

# Clay Baby (m.l.)

## Kaari Upson

Massimo De Carlo Pièce Unique opens to the public with *Clay Baby (m.l.)*, 2021 by Los Angeles based artist Kaari Upson. In her practice, Kaari Upson encompasses drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, installation and video. Upson's work touches on physical and psychological trauma, fantasy and fiction, the uncanny and the domestic, in a strongly autobiographical manner. The artist explores her past through sculptures, fictive spaces, texts and images that recall the gloom of American suburbia and creates a narrative around concepts such as the self and the other, public and private, appetite and disgust.

Here below a text on the exhibition by curator and critic Myriam Ben Salah.

« Turf turd shit burn ass burn asshole burn turd cooke dbarbecued ready eddy yum yum » Paul McCarthy

The face is round, puffed up, chubby in a childish way. The hair is short, cut into a prosaic bob, covered with a greenish folkloric hat, a vernacular hint. The bust is prominent, protruding. The round breasts are squashed into a square neck, pure Bavarian fantasy. «Greetings from the mountains in the South». The dress is mid-leght, prudish, modest. Kaari Upson's *Clay Baby (m.l.)* is a readymade, a 3D print reproduction—at infant scale— of a miniature figurine, a plump, wüerst-fed germanic archetype that landed in the artist's Los Angeles studio by way of her mother, via her grandmother. A matrilineal gift of sorts that presumably came from Germany—we don't really know. One of those unvoluntarily acquired objects that passes from one generation to the other, like a genetic condition. The smooth-

skinned original porcelain figure is all business in the front and all party in the back. Discretely lifting up her skirt, she uncovers a bulging rounded behind with a clearly defined whole. Did I mention she is bending over? Yes, it seems that *Clay Baby* is ready to defecate. Our German doll has the ins and outs—quite literally—of a caganer, a bare-bottom pooping figurine that appears in the nativity scene in certain regions of Spain—again, we don't really know. It is said that the caganer is a symbol of fertility and good fortune. I wonder what's the symbol of infertility and bad luck. Some also say that the caganer stands for accepting what we all have in common. Hum, defecate and perish ? If you fill *Clay Baby's* butt and light it up, if you plug a stick up her ass—excuse my French—she will defecate ashes, opening up a world of decay hermeneutics. Spodomancy: divination by studying ashes. We don't know where *Clay Baby* comes from but apparently she knows where we're going.

— Myriam Ben Salah

### KAARI UPSON

*Clay Baby (m.l.)*, 2021

Ceramic, aqua resin, fir wood, aluminium

125.1 × 121.3 × 60.3 cm /

49 × 47 3/4 × 23 3/4 in

Each *Clay Baby*: 51 × 23.5 × 26.7 cm /

20 × 9 1/4 × 10 1/2 in

Table: 74 × 60.3 × 121 cm /

29 × 23 3/4 × 47 3/4 in

**Kaari Upson**

Kaari Upson was born in 1972 in San Bernardino, California; she currently lives and works in Los Angeles. She has exhibited widely including recent solo exhibitions at Kunstverein Hannover (2019); Kunsthalle Basel (2019); and New Museum (2017). Her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions such as the 58th Venice Biennale, Venice (2019); Whitney Biennial, New York (2017); 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul (2017).