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ELSA SAHAL



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Elsa Sahal (b. 1975, Paris) is a Paris-based sculptor known for her ceramic works evoking organic forms that disrupt the representation of gender and sexuality through the enigma of morphology. Elsa Sahal sustainably works with blocks of clay, by making use of the permeability, bleakness and transformability of the material. Her ceramic sculptures translate the sensuality of the elements that they are made of: clay, humidity, the imprint of the modeling body, the colors and textures applied to them. They are fired and revived with the use of enamels at the end of the production process.

Her assemblages of fragmentary mono or polychrome, glossy or matte shapes constitute a joyful grammar by evoking the feeling of the body. Her sculptures act within the field of female corporeality in its most intimate dimensions, with a view to challenging the objectification perpetuated on women's bodies as objects of desire and fertility. It is through irony that Elsa Sahal questions the injunction addressed to women to become and remain available sexual and maternal bodies.

A graduate of the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts (National Institute of Fine Arts) in Paris in 2000, she has been the recipient of numerous awards and residencies, including the Georges Coulon Prize for sculpture, awarded by the Institut de France (2013) and the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres (2007-08). She has taught at the ENSAV National School of Architecture in Versailles, the École des arts décoratifs (Institute of Decorative Arts) in Strasbourg and Alfred University New York State College of Ceramic.

Elsa Sahal has also had numerous exhibitions both nationally and internationally, including at the Museum of Art and Design, New York (2013), the National Museum of Women in the arts, Washington DC (2018), the Bonnefantenmuseum (2016), Maastricht and the Monnaie de Paris (2017). These works are now part of the public collections of the Cnap (2009, 2020), the FMAC (2017) and the Frac Normandie Caen (2021).

ELSA SAHAL

1975, Paris. Lives and works in Paris.

Education

- 2000 École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris, FR
2010 MA, École Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle, Paris, FR

Solo Exhibitions

- 2021 Female Factory, Setareh, Berlin, DE
Hommage à Jambes Arp, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
Vénus Jouissante Polymathe, MO.CO Panacee, Montpellier, FR
X (with Jesse Mockrin), Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, NY, USA
2020 Hey, Halil Bey! THE PILL, Istanbul, TR
These boots are made for walking, Centre d'art La Chapelle Jeanne d'Arc, Thouars, FR
2019 Elsa Sahal. Harlequins and Bathers, Nathalie Karg Gallery, NY, USA
Equinoxes 2, Boutique Camille Fournet, Paris, FR
2018 Des origines à nos jours, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
2017 Soft is the new strong, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR
2016 Self-portrait as a frog wearing a trikini, Moments Artistiques, Paris, FR
Femminus Ceramicus, Le Carré, Scène Nationale d'Art Contemporain, Château-Gontier, FR
2015 Pole Dance, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
2014 Festival International d'Art de Toulouse, Hôtel-Dieu, Toulouse, FR
2012 Elsa Sahal, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
Fontaine, Installation FIAC Hors-les-murs, Jardin des Tuileries, Paris, FR
2011 Galerie de l'Hôtel de Ville, Chinon, FR
Collège des Bernardins, Paris, FR
2009 Elsa Sahal, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
2008 Sculptures, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris, FR
2007 Galerie municipale du Rutebeuf, Clichy-la-Garenne, FR
2005 L'Idieu, Galerie du Collège Marcel Duchamp, Châteauroux, FR
Iles, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
2002 Sculptures, Galerie Papillon-Fiat, Paris, FR
Dessins et Sculptures, Musée Nationale de la porcelaine Adrien Dubouché, l'ENAD, Limoges, FR

Group Exhibitions

- 2022 Against Nature, MO.CO Panacée, Montpellier, FR

- Toucher Terre, l'Art de la sculpture céramique, Fondation Villa Datriis, FR
Mauvais Genres, Le Parvis, Tarbes, FR
Elective affinities, SETAREH, Düsseldorf, DE
Mama, Prior Art Space, Berlin, DE
AS IF IT COULDN'T - 6th Year Anniversary Group Show, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR
2021 Les flammes. L'âge de la céramique, Musée d'art moderne, Paris, FR
2020 Re-Cloune, Le Safran, Amiens, FR
Les Extatiques, La Seine Musicale, Boulogne-Billancourt, FR
Picasso. Baigneuses et baigneurs, Musée des Beaux Arts de Lyon, Lyon, FR
Street trash: l'effet spécial de la sculpture / sculpture as special effect, Friche La Belle de mai, Marseille, FR
2019 Beyond the Vessel: Myths, Legends, and Fables in Contemporary Ceramics around Europe, Meşher, Istanbul, FR
Topor n'est pas mort, Galerie Anne Barrault, Paris, FR
Some of Us, Kunstwerk Carlshütte, Büdelsdorf, DE
Clayborn, Galerie Lefebvre & Fils, Paris, FR
2018 Women house, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C, USA
2017 Women house, Monnaie de Paris, FR
Point quartz, Flower of Kent, Villa Arson, Nice, FR
Les retrouvailles, Musée des Beaux arts de Brest, FR
Surreal House, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR
2016 Athanor- Petite suite alchimique #1 CRAC, Sète, FR
Core Sample, Alfred Ceramic Art Museum, New York, USA
Ceramix, La Maison Rouge, Paris, FR
198920072016, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
2015 Ceramix, Bonnefontenmuseum, Maastricht, NL
Le Banquet - Révélations, Grand Palais, Paris, FR
The housebreaker (Le cambrioleur), Riga Art Space, Riga, LT
Still Life, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
Élévations, Palais idéal du Facteur cheval, Hauterives, FR
OTIUM : De Mineralis, pierres de vision, Institut d'art Contemporain, Villeurbanne Rhône-Alpes, FR
Genre idéal?, Parcours privé de la FIAC, Maison Guerlain, Paris, FR
2014 Terrae Incognitae, Galerie accro Terre, Paris, FR
La Loutre et la Poutre, Moly – Sabata, Les Sablons, FR

- 2013 Bodies Speaking Out: New International Ceramics, Museum of Art and design, New York, USA
The French Haunted House, Songeun Artspace, Seoul, KR
One Million Years, Jardin des Plantes, Paris, FR
- 2012 Perturbations, parcours céramique et verre contemporain, Musée Fabre, Montpellier, FR
Festival a-part, Les Baux-de-Provence, FR
- 2011 Dreamtime 3, HabiteR, Grotte du Mas-d'Azil / les Abattoirs, Toulouse, FR
Cabinet de curiosités, Maison Champs Élysées, Martin Margiela, Paris, FR
3ème Biennale de sculpture, Yerres, FR
- 2010 Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
Circuits Céramiques, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, FR
- 2009 La conquête de la modernité - Sèvres 1920-2008, Palazzo Cafarelli, Rome, Faenza, IT
Avoir 20 ans à voir, Galerie Papillon, FR
- 2008 Des certitudes, sans doute(s), une collection privée d'art contemporain, Musée de Picardie, École supérieure d' art et de design, Amiens, FR
Pink, Cyborg and Imperfect structure, International Women artists Biennale Incheon, KR
- 2007 Maniera, techniques et persuasion, Maison de la Culture de Nevers et de la Nièvre, FR
Premio Internazionale Giovane Scultura Fondazione Francesco Messina Prima, Milano, IT
Edizione, Materima Casalbeltrame, IT
Mutatis, Mutandis, collection Antoine de Galbert, La Maison Rouge, Fondation Antoine de Galbert, Paris, FR
Place des Arts, la Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres, Grimaldi Forum, Monaco, MC
- 2006 Fictions Céramiques, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, FR
Human Size, Taille Humaine, Orangerie et Jardins du Luxembourg, Paris, FR
Carton rouge, atelier Tampon – Ramier, Paris, FR
- 2005 Trans-Ceramic-Art, Biennale de Céramique, I-Chon, KR
Rouge Gorge, exposition de dessins d'humeurs, la Maison Folie Wazemmes, Lille, FR
A Tables, Domaine de Chamarande dans l'Essonne, FR
Biennale de la céramique, Châteauroux, FR
Le corps, l'atelier, le paysage, Nouvelle Biennale de Châteauroux, Châteauroux, FR
- 2004 Les mêmes et même quelques autres, Galerie Claudine Papillon, Paris, FR
- 2003 Fragile, les 20 ans des FRAC, Musée des Beaux Arts, Reims, FR
Lignes singulières, Centre d'art Le Triage, Nanterre, FR
- 2002 Juste pour voir, Musée National de la porcelaine Adrien Dubouché, Limoges, FR
- 2001 Dessin en cours..., ENSBA, Paris, FR
Oeuvres de tous poils, Galerie Papillon, Paris, FR
- 1999 Alter Ego, Délégation Européenne en Asie du Sud-Est, l'AFAA, Ambassade de France, Bangkok, TH
- Awards & Grants
- 2013 Georges Coulon Prize sculpture, awarded by the Institut de France upon proposal of the
Académie des Beaux-Arts
Prix Meurice Nomination
- 2008 MAIF Prize for sculpture
- 2007 Prize for contemporary sculpture, Fondation Francesco Messina, Casalbeltrame, IT
- Residencies
- 2018 Alfred University, New York State College of Ceramic, New York, USA
- 2013 Archie Bray Foundation, Montana, USA
- 2010 Alfred University, New York State College of Ceramic, New York, USA
- 2008 Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres, FR
- 2005 Collège Marcel Duchamp, École d'Art de Châteauroux, FR
- 2002 Manufacture La Reine à Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche, Limousin, FR
- 2001 Seoul National University, KR
Usine de céramique Alain Vagh, Salernes, FR
- Teaching Experience
- 2014 Professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Versailles, FR
- 2012 Professor at the École Supérieure d'Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg, FR
- 2010 Conference at Unesco within the framework of the symposium 'Territories in movement organized by the International Academy of Ceramics
- 2008 Conference at the Haute École d'Art et de Design, Genève, CH

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WORKS AND EXHIBITIONS









Elsa Sahal
Vénus polymathe jouissante, 2019
Enamelled ceramics



Elsa Sahal
Nichonesque 2, 2020
Ceramic
65 x 73 x 64 cm



Elsa Sahal
Arperie 2, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
80 x 56 x 35 cm











Elsa Sahal
Arperie 3, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
28 x 65 x 36 cm





Elsa Sahal
Clownesse solo 2, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
84 x 49x 33 cm



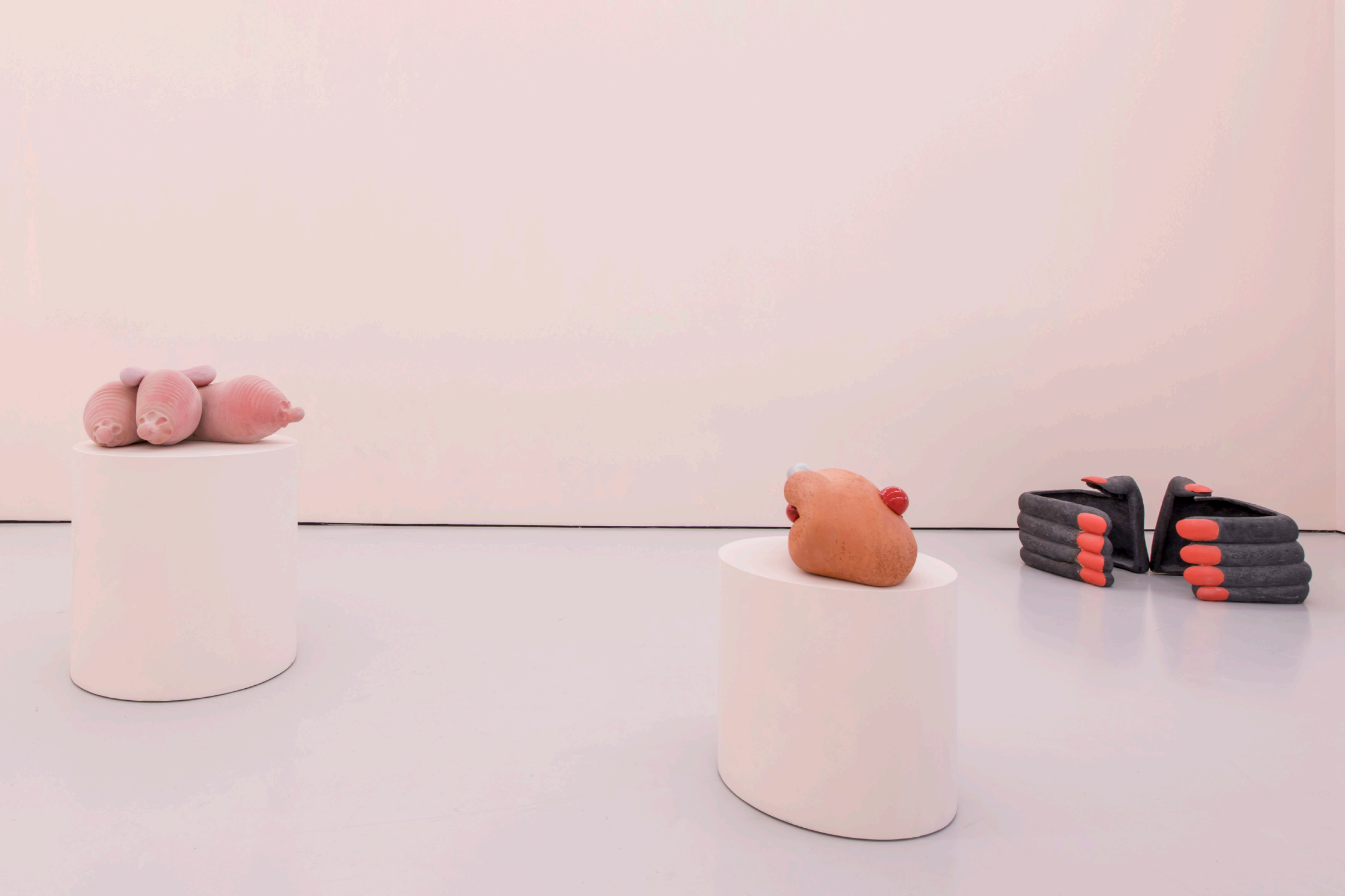
Elsa Sahal
Clownesses duo 2, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
63 x 44 x 36 cm





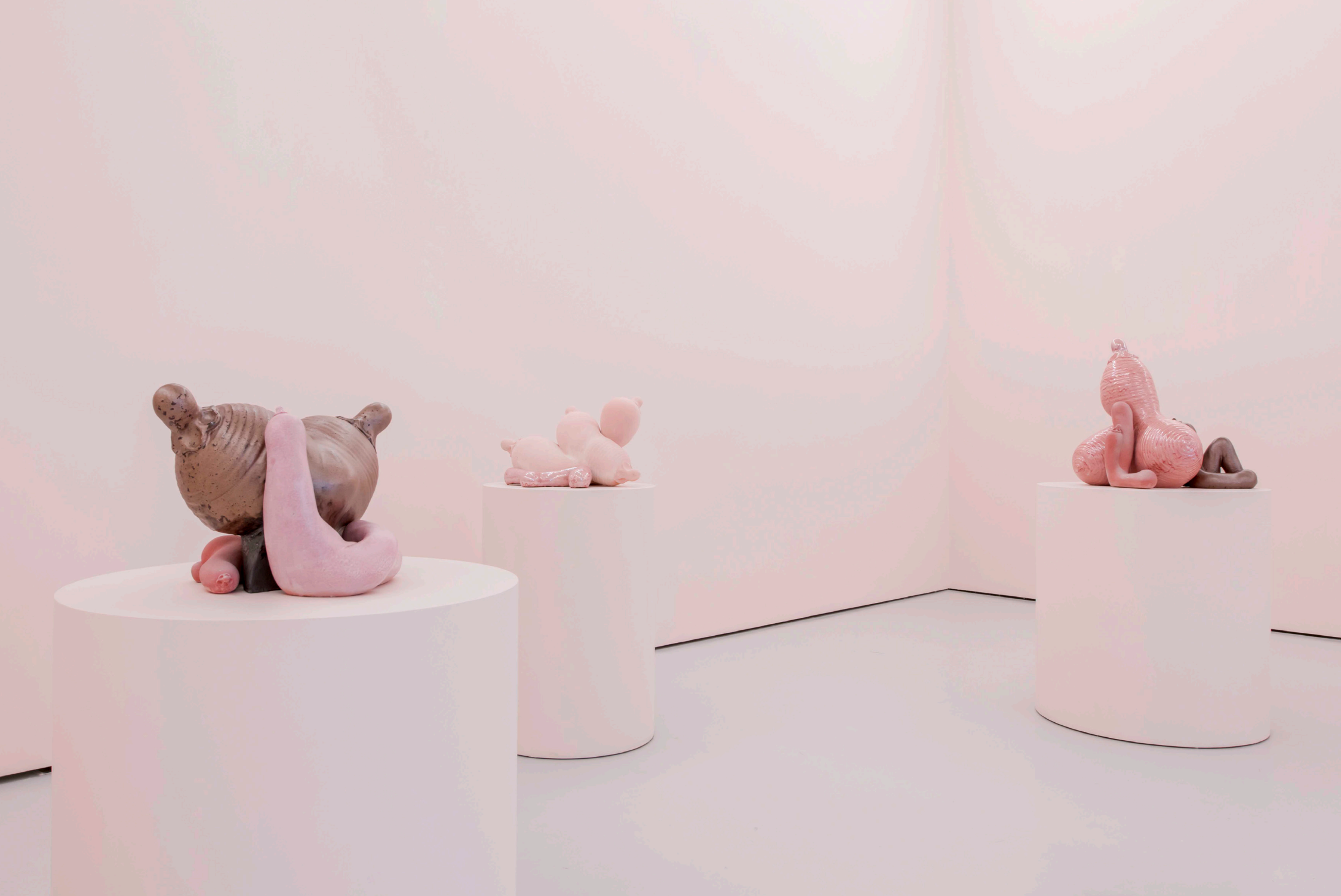
Elsa Sahal
Clownesses duo 2, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
63 x 44 x 36 cm





Elsa Sahal
Mains aux ongles rouges, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
52 x 56 x 55 cm





Elsa Sahal
Nichonesque 1, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
42 x 61 x 43 cm





Elsa Sahal
Nichonesque 2, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
65 x 73 x 64 cm





“These stones [...] at once begin to lose their hardness and their rigidity; slowly they soften; once softened, they begin to take on shapes. Then presently, when they'd increased in size and grown more merciful in character, they bore a certain incomplete resemblance to the human form, much like these images created by a sculptor when he begins roughly modeling his marble figures.”

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, W.W. Norton & Co, New York, 2005, Book I. Quoted by Valérie Da Costa in Elsa Sahal, *Les Éditions Particules / Fondation d'entreprise Ricard*, Paris, 2008.

Over the course of more than a decade, ceramicist Elsa Sahal has conceived a universe whose diverse biomorphic population is rife with contradictions, both visual and conceptual. Improbably, her clay creations manage to be simultaneously abstract and representational, adorable and abject, graceful and gawky, childish and erotic, masculine and feminine, and pathetic and powerful.

If not always openly figural, Sahal's sculptures are insistently and explicitly corporeal. Typically headless, her representations of acrobats, clowns, hikers or dancers exhibit toned muscles and humid skins while striking impossible contorted poses. From nascent works made in the early 2000's, just after graduating from the École

Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris where she studied with Georges Jeanclos and Erik Dietman, to her most recent sculptures, Sahal's studies of unnamable, unspeakable bodies continue to scandalize, surprise, and seduce.

For Elsa Sahal, the history of sculpture is “the expression of an expansive virility and a relationship to power.” She represents this paradigm of the masculine with humor, as a softened form, which a woman sculptor rectifies and cooks, without ever really managing to make stand upright. However, it is with assurance and delight that she uprights and monumentalizes the feminine: the large piddling child (Fontaine) which she installed in a public space on the occasion of the FIAC, in 2012, is in her words a manifesto. *La Pisseuse*, object of an aging Picasso's desire, has become the subject for a young woman artist and she turns it into a heroic character: “Young girls, you can urinate standing up like the men,” she tells the young women of her time. From the painting to the public space, from the object of masculine desire to the manifestation of feminine power, from the modern grotesque to the contemporary laugh, one perceives the completely singular questioning of gender in Sahal's work. And not content merely to interrogate, she has worked unceasingly to construct a feminine gaze on gender, sex, and desire. In this way she effects a profound renewal of

a history of forms that had only been constructed from the point of view of male artists: of the desiring and devouring gaze of an omnipresent male, by way of the first surrealist sexual explorations, followed by the “war between the genders” declared by feminisms, up to our century when, with the establishment of the concept of equality, the feminine gaze now can devour the masculine just as the latter had the former; the feminine can now be powerful, even devastating.

In Sahal’s work, the masculine is a pathetic past, the feminine a troubled future, but she places the woman at the center of our present: her body turns the public space into a heroic one, makes the masculine body bend, and plays with her/their desires.

Elsa Sahal
Fontaine, 2012
Glazed ceramic, hydraulic system
300 x 57 x 42 cm





Elsa Sahal
CAchemist's Daughter n°2, 2018
Glazed ceramic



Elsa Sahal
Composition abstraite, 2001
Ceramic (2 pieces)
120 x 120 x 70 cm



Elsa Sahal
Nichonesque 2, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
65 x 73 x 64 cm



Elsa Sahal
Leda Louisiana, 2014
Glazed Ceramic
60 x 45 x 28 cm







Elsa Sahal
Oeufs au plat, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
40 x 30 x 40 cm



Elsa Sahal
Chiens, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
20 x 24 x 18 cm, 32 x 22 x 20 cm





Elsa Sahal
Pied (Foot), 2020
Glazed Ceramic
130 x 80 x 60 cm

Elsa Sahal
Nichonesque 2, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
65 x 73 x 64 cm



Elsa Sahal
Autoportrait en forme de grotte n°1, 2020
Glazed Ceramic
93 x 30 x 40 cm



Elsa Sahal
Grotte généalogique, 2006
Glazed ceramic, 5 pieces
100 x 244 x 122 cm





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TEXTS AND CATALOGUES



CLOWNESSES DUO 3
GLAZED CERAMIC
26 x 43 x 30 CM
2020

Struggling to Stand Upright: Elsa Sahal's Eccentric Embodiment

With erudite irreverence, Elsa Sahal goes around canonical art history just as she does with the finite self: working from the inside out, the artist applies pressure to the boundaries of inherited normative figure. Through strategies encompassing sugary seduction, scandalous sensuality or carnivalesque inversion, Sahal's voluptuous ceramic sculptures claim traditional patriarchal spaces as their own. Swollen and dismembered, proliferating and self-generating, they unapologetically make themselves at ease in exhibition rooms and public space alike. Since the early 2000s, Sahal has been extending the dissident, overlooked lineage of female sculptors. Often compared to the likes of Annette Messenger, Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith or Alina Szapocznikow, she could also more broadly be seen as a tenant of an "eccentric" figuration—to paraphrase critic Lucy R. Lippard's characterization of "eccentric abstraction" in her eponymous 1977 article. In her characteristic shades of bubblegum pink or calcinated black, at times adorned with golden accents, Sahal's un-erected ceramics appeal to the visual and the tactile, triggering a nonverbal response which is the very reason for their atemporality. As such, they appeal to the contemporary gaze: the non-binary one as well as the digitally informed one. Indeed, beyond the post-war conceptual tradition of abjection and disfiguration, the sculptor's work also entertains affinities with the more recent developments of a post-humanist feminism formulated in the 1990s. Taking the critique of the humanist subject further, scholars such as N.K. Hayles or Rosi Braidotti have emphasized how the post-human helps understand embodiment beyond the confines of the individual. For them, a multiple self is best understood as inhabiting the body of border creatures such as the cyborg or the monster, neither human nor inhuman, organic nor synthetic. Sahal's sculptures, always headless, similarly deconstructs the idea of the finite body. They do, nonetheless, struggle to stand upright, refusing to flee the premises or simply dissolve into atoms: to her, the corporeal is not a curse nor a condition, but a wider life-system overflowing with a vital force yet untamed.

“Over the course of more than a decade, ceramicist Elsa Sahal has conceived a universe whose diverse biomorphic population is rife with contradictions, both visual and conceptual. Improbably, her clay creations manage to be simultaneously abstract and representational, adorable and abject, graceful and gawky, childish and erotic, masculine and feminine, and pathetic and powerful. If not always openly figural, Sahal’s sculptures are insistently and explicitly corporeal. Typically headless, her representations of acrobats, clowns, hikers or dancers exhibit toned muscles and humid skins while striking impossibly contorted poses.”

CAMILLE MORINEAU, ON THE OCCASION
OF THE EXHIBITION *SOFT IS THE NEW STRONG*,
ELSA SAHAL, *THE PILL*, 2017



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