

as an interactive archive (more versions of the song were recorded during the MAC exhibition), show each consecutive iteration of the piece opening up the venerated, lovelorn original to further unanticipated, vernacular inflection.

Corresponding interests were clear in the other examples of Billing's affecting encounters with diverse communities compiled in this exhibition. *Another Album*, 2006, for instance, recalls a precise period when local popular music took on profound meaning during traumatic historical shifts. Billing shot semistraged scenes of a relaxed, boozy gathering on a Croatian island, during which a group of friends attempted to sing New Wave classics from the former Yugoslavia. These half-remembered anthems nostalgically invoke the youthful solidarity and subcultural dissent of the era before the country's breakup. If this work, like others in the show, suggests comparison with key place- and pop-music projects by fellow filmmaker Phil Collins—pieces that similarly use song as an enlivening alternative means of voicing the problems and potentials of specific places—Billing's setups are at times much more self-consciously ludic. Her art can be defiantly, disconcertingly light in tone—never more so than in *I'm gonna live anyway until I die*, 2012, a video specially commissioned (in partnership with Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy) for this exhibition. This beautifully ebullient piece follows five children straying unsupervised through the streets of Rome, racing through parks and skipping across scrappy, undeveloped land before sneaking into a locked school, where they begin to make their own untutored art—a selection of which was displayed in combination with the film—imagining an entirely undisciplined way of seeing and experiencing the city. Throughout, an upbeat sound track by the popular Italian singer-songwriter Franco Battiato enhances the atmosphere of innocent liberation. This is music that was first formed in response to the tensions in Italian politics—and like Billing's generous, joyful art, its affirmative lightness disguises a deeply serious intent.

—Declan Long

PARIS

Loris Gréaud

YVON LAMBERT

With its renuous illumination at floor level, the gallery space seemed to be at the bottom of a swimming pool, if not undersea. On the walls, *Kraken* (all works 2012), paintings made with squid ink, evoked mythological sea monsters. A mirrored ceiling doubled the space as well as the milky light of a video, *The Unplayed Notes*, made by using a thermal camera to chart the warmest areas of two coupling bodies. Formless sculptures, like black coral colonies, slowly rotated on axis; each titled *Twain Rocks*, they are made of pages from Mark Twain's novels.



Electric guitar chords (recorded by Lee Ranaldo without amplification in Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique's anechoic chamber) reverberated through the space. These sounds were also superimposed on the sculptures in the next room, fifteen Tartin-style constructions in glass cases, a series titled "Tainted Love." Visitors had to move about warily through this rarefied world, which seemed at once lunar and aquatic, volcanic and mineral, made up of barely audible sounds and barely visible substances, as exemplified by the body heat captured on video. In this show, "The Unplayed Notes," Loris Gréaud assailed the gallery's architecture from top to bottom. He remodeled the interiors, painted the walls, and adjusted the ceiling height and the lighting in order to accommodate the cross-references among his videos, paintings, sculptures, lights, sounds, and the space itself. An apparently open and elliptical path was, in fact, orchestrated in maniacal fashion to manipulate not only the space but viewers' responses.

Gréaud loves John Boorman's cult movie *Zardoz*, released in 1974, before the artist was born. Perhaps in 2293, the year in which the film is set, this exhibition would be considered a form of realism. But Gréaud is less interested in predicting the future or constructing utopias than in reactivating and staging some of the innumerable futures contained in the past, which, for whatever reason, have not yet been realized. Thus, artistic activity becomes a platform for establishing a dialogue between, for instance, science fiction and the sciences that study invisible phenomena (as in the nanosculptures that constitute Gréaud's 2006 project *Why Is a Raven like a Writing Desk*) or phenomena that remain unexplored, such as the depths of the ocean (as in his recent short film *The Snorks*, 2012).

A sort of perpetual metamorphosis is at play in Gréaud's work. He burns his own drawings and utilizes the ashes as material for his monochrome paintings (*Nothing Left to Falsify*), or takes electrical energy produced by their combustion and stores it in batteries, to be used for a future project. Like energy, Gréaud's work is neither created nor destroyed, but constantly transformed. Such energy transfers are different from recycling. Gréaud is happy to "burn" ideas, a conceptual consumption made all the more striking in that it is not visible. I am thinking, for example, of the blown-glass lamps in the first room, from the "Spores" series: Though each one is different, all have been created exclusively with sand that has passed through an hourglass. Hourglass sand, which measures the passage of time, is transformed into light—a sinister light, at least once we realize that it pulsates to the rhythms, in the film projection *One Thousand Ways to Enter, Bats Edit*, of the flight of a bat filmed in slow motion.

—Riccardo Venturi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore

Elsa Sahal

CLAUDINE PAPIILLON GALERIE

Over the past decade, French ceramicist Elsa Sahal has conceived a universe where ostensible contradictions—abstraction versus figuration, male versus female, adorable versus abject—are reconciled into a variety of unsettling biomorphic forms. In her most recent exhibition, Sahal expanded her repertoire of tubular phalluses and thick-lipped orifices dribbled with syrupy glazes, creating two new breeds of large-scale androgynous figures. Explicitly corporeal, if not always blatantly figural, the sculptures are perhaps best described as bodies of clay—insistently of and about their own materiality. Harnessing the innate physical properties of her medium, Sahal convincingly suggests varied skin textures, facial expressions, general fleshiness, and assorted bodily secretions. In her deft hands, clay (soft and pliant) and glaze (runny and warm) become biological.



Elsa Sahal, *Acrobate*, 2012, ceramic, synthetic hair, 63 x 25 1/2 x 26"

The bodies in Sahal's 2009–12 "*Arlequins*" series occupy a precarious limbo between abstraction and figuration. With no obvious front or back, they encourage all-around viewing, whereby strikingly humanoid gestures and anatomies morph into nebulous blobs from one angle to the next. Sahal's complicated approach to figurative representation is indebted to Georges Bataille's concept of the *informe*. Although Sahal is clearly following in the footsteps of Dubuffet and Fautrier, who visualized this idea in the 1940s with heavily encrusted depictions of barely distinguishable ravaged bodies, her personages are less violently nightmarish and more whimsical and sensual than theirs. Her harlequins are headless child-size figures etched with the emblematic diamond motif and coated with a glossy bubble gum pink glaze. Thick dribbles of gleaming gold around the clowns' neck stumps are at once overtly painterly and undeniably scatological. Objectively grotesque distortions of the human form, these gooney, lumpy, knock-kneed creatures are also perversely endearing and aesthetically alluring.

Chromatically and conceptually darker, the works in Sahal's "*Équilibres*" (*Balances*) series, 2012–, are more willfully figural, but also more abject. A pair of figures—perhaps a mother and child—comprise a Frankensteinian assortment of mismatched body parts unified by an even matte black glazing. The robust and wrinkled elephantine launches of the larger one (*Acrobate*, 2012) conjoin a buoyant spherical rump, which is crowned by a knobby protuberance and a kinky hair-lined orifice just below. Jauntily posed with its backside in the air, this hermaphroditic creature has no apparent face—its front designated only by a pair of uneven breasts with large jutting nipples. The smaller, pedestal-mounted pup (*Petite Acrobate*, 2012) is decidedly cuter despite the fact that its gaping mouth and bulbous nose are strongly suggestive of genitalia. Vulgarity and affability are simultaneously embodied in these provocative and perplexing figures, underscored by the unexpected gracefulness of their stooped, asymmetric bodies.

In a series of altar tableaux—"Auteils," 2012—sinuous, erect tubes and oozy gashes are thinly disguised as various forms of sea life: urchins, corals, and sponges. Arranged on dark metal tables alongside various bluish-glazed ceramic curios, including a pair of severed feet, skull-like orbs, and fully abstract forms, these works recall small wooden sculptures made by Giacometti in the 1930s, likewise phallic and tactile, which he dubbed "disagreeable objects." Yet whereas Giacometti insisted on the worthlessness of these handcrafted objects, Sahal's sculptures, even in their most diminutive iterations, are adamantly precious—masterfully wrought objets d'art that inspire fetishistic reverence.

—Mara Hoberman

BERLIN

Arlene Shechet NATURE MORTE

One could call it ironic that during the opening of Arlene Shechet's exhibition at Nature Morte, one of the porcelain sculptures on view, *Shadow Box* (all works 2012) was accidentally broken by a visitor. Shechet decided to leave the piece—now pieces—on display, including

the shards shattered on the ground. After all, the show was about fragility and fractures—about "Breaking the Mold," as its title put it. And the remains of this incident also said something about the other twenty-eight works present. Most of the sculptures could be described as damaged but—unlike *Shadow Box*—in a delicate and controlled way. Shechet's sculptures look like beautiful accidents. Take *Spill*, which shows a female figure with broken arms whose head is covered by a teacup. Or *Wasabi Plate*, which presents a severed head on a plate with burn marks around it. The pieces all suggest deviations from something they once were, or were supposed to be.

Shechet has a long history with ceramic sculpture, but hadn't worked with porcelain before. She produced these latest pieces during a six-month residency at the famous Meissen factory in Germany. Meissen is not just a trademark of porcelain; it's a symbol of tradition, dating back to the eighteenth century, when the first European porcelain was produced in its factory near Dresden. Its success continued even under the GDR, where it was one of the few companies to turn a profit. For many Germans, the brand is still associated with the East, and also with solid and conservative German values. It has become common to invite contemporary artists into this kind of high-end manufacturing, but for Shechet the residency had its obstacles. Her approach as a sculptor is not directed toward the perfectly finished end product for which Meissen stands. Instead, she is interested in showing traces of the production process and finding unanticipated forms. To be able to do things her way, she had to shake up some of the manufacturer's perspectives and routines.

Shechet focused on material that is usually overlooked or regarded as trash or a by-product of the process, and she made those into her originals. In this redefinition of the object, her use of color plays a decisive role. In *Asian Vase*, half of the mold for a small vessel has become a sculpture with colorful dots on the spots where the two halves would be connected. Also, through unexpected transitions between shiny, glazed surfaces and matte parts, the appearance of the objects changes. Taken together, this collection of in-betweens, molds, errors, and false starts shows what normally goes unnoticed or gets discarded in the porcelain factory. Among my favorites were the rectangular corner pieces with a grid form, such as *Thumbprint* and *Platinum Drip*. These objects were produced by an extruding machine as part of a process of recycling the porcelain. In Shechet's hands, they look like Minimalist sculptures that were caught in an accident, after which their injuries and imperfections were accentuated with glaze and paint. You might call them battered ornaments; it's their potential effect on a surrounding interior that lends them their subversive beauty.

—Jurriaan Benschop

DÜSSELDORF

Luis Jacob GALERIE MAX MAYER

Caution: Exhibitions like this can be addicting. They can make you addicted to images, images of images, images within images, and details—in short, addicted to looking. And this seems to be the goal of Luis Jacob, a Peruvian-born artist based in Toronto. This was his first exhibition at Galerie Max Mayer, which opened a year and a half ago



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