

# Interview: LCP - Dirk Denoyelle

By HispaBrick Magazine®

Images by Dirk Denoyelle



Dirk Denoyelle at the Hilton Paris Opera Exhibition

**HispaBrick Magazine:** Name, age, position?

**Dirk Denoyelle**, born Roeselare (Flanders, Belgium) 2/10/2964 (so 52 when I write this), LEGO® Certified Professional (LCP), Comedian, CEO and Polyglot (haha), Education: Master in Electronics Engineering Science

**HBM:** Did you play with LEGO® when you were a kid?



Young Dirk playing with LEGO® set

**DD:** I did. I received my first box from my grandfather when I was about seven. We were spending holidays at the seaside, and weather was, typically for Belgium, not very good. I still have the model house; it's on a glass shelf in my home office. The trees are broken and the cardboard box and instruction booklet are gone, but I think I could even today still build it without the instructions. I must have built it a hundred times when I was a kid.

**HBM:** When did you discover that LEGO® could be something else than a toy?

**DD:** That was many, many years later. My dark ages started when I went to university and ended when my daughter got her first LEGO® set at the age of seven. I went to fetch the bricks from my parents' house, I nicely separated what was mine from what belonged to my brother, looked for special offers in toy shops and started playing again. After about a year or so, I wanted a bigger challenge than building cities. So I built our family portrait : my first mosaic, no software involved (we are talking about the nineties here), and it's still above our fireplace. The whites have faded here and there, the kids have grown up, but we all still love it.



Dirk's first mosaic



Willem Vermandere's sculpture

**HBM:** When did you build your first sculpture?

**DD:** That was the head of Willem Vermandere, a locally famous Flemish singer-songwriter and sculptor. I had been doing parodies on him in my comedy shows for some years, and I wanted to do something special with the guy. So I thought, why not make his portrait in 3D with LEGO® bricks? Why not make a sketch, in which he unveils a statue created with a new, revolutionary technique, in an ever-lasting material... LEGO® bricks! There was one problem: I wanted him to be built in light grey, so he would look like a rock, as the real Willem Vermandere is rock solid. But I hardly had enough light grey to make a little mountain for my train to drive through. So I contacted LEGO®, and back then (the nineties, remember), the LEGO® company rules were totally different. They said "we receive hundreds of requests like this a year, and we usually grant one ... we'll do yours". The fact that I was a quite famous artist already possibly helped my case. A few months later I got a K8 box [1] full of grey bricks. And again half a year later, the audience applauded massively for the LEGO® head. It would be the first of very many...

**HBM:** How did it turn into your business?

**DD:** I have always turned my hobbies into my profession. I wanted to be on stage, so I became a professional comedian. I like to learn languages, so I forced myself into performing not only in Dutch, but also in English, French, German... even Danish and Spanish. And I liked doing things with LEGO® bricks. After seeing the success of my heads, I figured "there is a business here".

**HBM:** How did you learn about LCP?

**DD:** That was quite the story. As the first LEGO® head was a big success, I developed a very good relationship with the LEGO® Benelux office. They were the ones who suggested the program to me, but at the time they did not really know where I should apply. Already back then the LEGO® Company was a big house with many doors. It was only a year later when I was invited to do a comedy gig for LEGOWORLD in Zwolle (NL) that I bumped into the ever-charming Jan Beyer, who pointed me in the right direction.

**HBM:** When did you start as LCP?

**DD:** That must have been early 2008. Via Jan Beyer I had made my application, explaining what I wanted to do (basically art and portraits with LEGO® bricks), and to my surprise I was accepted more or less right away. I had no idea my exhibit of 3D heads with LEGO® bricks was already so famous that LEGO® Headquarters knew about them. You have to remember: this was in ancient times when social media barely existed.

**HBM:** Which benefits do you have being an LCP?

**DD:** First of all, I am an artist, so being an LCP feels like an honor. Although it is not really a 'title', it sometimes feels like one, and I am grateful for that. It makes one feel special, and who doesn't like that? But on a more practical level, it also helps in a commercial way: I work a lot for companies, and in that world being 'certified' is clearly an advantage. Apart from that, LCPs have direct access to bricks at competitive prices. The latter, come to think of it, is quite bizarre in my case. In my early days, before I was an LCP, LEGO® Benelux used to sponsor my bricks for me. Today I pay for them. But then again, those were completely different times with completely different rules :-)

**HBM:** Could you explain to us the design process of one bust?

**DD:** It is very, very basic work, actually. Pretty much like what a sculptor does when they would make a bust out of clay. I collect pictures and I do some thinking. What scale, what colors, what style... And then it's just like building anything else: you start at the bottom, and move on to the top. No 3D-scans, no smart software, just a guy with a few pictures and a pile of LEGO® bricks. Sometimes I get it right the first time, sometimes I have to start over again. Usually I only know that the result will be OK, when I reach the eyebrows.



Kings of the Netherlands

When I was building Queen Maxima from the Netherlands, it was the eyelashes that made the difference. I thought George Clooney was going to be really difficult, as he has a very smooth face, but for some reason building him was also very... smooth :-)



George Clooney's head



**HBM:** How many copies of each bust do you produce?

**DD:** If the bust is a commission, I usually build only one. Sometimes two: one prototype that is unglued, and then a co-workers builds a glued copy that we send to the client. That is in case the bust needs to be transported a lot, or will be shipped by plane. The heads that I make for our touring art exhibit are made in a few copies more. First the unglued prototype, then a few glued copies for the several places we want to put them on show. At this moment my friends from E-Motion in Slovakia run a tour in shopping malls all over Central Europe, and quite a few of my heads are part of that tour. Our own art exhibit is due to take off soon as well. A big part of that is about heads and faces. Apart from the busts, there is the giant Rubens painting parody, in which I replaced the original heads with heads of people like Einstein, Ghandi, Martin Luther King and other wise people. Most of the art we make for the touring exhibit is also made in a few copies.



Rubens's painting

**HBM:** Do you keep copies of your work?

**DD:** Yes, usually the unglued prototypes stay in our workshop.

**HBM:** Besides busts, you have also produced other models like the Hilton Hotel in Paris. How do these collaborations work?

**DD:** The Hilton project – summer of 2015 – was an amazing experience for us. We had our art exhibit in the hotel all summer, we built a large scale model of the hotel, we did some team building workshops there for companies, we built a small scale model of the hotel concierge and we built an exclusive set, a miniscale impression of the hotel. For some reason that set was a huge success. I think the sparkling personality of Sofia Vandaele, the hotel manager, had a lot to do with that. And of course the real Hilton Paris Opera is a great building.

**HBM:** How many copies are you allowed to make?

**DD:** We can make as many sculptures or built models as we want to. But as soon as they are construction sets, the limit is set to a few hundred. Actually, there are quite a few restrictions to making custom sets. They have to be linked to a specific event, they should respect the LEGO® values, etc... So we could not make military or tobacco sets, for instance. But I would not want to make those anyway :-)

**HBM:** How are instructions generated?

**DD:** There are different approaches, but usually I – or one of my co-workers – first makes a prototype with actual LEGO® bricks. Over the years we've managed to have quite a 'bricklary' – a library of bricks – in stock. Then we send pictures to someone who reproduces our prototype in a computer version. In most cases we work with Jaco van der Molen in Holland, an awesome guy, actually. He then generates the instructions. Finally we have one of our own graphics specialists to create the exact look and feel we want for the particular project.



Hilton Paris Opera model



**HBM:** You are also a presenter in events and shows. Is there any link with LEGO®?

**DD:** There is more and more. My comedy shows are usually for companies and conferences. When they heard I also “did stuff with LEGO®”, I was asked to host team building workshops with LEGO® bricks. So I developed a few concepts and ran some of these exercises – quite successfully actually; so I decided to get a deeper background in the field, and became a LEGO® Serious Play Coach. With that in mind, we now run a series of different team building and brainstorming formats. I also developed a motivational speech about change that I have given in five languages in many countries all over Europe now.



Dirk during a show

**HBM:** Have you collaborated in any projects with the LEGO® Group?

**DD:** Not so many. We do work a lot for LEGOWORLD in Holland. We built the statues of King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima for them, and then also that planet of creativity – nobody ever came up with an official name for it – a big globe with a diameter of about 1.5 meters and six continents. Every continent is in a different LEGO® theme, but in a very creative way: technic bricks to build a forest with tyres, a pirate island in the shape of a skull, and a giant snake crawling over several continents. We also had our art exhibit at LEGO®WORLD a few times. And every now and then I have the honor to perform as a comedian or motivational speaker for some LEGO® event somewhere on the planet :-)

**HBM:** Do you have any contact with other LCPS?

**DD:** Yes, we actually meet once a year at an event hosted by the LEGO® Company. That is always fun. We've really become a bunch of friends. I could not imagine going to New York without visiting Sean Kenney, or being in Singapore without checking up on Nicholas Foo, and so on. During the year many of us contact each other now and then to see if we can work on something together, or exchange information... yes, a fine little crew we are :-)

[1] K8 is a standardised box size used by LEGO®. A K8 box is 60x40x30cm.

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