

Arlene Shechet

Frieze Masters
Regent's Park, London
11 – 15 October, 2023
Booth E9

Studio

Curated by Sheena Wagstaff
Former Chair of Modern and Contemporary Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Arlene Shechet, *Together series*, Installation view © Arlene Shechet

London—Pace Gallery is pleased to announce a solo presentation by American artist Arlene Shechet for the 2023 edition of Frieze Masters. Part of *Studio*, a dedicated section of the fair curated by Sheena Wagstaff, this project will mark the artist's first major presentation in the UK.

Inspired by the painted illuminations in medieval manuscripts, Shechet has reimagined the traditional format of the art fair booth as a faceted architecture, which resembles a jewel from an aerial vantage. Shechet's presentation will bring together two bodies of work: a suite of brilliantly colored and richly textured sculptures from her ongoing *Together series*, which she began during the Covid pandemic in 2020; as well as drawings and cast paper vessels from the 1997 series, *Once Removed*. In collaboration with Sam Fogg, the booth will place Shechet's sculptures and works on paper in dialogue with two medieval *Book of Hours* manuscripts, richly ornamented objects of personal devotion which have informed the artist's work both visually and conceptually.

The international artists chosen by Wagstaff for *Studio* are united by a shared impulse to excavate the past as a way of enlivening contemporary practice. For Shechet, the studio is a living link across places and moments in time—a protean and ever-changing space. Located in rural upstate New York at the gateway to the Catskill mountains, her studio spaces are populated by a library of both found and fabricated forms—objects that are cast, carved, wrought, thrown, and fired—which together create a laboratory environment, interacting in generative ways to produce a material poetics that drives Shechet's sculptural experimentation.

At the centre of Shechet's practice is a relentless curiosity to explore and transgress the limits of her chosen materials, which have included wood, steel, paper, clay, plaster, and porcelain, among others. In 1997, Shechet began an artist residency at the Dieu Donné paper studio in New York, where she became deeply involved in the technical facets of the papermaking process. During this period, Shechet had been deeply engaged with the

iconography of Eastern spiritual practices, producing a body of sculptures depicting the Buddha. Following these earlier works, Shechet's investigations at Dieu Donn  began with architectural drawings or "blueprints" of mandalas and stupas, Buddhist sepulchral monuments which are essentially architectural reliquaries. The works on paper, such as *Woven* (1997) or *Site Circling* (1997), crystallize her thinking around Eastern spirituality and devotional practice and its relationship to the ways in which the devotional body inhabits and traverses space.

Shechet's Once Removed sculptures emerged as a natural progression from her experimentation with paper pulp. These sculptural works translate the planographic diagrams of Buddhist funerary architecture into vessels cast in three-dimensions. Utilizing a process that she invented, involving liquid paper pulp and raw pigment, the artist worked with a paper mill to amalgamate shaped sheets of handmade white-and-blue abac  paper embedded with the geometric forms of the architectural plans, casting the resulting sheets around an array of curvilinear plaster forms to produce hollow vessels. These works make reference to Chinese porcelain, substituting ancient architectural floorplans as ornamental elements in place of the traditional motifs of birds and flowers. Rather than being painted onto the sculpture's surface, the blue pigment in the paper is physically fused within the diaphanous surface of the object. The air bubbles which remain on the surface as artifacts of the process are as much the content of the work as the image of the floorplans. Merging ornament and structure—breath and time—these works embody the artist's intent to construct a visual language that unites form and color in a single material presence. Each vessel is carefully displayed atop its plaster mold, the twin forms precariously balancing in mirror image. This doubling, at once architectural and corporeal, literalizes the negative space of the paper vessel while lending physical presence to the artist's delight in the process of making.

More than 25 years later, Shechet's practice continues to investigate the possibilities of unifying color and form in a single material presence. Her Together series—which she began in 2020 during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic—consists of vivid, richly textured sculptures in glazed ceramic, presented atop powder-coated steel pedestals. The dazzling effects that Shechet achieves with her glazes are the result of a carefully developed technique, achieved through long hours of experimentation, which results in strikingly haptic and chromatically lively surfaces. As the viewer circumnavigates each sculpture, their hard surfaces appear to become amorphous, crumpling, oozing, folding, and flowing in an infinitely varied sequence of visceral and abstract forms. Shechet's sculptures are at once alien and familiar, artificial and organic, elemental and bodily.

Shechet began the Together series as a way of thinking about the strange disruption of time imposed by the global lockdowns. This led her to consider the medieval *Book of Hours*, a type of devotional object that specifies personal prayers for each hour of the day, and often contains rich illuminations—small paintings made directly on the vellum pages using pure pigment suspended in tempera. For Shechet, the Together works were an attempt to dispel a sense of impending dread by producing works that elicited an unbridled sense of joy, but also provided a kind of ritual for marking the passage of her own time in the studio during this period of suspended animation. Like Shechet's sculptural process, the painted illuminations are the result of kind of alchemy, which transmutes ground pigments taken from the earth into luminous images imbued with mysterious power. Each work in Shechet's Together series is subtitled after a time of day or year, suggesting the link to the *Book of Hours* and underscoring the ways in which form, materiality, and time become inextricably entangled in the act of making.

Presented in conversation with one another, Shechet's sculptures appear like an ensemble cast of characters, simultaneously strange, playful, otherworldly, and familiar. Experienced together, these works produce a visual and material exchange that is vital to Shechet's practice. The artist's holistic design of the Frieze Masters booth is an extension of her abiding interest in the entanglement between space, time, and form, and the ways in which environment impacts the experience of viewing.

On October 12 at 12pm BST, Shechet will be in conversation with Sheena Wagstaff as part of the Frieze Masters Talks program, taking place in the fair's dedicated auditorium.

Arlene Shechet is a sculptor known for her effortless combination of disparate elements, precarious and provisional arrangements, and boundary-collapsing visual paradoxes. With gravity-defying work that seems to tilt, contort, bend, and melt, Shechet's sculptures appear to be set in motion while still, unearthing the expressive potential of material and forms and forcing us to sit with—and move around—its contradictions. Highly technical and yet entirely intuitive, her work embraces improvisation and seeks to examine the humor and pathos of being alive and in a body. Shechet has been the subject of many solo exhibitions, including a major, critically acclaimed survey of her work, *All At Once* at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, in 2015 and an ambitious, large-

scale public project *Full Steam Ahead* in Madison Square Park, New York in 2018, which featured monumental porcelain and mixed-media sculptures. Currently her exhibition *Disrupt the View: Arlene Shechet at the Harvard Art Museums* is on display and she is at work on a large exhibition scheduled for 2024 at Storm King Art Center.

In 2023 she was elected to be a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. This follows many other awards such as the Guggenheim Fellowship; Joan Mitchell Foundation; a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship; and the CAA with the Artist Award for Distinguished Body of Work. Shechet’s work is in over fifty public collections worldwide, including The Centre Pompidou, National Gallery of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Walker Art Center, and Whitney Museum of American Art.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

Today, Pace has eight locations worldwide, including a European foothold in London and Geneva as well as Berlin, where the gallery established an office in 2023. Pace maintains two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace’s long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace’s engagement with Silicon Valley’s technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, along with an office and viewing room in Beijing.

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