you don't have that.

**CS: I cannot think about two artists whose visual work is more aesthetically opposite to each other.**

DV: Isn't that beautiful!

CA: Yeah, our work is very different. I'm much more about control and Dick is all about a lack of it. [Laughs] But he's Dutch. I come from a very different place, a very chaotic society. Maybe it's a desire for the opposite.

DV: Carlos is cleaning his hands, and I am making them dirty! [Laughs]

**CS: Yet, both of you have used the motif of the mask in your work.**

DV: I did, once, when we were launching the cumbia lunática in Costa Rica. The masks were made by a saddle maker and the reason for it was very pragmatic. If someone got sick, they could be replaced without anyone noticing. A new person could take on the role unnoticed.

CA: This is the interesting thing about masks, it's this sense of anonymity. You actually can replace the person. That's why it became important in political activism. If a revolutionary is caught, someone else can pickup their mask and the struggle goes on. Paradoxically perhaps, by becoming anonymous, the person then becomes invulnerable.

**CS: The mask embodies the power of the masses?**

CA: It depends, right? There are masks that represent the masses, others that represent individuals.

DV: It wouldn't be farfetched, either, to think that people have already their masks on. It's a cliché, of course, but some people are masks with legs. Though, the reason why I didn't use a mask as a musician in the end is that once you've put a mask on, you're condemned to put it on all the time. Think about the band Kiss for instance. So, I thought, "no, I'm not going into that prison."

CA: It can also be a subterfuge against shyness. In Mexico, wrestlers started putting on a mask because they were very bad actors and some of them were shy, so that was their escape. And often, when they take off the mask, they cannot deal with it. And it's only the good ones that can do it with their bare face. But then the face can become a mask itself.

DV: This is a very royal remark, if I may say, and quite literally. I was once introduced to Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and I was shocked, because she really looked sweet and interested, but her face! It looked like a mask. You could see her eyes being imprisoned behind the skin. Like eyes behind a mask, and I thought, "How is this possible? How did this happen to her?" Perhaps

it's because she was trained to talk and still be expressive for people at a distance. Then I guess that you have to exercise your muscles for expression but then the wrinkles stay there. I felt really compassionated, because it's a role. She was born in a role and it seemed to me, trapped in it.

CA: The public persona is really what becomes a mask. Thanks god we're no royals! [Laughs]

**CS: Talking about politics, Dick, you went to Paris shortly after May 1968, to study at Vincennes University in the early 1970s where great left-wing thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze were teaching.**

DV: I did go to their seminars but I was primarily there for cinema. When I teach, I often show the work of Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés, who was also a political activist for the rights of indigenous people of the high lands. He worked under severe restriction during dictatorship. You can get killed when you filmed. With students, what I want to discuss is what it means to be a socially engaged artist. It's definitely not only going to a shopping mall and skate there as a way of saying, "I'm free!" It's much more serious and heavy than that. The tradition of Third Cinema Latin American film movement was really what I was being embedded in. Those were very interesting times.

**CS: But there were also a lot of internal fights amongst the different factions of the left.**

DV: That was really sad to see. If you really go and pinpoint a situation than all these opinions become more diverse. There were once Tunisian illegals living at the university selling food. At the same time they were a little problematic to the women, and they were hiding the food from one day to the other in no other place than the toilet. So, then, a big discussion ensued about what to do with them, and that's where I saw how complex it all was. Because when you think in abstract terms, then you can easily find unification, but once there is a single symptomatic, concrete thing that happens, then it becomes very difficult, and everyone has their own priorities. The clash was very visible then in Vincennes, and for me, it was very much like seeing the Titanic sink – really tough. All these factions became dead ghettos, and now, we have amalgamated middle-of-the-road politics everywhere. It's very sad.

**CS: For both of you, your work exudes a sense of "fuck it" punk kind of ethos.**

DV: And fuck them, too! [Laughs]

CA: It's an interesting anarchy, but at the same time, being critical of anarchy. It is an endless loop. It's about avoiding becoming short-sighted and narrow-minded. It's about avoiding the adoption of one belief. It's about doubting everything.

DV: Doubting everything in comfort.

CA: Yeah.

DV: It's like a fire or something. You sit around it, and then you can't take your eyes off it. You keep looking at it, again and again.



*SUPERFRITZ* (monument for german beerdrinker) by Dick Verduft  
*Dumbo Pinochet and Dummy Kissinger* by Dick Verduft  
*BULLSHIT DEFINES ARCHITECTURE* by Dick Verduft