

Art and Cake, June 22, 2017

Mai-Thu Perret
Féminaire
David Kordansky Gallery
May 19 - July 1, 2017

By Jody Zellen



Mai-Thu Perret is a Geneva based artist who creates politically and socially astute, albeit often bombastic works that deploy a feminist agenda. In her installation entitled, *Féminaire* she presents *Les guérillères*— an elevated white plinth dotted with nine figurative sculptures depicting a diverse range of women; all of whom hold weapons. Opposite this stage-like setting a grid of 32 (imageless) rectangular glazed ceramic slabs hang on the wall. This visceral work began with uniform clay slabs, many of which Perret attacked with her hands, poking, pulling and twisting the pliable surface before coating them with colorful glazes. Perret engaged with the clay as if her quasi-aggressive actions were part of a private performance that surprisingly resulted in the creation of abstract rather than representational artworks. Each 'slab' is a unique piece

whose title directs its meaning. *Clean and naked, totally fresh* (all works 2017) is unadulterated and glazed in deep blue tones, whereas *I have no Comment* has a light yellow glaze that gives way to deep blood-red splatters where Perret's hands clawed at the edges. While the majority of the ceramics are imbued with some sort of gestural intervention, there are a few that are glazed solid colors and among those, four are bisected by a circular void, as in the deep-red glazed *Add where there's lots, reduce where there's little*.

Seen in relation to the the gun-wielding women who stare directly at this wall, the ceramic slabs, as a totality, become a flag or a set of declarative statements, as if they were political posters. A modest sized cyan toned screenprint entitled *Féminaire* serves as the index to the exhibition. In this work, a black abstracted diagram of a female body is centered on the page with an upside-down black triangle in the top right corner in contrast to a black circle in the bottom right corner. The word *Féminaire* is printed vertically on the top left side as if the title of a book or a poster announcing an event.

As viewers encircle the raised platform taking in the front, back and sides of the stoic guerrillas (*Les guérillères*), the particular details of their being are revealed. Perret appropriated the title of Monique Wittig's novel *Les Guérillères* (1969) realizing Wittig's fictive characters — militant women with utopian feminist ideas who take control a society— as full-fledged beings. Perret's life sized figures are based on members of the Y.P.J. (Female Project Unions), a branch of the Kurdish People's Protection Units. The plastic gun carrying figures (*Les guérillères*) —composites made from myriad materials including ceramic, papier-mache, bronze, wicker— are both featured and featureless. The faces of *Les guérillères I* and *III*, for example, have no eyes noses or mouths, yet are adorned with large off centered monochrome circles akin to a kamikaze headband that complements the women's fatigues. *Les guérillères* are not poised for action. Rather, they are at ease, ready, waiting and willing to take aim. Who or what, exactly they are fighting is not specified so it is inferred that that these female soldiers, if asked, are there to fight for their rights, bodies, culture, peace and the betterment of the world.

Perret fuses the abstract, representational and conceptual, inventing situations drawn from someone else's fiction. *Les guérillères* are simultaneously humorous and cutting, pathetic and capable, active and mute. Because they are static and relaxed they are not convincing soldiers, but perhaps that is the point —they are trained and ready to take the enemy by surprise.

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