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Unmasked- Richard Dupont



Richard Dupont's hanging masks are an unexpected display of oozing rubber faces, drooping off of the wall. They evince an overburdened coat, hung behind a door and slumped over time. Rather than a piece of clothing, Dupont (American, b. 1968) creates bleak self-portraits. A sculptural face is enervated because its material – silicone rubber – follows its will.

Unlike an inflexible death mask, Dupont's work gives permission to the material to create form; the artist cannot fully predict the image's ultimate outcome. "Certain materials cannot be fully controlled, and have their own formal logic," the artist wrote in a recent email. "This is true of rubber. All the distortions of these pieces are determined by the way in which the rubber hangs or sags. The overlap of a narrative form, such as a life mask, with this more arbitrary process and material, creates unexpected expressions." The masks have the flexibility of a rubber glove and the coloration of grisaille painting.



Going Around by Passing Through (8), 2012-13
Silicone rubber
approx. 72 x 20 x 16 inches (152.4 x 50.8 x 40.64 cm)
1 from a series of 9 unique variants

They are grey, charcoal, and black. But there is also a surprising, hopeful character in these works: they evoke a natural cycle where an outer layer, or skin, is sloughed off. That layer retains Dupont's facial form even as he pulls an ear up to the forehead level, or pushes an eye to the side – a nod to the planar compositions of a Cubist visage. Dupont, though, doesn't cite Cubism as a direct influence for these works.

TRACY WILLIAMS

“These new silicone rubber pieces are related to the Body Art and Process Art of the 1960s and 1970s in that the artwork is a visualization of the behavior of the material,” he said. For artists like Lynda Benglis (American, b. 1941) or Eva Hesse (German, 1936 – 1970), the process of creating a work of art dictated its final outcome. Similarly, Dupont



follows the lead of the material. To create these objects, he brushes a layer of rubber over a large form and peels that layer off of the head. The rubber is revealed in one piece, “like an enormous mask,” the artist explained.

Going Around by Passing Through (5), 2012-13
Silicone rubber
approx. 60 x 20 x 16 inches (152.4 x 50.8 x 40.64 cm)
1 from a series of 9 unique variants

Dupont has regularly focused on sculptures of his complete body, as well as selected areas of the figure. He always uses his own form as his subject matter. Self-portraiture has a storied tradition in art history, but these works depart from an idealization of the self because the figure is disfigured. If Cindy Sherman (American, b. 1954) wears a disguise to mask her likeness in her photographs, Dupont is out front with his identity, although its pliability is the essence of his new work.

“My work is framed by a more recent period historically,” he said. “It is about the loss of identity, the loss of privacy, the stripping away of the self.” In Dupont’s current sculpture, that self pushes away from self-portraiture as the work becomes a metaphor for the anguish of the human condition.



Going Around by Passing Through (1), 2012-13
Silicone rubber
approx. 60 x 20 x 16 inches (152.4 x 50.8 x 40.64 cm)
1 from a series of 9 unique variants

Richard Dupont’s sculpture will be on view at the Museum of Arts and Design in “Out of Hand: Materializing the Postdigital” opening in New York on October 14, 2013.

by Brooke Kamin Rapaport