

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Mother Sky, an exhibition of new work by Mai-Thu Perret, on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from March 18 through April 22, 2023. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, March 18 from 6 to 8 PM.

Perret creates sculptures, paintings, drawings, site-specific installations, performances, texts, and other works that, when taken together, constitute an artistic world woven by material relationships, cultural allusions, and embodied abstractions. While she has availed herself of a wide range of mediums, Perret's use of ceramics has served as a clearinghouse for sculptural experimentation in which a wide range of techniques and approaches to color and texture have resulted in objects of varied scales, types, and conceptual orientations. This exhibition will include a wall-mounted ceramic work, among Perret's largest and most ambitious to date; a figurative ceramic sculpture based on a digital scan of an ancient sculpture of the goddess Minerva; and smaller ceramic works dedicated to animal and other forms. By way of juxtaposition, the show also features a neon work in which Perret engages with the legacy of multidisciplinary Swiss artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943).

Over the course of two decades, Perret has consistently approached her subjects with a revisionist feminist gaze, illuminating hidden histories and alternate readings of canonical ideas and figures, and generating new ways of seeing in which distinctions between self and other, or between the human, plant, and animal worlds, are reimagined as areas of transition rather than marked separations. Indeed, Perret demonstrates how the human self is often an expression of everything that surrounds and contains it. The large-scale ceramic work on view in this show, which Perret produced during a residency at the CSULB Center for Contemporary Ceramics (CCC) in Long Beach, California, especially for the occasion, is informed by this expansive understanding.

With painterly, overlapping layers of commercial glazes whose final appearance was revealed only after a multi-stage firing process, the circular work evokes both the encompassing, swirling energy of an earthly ecosystem and the craggy luminosity of the moon, bringing the grandeur and unruliness of the outside world into the interior space of the gallery. Some sections feature rough, even violent, finger marks that resemble geological formations; others are filled with swarms of linear impressions and the sense of movement—of air, of water—they create. Punctuating these amorphous passages are small, three-dimensional images of birds and frogs, which, in addition to accentuating the work’s imposing scale, introduce the possibility of expanded narrative and mythological meaning.

Perret’s interest in myths and other stories that pervade both cultural histories and the ways in which people interpret them finds moving expression in Minerva III (2022), a previous version of which was originally produced for, and exhibited in, a solo exhibition at Istituto Svizzero in Rome. In addition to its broad conceptual reach and striking presence, the work synthesizes many aspects of Perret’s project, including her multi-faceted approach to the mutability of clay; her incisive knowledge of how women have shaped the collective imagination; and her deep understanding of the past, present, and future of major art historical genres like sculpture and painting. Based on “readymade,” open-domain digital scans of a two-thousand-year-old, monumental reconstruction of a statue of the Greek goddess of wisdom, Minerva III is not only the result of twenty-first century technical processes, but a composite form that documents the complex global conditions in which twenty-first century life continues to unfold. Perret has reproduced the face of a family member—a contemporary Senegalese-Swiss woman, for example—in order to replace the modern facsimile that adorns the Greek original today. New visions of beauty give rise to another kind of goddess, not to mention new ideas about how objects function in relation to the ideals they commemorate.

In other ceramic works on view, Perret continues to explore how art offers a seemingly endless supply of interpretive lenses by which the forces of the natural world can be channeled into physical objects. She also establishes connections to and among the other, larger sculptures in the exhibition, further amplifying their formal range and symbolic connections. Rough-hewn, brightly glazed birds, which echo the elemental simplicity of Etruscan funerary objects, contrast the earthiness of clay with the ethereal, immortal realms birds are often taken to represent. Ceramic frogs made using press-molds that are in turn enlargements of small, lacquer-like boxes, meanwhile, exemplify the precision by which clay can be manipulated, even as they serve as reminders of awkward, uncanny truths about the human body that witches, magicians, alchemists, and philosophers have associated with frogs for millennia.

In each of these works, as in the exhibition as a whole, Perret's careful attention to the mechanisms of art itself, including both its cultural contexts and the particularities of its making, reveals where the biological becomes cosmological, and points to where the material and immaterial worlds intersect. The example of Sophie Taeuber-Arp—an artist whose affiliation with Dada in the early part of the twentieth century, and whose genre-transcending interests in fine art, design, architecture, and movement, contributed to her expansive conception of how abstraction permeates modern life—therefore provides her with a compelling opportunity for research and cross-generational conversation. Translating script-like exercises from a 1927 textbook that Taeuber-Arp wrote about textile production into luminous linear forms, Perret arranges a series of intimate gestures into an overall composition that is simultaneously monumental and ethereal, and that speaks to the subtlety of aesthetic thought as much as it does to the foundational nature of art's place in human life.

Mai-Thu Perret (b. 1976, Geneva) was the subject of a 2022 solo exhibition at Istituto Svizzero, Rome, and the subject of a 2019 survey exhibition at MAMCO Genève (Musée d'art moderne et contemporain). She has also been the subject of solo

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exhibitions at Le Portique – centre régional d’art contemporain du Havre, France (2020); Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany (2019); Spike Island, Bristol, England (2019); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2016); Le Magasin, Grenoble, France (2012); Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2011); University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor (2010); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2008); and Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (2006). Recent group exhibitions include New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, California (2021); The Musical Brain, High Line, New York (2021); New Age, New Age: Strategies for Survival, DePaul Art Museum, Chicago (2019); and Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body (1300–Now), Met Breuer, New York (2018). Her work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris; Collection Aargauer Kunsthau, Arau, Switzerland; Fonds National d’Art Contemporain, Paris; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Perret lives and works in Geneva.