

360 Speaker Series Artist Mai-Thu Perret in Conversation with Artist John Armleder

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Lynda Wilbur: Hello and welcome to the 360 Speaker Series. I'm Lynda Wilbur filling in for Anna Smith and I'm pleased to introduce Mai-Thu Perret. Today we welcome Mai-Thu Perret, who has created an exhibition in our lower level gallery that incorporates aspects of painting, sculpture, performance and installation. These disparate elements are woven together with a rich narrative thread based on a fictional feminist art community Perret created called "The Crystal Frontier." The imaginary women at this commune live in autonomy in the New Mexican desert and made work that speaks to the human longing for utopia.

Based in Geneva, Mai-Thu Perret received her BA in English Literature from Cambridge University, and from 2002 to 2003 she was enrolled in the Whitney Independent Study Program. Perret's work has been the subject of major solo exhibitions at such institutions as the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Le Magazin, Grenoble. As part of her current exhibition, Perret will stage a performance entitled "Figures" on June 2nd, and a newly commissioned world premiere performance on June 4th at the Nasher Sculpture Center. Joining Perret in conversation is her longtime friend, artist John Armleder, who has been a principal figure in the international contemporary art world for over 40 years. Working in painting, sculpture, performance and installation, Armleder and Perret have collaborated on multiple projects, notably under the banner of Armleder's Ecart Gallery and on the 2009 conceptual exhibition, *Voids: A Retrospective* at the Pompidou and Kunsthalle Bern. We are so pleased they could be with us today. Please join me in welcoming John Armleder and Mai-Thu Perret.

John Armleder: Hello, I'm happy to be here. Maybe we should start with asking you what kind of a project you're doing and the line of other projects done before. What kind of a follow-up is it?

Mai-Thu Perret: It's all new work, basically, which is shown here. The exhibition here is pretty much all new work apart from the two large eyes which are quite new, because I made them maybe six months ago, and it's a series—really the starting point for the show was two-fold. First, I was very happy, or I was excited about doing a show at the Nasher, and I came for many site visits and took in the great collection and all the sculpture, and I thought I wanted to do something that involved freestanding sculptures and also basically statues, because it seemed appropriate and it's right on time. I've made works in that vein before and it's a thing that I kind of go in and out of making, and I wanted to go back to this type of art-making. So here are some older examples. And this coincided with my sort of becoming really fixated with events and, I think, like a lot of other people, in Syria and what's happening in the Middle East and just generally the current politics, and I became very, very interested in developments in a place called The Free State of Rojava, which is a Kurdish enclave on the border between Turkey and Syria where basically, in the sort of destruction of the Syrian State and of Syrian control through the war on other things, the struggle with ISIS and so on and with the civil war that is going on in

Syria, a Kurdish government took power and they set up a kind of revolutionary government system according to very utopian very progressive principles, and also specifically where they set up a number of female militias. So in a region that is generally, I think it's safe to say, quite—how would you say—traditional, rural and even more so it's really a—I'm struggling to find the word—it's very much a nomadic society and very patriarchal, basically. They set up these militias that are run by women. Women bear arms and defend themselves and their communities against, among other things, ISIS and various other military groups, and I found that incredibly fascinating, and I watched many, many... There are loads of videos on the internet, and nowadays we live in a very particular time when you can suddenly become interested in topics like that and then only do you read the articles in *The Times* or magazines and things like that, but you can actually watch hours of videos about these people, which I did and I became completely obsessed with them and somehow I wanted to make a show that in some ways commemorated them, or it was related to them. So part of the inspiration for the objects or the sculptures you see in the exhibition are these women, these militias, called the YPJ's. And then, of course, this sort of dovetailed into older interests of mine of, basically, female communities and so on. So this is how I guess we got to the exhibition as it is now.

JA: I have one question, which always comes up when I look at your work, is that there is, in a way, two sides to it, which are very clearly exposed: one is a political, social expression of your positions, probably, and one is a very formalistic one. And it's very clear in the show, which is here because, in a way, the painting—which is a stain painting on a carpet, a Rorschach image, kind of—in a way it doesn't have the subtext that of course all the figures have. And in between there's the eyes, which we don't know exactly how they activate the whole process. Could you talk about that?

MTP: Yeah, I mean, it was always very important when I made... In older shows that I did, they do, but especially this one with this sort of content that was quite, you know, that is very specific—very real, and can be very overwhelming in a way—that I would also introduce things that have absolutely nothing to do with the narrative. And the carpet, I mean, somebody mentioned to me that it was like a flag, and I thought it was actually quite an interesting comment because I didn't really think of it that way, but it is a form of emblem.

JA: You've made many flags in your life.

MTP: I made many flags, but this is a very particular flag because, in a way, it's like it's sort of straddling two things that don't really go together, which is a kind of projection of the unconscious. I made this reference to the Rorschach patterns, that are these tests cards that psychologists use to diagnose—I don't think they use them anymore, I mean I'm not very up to date on this and I don't think they are used anymore—but it was something, a very, very prevalent diagnostic tool in psychiatry, and I have always been fascinated by them because it's this issue of projection and, you know, what do you see when you look at an image. And everybody, of course, sees different things, and surely when they see my work they... Nobody sees what I, you know... Everybody else sees different things, and, in fact, I see different things at different moments. And I think that's one of the reasons that you want to make art. It's because of this constant changing of relation to an object that is there and doesn't change. So yeah, the flag—I mean the carpet painting—in some ways it functions like a flag, but then what does it represent? It represents the fact that you can't really have an emblem of what is going on. Do you see what I mean? And the eyes, again, I

didn't really know why I wanted to have the eyes, but I knew that I had to break... The show's been a... Making the work has been a process of trying to break down the single-mindedness of the kind of reference material I was starting from. So I started making representations, in a way, of these people, homages to these people, but then, in a way, every single formal strategy that I employed was a strategy that sort of broke down the possibility of having a clear legibility. You know, having a clear representation these people. I mean if you think of what a statue, a monument for example, is like, you don't want to confuse... If you want to memorialize something, you'd rather not confuse the viewers by using too many materials, making things too "collage" and having too many references to other things in there, and I think that's exactly what I did in that show. And the eyes, to go back to the eyes, it was a body part which I thought was interesting in terms of these bodies of the figures. And now that I've been in the room with the show, I think, for me, what I like about the eyes is that they tweak the perception, and actually it's—I've just realized—it is a thing done before and I hadn't thought about it that way, but the eyes, because they're oversized, they make you question the ratio of the other things in the room. And so you're with these figures that are a bit like action figures on some level. They are giant figurines or giant toys, but of course they're life-size and you have these eyes, and it makes you maybe see the figures even more like small figures, and it makes also your perception of your relation to the objects in the room quite different than if everything was one-to-one. So, like you say, it's fair to say, a fairly formalist way of going about it but it's also about perception and one's sense of being in the world and one's sense of the legibility of the objects that you are placed in front of. Does that make sense?

JA: I don't know. And we don't need to make sense.

MTP: Oh yeah, that's true. Thank God.

JA: There's one fascinating thing about a show like that, is that there's a strategy of perception which we're talking about but also because the figures are more or less, well they are life-size, and at one point there's always this thing about getting into the artwork physically. You know, Barnett Newman always wanted his paintings to be photographed with him or someone in front of them.

MTP: To get the sense of scale.

JA: Maybe. Or something else we never knew exactly. Well, he talks in different ways about it and obviously in that show it was very interesting while you were putting it up because people thought there were more people in the space than actually there were because there was confusion between the actual sculptures, and it was like the people working here say, "What's all this crowd in that space now? People are not supposed to be there because we are putting up a show." So there's a sort of misperception or vice versa, a better perception, and I think those scale problems are very obvious in the show because as you said the eyes are big but they're not as big as the Tony Tasset one.

MTP: Yeah, the one John is referring to is on Main Street in Dallas opposite the Joule hotel. It's a humongous eye, which is much, much bigger. But it's clearly a very different public scale object.

JA: Of course. But I mean what's interesting, and you know, you do like a very large Sam Francis or Jackson Pollock stain on the carpet, which is no more cleanable, and there are all those sorts of venues in which we are invited to participate, and what is, I

think, is interesting is that the narrative which is very often given with it is about this sort of political position which goes from feminism to political positions in a social kind of situation. On the other hand, you can very well just forget all about it and look at all of that from a formal point of view what you can do with Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis also.

MTP: I never mean to close down the way that people interact with these things, and, as a matter of fact, a lot of people may come and see this show and not think about Sam Francis and not think about Rojava or Pollock, and that's quite fair. I mean, that's totally fine.

JA: But you do set up a stage because this is really like a stage which the people walk on to, or are a part of, which happens always. I mean, when you go into an exhibition there's a guy, like, looking at the same painting as you are looking at. I have no idea what he's thinking about. He has a different kind of reference but you don't really look at him in that show.

MTP: I always look at the people in museums as objects in the museum. I think because...

JA: That's obvious in that show, we understand.

MTP: But it's a thing, that's why I also started to say that I did the show also, probably it is, in a roundabout way, influenced by the fact that it's in the sculpture museum because I like to sort of mimic the place, you know, the institutions and the environment in which I work. And in some ways there is sort of, I mean, in some ways it's also a picture of an exhibition. It's not only an exhibition, it's an image of an exhibition, which is a concern that—do you know what I mean? It's a concern for things not being quite real, not being so... It's clearly not a Pollock or a Sam Francis because it's not something that asks you to look at it very directly. In a way it's also kind of post... I'm also very much a post-appropriation artist. Do you know what I mean? Like, you are on some levels too.

JA: Yeah, it's interesting that a lot of the references that one could bring historically to those kind of works are very foreign, as far as I know, from yours. It's like, you think about Pollock, it starts with Surrealism in a way, which I don't think is your case but maybe I'm wrong.

MTP: No, I don't think it's my case but I mean, giant eyes, things, projections: it's very serious. That interest was sort of unconscious projection mechanisms, or whatever, is something I like about... I was thinking more actually about it in terms of Dada or things like that. Things that are about the sort of rupture of collage. That uses formal strategies of disruption and cutting things up and having elements that don't fit together, and Dada has something to do with a particular political situation. There have been many readings of Dadaists.

JA: Well, there's many Dadaists. It's like with all these movements there are people who have a position, some have another.

MTP: But if you look at a Hannah Hoch collage there's a sort of way that that is expressing the horror of being, of living in Nazi Germany or in soon-to-be Nazi Germany, and in ways that are not directed at all. She's not talking about Nazism specifically, but I think the formal, destructed quality of the collages is part of that. It's

a way of dealing with that that I find very, I don't know, efficient, or it speaks... I relate to it.

JA: So in a Dada way, how do you feel about bringing all those ladies with guns in a museum?

MTP: "In the museum we are not allowed to have guns," in front. That was a sort of a paradox in this show being shown. Again, this is all about changes in context and place, because I think this work in the European museum, people would not have known... These guns would have just been a foreign object. Here I'm not so sure. And I've been asked by a few people if, for example, this was a reference to the Vietnam War, which is something that I think... It's the fatigues and the jackets which are US Army sixties/seventies era jackets, but I understand that it would bring this association and maybe people know that I'm partly Vietnamese, but I had no idea at the beginning of working with anything that it had to do with the Vietnam War. And some people thought that maybe it had something to do with it. I find that very fascinating because it's just a question that's an American question, and so if you're in America, people are going to see the Vietnam War or things that speak to them in the work.

JA: Yeah, I mean it's not that you talk about the Vietnam War. I think the problem with guns today is a problem of today.

MTP: Sure, sure, of course.

JA: And I think there's an irony which is quite Dadaistic in this situation is that the guns look like candies.

MTP: Yeah.

JA: And is that on purpose?

MTP: That was always a very conscious decision, because when you watch these videos, there's like long—these Rojava videos, these women are fighting against ISIS—there's like long things about guns when you watch them clean their guns and when they say "I didn't know that, as a woman, I could touch a gun. I didn't know how it worked. I was so afraid of it. I couldn't touch it." All these taboos and everything. And in fact, there is a sort of gun fetishism that is very strong, and you always see... These images are potent because you see these accessories. And then, when I started making the show, it was obvious to me that I wasn't going to have real guns. That was quite obvious, and I didn't want it to look like real in any way. I mean, I didn't want to have any possible confusion on that level and I thought this candy color and the sort of regressive—because it is very regressive—quality of, you know, that was what I was looking for. So in the same way that when you're a little child and you see a toy gun and, you know, it's brightly colored, you run for it and you want it. I wanted to sort of appeal to that drive. You know, guns are very... People get very fetishistic about them.

JA: I think it's a good place to talk about that. The other thing is that when you're—and I'm referring, in fact, to what I was trying to say before—when you look at the stage which you organized, which you put the visitor into and he activates it, and at one point when one of the visitors in and another visitor is there he doesn't really know who's the visitor and who is one of the artworks. And, in fact, there's this sort of confusion. So it's like a kind of a trap strategy. You are getting hold of the people and

making them do things within the artwork, which, basically, artwork always does, but in a very passive way. I mean I think someone who looks at an artwork becomes the artwork. It's an old Duchampian thing. We know that the artwork in itself is defined by the person who's looking at it, meaning that the guy who's looking at it next to you sees something totally different. And this is why, maybe, such talks are bizarre, because we're trying to ask you as the artist what your work is about, and the only thing that is about is about a person looking at it.

MTP: Yeah. Of course. What do you want me to say?

JA: Well, how did you get involved? I mean you get involved in a narrative from one show to another which has basically—and that's a question that most artists have, certainly me—is once you've done one work, why do you do a second one?

MTP: Habit.

JA: That's not a good answer. Probably the traditional artist, which is a bit existentialist...

MTP: To make it, you mean to improve upon the earlier...

JA: No that's the moral one, which is usually quite boring.

MTP: To get it right sort of thing.

JA: No, basically, I think many artists, when they do a second work, is to cancel the one they did before.

MTP: Yeah, of course.

JA: But what's interesting...

MTP: Which is maybe a form of correction on the work that was done before.

JA: But then you do it to cancel the pervious one but you do the same, in fact.

MPT: Yeah.

JA: And what kind of a disease is that? You have no answer?

MTP: No.

JA: Ok, so we need a doctor. There's another question I have, and it's a bit selfish question, but in a way the best—how would you say—the normal position in front of doing a work is not doing it, in a way. And something pushes us to do it nevertheless, and these things are coming from nowhere, which is not the thing I should be saying now, but it's an invitation from a curator or critic or a friend, another artist. It's a conduct which brings you into doing something. Are you conscious about that?

MTP: You mean do I think about the nature or the interpolation to make the art while I'm making it? Something like that that? Or do you mean... Are you asking me if I also have drives to make artworks when no invitation is around, because there is a possibility that even if nobody invited me I would...

JA: You would go on doing it.

MTP: Yeah. I wouldn't make this, probably, because this is work that specifically addresses... I don't know, it's made... This is definitely work that's made to be seen.

And that is not... I mean, it's not a, definitely not a sort of solipsistic thing that I would do on my own. It's very difficult to ask yourself what you would be if you were in a position that is absolutely not the position that you've always worked with, right? But of course I ask myself, you always ask yourself, why you're doing things and how maybe you can mess with or play with all the expectations that are set up around invitations, or being the structure of the arts, you know, the life of an artist. The shows, even the system that means that you maybe you sell the work or maybe you get a grant to do the work. All of this apparatus that structures the way that you view the work. But that said, I also sometimes make... You know, play around with little bunches clay and stuff like that, and I would probably do that always. You don't like that one.

JA: I don't think it's perfect. You can do better. You should never outgrow that moment. Being an old man and of a very specific period, when I started doing art—and I started fairly young, big enough to walk, that kind of person—that idea is that there was a freedom in doing art which would give you the chance to activate tools to try to change the world. I think this kind of a utopia is sort of difficult to grasp today because the situation is very different. For your generation already and even more so for the even younger people. Nevertheless, we're, in a fairly vain way, intervening in the world in a very active and heavy...

MTP: Preposterous way, is what you're saying.

JA: Well, there's museums, there's artwork all over on the walls of private people and institutions. It's part of something which is quite heavy in the world when you open the papers, this seems fairly vain in a way. How do you relate to that?

MTP: I think maybe how I relate to it, very simply, is by making bizarre connections between the room on the lower floor of a museum in Dallas and some story that I read about in the newspaper about girls who, you know, clean up guns to go fight crazy, you know, Islamic extremists high on speed in a place. You know what I mean? I think that's exactly what kind of... Maybe that's one of the ways that you deal with it, and maybe it's really completely vain to think that has anything... I mean, I think I'm very aware that the relationship of this work to the things that, in part, inspires it is probably a very vain relationship that, I mean... I'm certainly aware of my lack of right to claim any truth or direct knowledge about this situation or what these people are going through. It's all about my reaction to it and not at all, I mean, there's definitely no ethnographic truth, if there ever was such a thing. But maybe that's one of the ways that you deal with it. The other way is to move to a monastery somewhere which isn't... Do you know what I mean? Or maybe just to... Sometimes the impulse or the response is maybe just to be even more playful or even more somehow, yeah, playful or light. Do see what I mean? Which I think is what you do very often. Yeah? Turn it back on you and your work in the face of all the stuff that can get quite heavy and, in life, your strategy has always been to achieve a certain kind of lightness and humor and detachment.

JA: Yeah. What have I to say about that? Nevertheless, I think there's something which is strange when you reach my age. It's even more strange because you think you spend your life doing those things. You don't know if you're just doing them for yourself and it's a very selfish kind of position, which I think it is. And we have this idea that it's a generous move to exchange or to give away our selfishness to other people. And we have this idea that in doing that, we turn generous. Nevertheless,

there's a problem there, that I do believe we are, as artists, in a very privileged position, the most privileged position. I think we can be in society when it was a better position than anyone else. I mean, maybe priests have a lot of freedom. Maybe, I don't know who else has the kind of ease that we have to say, "I do that because I want to do it, and it's like that, and take it or leave it," kind of situation. But that gives us a kind of responsibility, and I don't know exactly how...

MTP: ...responsible we are, you mean.

JA: Yeah, because we have this freedom. We have this platform that most people in society don't have. They have to take care of so many other things, they don't have time to think about it like that. And I think because of that, we have a responsibility versus society which obligates us in a way. And, of course, that's reverse, this course, because most artists don't feel obligated at all in any way. And I think it's wrong, but I don't know what to do about it. Would you?

MTP: Wow. I do... I mean, I think I understand what you mean about responsibility and privilege, but I don't think that, I mean, I don't think that saddling yourself with that question all the time is the best way to be responsible. In fact—it's kind of a cop out of answering your question—but I think in some ways to... Do you know what I mean? I think there is a moment when you have to suspend... You just naturally do suspend those types of interrogations in order to have some form of freedom to maybe make something that is actually interesting or relevant, or, you know, hopefully could be interesting or relevant. That said, I think, sure, you're responsible for, I don't know, you're just also responsible for basic things like, you know, treating people properly and, I don't know, very basic relations of exchange and all of these things. And I think that's actually not a thing that's specific to being an artist. I think it's a thing specific to be a human being as soon as you are in any position to control your life and, you know what I mean? So I don't know that—it's kind of weird for me to say that in relation to this—but I think the places where we make a difference in the world and where we are being political is not necessarily in the artwork at all. Don't you think? I don't know. You're reading all these pretty serious questions to answer. I have to think of how to answer them.

JA: My question is serious so the answer shouldn't be. Well, I mean, there's this thing about artists: he would be maybe a helpful person that rather than helping an old lady to cross the street will show her where the other side of street is.

MTP: I don't understand.

JA: Maybe me neither, but there is this idea that the artist gives a representation of the world, or something like that, that is informative enough to show you how to cross the street. Possibly.

MTP: Yeah.

JA: Now, what it doesn't say is why you should cross the street.

MTP: And so what you are suggesting is that the old lady sits on the streets and meditates or something like that. Or just sits on the street and has an ice cream. Should there be an ice cream stand?

JA: If she's really good at it she will stay on the same side of the street and have crossed without even going there.

MTP: So if she's really good, she could practice telepathy. Is that what you're saying?

JA: Something like that, but I think art has a lot of...

MPT: That's asking a lot of an old lady.

JA: Well we are all old ladies in that sense. That's what I'm trying to say. We are all crossing the street also. But the art is putting this platform available in a very special way, because if you are doing most things in society you're really only crossing the street from one step to another. The artist in a traditional way—and we come from like French culture—you think of enlightenment in a way. So there's this sort of moment where you give an image which would be about this, about that... Like, in your case, there's this political feminist political position and also a perfectly formal position, and it should...

MTP: But I'm not sure about either. I mean I'm not even sure it's about anything.

JA: It's with something, no?

MTP: Yeah, it's with something. Something arrives, you take it, you make something with it and then it's there and then other people arrive and take it and make something of it. And for the purposes of, you know, producing catalogues and exhibition brochures and discourse, we try to make sense of it by saying what it is "about," and sometimes we say what it is about in ways that are more coherent or more intelligent or better related, maybe, to what we think at this particular moment is going on with the work, but actually in the end it's not about it... You know, what I mean? It's like, you know, it's a red wheelbarrow or something. You know, it's just there. It's a thing. That's like a super Modernist way of thinking about things, but I think... I definitely don't think the work is really "about" anything.

JA: Yeah, I believe in that also. On another hand, don't you think with this overproduction, aren't we dumping tons of things on the planet that we don't really need to do?

MTP: Art, but a lot of other things.

JA: No, that's not right, because you wouldn't survive without water and you wouldn't be able to drink the water without a container.

MTP: Yeah, but I mean, does the container have to be plastic? Does it have to be from this Nestlé? Does it have to be purified water, whatever that means, you know?

JA: So that basically says, must the painting be framed?

MTP: Yeah. Would you make your frame in radioactive materials that are dangerous to the people who are looking at the painting? No.

JA: I don't want to know what's in my paintings.

MTP: That's true. But I mean of course there is... That's a very generational position that you're taking. That's a very seventies conceptual thing to say. That is Douglas Huebler saying there is too much, you know, there is too much art in the world. There is too much stuff in the world and I will not make more. But you're making so much more.

JA: In my case that's for sure. And again...

MTP: And you enjoy it.

JA: Enjoyment is a complicated position because it's at the same time selfish and at the same time can be shared in a way that would make the world, if not better, more enjoyable.

MTP: You're a Catholic.

JA: I'm a Catholic, which is good because you can have all your sins forgiven. That's true. And what are you?

MTP: I don't know.

JA: Well it's a quest. It's a never ending quest. So what's next?

MTP: Maybe questions?

Audience Question: About some of the images on the screen. Some of them are very strong and maybe you could connect that to us.

MTP: This is a slideshow I've made for very different occasions. It's a slideshow that I've used in conference situations or art school situations when I was asked to present my work and I didn't have the privilege of doing it with someone like John, and I was more going through the evolution of the work or the different things that I had done at different points. So it's a fairly... It's kind of a chronological array of artworks that have been made since 2000 to now, and some of it also incorporates reference materials were used in order to make it: work or things that were important when I made the works. So for example, here is all this stuff about Krazy Kat and George Herriman—who's this American comic book artist who started working in the teens and I think worked until the forties—and I made a piece that was a performance piece of a choreographer which was very much based on Krazy Kat as a dance, and so this is what it is. This is an image from the piece called *Figures*, a performance piece called *Figures*, which you may see if you come to see it in June at the Nasher. And it's also quiet. It also introduced for me to use of these silicon faces, the sort of very realistic face masks that I'm using also in exhibition here at the Nasher, and it's a play with a giant puppet. It's a performance of a giant puppet. It's very much about the live dancer and the puppet and the relationship between these two objects

AQ: The promotional material piqued my interest and I was wondering if you could talk about the exhibit that's here. Is that part of your work as it relates to a fictional art commune and utopian society? Is that part of that same thrust?

MTP: Yeah, so actually I didn't read the blurb, so forgive me for not actually knowing what you're talking about, but I think I can surmise what you're talking about. The work that's there is not a direct... It's not the same people as the people that I have been writing about in this project called *The Crystal Frontier* with this autonomous commune in the desert in New Mexico. It's very germane to it, and it's a sort of an evolution from it but it's not... It doesn't fit directly under the rubric, if you will, but it's the continuation of this quite long work with this story, and to an extent my trying to extricate myself from the story that I had created, I think.

AQ: You were talking about Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis, and everybody looks at it differently. This may have nothing to do, but I can't help but think of John Baldessari with the circles. And I just wondered if you could comment on that.

MTP: There is maybe a similar strategy to the one Baldessari is using on his images. These circles arose out of a very basic problem, which is: I was making these figures; they were, quite simply, they were quite crude and I didn't want to paint the eyes and paint the mouth and be really realistic, and yet I didn't want to leave them blank. And so I tried all types of things and geometric signs. And then I came across this circle idea and it seemed to work quite well because it's like a giant eye, so it is a bit of a cyclops type thing, and it also kind of canceled, somehow, the face, and, in my mind, also reminded me of more things like Dada, or where you have characters that are like that. So, yeah. And I think, in Baldessari, it is a strategy that is something like that, which is a kind of this canceling out of the images that he's using by sticking this circle on it. You have to pick the questions. There are so many questions

AQ: Can you say something about the oil on the window? And then, also, can you say something more about... You called the performance a puppet, a dummy, a person related to that. But can you say something more about the uncanny or the person relating with the puppet and how your performances work in that way?

MTP: Okay. So the window... The grease on the window was one of the first things I knew when I saw this room, was that I had to do something with that glass. I just felt it very... Like, I mean, everybody feels like a fish bowl, which it is, and I didn't want people to encounter the work straight on from the stairway. I wanted to break down the perspective and to look in there and I didn't want to just put something in front of it. So I toyed with, like, I went through all things like build a wall in front, or cover it with, you know, foil. And the thought occurred that silicon that looks like skin, which I don't really know how it would be, but I had this kind of fantasy which... And then, at some point, I was reminded of things I've seen about using Vaseline to smear on, for example, lenses on cameras, and I just thought this could be a very simple trick that would look very beautiful and just blur the view, and it also makes the room—makes the glass function. I think. in terms of the exhibition being some kind of machine for viewing. or it makes the people pass through into this kind of kinetic painting. There is a prominent Gerhard Richter thing that happens when you are in there and the people are going down the stairways. and I find that cool. So that was the reason for doing that. And I thought it was a good material because it went, to me, well with all these faces, all these bodies and all these guns, because, you know, you grease guns and you put cream on your body, and there's something a bit physical about it that I enjoyed. That it was Vaseline specifically. That it's a bit dull, which I like. And I think in terms of making, it isn't a very different thing than if I had ordered a grey foil to obscure the window—an industrial foil—like, they would have been very... Like you have in advertising, it would have been a very different thing. And then the figures... I mean *Figures*, that performance it started with Bunraku, which is Japanese form of puppetry where on the side of the stage, set up like most forms of traditional Japanese theater, you have musicians and a narrator, a voice, and usually on the on the back something that depicts a big pine tree or sort of elements of a landscape or house and so on. On the side, you have music people making music and a person who's singing, a person who's vocalizing, and the vocalizer is the voice of giant puppets, plural, in real Bunraku. So these large-size puppets are being moved by very skilled manipulators who are really amazing at making them look real, but the crazy thing about this is that you see the puppet but you also see the people moving the puppet, and in a sort of western-style puppetry it's kind of strings. You know, the manipulator's hidden, so it's all about this sort of illusion of this illusionistic thing, and in Bunraku it's more about the sort of marvelous kind of move in between, you know,

in and out of the illusion. So its focus to some parts of the puppets, and at moments it's more real—the puppet—than the real people. So the movement will be so skillful and that de-realizing effect, that was the thing I got interested in and that's how I created the performance. But it's quite a crude mannequin that we have so it doesn't...I don't think it's ever is really quite lifelike. And then the dancer interacts with it and there's all these faces that that sort of come in, and on and off the public, and in effect, maker become different characters, and the singer... I see the singer as the voice of the of these different characters. That's it. Yeah.

AQ: Because I'm kind of a straightforward person, I thought maybe you could talk about some of the individual pieces in the show because I'm not really sure I understand exactly what you're talking about—what your practice is about. So you mentioned the carpet, I read that there is a mannequin with a wig on it. Could you please explain to me because I don't understand? Just quickly about a few of them. Maybe other people understand it but I don't.

MTP: The carpet is a painting, and I make it by buying paint and dumping it on the carpet and folding it. Folding it over and over again until I get a sort of image... a stain. So materially that's really all that is.

AQ: So it's like a Rorschach. Why fold it half? Why try to do what a child would do in kindergarten?

MTP: That's a big question about a lot of modern art, isn't it? Why do what a child would do? It is, of course, like a Rorschach, and it refers to that and it's made like you made a Rorschach Test, although, I often fold them both ways. So I don't really follow any rules about it. In a way they're very kind of formalistic paintings. Now I find it quite special that it's on carpet and, you know, I don't make it on a canvas, which I could quite easily do, like doing with canvas, fold it. But I like that it's a kind of domestic material, and something more industrial reminds you much more of the floor, which of course, if you want to do that—if you want to go back in art history—there are interesting things to say about artists who painted things on the floor and put them up on the wall. And I think it relates a lot to the body and also to mental projections. And then the sculptures, they're figures. They're realistic sculptures that work with, definitely, the idea of the mannequin, and I tried to in this show to play with many different types of materials and to create a kind of collage aesthetic, and you sort of have a panel of levels of realism from things that are more like special effects, of materials like the real faces, two things that are very crude and very handmade like the *papier mâché* with the circles, and I was interested to merge all of these different levels together. And the shoes are bronze

AQ: Well, I'm going to go back to the philosophical, but I love having this generation from the sixties and this other generation. You believe in change and revolution. But I have two statements. One statement the German artist Hans Hakke had made since 60s and 70s really dealt with the relationship of political and social and economic and cultural systems. He said once, "There has never been a painting that has stopped a war." And the other one I have is Hal Foster, the great American critic, said, "All art is political because you take positions." But I want to go back to the idea that you haven't brought up much about feminism. And I just wonder... There is so much in the ether out there now about exhibitions and about writing and so many people say it's feminist. And sometimes I think that... Sometimes it's not all about the intention of feminism. But anyway, I just want to you to address your work as feminist.

MTP: I think, in a way, it's more interesting whether I am a feminist than if the work is feminist. Which doesn't mean the work doesn't deal with issues that are germane, that are related to feminism. The work is in the world, and like you said, on some level it's apolitical and it's just this rich toy for people who have money and time to sit here, you know. It's a distraction, you know, it's depressing. Then, at the same time, definitely I didn't mean I never had the pretention of stopping wars, because if I could I would have done it already. But wouldn't everybody? I've been very influenced by ideas of feminism, and I also think that feminism can be a very interesting tool for thinking about all manners of equalities, and so feminism is not just feminine. It's not only that, it also keys into other issues of, I think, somehow wanting the world to be less horrible. It's very sentimental.

AQ: It's really a coup that the Nasher in this particular time has forwarded our feminism. It is one of the few places in America right now that has three women artists on show at the very same time.

MTP: May I say something else. I have something to say to that because I think we talked about this before. What I think is nice, also, the fact that the Nasher—it's like this at the Nasher at the moment—is that it's not especially being made a big deal out of, and I quite like it that it doesn't feel like somebody's made an effort to showcase... It just seems that these works have been shown here because the people are quite passionate about showing them, and it wasn't just... I mean it's also just about the work, which I think is really quite fantastic. I mean, to me, it's quite flattering and I'm happy about it. And I'm happy about that company.

AQ: One of the statements was that Jeremy and the Nasher itself did not do this show as just a feminist show. They did it because it was good art and it was here and we could do it. So nothing but my applause to the two of you.

AQ: I'd like to talk a little bit about process. I would say in terms of women's art; you don't have to go far to see three women artists highlighted from the Nasher. You know The Meadows is doing it now. I would take issue that there is a wholesale suppression of women's art in this country. But The Meadows has highlighted three women artists currently.

But the question I have is about process and it goes back to the Kalashnikov in candy colors like big juicy fruits. It means something to me, the source of the casts. Was that something you they made in your studio or were they something available, like toys?

MTP: So it's not cast from... I didn't go through the... I didn't try to get a real Kalashnikov. I went online in Switzerland, where I live, and I went onto a website that sells pellet guns. So there is this whole subculture out there of people who have fun by shooting at each other with small, very realistic replicas of guns that shoot small plastic pellets, and so that's what I got. I thought it was good enough for giving the feeling of it being real. I didn't really want to be involved with having a real gun. I mean, had I the option of working with one, I don't even think I would have done it. I mean, I'm not so comfortable around these things

AQ: But the colors. That's what you ordered? They came in those colors? Those aren't really pellet guns? Are those the actual product?

MTP: No, of course not. I mean, so, okay... So what I did was I went online, I ordered a toy replica of a real gun, which is very real, and in fact I had to sign a piece... I had to give my identity to Swiss government so that they knew that I had this gun,

because I think you could presumably use those and pretend that you have a gun to go, maybe, rob a bank or something, so it's quite controlled these things. It's not super controlled, but you know they tried to control it. And I took it and we made two-part silicon mold with, yeah... Well, actually it's more than two parts because there was a problem during the butt part. It turned out to be a bit complicated, but we made a mold. A mold was made by—not by me—by people who make castings, and then we used a clear polyester resin with pigments and produced them in these colors. That's how it was made.