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Sarai Delfendahl: Vivre en Oiseau at Galerie SCENE OUVERTE, Paris

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Saraï Delfendahl: Vivre en Oiseau is on view at Galerie SCENE OUVERTE, Paris

January 30 – March 1, 2025

In Saraï Delfendahl's work everything is alive, inhabited, human and animal. An expressionist naivety emerges from her world of telluric creatures. The underlying raw art, however, seems to be polished by the varnish of the ceramic. The unconscious springs forth in a jubilant energy: that of creation but also of the creator, united in a vital impulse. Like a demiurge, Saraï Delfendahl creates a poetic world where the spectator hesitates to recognise a forgotten kinship, an ancient and contemporary fable. Saraï has exhibited in Paris, notably at the Palais de Tokyo, in Milan, Brussels, London and Dallas among others.

Saraï Delfendahl's view of the world and her relationship with it needs to be sought in the places of her childhood. That of the little girl of past times that never really left her. Born in Avignon in 1961, she grew up in La Roque-sur-Pernes, not far from Carpentras, in the anti-conformist hippie atmosphere post-1968, where the forbidden was banished and money demonised.

Wild and solitary, she remembers with emotion the little path she takes in the middle of nature, in the little universe she invents for herself between school and the ruined house her parents have acquired. They do everything for themselves, from plumbing to masonry, to carving the wooden door handles. This way of life and the imagery that cradled her childhood would leave an indelible mark on the self-taught artist, whose later work was done with great economy of means, made of handmade paper, wire and ceramics.

From this encounter with the material grows an insane bestiary that bears comparison with Jean Lurçat's Animal Geography with its bull-siren of Aden, its owl of good hope, its crayfish of Guam or its moon carp. Like the ancient Mesopotamian goddess Aruru, the artist as demiurge has finally found the seminal clay from which her universe is born, where all forms, colours and sensations are summoned in an automatic and almost unconscious act of creation. The first sea monsters and other winged fish emerge from the medieval iconography of the tapestries that line the walls of the family home. Others may result from discoveries at some exhibitions of Henry Darger, Jean Dubuffet, or Pierre Alechinsky.

Beyond the lively and spontaneous modelling that characterises her work, the only pentimento she permits herself, and indeed is particularly fond of, is in the rendering of enamels and the different firings necessary to obtain the desired depth or sparkle for a chosen colour.

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