

## Press release

Elsa Sahal

*Les vases sont debout, les potiches ont attrapé des jambes*

March 22 – May 17, 2025

*"Les vases sont debout, les potiches ont attrapé des jambes" is a phrase from Les Guérillères<sup>1</sup> by Monique Wittig. I heard it while I was making vases in the shape of women with flower tits inside. I was so surprised by this coincidence that I decided to give this series of works titles in homage to her. I'd been making ceramics for so long that people kept telling me 'ah it's pottery, it's crockery'. Recently, people finally realised that ceramics could be sculpture. It was time to take up the theme of the container and make it work."*  
Elsa Sahal

"Resisting standardization, armed with her favorite material – ceramics – and a range of forms that elude normative, objectified determination, Elsa Sahal draws monstrous bodies and de-standardized women's bodies, which she does not hesitate to hybridize as Mary Shelley did with her literary Frankenstein. What is more, these assemblages are reminiscent of the famous "Fiji Mermaid" presented by Phineas Barnum in 1842 in his New York Museum. Like his artifact, Sahal's sculptures bear no relation to truth. [...]

Her sculptures play on the supposed softness of a palette abounding in the color pink and the textured grain of the surface material, to better divert the grip of standardization. They expose, without embellishment, the way in which working by hand makes it possible to counteract unevenness and the asperity of other states of matter. The sculptures assert both the gesture of the hand and its corollary, the power of craftsmanship, contradicting the assignment of ceramics to that of feminine domestic activities. When the question of women's handicrafts is raised, it is almost always in terms of a revitalization of the dilemma between industrialization and handicrafts, and consequently in a simplistic opposition between men and women, the latter being excluded from industrial production. But as well as making this alleged objectification of sexist techniques her own, Elsa Sahal's sculptures deconstruct the illusion of a normative conception postulating the existence of universal models.

More specifically, Elsa Sahal's sculptures are part of a project to reconstruct art history from a perspective of disinvisibilizing the practice of women and female historians, extending the debates of the 1970s-1980s. While contemporary historiography has recently taken up some of this work, it remains to deepen and consolidate it. Long envisaged as the "Little Women" working for the professional success of their husbands, lovers, and peers, it is time to construct – even if it means simulating it – a specifically feminine view of empowerment based on art by appropriating, for example, the ceramic kiln of the woman artist. In this way, Elsa Sahal develops a policy of emancipation from the gestures of work, the work itself and its meanings. [...]

By concealing encrypted meanings in her sculptures of excess, like the coded signals transmitted by Rosa Luxemburg<sup>2</sup> to lead her revolution, it is this time from her studio, and through her sculptures, that Elsa Sahal creates her works with the greatest care, which joyfully blasting

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<sup>1</sup> Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, Paris, les Éditions de Minuit, (1969) 2019, p. 205-207.

<sup>2</sup> Muriel Pic, *Rosa Luxemburg*, *Herbier de prison (1915-1918)*, Genève, Héros-Limite, 2023, p. 352.

through hubris all the sweet metaphors supposed to signify women, for her work "disorients things, [...] perturbs a certain order of the world."<sup>3</sup> Elsa Sahal's sculptures in general, and her vases in particular, are alert and ready depart. In so doing, they overturn a series of clichés. The first stems from the material used, ceramics, so intimately associated with craftsmanship and feminine pastimes. The second concerns the codified representation of the female body, normalized by the male gaze that has constructed art historiography. The third frees itself from the perfection of body proportions to daim, on the contrary, their sublime hybridity. Together, monstrosity, disorientation, and cryptology carve the political vocabulary of Elsa Sahal's art forms, underlining the benefits of her amoral, incisive, and undisciplined stance.

### Alexandra Midal

Extracts from *Monstres exquis* in *Les vases sont debout – Les potiches ont attrapé des jambes* – Elsa Sahal published by JBE Books, 2025

### Exhibition scenography: BLLK\*

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Elsa Sahal – Born in 1975, Bagnolet. Lives and works in Paris.

#### News 2025

La Piscine de Roubaix solo show *Pool Dance*, March 1<sup>st</sup> – June 1<sup>st</sup>

Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes solo show *L'alchimiste, Gilda, Suzanne et les autres*, March 28<sup>th</sup> – August 31<sup>st</sup>

Monograph *Les vases sont debout, les potiches ont attrapé des jambes – Elsa Sahal*, by JBE Books, February

#### Few key dates

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

2007 Residency at the Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres.

2008 Solo exhibition at the Fondation d'entreprise Ricard.

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

2013 Residency at Archie Bray Foundation ; Her sculpture are shown at the exhibition *Body & Soul: New International Ceramics* at Museum of Art and Design de New York.

2015-2016 *Ceramix*, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht and at maison rouge, Paris.

2017 *Women House* at la Monnaie de Paris and at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington. First solo show at The Pill, the gallery representing her in Turkey.

2018 6<sup>th</sup> exhibition at Galerie Papillon – curator Gaël Charbau.

2019 First solo show at Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York representing her in the US.

2020 *Picasso, baigneuses et baigneurs* au musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon.

2021 *Les flammes. L'âge de la céramique*, Musée d'art moderne, Paris.

2022 *Toucher Terre, l'art de la sculpture céramique*, Fondation Villa Datriis and *Contre-nature. La céramique, une épreuve du feu* at MO.CO.

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<sup>3</sup> Sara Ahmed, "Orientations. Vers une phénoménologie queer", *Multitudes*, 2021/1 (n° 82), p. 200.