

Mai-Thu Perret

Teaching Resource

Sightings: Mai-Thu Perret / March 12 – July 17, 2016

About Mai-Thu Perret

Born in 1976 in Geneva, Switzerland, artist Mai-Thu Perret studied English Literature at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom, and participated in the prestigious Whitney Independent Study Program in New York City. Utilizing a variety of means including painting, sculpture, performance and installation, Perret creates open-ended works that invite viewers to consider gender, social structures and utopian ideals that relate to her studies in literature, her own writings and to current events.

Feminine / Masculine

Mai-Thu Perret uses a wide variety of art materials and processes, some of which are traditionally considered to be either feminine or masculine by art historians, and by society as a whole. **Look over the list below. Use your own logic and experience to assign each item with an (F) for feminine, (M) for masculine, and (N) for neutral.**



Mai-Thu Perret. Photo: Annik Wetter

After filling in the blanks, compare your responses with a partner.

- **Discuss why you chose different responses on specific items.**

Mai-Thu Perret incorporates all of these materials, colors, and items in *Sightings*. The eight figures in her installation are all women.

- **Think about the items that you assigned as 'Masculine' or 'Neutral.' Do your responses change after viewing the sculptures in this installation? Why or why not?**

Perret identifies herself as feminist.

- **How do you define feminism? Consider the subject matter, materials, and overall feeling of the exhibition. How does Perret's work incorporate feminist ideas?**

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ceramic | <input type="checkbox"/> Paint | <input type="checkbox"/> Combat boots |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow | <input type="checkbox"/> Camouflage | <input type="checkbox"/> Red |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clothes | <input type="checkbox"/> Bronze | <input type="checkbox"/> Stripes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carpet | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue | <input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum jelly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Polka Dots | <input type="checkbox"/> Glass | <input type="checkbox"/> Black |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wicker | <input type="checkbox"/> Hair | <input type="checkbox"/> Resin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Military fatigues | <input type="checkbox"/> Silicone | <input type="checkbox"/> Purple |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> Green | <input type="checkbox"/> Military jacket |
| <input type="checkbox"/> AK-47 | <input type="checkbox"/> Braids | <input type="checkbox"/> Fabric |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog | <input type="checkbox"/> Eyeballs | <input type="checkbox"/> Brown |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pink | <input type="checkbox"/> Papier-mâché | <input type="checkbox"/> Blanket |



Sightings: Mai-Thu Perret installation view, Nasher Sculpture Center, 2016. Photo: Kevin Todora.

Suggested Curriculum Connections

Fine Arts: Foundations, Critical Evaluation | 117.52 Art, Level I (c) (1-4)

Social Studies: World Geography | 113.43 Level I (5) (A), Government 113.46 Level I 14 (A), (B), 18 (B)

Uniform & Uniformity

The eight figures in Perret's exhibition wear clothing and gear appropriate for soldiers. These outfits were inspired by video footage of the Y.P.J. (Women's Protection Unit) in Rojava, Syria.

After viewing the exhibition, discuss the following questions with a partner:

- Why do military groups wear uniforms? What is the purpose of a uniform?
- Have you ever had to wear a uniform? If so, describe how it felt to wear the same thing as others? Did you attempt to make it unique?
- How can a person express her/his individuality while in uniform?

Sketch a design for a uniform that you would wear every day. What patterns, textiles and materials would you choose? What symbols, colors or words would be important to include in the design?



Utopia

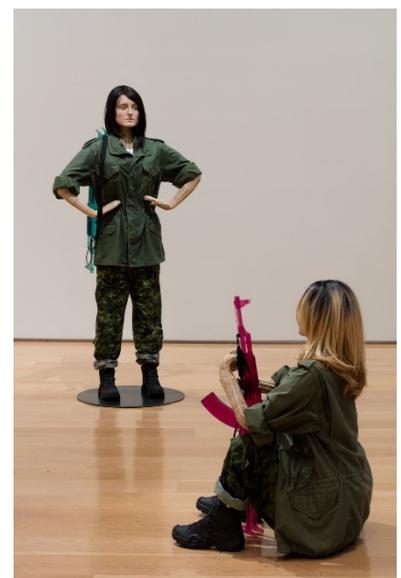
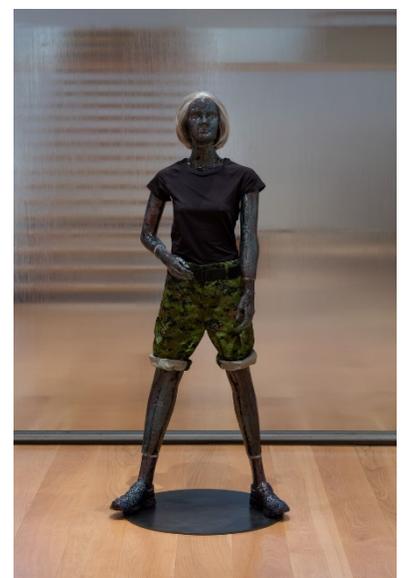
Mai-Thu Perret's exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center relates to her earlier work about a fictional, feminist utopia and to the Y.P.J. (Women's Protection Unit) in Rojava, Syria, an actual militia group of Kurdish women who protect their community against the threat of enemy attack amidst the Syrian War. This and other all-female protection units have been hailed as champions of democracy, liberty and order.

After viewing Perret's exhibition, spend a few minutes answering these questions in writing before discussing them with a partner or small group.

- Define utopia.
- Is utopia possible? Why or why not?
- Describe your utopia: Who are its leaders? What are its values? In the face of conflict, how will your utopian society solve problems?

Using the medium of collage, create a two- or three-dimensional depiction of your utopian society. Consider making drawings with collaged elements or utilizing found objects and clay to create a diorama. When you are finished, give your utopian society a name and share your work with the class.

As a class, choose a current world event to research—a conflict that involves unfair or inhumane treatment or living conditions. In small groups, discuss the conflict and develop an ideal (utopian) resolution to the problem. Then, have a representative from each group share their plan with the class.



Related Research

BBC News "Kurdish & Yazidi Women Fighting Isis" video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQZR6xzDkjc>

New York Times article: "A Dream of Secular Utopia in Isis' Backyard"
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/a-dream-of-utopia-in-hell.html?_r=0

Top: *Les guérillères II*, and *Les guérillères VII*, (installation view) 2016. Center: *Les guérillères IX*, (installation view), 2016. Bottom: *Les guérillères IV*, and *Les guérillères V*, (installation view) 2016. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Photos: Kevin Todora.