



Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel
Artforum, December 2020
(author: Amanda Sarroff)
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ARTFORUM



Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel, *Oak chest of drawers with giant Flanders rabbit and arms*, 2020, oak wood, 49 1/2 × 52 1/4 × 29 3/4".

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CLEARING | BRUSSELS

“Animals and Sculpture” is a plainspoken exhibition title if there ever was one. It befitted Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel’s freestanding sculptures and wall reliefs in massive wood, which depicted rustic furniture including cabinets, chests, benches, and a dresser. Each was playfully embellished with animals, body fragments, or more than one kind of squash. The exhibition followed a style of woodworking that the artists (who have been collaborating since 1998) have been honing for several years. The sculptures created a peculiar landscape, stretching from the granite of Brittany to the oak trees of the Ardennes, and where human limbs, gourds, and assorted creatures intermingled on an equal plane.

Using a manually piloted 3D milling machine and finishing each work by hand, Dewar and Gicquel coax dispersed limbs—toes, torsos, or arms—to emerge and recede from oaken matrices. In *Oak relief with courgettes* (all works 2020), the titular vegetable’s taut skin bulges beneath the wood grain. Protuberances abound. Noses adorn cabinets, toes jut from relief

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panels, and snails coil around bench legs. Then there are the softly sloped navels and puckered nipples that punctuate several wood panels. The artists relish each curve and delight in the articulation of surfaces and volumes.

Dewar and Gicquel's buoyant pastoral vernacular belies their ambitious engagement with the expanse of Western sculpture making. It also serves as a way to prod at hokey nostalgia, especially for what we embrace as natural or pleasing. In *Oak relief with mirror carp and feet*, the fish's smooth, mostly scaleless body rises from the undulating grain of the wood. Human toes poke out incongruously, testing the water. Mirror carp, widely believed to have been bred by monks in medieval Europe, are considered an invasive species, not unlike the now devastating Colorado potato beetle, whose likeness here propogated across one bench's machine-embroidered cushion. Even the replicated limbs of the wood reliefs, hand-cloned from clay models with the help of a copy-carving machine, seize on our longing to remold the world nearer to our hearts' desire.

Wood-incarnated fleshy desires are, in the words of the artists, "oily bodies out of oiled oak." Allusions to water and bodily fluids have long coursed through Dewar and Gicquel's works, most notably perhaps in their earlier depictions in stoneware and marble of toilets, sinks, and bidets. Here, one saw new vessels, other secretions. One could almost feel the snail slime snaking its way across a torso in *Oak relief with body fragments and snails*. The exhibition's chef d'oeuvre, tucked away from immediate view, was a sow and trough carved from a single, hulking block of granite. Intimations of milk and mud and slop mix with the raw *non finito* stone, coarse pigskin, and pristine trough.

Dewar and Gicquel's penchant for directly carving stone has drawn them to incorporate passing citations of Rodin, as well as of Michelangelo, whose final sculpture, the *Rondanini Pietà*, seemed an ineluctable reference here. In this roughhewn scene of grief, which the Tuscan artist worked on intermittently over twelve years until his death in 1564, Christ's frail, attenuated body emerges from Mary's. Along the length of the sculpture, Michelangelo retained a tenderly polished arm he had carved for an earlier version that included a larger, brawnier Christ. This phantom limb is echoed in the life-size arms, lopped off at the shoulder and carved out of wood, that appear as the elongated handles of *Oak chest of drawers with giant Flanders rabbit and arms* and in the wall-mounted panel *Oak relief with body fragments*. In reckoning with the medium of sculpture, from its internal or formal coherence to expanded fields of perception and cultural resonance, Dewar and Gicquel also address our uncertain place in this world. To that question, the severed arm is an open parenthesis.