

# Arlene Shechet

## Skirts

February 28 – April 25, 2020

540 West 25th Street

New York

Opening Reception:

Thursday, Feb 27

6–8 PM

Image: Arlene Shechet, *In my view*, 2020, glazed ceramic, wood, paint, 58" x 26" x 20" © Arlene Shechet, Photography by Jeremy Liebman



New York — Pace Gallery is pleased to present *Skirts*, its first solo exhibition of works by Arlene Shechet, from February 28 through April 25. Running concurrently with the Whitney Museum’s exhibition *Making Knowing*, which also features works by Shechet, *Skirts* brings together more than a dozen of the artist’s most recent sculptures, including large-scale works and a monumental outdoor piece, to be displayed on the second-floor galleries and terrace of Pace’s new flagship building at 540 West 25th street.

Rich in idiosyncrasies, Shechet’s latest pieces combine disparate mediums, from ceramics to wood and metalwork, with playfully ambiguous titles that prompt endless associations. Utilizing a title that is both a noun and a verb, *Skirts* is a testament to the artist’s fluid and unformulaic process. Though her works appear effortless and forgiving of imperfections, they are the belabored products of an intuitive and technically fastidious approach, involving casting, painting, firing, carving, stacking, undoing and redoing with no predetermined endpoint. Her expansive approach to sculpture and materials is reminiscent of artists Shechet admires, such as Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Sonia Delaunay, whose work transcends the divisions of painting and sculpture and encompassed innovative multimedia practices, distinguishing their work from that of their male peers. Shechet’s title, *Skirts*, also reclaims misogynist slang. As if to counter this term’s reduction of women to passive things, Shechet’s unruly, polymorphous sculptures suggest that objects themselves are active and subversive.

Shechet’s sculptures appear to be suspended between the living and inanimate. An encounter with a piece such as *Grammar* suggests an immediate and bodily kinship. A bloated and lumpy vessel, it seems to churn with the vitality of a stomach or lungs. Punctured by tubular openings, or what Shechet calls “breathing holes,” the

sculpture offers its orifices as portals through which to see internal, structural mysteries.

The potential of structure is a central concern that Shechet's latest production explores with virtuosity. *Magic Matters*, for example, reveals itself as a counterintuitive pas de deux: from one side, two rectangular steel sheets seem to compress a sliced log into a starkly geometric and gravity-defying planar arrangement; from the other, this tension is suddenly released as the same wooden and metal pieces appear to unravel to the ground. Similarly, Shechet's larger-scale assemblages are seemingly precarious stacks of massive logs juxtaposed with bronze or ceramic parts. In spite of their bulkiness, these works suggest motion, whether the swaying of skirts, teetering of towers, or slow growth of organisms. Shechet's incorporation of wood in forms still identifiable as tree trunks suggests a kind of taming on the artist's part, with each carefully crafted piece incorporated without detracting from its wild rawness. The result is a type of sculpture that confounds the man-made with the organic, a reminder that humankind is neither apart from nature nor unrivaled in its creativity.

To Shechet, who has long mastered the technical difficulties of creating glazed ceramics, color is not extraneous to structural problems. "In firing the glaze into the clay, the color becomes part of the structure," she observes. Even in works devoid of ceramics and hence glaze, Shechet retains this understanding.

Shechet's dismantling of the conventions of sculpture is also apparent in her treatment of the base; the work's "skirt" is integral to her work's logic. She achieves this integration through a variety of means: a pedestal-like form might appear at the top of the work, as in *Ripple and Ruffle*, or a base of metal or wood might determine the contours of the ceramic forms that hug and exceed the edges of its "base." Casting ceramic parts from these supports to create a seamless interlocking, Shechet's sculptures absorb their idiosyncratic pedestals, expanding and even encompassing the room, since Shechet choreographs the placement of her works—"a family of actors" in her own words—to form a totality that enlists architecture, light, and ambulant bodies in its play.

Yet Shechet's reversal of hierarchies is not confined to the skirt of her works. It is not merely formal. Through her work in clay, paper, and porcelain, Shechet has continuously demonstrated the critical force, as well as aesthetic richness, of mediums and traditions historically marginalized as craft, to wit, gendered as the purview of women. Such masculinist policing of boundaries can no longer hold in the universe that Shechet's art conjures so powerfully—a place of flux and transformation, where the unmooring of oppositions, identities, and hierarchies can be conceived and felt.

**Arlene Shechet** (b. New York) is a multidisciplinary sculptor living and working in New York City and the Hudson Valley. A major, critically acclaimed survey of her work, *All At Once*, took place at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, in 2015. Her work also includes historical museum installations, such as *Porcelain, No Simple Matter: Arlene Shechet and the Arnhold Collection* at The Frick Collection, New York (2016) and *From Here On Now* at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., (2016). She has additionally created ambitious, large-scale public projects such as *Full Steam Ahead* (2018) at Madison Square Park in New York and received numerous awards, including a John S. Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship Award (2004), the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant

(2010), and the 2016 CAA Artist Award for Distinguished Body of Work. Her work is held in many distinguished public collections, including the Brooklyn Museum, New York; CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; The Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Jewish Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.

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