

No Martins

JACK BELL GALLERY

In the mid-twentieth century, Brazil's multishaded racial democracy may have looked good compared to Jim Crow policies in the United States, but lately, bolstered by the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, the "tropical Trump," racism in Brazil has violently worsened. In a country where about half the population is nonwhite, three-quarters of the victims of police killings are black.

This was the grim context for the exhibition "Social Signs," displaying four of Brazilian artist No Martins's large, brightly colored figurative paintings. His black-skinned subjects include a defiant-looking mother standing protectively over her two children in *Dia do descobrimento* (Day of Discovery), 2019, evidently in no mood to celebrate Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral's "discovery" of her country. *Após ler as notícias* (After Reading the News), 2020, presents a seated older man in a vivid red sports shirt wearing an inscrutable, unsmiling expression as he lays aside the day's newspaper. In *Estratagema* (Strategem), 2020, identical twins (or clones?) ponder the impossible opening move of a chess game whose pieces are uniformly white. The exhibition's largest work, *Campo minado* (self-portrait) (Mine Field [Self-Portrait]), 2019, showed the standing artist from the back, his hands up against the wall—placing the implicated gallery viewer in the empowered position of a police officer. The artist's prone body is surrounded by a scattered assortment of signs and symbols, including an off-balance scales of justice and a no-entry sign with the artist's own dreadlocked, walking silhouette—in lieu of a generic striding stick figure—inscribed behind the thick red diagonal line.

Paulino's, rejuvenates the ongoing critical tradition of collage: a strategy that art historian Kobena Mercer has identified as one favored by Afro-modernists as a means to represent lives "collaged into history by contradictory forces." The artist makes clear that the collage of familiar street fixtures (a CCTV camera, striped yellow-and-black police tape) inserted into *Campo minado* (self-portrait) hardly appear innocuous to a young person of color like himself, but act as warnings addressed directly to him: the unwanted individual literally pictured in the no-entry sign.

In Kerry James Marshall's historical paintings, as Mercer has written, collage is combined with another avant-garde modernist aesthetic strategy: painterly abstraction. Martins also employs abstraction's flattened space, combining it with collage to great effect, in this case to foreground his subjects' strength and endurance. A flat blue-green street scene contrasts starkly with the red-shirted gentleman in *Após ler as notícias*; similarly, the twins' bold attire in *Estratagema*—raspberry-pink caps, white T-shirts, marine-blue pants, high-visibility orange sneakers—stands out against a featureless interior painted dull gray, ocher, and dusty salmon pink. Despite the onslaught of minatory messages—whether pasted on the walls or headlining the newspapers—Martins's larger-than-life figures resolutely refuse to be pushed out of the frame or fade quietly into the background.

—Gilda Williams

PARIS

Alia Farid

GALERIE IMANE FARÈS

For her second exhibition at Galerie Imane Farès, Alia Farid applied tinted vinyl to the gallery's glass-front facade to cast its interior in pink light. The rosy atmosphere, like that of an equatorial crepuscule—and in sharp contrast to the gray Rive Gauche streetscape outside—surrounded her video installation *Maske Paske Wi*, 2020. The title is Haitian Creole for "Perform Because Why Not." Originally commissioned for Rotterdam's Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, the film was shot in Port-au-Prince this past winter, where Farid worked with local residents to realize and record the eponymous dance and costume competition. Antigovernment protests, economic instability, and violence were widespread throughout the country at the time, and the event was imagined as way to address a need for safe, shared spaces. Entry was free, and the top prize was one hundred dollars.

On one of the screens of the two-channel projection, Farid showed slow-motion footage of three men moving through the city's arteries on the back of a small motorcycle. The visual narrative on the second screen begins with the same trio, seen photocopying flyers and posting them across the city with liquid glue. At dusk, Farid captures the contest's prizewinning performances at Plas Jeremi, a shady outdoor space bordered with concrete risers. Two children in Air Jordans follow the beat of a dance track, nimbly showing off their mastery of current dance moves such as the Reverse Nae Nae and the Roy Purdy. They are followed by a young woman, in a traditional cotton dress, who lifts her melodic soprano to invoke Erzulie, the vodou patroness. The final performer is one of the men from the back of the black motorbike, a suit jacket now over his tight white shirt. In a physical-comedy routine, he holds wide-eyed expressions he practiced while speeding through traffic. Farid gains an enviable intimacy with her subjects, who allow her to focus her camera on details of movement and dress for extended, unflinching shots. The passion and trust of her performers are evident. Her gaze is penetrating. And in contrast to the LED-powered flat



No Martins,
Campo minado
(self-portrait) (Mine
Field [Self-Portrait]),
2019, acrylic on
canvas, 7'2½" ×
14'1¼".

Campo minado, the artist has said, reflects the sense of displacement he feels living in São Paulo, the most populated city in all of South America. In fact, Martins often constructs paintings with figures slightly out of place, on the edge, or decentered. The mother and her children in *Dia do descobrimento* cluster to the left, their feet barely fitting into the picture. The *Estratagema* chess players' wheeled office chairs seem to be rolling gradually off the bottom edge, while the newspaper reader of *Após ler as notícias* sits to the side of the frame, his shirtsleeve partially off-canvas. Martins is influenced by artists such as Rosana Paulino, who in her work draws together textiles, found images, words, and objects to examine the damaging histories behind her experiences as a black Brazilian woman. Although Martins's symbolism can feel at times heavy-handed (the all-white chess set, the traffic light solely equipped with three red signals in *Dia do descobrimento*), his art, like



Alia Farid, *At the Time of the Ebb*, 2019, 4K video, color, sound, 15 minutes 43 seconds.

screens that have been the primary access points for movies and artists' films these past few months, the installation of Farid's film, which involved a projection, allowed for an immersive experience appropriate to the work.

Filmed on Qeshm, an Iranian island that edges the Strait of Hormuz, *At the Time of the Ebb*, 2019, observes Nowruz Sayadeen, a local celebration of Fisherman's New Year. The video opens in a white-and-rose-plastered room with a close gathering of seated figures, all veiled, some draped entirely in swaths of white-fringed fabric, rocking rhythmically to the sound of chanting and drums. Soon, the piece cuts to a vignette that serves as the film's central scene: On a Qeshm beach at sunset, waves crash in the background as figures in towering palm leaf hats conjure the magic of theater. A cast of characters, some in white face paint and ceremonial dress, others costumed as animals, move quickly toward and then gracefully around one another before colliding in a whirl. A child appears in a plastic tiger mask; two adult figures wear a horse costume made partly from a carpet; another pair form a burlap-skinned camel. The film closes with a return to the candy-pink-and-white interior. Pieces of foil shaped into butterflies have been fastened to the wall. In a cropped shot, a young man performs a solo dance in jeans and a T-shirt. His face glistens with sweat as he gracefully moves his torso, his mouth shaping the words of a love song playing in Farsi. English subtitles run at the bottom of the screen: I KNOCKED AT THE DOOR OF MY LOVER'S HOUSE, SHE OPENED IT, AND THEN STOOD TO ONE SIDE. As in much of her work, Farid brings us very close to a figure once very far. She orchestrates a careful crossing of the thresholds of tradition, history, and love.

—Lillian Davies

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. Often-times 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

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

