

# FORT GANSEVOORT

Interview

Sam Stewart x Mango

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By Julia Deutsch



## The New York-based artist and Spanish retailer are a winning team!

During the Salone del Mobile, MANGO teamed up with the New York designer Sam Stewart. His work will be displayed at the Mango flagship store in Vittorio Emanuele until the 24th of April.

Stewart, who is well known for his exceptional sculptural household furniture and domestic objects, designed the shop windows for the store. The project combines photography and objects in order to create a narrative around sustainability. It is about new ways of viewing unused architecture in the landscape by collaborating with existing infrastructure. Stand pipes turned into lamps that light the way down a dark city street.

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The artist uses forms and colours to create observations of his very own present— from everyday New York spaces (drainage pipelines, subway seating), to iconic 20th century design, and 3D modelling software. He also plays with the evocation of his memory of childhood perception using the mass produced palette of Fisher Price.

Interview talked to Sam Stewart about his inspiration, intertwining the fashion and art world as well as his take on the grotesque.

**INTERVIEW** What were your references for the collaboration with Mango?

**SAM STEWART** The main reference for the collaboration is the street pipe vent that is commonly seen on the sidewalks around NYC. It's a curved, tubular form that is the end point of a much larger system of pipes that are hidden from sight, buried underground. On a purely formal level, I've always liked these curved pipes. They look a bit like a butt, or the human form from the rear, waist down, bending over. There is a humorous, soft chunkiness to them, like a melting Sottsass totem. However, the form felt incomplete at the same time, and it seemed natural to have some substance coming out of the pipe. I thought that the best way to resolve this was by adding a tube of light to complete the form. For the installation at Mango, I'm exposing the rest of the pipe system, such that now the lamps are repositioned back into the very system that inspired its existence.

I Have you worked on shop windows before?

**SS** Only once, quite a few years ago, and it was an entirely different context. Basically, I created a 10' inflatable human torso that wore a giant t-shirt for the musician Mac Miller's clothing line. I lost a lot of sleep for the month that it was installed, wondering if the fan would stop working. It didn't.

I How did you translate Mango's brand I-D into the design?

**SS** Instead of thinking of Mango as a whole, I preferred to take a more narrow approach, and thought of the store window as a vitrine where I could propose an imaginary and idealized world of my own. My concept served as an entry point into the start of a conversation with the brand. Over the course of our conversations, I got a better understanding of their identity and the idea took shape in a very natural way.

I Which significance does color play in your work?

**SS** I always approach color based on what I observe in the world. I don't have a background in color theory, nor have I ever worked for someone that has influenced my approach to color. So in this sense my approach is very freeing— if I see something I like, I try to at the very least take a photo, screenshot, to use as a reference. Just walking around NYC and looking at what people wear and the surrounding architecture pretty much offers a masterclass on color, and proves that it is important to embrace.

I Can you elaborate on the influence of fashion trends (e.g. ugly sneakers) on your interior design?

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**SS** It's almost impossible right now to make something that doesn't have a counterpart or reference to a fashion trend. The scope of fashion and the many micro trends are endless. However, I do take notice of certain patterns (although at the time I might not realize it's a trend). For example, I think my work embraces a bit of the absurdist humor, memphis group inflected, pop sensibility that is certainly also a trend in sneakers and clothing at the moment. I also sample from a lot of things that I observe in a kind of purely aesthetic and naive way, not dissimilar to my approach to color.

**I** Do you use storytelling as a creative tool?

**SS** Yes, but it doesn't feel so much like a tool, instead it's something more essential than that for me. Other than storytelling, I'm not sure how else I would communicate my visual world. I also come from a family in North Carolina of a lot of really good, natural storytellers. Everything is a story, and something simple like the weather or a trip to the post office can quickly become an elaborate and beautiful narrative. I also realize that it's not something that people always have time or patience for—I think living in NYC for the last 8 years has increased my efficiency, and perhaps simplified my approach somehow.

**I** Would you describe your work as slightly perverse?—What is perversion in a Sam Stewart sense?

**SS** Perversion is something that surfaces, but never really begins as a starting point in my work. Sometimes I'll create something with no intention of being explicitly perverse, and the first person I show will immediately make reference to this perverse quality. I don't know if I have the words to describe how this continues to surface from me on deeper psychological level, or what it says about the viewer as well. It seems that even if I tried I would be unable to contain or suppress the perverse, so I've decided not to fight it.