

DAAN GIELIS | *U'll be fine*

For *U'll be fine*, the first solo exhibition of Daan Gielis (1988–2023), Keteleer Gallery focuses on a striking and highly meaningful component of his oeuvre: the neon sculptures. Although Gielis worked with a wide range of materials and techniques, neon constitutes a recurring and significant element in his practice, functioning as a visual anchor within a layered and multifaceted artistic approach.

Daan Gielis was a Belgian artist whose poetic and deeply personal practice explored tensions between vulnerability and resilience, desire and disillusionment, individuality and connectedness. Shaped by his background in hardcore punk and by living with a chronic illness, Gielis developed a distinctive visual language—often employing neon, sculpture, and installation—to articulate the emotional contradictions and social paradoxes of contemporary life.

His work moves effortlessly between high and low culture, drawing on subcultures, emojis, pop aesthetics, and art-historical references to question how meaning is constructed and experienced. Recurring motifs such as wilting flowers, crying smileys, and desolate jungles create a space in which opposing emotions can coexist—hopeful and sorrowful, strong and fragile—thus rendering visible the poetry of our inner contradictions.

At the core of his oeuvre lies a quiet yet powerful drive toward sincerity and connection: a desire to transform the personal into something universal. Through his work, Gielis offers both comfort and resistance, posing the question of how we might continue to live meaningfully in a world that often feels incoherent.

Neon light carries an inherent ambiguity. It is intrusive and seductive, distant and intimate, inexpensive and precious all at once. In Gielis's hands, the medium acquires a polyphonic charge: his neons do not speak in slogans. Their colours are vivid, yet their messages are often nuanced. By abstracting and distorting symbols, Gielis slows down our engagement with a visual language we usually read automatically. His neon sculptures embody the paradox entangling contemporary social life: the attempt to articulate a deeply personal narrative through an unforgivingly generic language.

Within art history, neon is known as a medium that balances between commerce and art, between the public and the personal. From Bruce Nauman, who fragments language and the body through neon, to Tracey Emin, who uses it to express vulnerability and intimacy, the medium has repeatedly been employed to reflect on how meaning emerges and how emotion is visualized. Gielis positions himself within this tradition, albeit with a distinctly contemporary outlook: his neons are not merely 'images in light', but visual fields of tension in which the intimate is amplified into a shared experience.

The title *U'll be fine* emerged from Daan's notes and reads as a simple yet heartening statement. It is a hopeful address in which the artist's voice continues to resonate. At the same time, we embrace these words as a reciprocal gesture of trust: a quiet affirmation of our responsibility to care for his oeuvre with attention, respect and commitment. *U'll be fine* marks a first moment of focus within a broader, long-term engagement with the work of Daan Gielis. In the years to come, Keteleer Gallery aims to gradually unfold the layered complexity of his practice—one in which diverse media, materials, and atmospheres repeatedly touch upon the same existential undercurrent: that of the human condition, caught between desire and limitation, between trying and failing, between beauty and melancholy.

Koen Leemans, 2026

Opening Saturday, 17 January, 2 – 6 pm.

The exhibition will be on view until 28 February 2026.

**KETELEER
GALLERY**

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Sat: 12pm – 6pm

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