

# DANIEL DEWAR &

Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel, 'The Wet Wing,' Z33, Hasselt, through 24 August 2025, z33.be

An exhibition opens at the ING Marnix Gallery, Troonstraat 1, 1000 Brussels on 25 September 2025

Review by  
Sue Spaid

# GRÉGORY GICQUEL AT Z33

One model proposed for the visual art exhibition is the theatrical play. It is a stage setting minus performers, since we spectators are the actors who enact each scene, with the artworks serving as our 'props'. Rather than reducing artworks *entirely* to props, however, this model assigns the spectator the role of script writer who imaginatively engages the set, each viewer coming away with their own plot. Following the Greeks, Hannah Arendt drew attention to the spectator's significance, since only the spectator witnesses the whole play, much like the philosopher who experiences the *kosmos* as an 'ordered whole'.

'The Wet Wing', the current exhibition by the duo Daniel Dewar (1976) & Grégory Gicquel (1975), who have exhibited together since art school, offers an opportunity to test out this theoretical model. As if to invite the spectator for a swim, the first sculpture we encounter is *Flipper* (2022), an oversized, full-foot snorkelling fin emerging from its pink marble slab. With only a single flipper to propel us, we dive head first into their immersive exhibition (lacking a ready script is akin to snorkelling with a single fin.)

'The Wet Wing' is indeed a stage setting, replete with a massive back cloth featuring subaquatic imagery that extends from the space facing the staircase through five galleries of Z33's original building. Comprising dozens of vertical panels painted on silk, this stage set features six giant fish frolicking in their natural habitats and thus recalls the catfish painting presented in Dewar & Gicquel's breakout Prix Marcel Duchamp 2012 exhibition, where they last exhibited silk paintings. To create their first silk painting, they transferred a preparatory drawing made for a mural they had proposed for the Amsterdam Metro — hence its massive scale. The colourful scene depicted in the preparatory drawing didn't end up in the Rokin Metro Station, one stop away from Amsterdam Centraal. Dewar & Gicquel's two 120-metre long 'Rokin panels' rather display scores of contemporary tools, animals and clothes carved from stone and are placed alongside adjacent vitrines featuring 9,500 historic objects (out of 700,000) unearthed by construction workers while digging the subterranean tunnel under the heart of Amsterdam's Old Centre.

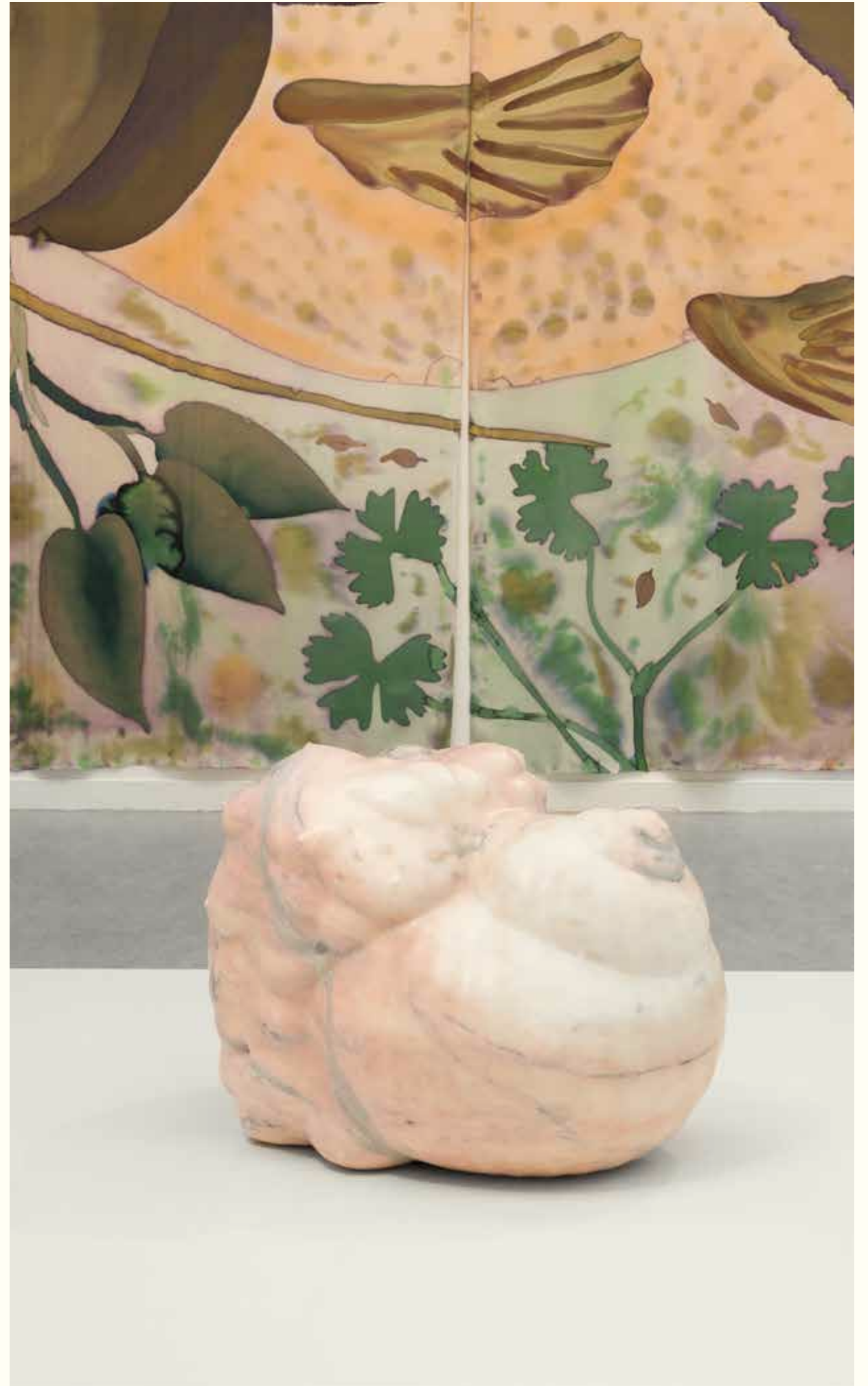
Clay is an integral aspect of Dewar & Gicquel's artistic process, as they typically sculpt objects in clay before produc-

ing them in wood, concrete, stone or metal. Recently, they built a wood-fired kiln and started producing stoneware ceramic objects (fired between 1,260 and 1,325°C), a feat inspired by Dewar's father, who is a potter. For 'The Wet Wing', whose title recalls the TV drama *The West Wing*, the artists took stoneware's glossy, wet-looking surface as their starting point.

To illuminate their line of thought, Dewar & Gicquel have positioned six thigh-high empty barrels, each titled *Stoneware Jar with Body Fragments and Snails* (2022–2024), in a straight line traversing three galleries. Lined up from shortest to tallest, each object is embellished with a mélange of belly buttons and human breasts interspersed with snails, making their exteriors remarkably bumpy despite their smooth finish. The 'look but don't touch imperative' arising from the museum context only heightens the spectator's desire to caress these erogenous vessels, whose scale resembles kimchi jars. Giving into one's impulses would surely change the narrative of this staged set.

Snails imply slimy mucus trails, much like breasts insinuate milk. Snails and breasts are a recurring theme in this show. Two hand-carved pink objects entitled *Marble Sculpture with Snails and Body Fragments* (both 2025) occupy the final gallery, alongside this exhibition's largest silk painting, which captures a colossal catfish swimming among wetland plants. Renowned for being faithful to materials and for their commitment to the process of making detailed objects themselves, Dewar & Gicquel obviously find pleasure in disrupting spectators' expectations regarding the properties of ordinary things. To that end, stoneware is bulbous, marble cuts are delicate, and silk paintings feel overbearing, causing something akin to the 'fishbowl effect.'

In light of this exhibition's focus on wetness, it is hardly surprising that Dewar & Gicquel returned to their earliest silk painting, whose subaquatic theme, fluid marks and watery imagery exude wetness. Their choice of catfish and the mirror carp, both freshwater bottom feeders that thrive in the mud, also connects back to clay. Known for its shiny, round, mirror-like scales that only partially cover its body, the mirror carp is yet another surprising thing with unexpected properties. In the middle gallery, spectators are enfolded between mirrored images of mirror carp.



Wetness conveys flow, in this case the laminar flow of a tranquil stream wending its way through several galleries. Here one feels as though one is swimming with the fish in their natural habitats. Such varying painting titles as *Silk Painting with Mirror Carp, Water Lilies and Duckweed* (2025), *Silk Painting with Mirror Carp, Common Water-Crowfoot, Pondweed and Duckweed* (2025), *Silk Painting with Two Mirror Carp, Pondweed, Common Water-Crowfoot, Water Knotweed and Duckweed* (2025) and *Silk Painting with Catfish, Common Water-Crowfoot, Pond-*

*weed, Duck Potato and Water Lilies* not only list relevant plant species but also distinguish each fish's habitat. For example, catfish prefer duck potato over duckweed.

Two 'fish-free' silk paintings capture the powerful presence of plants. Here, too, we are tossed into new habitats, however virtual, that invite us to engage wetland plants whose magnanimity and beauty escape those of us who neither fish nor keep ponds. I imagine each of us having different relationships with these plants. Thanks to Claude Monet, who was a master

Installation view, DANIEL DEWAR & GRÉGORY GICQUEL, 'The Wet Wing,' 2025, Z33, Hasselt, photo Lola Pertsowsky



gardener and pond builder, most art lovers know and adore water lilies. However, most of us will probably have to do additional research to grasp the significance of the other plant species depicted here. For example, water crowfoot plants are toxic if ingested, except for snails and some birds, yet they provide physical shelter for young fish, resulting in higher population yields. By contrast, pondweed provides herbivorous fish food while oxygenating waterways. Duckweed cleans water as it absorbs excess nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphates.

As it turns out, duckweed was actually on my mind the afternoon I visited 'The Wet Wing', so I was pleasantly surprised to find it highlighted there. I had just come from the Japanese Garden of Hasselt, whose peaceful stream was suffering in the vicinity of waterfowl being fed by visitors. As I stared into the murky water pooling on the surface of the stream, I wondered why the caretakers of Europe's largest Japanese garden hadn't introduced duckweed to curtail the surplus phosphorous likely caused by geese inhabiting the garden. Luckily, koi, geese and ducks all eat

duckweed, which could prevent it from multiplying out of control should the gardeners ever decide to add *Lemna Japonica* to restore balance to the stream's ecosystem.

Ultimately, I take issue with Z33's claim that this exhibition is 'site-specific', as opposed to 'site-relational'. For sure, each artwork perfectly fits the scale of each gallery, but I could also imagine these paintings and sculptures inhabiting other sites, whether hotel lobbies, corporate offices, private collections or other museums. To my lights, the main thing that makes this ex-

hibition potentially 'site-specific' is its proximity to the Japanese Garden, some 1.4 km away. There, one can witness in person many of the features 'The Wet Wing' brings to light, such as the kinship between fish, plants and water; the notion of a continuously moving stream that starts out wild but calms down as it pulses down river; the importance of plant diversity; the livelihood of fish, though this exhibition addresses local, not foreign species; and the fusion of human bodies with nature, as represented in the exhibition by Dewar & Gicquel's snail/breast amalgamations.

Installation view, Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel, 'The Wet Wing,' 2025, Z33, Hasselt, photo Lola Pertsowsky