



FEATURE - 07 SEP 2013

In Focus: Dewar & Gicquel

The intermingling of conceptual and material worlds

BY VIVIAN SKY REHBERG

Over a relatively short period of time, a particular narrative has

taken shape around the Franco-British duo Daniel Dewar and Grégory Gicquel, who have been working together as Dewar & Gicquel for the past 15 years, ever since their art-school days. That latter bit of information is an essential part of this tale, as is their seeming lack of a studio, their tendency to work outside in rural settings, their attachment to materials, their willingness to learn new techniques simply by getting down to work, and their love of fishing, which is apparent in the works *Waders* (2010) and *Daiwa Fishing Reel* (2006). These facts are not particularly distinctive in themselves; there are scores of artists who fit this description (with the possible exception of the fishing), but critics agree that the sculptural work of Dewar & Gicquel distinguishes itself by rigorously cleaving the conceptual and the material.

To a certain degree, Dewar & Gicquel consciously cultivate their image as outdoorsy types capable of great physical effort. A photograph accompanying a 2006 article about them in *Beaux-Arts* magazine shows them jeans-clad and perched on a felled tree, both with chainsaws at the ready and sawdust flying. The photograph might be perceived as tongue-in-cheek because it so readily conforms to certain codes of masculinity that still adhere to the practice of sculpture, but it is also an accurate portrayal of the duo's hands-on working method. No evanescent dematerialization here: Dewar & Gicquel resolutely depart from, yet remain in the realm of, the material. They also claim a symbiotic relationship exists between their chosen media – such as wood, marble and wool – and their largely figurative subject matter, which they maintain is 'a reason for using a material'.

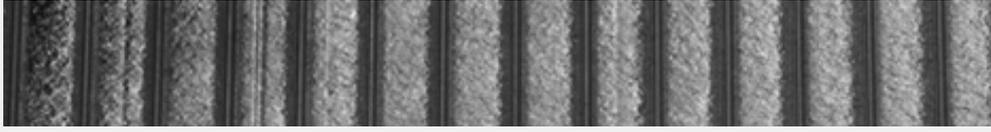


Entrechat, 2012,
animated GIF,
three-second
loop. Courtesy:
Loève Venbrück,
Paris

But, according to the artists, 'the opposite is also true'. Their subject matter comprises humans, animals and everyday objects, with their replication of the latter essentially reversing the logic of the readymade. Footwear is a favourite motif: they have worked a single branch of roughhewn wood into one of those hideous Velcro-strapped walking sandals and propped it up on a built-in pedestal (*Sandal*, 2011), crafted a more smoothly totemic riding boot attached to a cylindrical perch (*Boot*, 2011), also out of wood, and carved a luscious block of pink-veined marble into a tasselled loafer (*Untitled*, 2008). Each of the materials yields a distinct surface texture that somehow 'clicks' with the object represented.

Size and scale also matter to Dewar & Gicquel, who do not shy away from the monumental. Take *James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammet and Cliff Burton* (2008), an homage to the band Metallica carved out of huge hunks of marble stacked and grouped together on grass, from which portraits and broken features of radically different sizes emerge. A full, scowling face here and a teeny-tiny head there – the whole group is eerily reminiscent of the fragments of the ancient Roman *Colossus of Constantine* (4th century BCE). But their taste for the outsized is not limited to their work in stone or clay, it also reveals itself in handicrafts like *Mammoth and Poodle* (2010), a 9 × 4.5 metre fringed, pseudo-Peruvian woven wall hanging.

Advertisement



<<http://concrete.ae>>



'Jus d'Orange'
(Orange Juice),
2013, exhibition
view at Palais de
Tokyo, Paris.
Courtesy: Palais
de Tokyo, Paris;
photograph:
André Morin

Dewar & Gicquel's use of traditional techniques and their fidelity to figurative representation are decidedly non-academic, in that they are not trying to demonstrate any sort of sculptural virtuosity by accurately portraying their subjects or flaunting their technical finesse. That said, with their combined expertise they cannot seriously pretend to be amateurs. Their commitment to trial and error and experimentation are rigorously girded by an awareness of sculpture's historical trajectory and its legacies. Recent exhibitions at Spike Island in Bristol ('Crêpe Suzette', 2012) and the Palais de Tokyo in Paris ('Jus d'Orange' [Orange Juice], 2013) – which explored the relationship between sculpture, photography and the moving image – highlighted this more conceptual aspect of their work. Inspired in part by the role photography has played in the history of sculpture, specifically with Earthworks in the US and the UK, Dewar & Gicquel assembled carved woodworks, ceramics and projected gifs that animated their sculptures in progress. The GIFS represent simple forms, like *Bump* (2012), which, as its title suggests, grows out and up from the earth, and more complex

creations, like *Ram* (2012), in which the whole body of a ram devolves into a large disc formed out of spiral chains of rams' heads. These films are mesmerizingly shot from a single perspective and their lo-fi, jerky repetitiveness appears even more anachronistic when projected crisply and largely in the gallery.

In these latter works, Dewar & Gicquel problematize a distinction Thierry de Duve has made between *métier* and medium, whereby engaging with sculpture as a *métier* means 'doing sculpture' and engaging with sculpture as a medium means 'questioning' its conventions. Dewar & Gicquel do both. They simultaneously rely on the artisanal modes one associates with a *métier* – stone and wood-carving, modelling with clay, weaving and working with ceramics – and display a strong conceptual awareness of the medium, in other words, of what is specific to sculpture, its traditions and its history. And because of this, the work they make and the discourse it generates plugs into and gratefully enlivens a much broader critical and historical dialogue about what sculpture is and can be.

Based in Bordeaux and Paris, France, Dewar & Gicquel have been working collaboratively since 1998. Recent exhibitions include 'Crêpe Suzette' at Spike Island, Bristol, UK, in 2012, and 'Jus d'Orange' (Orange Juice) at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in 2013. This autumn, a collection of their work will be shown at the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

VIVIAN SKY REHBERG

Vivian Sky Rehberg is a contributing editor of *frieze* and course director of the Master of Fine Art at the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. She lives in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.
