



# IMMERSIVE NIGHT

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## INTERVIEW WITH DAVID COMBE AND ÉLISABETH RIVIÈRE

**Over the past twenty years, Tracks has become a reference when it comes to presenting unique contemporary artists. Élisabeth Rivière, you're a producer for the show, and David Combe, you're a writer; can you tell us what makes Tracks unique?**

**Élisabeth Rivière:** Tracks started as a TV show about music, but over time it started talking about cinema, visual arts, the performing arts, and artistic communities, and it also gained a digital version.

**David Combe:** Tracks is first and foremost interested in pioneers, in innovative artists. "Culture" nowadays is embodied by many people working in many different ways. To put it simply: we're interested in artists and activists who aren't afraid to open doors, wander out, and explore new fields. They're researchers, sometimes clumsy in the paths they choose, sometimes funny in the unexpected things they find. What we mostly see in them is courage, energy, and enthusiasm. What will become of those creators? We don't know if their work will end up playing an important part in the history of Art. We couldn't possibly know yet, so we want to remain open.

**What's the state of mind behind Tracks?**

**David Combe:** It all starts with an essential ingredient we want to nurture in our viewers in turn: curiosity. To this we add a rather stimulating obsession: to always step out of our comfort zones. As soon as we don't get something, we're interested! Tracks is a unique programme: we are lucky to have Arte's trust, which allows us to feature little-known, or even unknown, artists, the authors of surprising and eccentric projects, and who don't necessarily aim to appeal to a wide audience. We go to them with children's eyes... happy children. To discover them and share their creations, without any preconceived notions.

**You're hosting an Immersive Night in the Église des Célestins. Is this the first time you've made an encounter in the flesh with artists discovered by Tracks possible?**

**Élisabeth Rivière:** For Arte's twentieth birthday, we had a first encounter between artists we featured on the programme and an actual audience. That was *Tracks Circus*, at the 104, which was closely followed by two immersive evenings in Lyon. This Immersive Night at the Festival d'Avignon will be the continuation, on a larger scale, of this original form of sharing the show.

**David Combe:** It's the fantasy of Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*: the actor steps out of the screen to meet the spectator. We'd always dreamt of it; the shape it's taking at the église des Célestins is fascinating. And then there's this exceptional partnership with Adami, whose Art & Tech department has always been, like us, at the avant-garde. We move in the same circles, meet the same people, but they do so as an institution while we're a television programme. Adami took part in creating the line-up for this Immersive Night, just like we put some artists forward. It allows us to create a "tracksian" world, whose pleasure comes from refusing to obey the usual rules of the performing arts. It's a fortunate mix: the artists we feature on Tracks come from very different worlds. For this Immersive Night, we very deliberately decided to call on artists working in different disciplines and from different countries. Similarly, we're asking the audience to interact with the artists differently, to come to this show with a new state of mind.

**Adami is an association which helps artists and performers, and your partner for this Immersive Night...**

**David Combe:** We share with Adami this European vision of “emerging” artists; it’s part of their mission statement. Like some viruses, the artists we invited are peaking, and they are, without irony, perfectly in keeping with the main theme of the 74th edition of the Festival d’Avignon, Eros and Thanatos. Working with Adami, we’re keen to support them. The goal is to let people know about them. We’ve also chosen the artists with the *église des Célestins* in mind, which is very different from your usual venue. It’s a constraint we don’t mind; we’re more than happy to work with it. We agreed with Adami that this Immersive Night shouldn’t be a patchwork of artists but a source of creation. The idea is to create a mix, like a DJ set, a performance.

**Experimentation and trials are at the heart of the work of those artists. The notion of performance seems to be more essential than ever...**

**David Combe:** We’re dealing with performers here, with makers—a word that’s very hot in the US right now, and which implies taking back control over technology. Those performers are very open, but they want to master technology: they’re not afraid to get their hands dirty, they can lay cables, reinvent things, build their own machines. Technology can lead to the dispossession of an artist’s work. But they won’t accept it. I also use the word *fluidperformers*: they belong to porous disciplines; their work has as much to do with dance as with new technologies, with scenography or visual arts. They’re like *Tracks*: they don’t need to identify with one thing to be happy.

**Let’s go back to Eros and Thanatos: what do you expect from the artists you invited?**

**David Combe:** The one thing all human beings have in common, we think, is the will to live on the one hand, and the death drive on the other! Looking into what drives us and exploring it in as many different ways as possible was what guided our selection. Each of the artists we’ve chosen to feature explores, in their own way, this theme. We didn’t want to impose our vision, to tell artists what to do. Our goal is to allow them to share their own personal approach. The other challenge is to bring them together, to create connections between their performances, to create a sort of overview of this theme as tackled by artists who use forms and technologies that are very different from one another.

**Tracks was originally based in France and Germany, but has since expanded to cover Europe and the world...**

**Élisabeth Rivière:** Tracks is a journey, in all meanings of the word. Technically, artistically, emotionally. The culture Tracks presents has changed a lot over the years. In the beginning, our reputation was that of a trashy programme, focusing a lot on sex, etc. It’s still true to some extent, but the cultural fields we explore have changed. People, too. I’ve been with the programme since its inception and I’m always amazed at how much it’s widened its point of view, how much better it’s become. There are about ten people working on *Tracks* today. Four on the digital side, two writers, three in our editorial team, and two for the production side of things. A lot of the work we do, we do as a collective. Right from the start, what was original about Tracks was our desire to avoid a journalistic approach to culture. A refusal to follow the “tastes” of a host—and the programme doesn’t have one!

**David Combe:** Our strength, as a programme broadcast by Arte, is that we’re one of the last ones to be produced by both French and German teams, alternating every week. We’re always shifting from a French programme to a German one. This constraint is a source of creativity. Early on, we had to talk to a French audience while avoiding self-absorption at all costs. Arte is a European network, so we voluntarily decided not to feature some famous French artists, whose influence is negligible in Germany, and instead turned to other countries beyond Europe, like the United States or Japan, or to a continent like Africa. The pleasure of Tracks is this openness to the other. We love difference; it feeds our excitement at creating.

Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet