

Mai-Thu Perret

Grammar and Glamour

12.07.-15.09.2019

Opening: Thursday, 11.07.2019, 7 pm

Press preview: Wednesday, 10.07.2019, 11 am

Opening at the Badische Kunstverein under the title *Grammar and Glamour* is the first major solo exhibition in Germany devoted to the Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret. The show features a representative selection of works, with a focus on current projects. Perret works with diverse formats and media, including painting, sculpture, ceramics, tapestry, film, performance, and texts.

In her work, Mai-Thu Perret turns her attention toward a discourse of feminism and spirituality which she associates in a singular way with artistically immanent questions of materiality and form. At the same time, her handling of a variety of ceramics and tapestry techniques refers to her interest in the arts and crafts movement as an alternative form of artistic expression. In Perret's works, figural sculptures depicting female fighters and reformers are linked in the most intimate way with approaches to formal abstraction, which moreover reference her continuous scrutiny of painting and the possibilities of painterly transformation. But Perret's oeuvre is by no means self-referential; it is instead bound up with concrete narrative contexts. To some extent, her stories are based on direct references from literature and theory, while other connections are invented by the artist herself, and circulate around a number of different works or work groups in ways that interrogate the linearity of conventional narrative techniques. Perret's uses her works as a speculative space in order to activate marginalized forms and techniques, to reanimate forgotten figures and to narrate alternative stories.

Based on Mai-Thu Perret's large-scale project *The Crystal Frontier* (since 1999), about a fictive feminist commune in the New Mexico desert, the exhibition in the Kunstverein weaves together various narratives about strong, independent female figures – from the lesbian fighters in *Les Guérillères* (2018), based on a novel by the French avant-garde writer and feminist theoretician Monique Wittig, to the originary figure of the witch, as reflected in the most recent works in the exhibition. While Wittig's disruptive language evokes/provokes a series of works that engage with strategies of interruption and repetition, and link these techniques with Dada, Perret's investigations of witchcraft led to a group of sculptural works which have been restaged, reconstructed, and expanded especially for this exhibition. For the artist, witchcraft represents a fundamental power in relation to disciplinary strategies, capitalist systems, and forms of coerced conformity. The witch as archetype is transferred into the modern world, and becomes a symbol of liberation from restrictive gender politics.

The story of *The Chrystal Frontier* is present in the exhibition through a series of texts in which the women of the "New Ponderosa" commune envision a new world, one they seek to establish via a return to nature and to crafts. At least initially, Perret's ceramics, wallpapers, clothes, and tapestries must be read against this background, and are interpretable as the results of the fictive production of the women of "New Ponderosa" before these objects emancipate themselves increasingly from their narrative. In the final room of the exhibition, formerly the Kunstgewerbesaal (gallery of applied arts) of the Kunstverein, the diverse form languages of arts-and-crafts and modernism become interlocked with one another, and are supplemented by new works.

Through an explicit affinity with the Bauhaus and Constructivist movements, Perret envisions a new society in which handicraft production and ornamentation experience an emphatic revaluation: no longer are they the excluded testimony of domestic decor, but instead a powerful expression of a feminist inscription into the male-dominated art history of the West. At the same time, they clarify her intensive preoccupation with the early 20th century avant-gardes, and in particular their potential for political and formal emancipation.

Curated by Anja Casser

Mai-Thu Perret (*1976) lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland. She is known for her multidisciplinary practice in sculpture, painting, video and installation art. She studied English at Cambridge University and was a participant in the Whitney Independent Study Program 2001/2003. In 2011 she won the prestigious Zurich Art Prize and the Prix Culturel Manor. She is the recipient of the 2018 Paul Boesch Award. Since 2008 Perret is a professor at Haute école d'art et de design in Geneva. Her most recent solo shows include Spike Island, Bristol (2019) and at MAMCO, Geneva (2018).

For additional information, press images, or to make an individual appointment, please contact:

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