

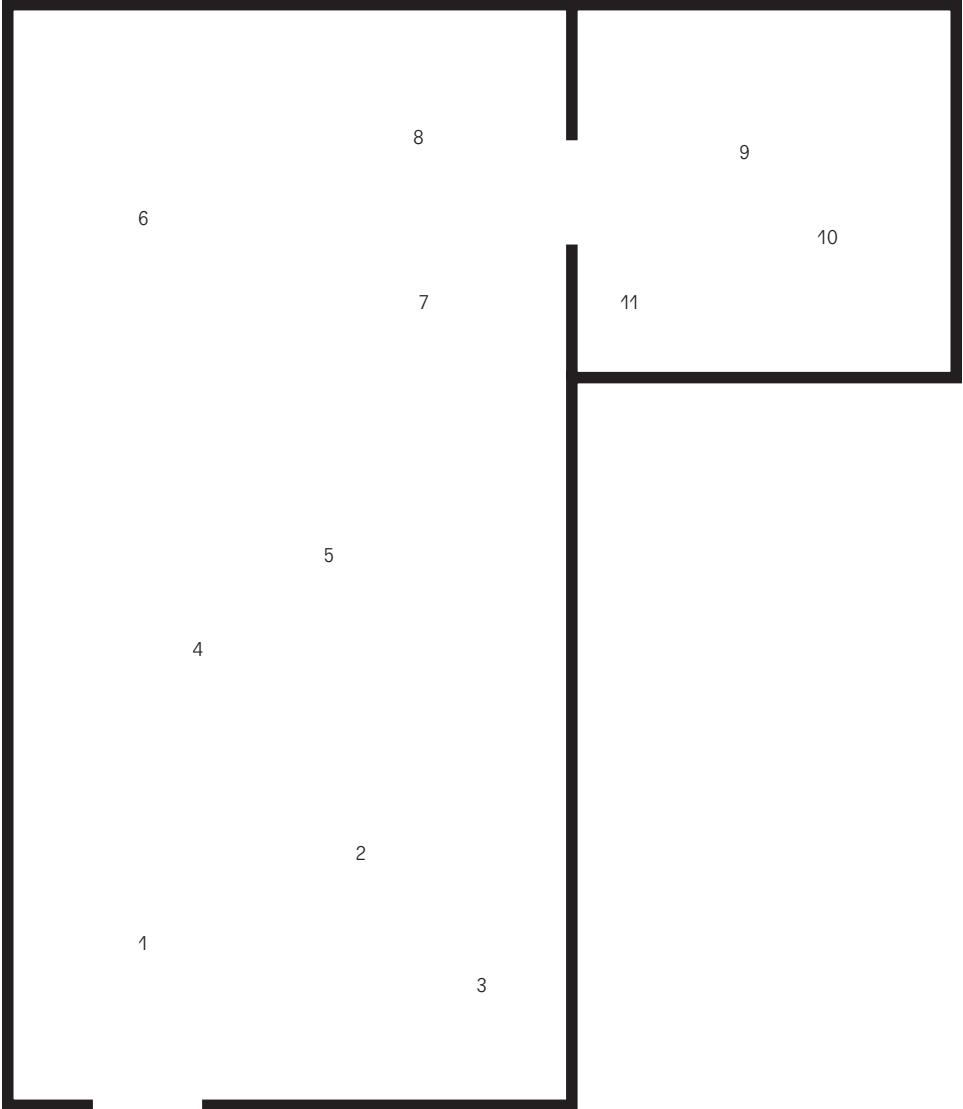
Valérie Blass

*La poudre aux yeux:
Of smoke in mirrors*

May 23–June 27, 2020

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950 East Cordova Street Vancouver, British Columbia V6A 1M6 Canada



1 *L'homme réparé*, 2019, stainless steel, denim shorts, epoxy resin, acrylic paint, 41 x 89 x 12 in. (104 x 226 x 31 cm)

2 *L'homme préservé*, 2019, forton, photographic print on polyester tissue, plexiglas, chair, 61 x 25 x 25 in. (155 x 64 x 64 cm)

3 *L'homme augmenté*, 2019, pvc pipe, heat-shrink tubing, acrylic paint, 117 x 15 x 12 in. (296 x 38 x 24 cm)

4 *Le diable est dans les détails*, 2019, pitchers, heat-shrink tubing, acrylic, oil, gouache, 47 x 9 x 4 in. (121 x 22 x 10 cm)

5 *Le mime, le modèle et le dupe*, 2019, acrylic, oil, gouache, plaster, copper, chip bag, juice box, jumpsuit, resin, epoxy, fibreglass, 40 x 58 x 21 in. (102 x 147 x 53 cm)

6 *Ceux qui ne demandent rien*, 2019, stool, acrylic, oil, gouache, fibreglass, brick, shopping bag, cheetos, popcorn, milk carton, kraft dinner, apple juice, kitchen sponges, scouring pad, 44 x 66 x 33 in. (112 x 168 x 84 cm)

7 *Pourquoi appelle-t-on un trou noir; un "trou noir"?*, 2019, ceramic, acrylic, oil, gouache, metal, clothing, resin, epoxy, 52 x 20 x 16 in. (132 x 51 x 41 cm)

8 *Ma fille coupée en deux*, 2019, ceramic, 41 x 38 x 19 in. (104 x 97 x 48 cm)

9 *Take all the time you need*, 2019, resin chain, paint, heat-shrink tubing, 109 x 18 x 24 in. (277 x 45 x 61 cm)

10 *Échapper à la psychologie*, 2019, chair base, plaster, inkjet print on polyester, 53 x 19 x 17 in. (135 x 48 x 43 cm)

11 *Ce qui a déjà été vu ne peut pas être dévu*, 2020, inkjet print on paper mounted on aluminum, 15 x 10 in. (38 x 25 cm)

What is a ghost without a sheet? An invisible form, the memory of an individual partially physicalized, a history made present and visible only from a thin layer of fabric, a form indifferent to gravity and physics. A ghost occupies a space between this plane and another unknowable one, inhabiting both spaces simultaneously.

In *La poudre aux yeux: Of smoke in mirrors*, a survey of the most recent sculptures of Montreal-based artist Valérie Blass, the works share a similar disregard for the boundaries of physical reality, the body and its inherited cultural categories. The suggestion of bodily presence has haunted her practice, here explicitly or subtly figured anew in each work. To be clear, these works do not rely purely on simple, uncanny tricks for their effect, but confound through a layered multitude of visual and intellectual surprises.

For Blass, the dominant categorical boundaries of the history of art—the separations of sculpture from photography from painting, and figuration from abstraction—are lightened, released, floated, pushed through and recombined. While Blass's work has almost always been rooted in the realities and complexities of sculpture and the body, and their attendant art histories, with this exhibition she explicitly challenges preconceptions of how bodies, sculptural form and vernacular clothing and objects are expected to behave in relation.

These sculptures do not sit comfortably in one realm, but expand and brush past borders with intense material literacy, vigorous humour, and a skillful and curious visual adeptness. Here, the gendered public language of personal adornment, the clothing that indicates the figure and their accoutrements, are mismatched, creating new forms and slippery suggestions, an uncertainty about who is wearing what and why.

Observed together, the relations between works can be inferred or extrapolated. Informed by each other, but not content only to repeat, the works have been built off of one another, mimicking the studio process, still joking amongst themselves and challenging their own art historical predecessors.

These figures are eccentrically and undeniably convincing, real and simultaneously strange, trompe l'oeils in three dimensions, layering odd details and logic to create new understandings and intentional confusions of the material and cultural world. Each chases a state of confusion, but doesn't just hover mysteriously—to experience these works is to have observation and expectation generously challenged, material and bodily knowledge subverted.

For over twenty-five years, Valérie Blass (b. 1967, Montreal; lives/works: Montreal) has honed a sculptural language that plays with traditional and contemporary materials, techniques, and tropes. Found objects, photographs, marble, wood, spray paint, and plaster are examples of media that Blass has incorporated into her set-like installations, assemblages, and free-standing objects; these works sit along various points of a long spectrum between figuration and abstraction. Running through Blass's practice is a concern for the proportions, scale, and shape of the human body. In some works, such as *Surtout ne pas consulter les ingénieurs!* (2014), an abstract plaster form echoes the bends and folds of a bipedal skeleton. In other works, such as *She's a Nympho, I'm a Therapist* (2013), a recognizable body part juts out of an otherwise abstract tower of materials that tests sculpture's historic concerns with weight, volume, and mass. Through this ever-evolving language, Blass is creating a world just-removed from our own, filled with imaginative creatures, personas, failures and aspirations. Following her inclusion in the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal's Triennale du Québec in 2008, Blass received international commissions and regular inclusion in biennials and group exhibitions.

Blass studied at the Université du Québec à Montréal, receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1998, and a Master of Fine Arts in 2006. She was the 2017 recipient of the Gershon Iskowitz Prize, presented with the Art Gallery of Ontario, where her prize exhibition was held in 2019. She has presented notable solo exhibitions at Oakville Galleries, Oakville, Canada and Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2019); Artspeak, Vancouver (2015); Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal (2012); and MOCA Toronto (2009). In 2013, she presented a new commission for the Public Art Fund in New York. Blass's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including at Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry – le Crédac (2019); National Gallery of Canada (2017, 2011); La Biennale de Montréal (2016); Vancouver Art Gallery (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (2016); Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2016, 2011); Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (2014, 2010).