



Jean-Charles de Quillacq, *Mon produit (My Product)*, 2020, polyester resin, clothes, natural hair, gloves, polyethylene. Installation view. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

## Jean-Charles de Quillacq

MARCELLE ALIX

Having opened just days after Paris ended its strict two-month coronavirus lockdown, Jean-Charles de Quillacq's exhibition "*Autofonction*" (Auto-function) inevitably adopted a pandemic-related subtext. A last-minute addition to the show, *Momie* (Mummy), 2020—a braided loaf of bread, baked by the artist and posed on the gallery floor—was a direct response to the global health crisis, nodding to the uptick in home baking during confinement. It was a reminder of socially distant behavior, which is one way to describe the artist's studio practice. For de Quillacq, artmaking is an erotic experience that leads to intimate relationships with each finished work. Tender and kinky, his engagement with inanimate objects took on new urgency (and perhaps a wider appeal) amid an ongoing health crisis that has made human proximity unsafe, unexpectedly capturing the zeitgeist of our suddenly estranged society.

De Quillacq's sexualized studio practice begins with his selection and handling of raw materials. Working with toxic substances such as resin and epoxy—into which he sometimes mixes his own bodily fluids—the artist kneads, stretches, and molds soft pliable matter into humanoid and abstract forms. To protect himself from noxious chemicals, he wears gloves and a mask—his use of PPE evoking the measures taken by all of us today as we confront our fear of exposure. But for de Quillacq there's another aspect: The mask, he says, causes him to experience autoerotic asphyxiation. He finds the dangerous nature of his materials to be part of their allure and, furthermore, essential to the reciprocal relationships he forges with them. Both parties have the power to infect and affect.

Dried and hardened into their final form, de Quillacq's finished sculptures remain highly sensual. To create *Phile*, 2020, and *Phile 2*, 2019, whose titles might hint at the idea of paraphilia, the artist coated two leather belts with epoxy mixed with urine and

(in the more recent of the two works) sweat. Potential tools of autoerotic asphyxiation, the belts are also overtly phallic. As if aroused by the artist smoothing their undersides with epoxy, the leather straps hung slightly away from the wall—stiff, long, and erect. *Phile* is enclosed in a long, transparent plastic sheath as a reminder that protection is worn by all active parties.

In addition to infusing sculptures with his own excretions, de Quillacq inserts his actual body into his still-soft materials to make casts. Oftentimes he uses his own clothes to dress his sculptures, as is the case in *Mon produit* (My Product), 2020, a full-body polyester resin cast wearing a denim jacket, sweatpants, and socks, or in *Jeans*, 2020, a pair of the artist's denims filled with a cast of their own interior to represent his legs, but with a pair of sneakers nestled inside the waistband. If the fact that the artist presents his self-representations as sex objects seems masturbatory, de Quillacq sees this as a way to become closer to his creations and vice versa. The best examples of this artist-artwork merge were two pieces titled *Présentation du travail* (Presentation of the Work). One, dated 2020 and displayed near the entrance to the gallery, was a resin cast of the artist's nude lower torso balanced precariously on a white melamine table. Positioned faceup, this sculpture inverted a pose that de Quillacq held during periodic basement performances of *Présentation du travail*, 2019, for which he balanced prone atop two chairs massaged with yogurt body cream. This test of endurance, whereby de Quillacq himself became as silent and still as the sculpture upstairs, convincingly illustrated the intense physical and emotional bond between the artist and his creations.

— Mara Hoberman

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