

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to announce *Féminaire*, a new exhibition by Mai-Thu Perret. The show will open on May 19 and remain on view through July 1, 2017. An opening reception will be held on Friday, May 19 from 6:00pm until 8:00pm.

Mai-Thu Perret's sculptures, ceramic works, performances, and texts exist at the intersection of contemporary culture, art historical insight, and visceral materiality. She explores (and generates) feminist narratives and counter-narratives that cast the role of the art object in new light, introducing utilitarian, symbolic, and even mystical possibilities in contexts that are often limited to formalist readings.

*Féminaire* consists primarily of two bodies of work: a monumental installation of figurative sculptures positioned on a single plinth and a gridded wall arrangement of dozens of ceramic wall pieces. These distinct groups of objects are positioned at either end of the gallery, creating a showdown of competing geometries whose gravity and imposing presence are reminiscent of political monuments and spiritual architecture.

The title of the figures, *Les guérillères*, is borrowed from a 1969 novel by Monique Wittig that tells the speculative story of a war waged by women to take control of society. Its militant protagonists find echoes in Perret's sculptures, which are also informed by the YPJ, a real-world female militia that has been fighting in the ongoing Syrian civil war. The figures are constructed as three-dimensional collages, and the artist makes use of her entire repertoire of materials, including glazed ceramics, steel, papier-mâché, wicker, and bronze, as well as found elements like synthetic hair and clothing. The sculptures stand and sit in various positions of waiting and repose, actively pensive and patient. Many of them carry guns, and in one case a ceramic dog lies nearby on a wool blanket. Warriors at rest, far from home but resonant of domestic textures, they are reminders that war extends beyond the battlefield into every facet of life, and that in armed conflicts, culture is just as contested as territory.

Perret evokes both the formality of battle memorials and an archaic sense of ceremony by placing the sculptures together on a chest-high base with a sloping front-side. Like mannequins or cyborgs, they broadcast an uncanny, silent gaze that implicates the viewer in their world; but because they are in fact modeled on the forms and faces of the artist's friends, they deny retreat into purely fictional anonymity. As in the work of relevant predecessors Edward Kienholz and Paul Thek, Perret's art conjures the intensity of living beings with tangible bodies.

Immediate physicality is also a defining feature of the ceramic wall works that hang opposite the

figures. Hung in a grid-like arrangement, they too have been configured so that each object functions both on its own and as part of an overarching totality. Feelings of transcendent universality, specifically the historic appeals to spirit of geometric abstraction, are presented as not only coexistent with, but inseparable from human passions and particularities.

Beginning with uniform rectangular slabs, Perret uses her hands to distort the material into torqued, unpredictable shapes; the depth and variation of applied glazes accentuate their contours and dimensional relief. Each therefore records a clearly articulated interaction between the artist's body and the clay that absorbs her actions. As a material with implied connections to the body, both in terms of its inherent malleability as well as the vessels it has been used to create for millennia, the clay offers an alternative (if less explicit) mode of figuration when seen alongside the sculptures that stare back from across the room. At the same time, with their nuanced colors and hanging relationship to the wall, these works also find Perret engaging in conversations commonly associated with painting.

An image-based screen-print endows the physical and formal issues raised throughout the exhibition with the suggestion of a narrative framework. For such works, Perret typically borrows from literary and philosophical sources, but also generates her own Dadaist interventions. This enigmatic print, evocative of a page from a book or a poster announcing a performance, also emphasizes the circular nature of her practice: at the beginning of her career, the artist composed a fictional narrative entitled *The Crystal Frontier* that documents the activity of women in a separatist utopian community. The objects in *Féminaire* can be seen as elements in an exploded version of this foundational text, and the evolution of Perret's practice can be understood as a circular process that challenges the dominant linearity of prevailing historical models.

In 2016, Mai-Thu Perret (b. 1976, Geneva) was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas. Other recent solo exhibitions include shows at NICC, Brussels (through June 1, 2017); Fondation Speerstra, Apples, Switzerland (with Martine Bedin, 2014); Le Magasin, Grenoble, France (2012); Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2011); and the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor (2010). Forthcoming and recent group exhibitions include *Medusa*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (2017); *India's Search for Power 1966 – 1982 (Indhira Gandhi's Foreign Policy)*, Dak'Art 2016, Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain, Dakar, Senegal (2017); *NO MAN'S LAND: Women Artists from the Rubell Family Collection*, Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2015); *Collection on Display: Experimental Arrangements*, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2015); *Female Power*, Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, The Netherlands (2013); *Anti-Establishment*, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, New

York (2012); and *ILLUMInations*, International Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale (2011). Perret lives and works in Geneva.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*