

**GEORGE HENRY LONGLY**

« The Smile of a Snake »

Exhibition from January 21 to March 12, 2016  
Opening on Thursday January 21, 6-9pm



George Henry Longly's new exhibition at Valentin, *The Smile of a Snake*, takes its name from a language tutorial emphasising the pronunciation of the letter "s". A phonetic exercise for learning English as a foreign language it also highlights problems with the physical materialisation of language. A lisp also known as sigmatism, is a speech impediment in which a person misarticulates sibilant sounds. This exercise evokes how language, on one level, is the physical process of testing boundaries and forming sounds through the body.

"S" is also the shape of the serpent, whose flexibility and musculature evoke language. A liminal motif in Longly's work, the snake is a communication tool used in humanity's most ancient rituals. Semiotically ambivalent, a pharmakon representing both purity and corruption, flexibility and immobility—fundamental intensities of the artist's plastic research. Its cerebral nature comes into tension with the inevitably visceral, irrational reactions it provokes in people.

Built as an immersive environment, *The Smile of the Snake* plays upon this analogy between the physical and semiotic materialisation of language and that of the plastic shaping process, from the perspective of how these operations relate to the demarcation of internal and external spaces, of meaning and sensation. Here, references to industrial rationality and to the structuring systems of architecture, language and the body's morphology come into tension with internal perceptions / affections such as those provoked by colour, smells and sound.

*Text by Clara Guislain*