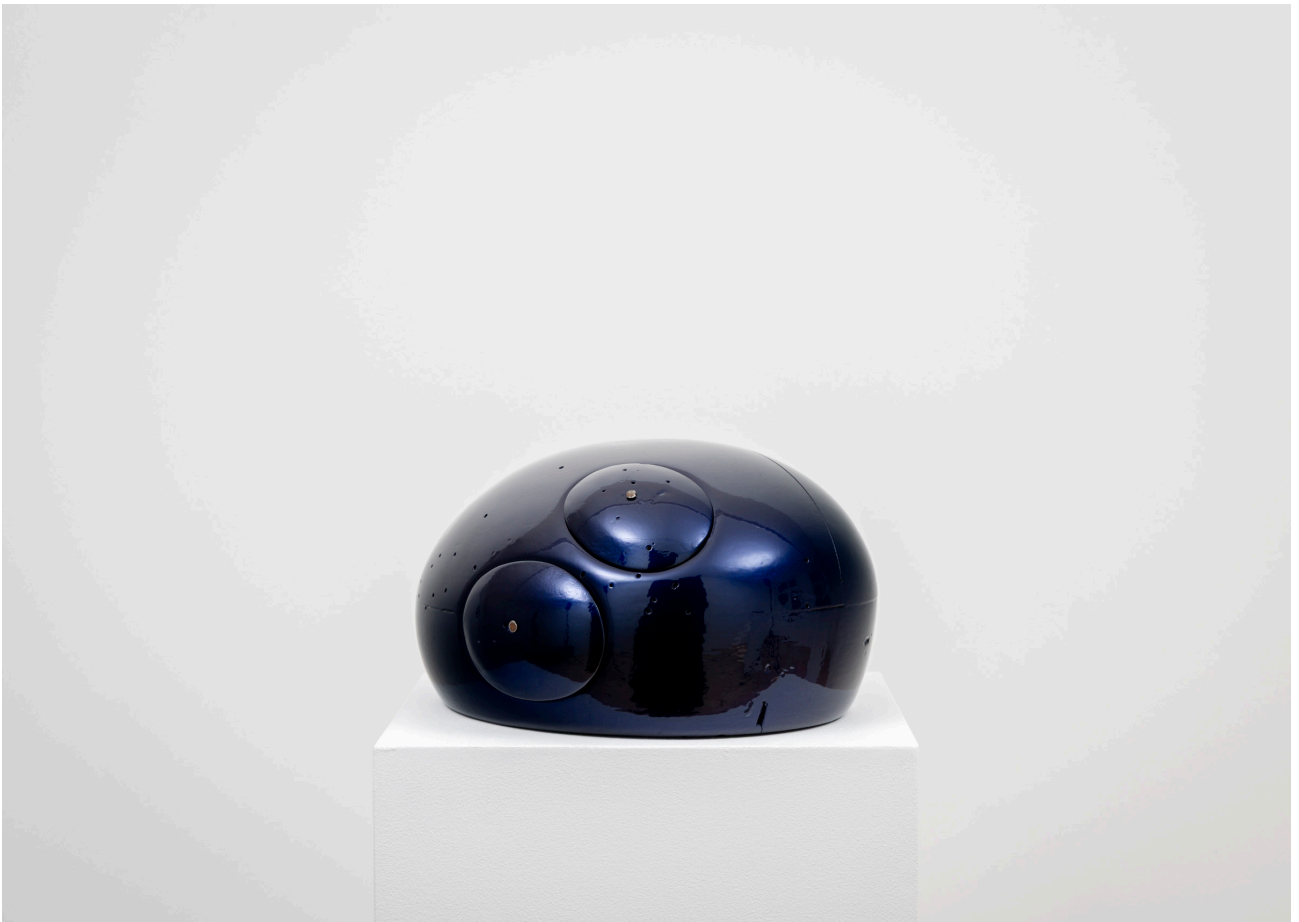


Lagune Ouest

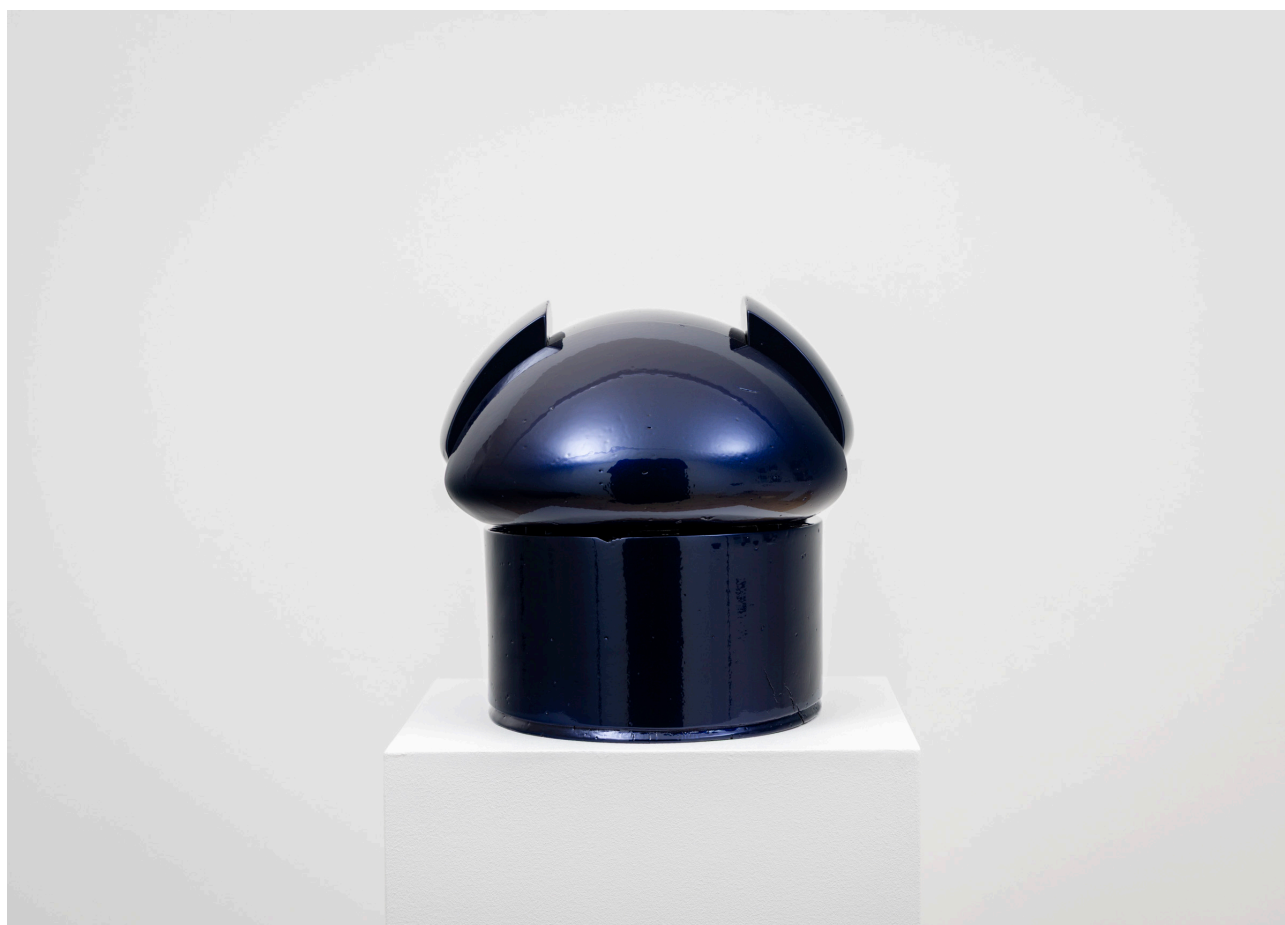
Mille Qvist
Automatons Republic
August 14 - September 19, 2026



Bench. 2026. MDF, latex. 46 x 143 x 73 cm



Automaton. 2026. Auto-coated wood. 12,5 x 23,5 x 20 cm



Automaton. 2026. Auto-coated wood. 20 x 19 x 22,5 cm



Automaton. 2026. Auto-coated wood. 19 x 45 x 44 cm



Automaton. 2026. Auto-coated wood. 12,5 x 29 x 29 cm

All photos by: Malle Madsen

Can, cannot, may, may not. Upon closer inspection, the four midnight-blue sculptures on vertical plinths reveal themselves to be slightly modified oak hat-blocks; antiquated tools over which milliners once stretched damp, compliant felt or leather, leaving the material to dry and stiffen into form. Despite this intimate, expanding-relational connection between form and material, it is the sculptures' slick surfaces—borrowed from the fetishized perfection of the automobile and the narrative potential of science fiction props—that transform these tools into uncanny automata whose interiors have been gently dissected. We find ourselves within *Automaton Republic*, charting a course across a star map of references: from George Grosz's satirical 1920 portraits of faceless citizens with mechanized interiors, to Siegfried Kracauer's diagnosis of *Die Angestellten*—the hollowed-out salaried employee trapped in over-qualification and institutional control masquerading as human care—and over to the more hopeful, functionalist realm where constructivist sculpture operates in tandem with Walter Benjamin's concept of positive barbarism. Dragged through a century of cybernetics and atomic anxiety, this figure of mechanized humanism points today toward Franco "Bifo" Berardi's analysis of cognitive automation in a techno-linguistic society. Here, machines gain ground in administration and warfare, yet planetary chaos remains unmanaged by any intelligent design; rather, it is an unpredictable, thoroughly human dementia, a psychic chaos, that rules the daily breakdown of modern life.

Along the gallery's horizontal axis lies a modular work consisting of two black MDF plateaus and an empty latex pillowcase. These elements can be moved and arranged; their impure utility continuously alters the character of the plateau from sculpture to bed, sofa, or stage, depending on where the body falls. The installation of these automata and furnishings reads as a wonky portrait of an interior, filtered through an almost black-and-white, necessarily self-reflective retro light that shifts its center of gravity depending on perspective. This is a strategy that mobilizes utility via the textural contradictions between latex and soft form, where the perverted sides of domestic comfort and the playful fetish-threat of confinement melt into one. The shifting roles of 'design' in these sculptures can be linked to what art historian E.C. Feiss has proposed as an "art theory of reform" in a recent

issue of *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* on contemporary Marxist aesthetics. Feiss proposes an artistic practice of reform which introduces a distinct form of split artistic subjectivity that simultaneously undertakes and references the reproductive labor which undergirds art and is its condition of appearance. This strategy is distinct from performance or social practice precisely in its maintenance of the constitutive separation between the art object and devalorized (reproductive) reform work. In this interior, the hat-blocks carry a submissive, modeling history of manual labor within them, while the bed-plateau, obstructing the space like a barricade or a piece of security architecture, extends a different inquiry into the room about any body vis-à-vis design.

Consequently, this friction between the autonomy of the sculpture and the relational demands of the design object becomes the active material driving the logic of the exhibition. This engagement with design as an artistic strategy asks what maneuvers of differentiation remain viable today, and why the boundary between these two statuses must repeatedly resurface as a problem. Historically, this tension marks a calculated escape toward the periphery of art—acting as an immanent alternative, a negative foil, or a psychic straitjacket turned inside out against, as found within a matrix from art brut to subversive punk strategies before and after 1989. The structural modification of the hat-blocks addresses something like this: a desire to open the object, to dissect it, and to create cross-sections with the help of a curiosity that sidesteps consuming or penetrating. The high-gloss objects thus align themselves with the tradition of kinetic sculpture within Global Constructivism, as movable structures retaining a stubborn, everyday durability: they can, so to speak, be washed at 40 degrees. It is perhaps within this incomplete negation that a space for agency reappears, even when such a practice always risks the accusation of being merely "reformist" because it rejects pure, empty negation. Ultimately, the critical potential to break free from the Automaton lies precisely within this resurfaced crisis—negotiating the shifting differentiation between art and design as a reformative, threshold-based maneuver, derailing and expanding the rules of imagination and legibility.

— Line Ebert