

EVENTS

ARTISTS' BRUNCH:
CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN
THOMAS AND MAI-THU PERRET
Saturday 19 January, 11am–1pm
£5/£3 concessions, booking advised
On the opening day of their
exhibitions at Spike Island, artists
Christopher Kulendran Thomas
and Mai-Thu Perret discuss the
ideas behind their work with curator
Vanessa Boni.

PERFORMANCE: MAI-THU PERRET
Wednesday 20 March, 7pm
Free, booking essential
Perret's performance activates the
sculptural elements of the exhibition
and plays with the ongoing cultural
relevance of the witch as fairy tale
bogey woman, feminist icon, and
working class heroine.

In collaboration with Perret's
students at the Workmaster program,
Labzone and Geneva School of Art
and Design (HEAD – Genève), and
with UK singer-songwriter Tamara
Barnett-Herrin.

INFORMATION

Spike Island is an international centre
for the development of contemporary
art and design, located in Bristol's
harbour area. Admission to the gallery
is free.

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OPENING HOURS

Gallery: Tuesday to Sunday, 12–5pm
(during exhibitions)
Café: Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5pm
Saturday to Sunday, 10am–5pm

Spike Island is a registered charity
(no. 1003505). Spike Island gratefully
acknowledges support from Arts
Council England and Bristol City
Council.

Mai-Thu Perret's exhibition is
supported by Pro Helvetia and
Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation.

Mai-Thu Perret's performance
is supported by Geneva School of
Art and Design (HEAD – Genève).

Spike Island

MAI-THU PERRET *The Blazing World*

19 January – 24 March 2019

The Blazing World is a major new commission by Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret, extending upon her interests in feminist politics and the figure of the witch. The exhibition evokes an imagined landscape composed of three abstracted motifs: a tree, a ramp and a cone, and borrows its aesthetics from early Avant-garde stage designs and the gardens of Japanese Zen temples.

Perret's geometric cone is inspired by the forms found within Zen gardens, such as the "moon viewing platform" from 'The Temple of the Silver Pavilion' in Kyoto, Japan. Extending from the cone is a ramp, spray painted in carmine red. Viewed from different angles, this object appears as a minimalist box, while its curvature reveals itself and the colour changes intensity. The burnt looking tree with its twisted roots refers to representations of barren, wild landscapes in popular culture, evoking an atmosphere of danger or the unknown. Entitled *Superpotent*, the installation creates a sacred garden to be manipulated as a theatrical stage set. Designed with the presence of the moon as its conceptual centre, but in the knowledge that this natural satellite is often invisible, absence is at the core of this type of garden. The uncanny quality of this absence recurs in many of the works: the empty stage, the empty house, the voice with no body, carrying the haunting sense of something yet to come.

The Blazing World, a spoken word recording written and performed by singer-songwriter Tamara Barnett-Herrin, permeates the space. Drawing on many sources such as

ethnographic and feminist readings of witchcraft, this series of poems are written as incantations, which find their form through techniques of cut-up and erasure.

The metallic silver walls create an otherworldly atmosphere. The colour not only has associations to the moon and its feminine energy but also with the genre of science-fiction. *Mirror Logic*, a fabric banner suspended from the ceiling, is composed of abstract circles of differing sizes orbiting each other on a diagonal axis, alluding to a planetary formation. Perret has been making abstract fabric banners since 2005 – they are a recurring motif in her exhibitions. Perret's use of abstraction often dovetails with references to the occult and spiritualism. Through her use of textiles and ceramics – both associated with craft traditions and what one might call "women's art" – Perret explores how we might appraise 20th century avant-garde movements and modernist aesthetics.

While the stage set is monumental, Perret's new body of ceramic sculptures convey a domestic scale. Each sculpture is associated with the imagery of the witch in fairy tales: *A Magnetiser*, the ceramic dollhouse recalls the gingerbread house in *Hansel and Gretel*. Ceramics can also be thought of as a kind of baking as it involves very similar processes in terms of construction and glazing; *Abnormally avid*, a basket of a dozen half eaten, slightly rotten apples recalls the image of the poisonous apple offered to Snow White by the wicked witch; and *With an unbounded force*, a series of animal masks allude to the

transformation of witches into animals or the possibility of being possessed by other subjectivities. Ceramic material plays a fundamental role in Perret's practice owing to its wide-ranging anthropological significance, inherent tactility and reliance upon the transformative role played by fire.

By referencing the figure of the witch, Perret recalls the persecution of women in the Early European Modern period, when witchcraft and Satanic worship became an expression of peasant and working class rebellion, as feudal society transitioned towards capitalism. The deep psychic entanglements of this archetypal non-compliant woman – as a perceived threat to fertility, reproduction and patriarchy – continue to live on in popular culture and fairy tales. The witch is a figure ingrained in collective consciousness – it both connects with unconscious forces and is a cultural cliché, a readymade, a familiar figure in fairy tales and Hollywood films.

This commission extends Perret's ongoing project *The Crystal Frontier*, initiated in 1999 as a fictional all-women commune who opted out of contemporary capitalist society and settled in the New Mexico desert. The story of this autonomous community provides the framework for Perret's interest in radical feminist politics, and the objects she presents often masquerade as the 'hypothetical production' of the women inside *The Crystal Frontier*. Perret's continually expanding fiction explores how both personalities and objects function within the social systems they inhabit, the nature of utopia, and the compelling power of revolution and ritual.

BIOGRAPHY

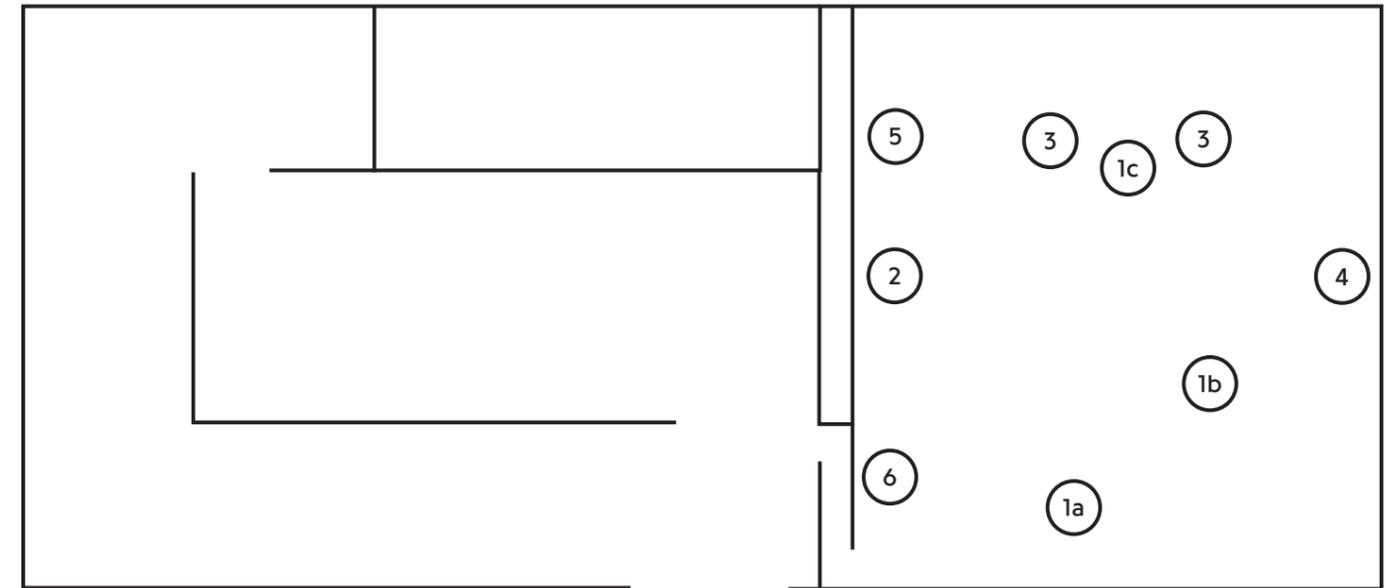
Mai-Thu Perret was born in 1976 in Geneva, where she lives and works. She is known for her multidisciplinary practice encompassing sculpture, painting, video and installation. Perret has created a complex oeuvre which combines radical feminist politics with literary texts, homemade crafts and 20th century avant-garde aesthetics.

She studied English at Cambridge University and was a participant in the Whitney Independent Study Program. In 2011 she won the prestigious Zurich Art Prize and the Prix Culturel Manor. She is the recipient of the 2018 Paul Boesch Award.

Her recent solo shows include the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2016); Le Magasin, Grenoble (2011); MAMCO, Geneva (2011); Aargauer Kunsthhaus, Aarau (2011); Swiss Institute of Contemporary Art, New York (2011); University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor (2010); The Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2009); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco (2008); The Kitchen, New York (2008); and The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2006). She has a major retrospective exhibition opening at MAMCO, Geneva in autumn 2018.

Mai-Thu Perret's work has featured in numerous group shows, including the Centre d'art contemporain, Geneva (2014); Swiss Institute, New York (2014); Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris (2013); Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing (2013); Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver (2013); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2012), CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (2012); Kunsthalle Bern, Bern (2012); ILLUMInations (curated by Bice Curiger), 54th Venice Biennale (2011); and Haus der Kunst, Munich (2010).

FLOORPLAN



LIST OF WORKS

- 1 *Superpotent* (2019)
 - a Rubber mulch, wood, resin
 - b Emulsion, MDF
 - c Timber, chicken wire, muslin, polyurethane expanding foam, paint

All works courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London

- 2 *Mirror Logic* (2019)
Appliqué on fabric
- 3 Tamara Barnett-Herrin
The Blazing World (2019)
Percussionist:
Manuel Branáa
Sound piece

- 4 *With an unbounded force* (2019)
Eight glazed ceramic masks

- 5 *A Magnetizer* (2019)
Glazed ceramic

- 6 *Abnormally avid* (2019)
Glazed ceramic, copper wire and plastic