

## Press release

Elsa Sahal

### *A tribute to Jambes Arp*

Set design by Lef Kazouka and Jean-Baptiste Lepeltier

October 9 – November 20, 2021

From the different methods and temperatures of firing the clay, Elsa Sahal explores all the effects on the material, right down to the subtleties that will not escape the sharpest eyes. Most obviously, the glossy and the matte oppose or complement each other – and in her latest sculptures they suggest a dance that has all the makings of a combat. For the duality present in the surfaces works just as much on the forms, in a variation choreographed by the sculptor between gathered protrusions and slender spindles, limbs or parts of the human body and less disassociated forms of life, which together execute figures that are more or less acrobatic, like couples of dancers, lovers or wrestlers : the twists are lustful or constrained, enveloping or threatening, while the legs sometimes become tentacles or caressing veils, sometimes horns, darts or banderillas that are about to sink in – here metamorphoses and associations reign. With these dynamic tensions, the stability of forces leaning on each other, Elsa Sahal adds a chapter to the history of the representation of movement and sculpture in several parts: evoking heads or legs, these forms that approach until they brush against each other seem inescapably drawn to each other, while their duets, because they combine rising and falling, rolling and tumbling, dissociation and fusion, could well embody various versions of a topsy-turvy carnivalesque atmosphere.

Because the artist likes, as we know, to play with art history with a tender irreverence, the matte forms call to mind mannequins – those of the Surrealists or pop artists such as Allen Jones – and the shiny ones recall Jean Arp's sculptures, although we more spontaneously associate them with the matte whiteness of plaster or marble. And in this inversion of value there is an unveiling similar to that which takes place when Daniel Arasse describes Fragonard's *Le Verrou* and shows, in the nothingness of an unmade bed, the object of desire and the painting itself. Elsa Sahal's sculptures – always hollow, as we shall recall – resonate with the ambivalence that runs through Arp's texts, more explicit than in his works, which nonetheless contain, in addition to their round, full forms, certain "unpleasant objects". "I have interpreted and named 'amphore'," he writes in *Jalons*, "a certain concretion that I work and rework. The core of this concretion is an object that could be found around the home resembling a good-natured doll with rounded and pleasantly curved forms. From this form stretch out malevolent limbs, murderous snakes, biting, eager to strangle." Elsa Sahal, too, is haunted by the reason behind the snake, by the violence that nestles in it like those with which Laocoon and his sons are at grips in the famous sculpted group that represents them, and by its ambivalent symbolism, which Aby Warburg studied in *Le Rituel du serpent: récit d'un voyage en pays pueblo*. It is therefore not surprising to see the image emerge in the twisting of the legs as well as in the gathered forms, like knots, and to feel the seduction and the violence intertwine: the condition of the world is not always in the pink – one of the sculptor's favorite colors – and Hans/Jean Arp will not contradict her, he who chose to "accept the light and the dark that chance sends us not only with astonishment but also with emotional gratitude" (*Jalons*).

{ Galerie Papillon }

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Perhaps we feel this same gratitude when, with the simple gesture of twisting a ball of clay, a snake emerges or when the artist sees a "stone formed by the human hand". However simple it may be, the form is never alone and if it is the product of the happy encounter between an action and a material, it also carries its own commentary - its meaning, its unimagined, or even its repressed meaning. Hence the game of duplication, attraction and emphasis that is at work in these sculptures by Elsa Sahal who likes to play with the clay, words and the spectator. This is not her first Arperie pirouette, joke, trickery, jest, mockery. The latest one could have a long, fable-like title: the shepherd of the clouds in the land of the snake charmer (1).

**Guitemie Maldonado** (October 2021)

(1) This is somehow Jean Arp and his sculpture *Berger des nuages* meets Henri Rousseau and his painting *La charmeuse de serpents*. Arp in fact advised sculptors not to try to shoot down a cloud with arrows, but rather to charm it "with a violin melody on a drum or a drum melody on a violin", until it descends, basks in happiness and finally becomes petrified.

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**Elsa Sahal** - Born in 1975 in Bagnolet. Lives and works in Paris.

2000 Graduated from the Beaux-Arts de Paris, she joined Galerie Papillon.

2007 Residency at the Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres.

2008 The Fondation Pernod Ricard dedicates her a solo exhibition and she obtains the MAIF prize for sculpture.

2009 Guest professor at Alfred University, New York State College of Ceramic.

2013 Residency at the Archie Bray Foundation in Montana. Her work is shown in the exhibition *Body & Soul: New International Ceramics* at the Museum of Art and Design in New York.

2015-2016 *Ceramix* at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht and at la maison rouge in Paris.

2017 First solo show at The Pill, since then the gallery represents her in Turkey.

2017-2018 *Women House* at the Monnaie de Paris and the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington.

2018 Sixth solo show at Galerie Papillon - curator Gaël Charbau.

2019 First solo show at Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, which now represents the artist in the United States.

2020 *Picasso, baigneuses et baigneurs* at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon; in situ installations *Le Voyage à Nantes* and *Les Extatiques*.

2021 Solo show *Female Factory*, Setareh, Berlin, Germany; presentation of *Venus Polymathe Jouissante* at La Panacée-MO.CO., Montpellier.

**Among public collections:** Centre national des arts plastiques (2009, 2020), Fonds d'art contemporain - Paris Collections (2017), Fonds régional d'art contemporain Normandie Caen (2021)