

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Los Angeles

Mai-Thu Perret

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY
3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Unit A
April 2–May 7

"Migraine"—Mai-Thu Perret's first exhibition of ceramics and paintings in Los Angeles—is a continuation of her ongoing meta-narrative, *Land of Crystal* (aka *The Crystal Frontier*, begun in 1999 as an open-ended literary account describing a fictional, all-female utopian commune based on radical feminist ideals), advancing that sprawling epic's mounting sense of cerebral fissure and nervous breakdown. An outgrowth of Perret's "Crack-Up" series from 2009, five "Migraine" paintings (all 2010) symmetrically map blooming and sputtering Rorschach blots of black, blue, red, and orange acrylic paint onto gray or off-white carpet supports. The group's title reinforces the resemblance of the works' psychedelic abstractions to brain scans imaging neural activity or, presumably, the onset of a fierce headache of existential proportions. The soaked and stained pile of each carpeted surface stylizes the sinister dimension of the material's domestic register, suggesting the spilled blood or wine of marital strife and the messy accidents of potty training.

One floor-based and ten wall-mounted handmade ceramics, all 2011, similarly display slightly disturbing abject and cranial qualities. *The great earth is so vast it saddens the people terribly*, a swollen, brainy mass whose pocked and pitted surface glistens with purple glaze, protrudes Benglis-like from a wall. Elsewhere, clay eggs cluster and stud several pallid works, teaming in particular abundance like a profuse deposit of gelatinous insect larvae in *All your bones and joints are made of gold*, where hundreds of eggs are heaped high into an unstable mound that seems ready to hatch a swarm. Clay slabs have been squeezed through fists, massaged around their temples, and gouged away at by attacking fingers in many of Perret's gripping ceramic wall reliefs. The slick gleam of their enticingly glazed facades lubricates the show's transitional slippage from composure to tumult, from uptight to outburst, from calm to migraine.



Mai-Thu Perret, *All your bones and joints are made of gold*, 2011, glazed ceramic, 25 1/2 x 22 x 20".

— Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer