Arlene Shechet

Full Steam Ahead

September 25, 2018–April 28, 2019
Madison Square Park
New York

Presented by
Madison Square Park Conservancy
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Introduction

Arlene Shechet may be best known for realizing work in ceramic, a material associated with brittleness, fragility, and its application in vessel making. Since the 1980s, she has shattered that hoary association by producing transcendent sculpture with unanticipated form, surface texture, and dynamic color. Her work often alludes to the folds, limbs, and crevices of the human body, and she plays on and cues the viewer’s willingness to imagine. In keeping with its relation to the body, she typically makes human-scale work. So with the prospect of her first major outdoor public art project, in Madison Square Park, Shechet had to solve some problems.

She exploded the scale of her sculpture not to the colossal, but to larger than life. Porcelain became her material of choice for the outdoors because of its durability. A 2017 residency at Kohler in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, enabled her to work with the same porcelain used for mass-produced toilets and sinks, yet she brought her distinct visual language to the material while enhancing the scale for outdoors. And a collaboration with Porcelanosa allowed her to introduce cast resin, in the form of a material called Krion, to the bench slats and seats on Park benches. Shechet also made new work for this project in steel, electroplated tiles, and wood.

Her initial gambit may have been inspired by witnessing puddles in the Park’s drained reflecting pool. Shechet photographed those shimmering memories of a rainstorm and went on to install one hundred mirrorlike tiles on the ground plane of the pool, a constant reminder of the ephemerality of a vision, and of the dwindling of a natural resource. *Tall Feather* and *Low Hanging Cloud* (Lion), both in white porcelain, also nod to environmental concerns: the feather hoisted onto a platform like a trophy of a bygone era, the lion head a flashback to the power of a mighty beast. Shechet’s trees (which she calls sprues, a reference to the channel through which a liquid substance is poured into a structural mold) have no leaves and look like splayed, defiant human arms. No factor in this man-made amphitheater has escaped Shechet’s gaze, including the dominant presence of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut, the Civil War-era Union Navy hero who presides over and above the space where *Full Steam Ahead* is installed.

The Admiral Farragut Monument, dedicated in 1881, was a collaboration between American Renaissance sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Gilded Age architect Stanford White. The Farragut sculpture was considered vanguard in its day for the figure’s naturalism, conjuring the admiral’s steady stance on the prow of a ship, his coat flapping open in the breeze. With recent and controversial attention paid to historic monuments across this country, Shechet knew that Farragut’s prime position as a male commander must be addressed.

Because the project is on view across the seasons, from fall through winter and into spring, she worked with a lighting designer to sensitively spotlight the darkened monument each evening. Her critique of Farragut’s permanent bronze presence involved the installation of a temporary wooden seated female figure, titled *Forward* (fig. 3), more modernist form than nineteenth-century comportment. Seated on the monument steps, she plays against—or to—Farragut.

Shechet’s *Forward* is of two worlds: the figure becomes part of history by her presence and her outsize stature, but dips a toe into the hardscape, firmly planted in the here and now. Farragut’s call to his fleet during the 1864 Battle of Mobile Bay—memorialized as “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!”—is a reference point for *Full Steam Ahead*. It grounded the artist, who pushes her work to the edge of irony, materiality, and humor.
And it has hastened Parkgoers, whose charge toward constant motion has been stopped by this project, an outdoor place for sanctuary and for joy.

In a sort of pas de deux, Shechet conceived *Full Steam Ahead* as an outdoor room, while from a curatorial perspective the project might be characterized as an outdoor sculpture court. The two descriptions—one suggesting intimacy, privacy, personal interaction; the other focused on publicness, commonality, community—exemplify the complicated tension and culminating balance in the interpretation of public sculpture and of this work specifically. Both descriptions are right, for both privilege valid conceptions of what it means for sculpture to come out into the public realm.

For Shechet, the goal for an outdoor room created through her work was to bring informal interplay to the Park’s hardscape, terrain most frequently used for urban access from east side to west. She describes how the Park pathways channel people’s movements and refers to how individuals are funneled through their daily commute, in a manner recalling the branches of her work. The Park’s reflecting pool, and its annual seasonal draining in particular, lingered for the artist, who remembered the sunken living room in her grandparents’ apartment on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, which paralleled the below-grade reflecting pool and its circularity. Shechet’s work surrounds this water feature, but it is empty, with only a reflection of the abundance that was once in the pool.

Alternatively, the rough-and-tumble civic sculpture court—open to all in a site teeming with people—shatters the preciosity of traditional indoor sculpture court settings, where quietude and contemplation guide behavior. The sculpture court is a reminder of Shechet’s 2016–2017 exhibition *Porcelain, No Simple Matter: Arlene Shechet and the Arnhold Collection*, at the Frick Collection in New York. She was the first living artist invited to assess a historic body of porcelain, the promised gift to the Frick from collector and philanthropist Henry H. Arnhold. In that project, she selected eighteenth-century pieces from the Royal Meissen manufactory and juxtaposed them with relevant examples of her own work. Even the quietude and hush of the Frick’s Portico Gallery, where the works were on view, echoed the traditional sculpture court, which the artist upended by thrillingly showing her contemporary sculpture cheek by jowl with the Meissen porcelain.

In Madison Square Park, Shechet’s objects become transformed stand-ins for the expected works in a museum sculpture court, conceptually and formally altered for the outdoor setting: ancient heroic nudes in marble and Renaissance busts of prominent citizens, often with a central flowing fountain, are nowhere in sight. Instead, *Full Steam Ahead* allows the quotidian to become sculptural: seating areas, natural forms, and suggested body fragments are refreshed, and these objects compel us to look again.

So why would Shechet—whose 2015 exhibition *All at Once* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, whose show at the Frick, and whose 2012–2013 residency at the Meissen porcelain manufactory in Germany all confirm her stature as a prominent sculptor of an unsung material, clay—want to make her work vulnerable outdoors? The opportunity to place her sculpture (and to add materials in addition to porcelain) directly within the walking paths and traverses of a site where people have direct physical contact is the guiding force. Shechet’s work has always teetered between the dissolving distinctions of figuration and abstraction, representation and nonobjectivity. In museum exhibitions and in gallery shows, her work conjures restless, unpredictable allusion to nature and the body. Pushing her sculpture outdoors into a park where choreographed nature and throngs of people are hustled together clicks as a vision for public art.

It is a bold move. Shechet was the youngster in the list of twentieth-century American artists most closely associated with freeing ceramics from its long-standing connection with vessel making and with legitimizing it as a material for investigating critical issues in sculpture, such as surface texture, color, corporeal content, and the obfuscation of three-dimensionality. Ron Nagle (b. 1939), Ken Price (1935–2012), and Betty Woodman (1930–2018), for instance, each pursued questions beyond modernism in their work. Shechet stands between these artists who came of age confronting the former reigning movements of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism and a new generation of artists who have taken on ceramics with an unexpected bravura of
Like all of Madison Square Park’s exhibitions, *Full Steam Ahead* could not have been realized without the extraordinary support and counsel of the Conservancy’s Board of Trustees, including Board Chair Sheila Davidson. Our Art Committee, chaired by Ron Pizzuti, is a group of thoughtful advisors who share their guidance, generosity, and wisdom. We are grateful to Christopher Ward of Thornton Tomasetti, who worked with the Conservancy and the artist. Our neighbors at Porcelanosa—Manuel Prior, Carlos Monsonis, and Sindy Guerrero—have shown unstinting generosity to the project and to Shechet’s vision. At Kohler, Shechet was guided by Amy Horst and Kristin Plucar. Our thanks to Marc Glimcher, Susan Dunne, and Adam Sheffer at Pace Gallery for their wonderful support. At Madison Square Park Conservancy, Tom Reidy, Senior Project Manager; Julia Friedman, Senior Curatorial Manager; and Tessa Ferreyros, Curatorial Manager, have been outstanding colleagues on all aspects of this project. In her studio, the artist was assisted by Eric Ehrnschwender, Jessica Gaddis, Chelsea Maruskin, Pareesa Pourian, Johnny Pouz, and Julia Rooney. Linnaea Tillett at Tillett Lighting Design has added a subtle nightscape to *Full Steam Ahead*. Thanks to Carter Foster at the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin and to Lilian Tone at the Museum of Modern Art in New York for their thoughtful and perceptive essays in this volume. Arlene Shechet has always proceeded full steam ahead. We congratulate her for bringing her significant work to Madison Square Park.

Brooke Kamin Rapaport
Deputy Director and Martin Friedman Senior Curator
question the notion of the “monumental.” The works would be human-scale, touchable, resonant, and yet not entirely knowable.

The notion of “delight and discovery” soon took hold as a driving idea. I understand this eighteenth-century concept associated with what we now call relational aesthetics—the idea that the audience experiencing the work becomes a part of it, is awakened by it, and actively participates in its meaning.

In all of my installations, I have listened to the space and tried to draw attention to the elements that people may otherwise ignore. The installation prompts a discovery of the “less visible” as different populations encounter it by chance, in unpredicted ways, which are out of my control as the artist.

The imagery of the sculptures evolved from my time at the Meissen porcelain manufactory in Germany. There, I had made a series of miniature porcelain “sculpture gardens” using painted plates as landscapes. I saw a parallel between their circular form and the empty reflecting pool of the Park. Parts of these small sculptures became models for the installation, to be reimagined at human scale: a lion’s paw as a boulder (Kandler to Kohle), a low-hanging cloud that could be seen as a giant lion’s head, and “teacup handles” that reach the proportion of Admiral Farragut’s bent arm.

In a loop of meaning, these curled handle-like shapes return to the outdoors to regain their references to birds, flowers, and leaves. The most monumentlike of the sculptures is a large bird feather (Tall Feather) that stands upright on stepped plinths. In addition to
The large sculptures, the installation contains quieter gestures that further encourage surprise and discovery: pigmented resin bench slats (Threads), electroplated reflective tiles (Ghost of the Water), and fanciful table-seats (Skirt Seats). Because these elements are multiples, existing in more than one place, they create a continued language of repeated noticing.

I had first used porcelain outdoors in my 2016 Frick installation. In the tradition of gardens at Meissen and Versailles, I placed large Meissen porcelain animals in the Frick’s garden. At Madison Square Park, I took this gesture one step further. I enlisted the Kohler corporation as a collaborator, because the rarefied language of porcelain finds its way into daily life via the manufacture of bathtubs and sinks at Kohler in Wisconsin. Moving from Meissen in Germany to Wisconsin permitted me to transform a material that is marginalized as “fragile and female” into something that is “monumental,” durable and resilient. At this scale, the interior language of the decorative arts becomes reinvented for the outdoors.

It is Forward, a full-bodied hand-carved wooden figure, that grounds the monument area. She sits on the steps below the bronze statue of Admiral Farragut. Constructed like a boat, she anchors him. Unlike Courage and Loyalty (nineteenth-century female allegories carved in the granite below him), Forward represents a real, non-nymph woman. So named for her determination and resolve, she sits with her body pivoted toward the allegories, but she gazes ahead. This non-white wooden figure is at one with visitors sitting on the existing steps. Channel Liberty (with Fallen Arm) is the installation’s other female presence, broadcasting an association with the Statue of Liberty. The left arm of Lady Liberty holds a symbolic Declaration of Independence, but in my sculpture the arm is fallen in distress. All of the sculptures are intended to have many readings; in this case, I hope also that Channel Liberty recalls the fact that between 1876 and 1882 the torch and right hand of the Statue of Liberty were on view at Madison Square Park.

Passersby, adults eating lunch, children playing on the sculptures—these people activate the site every day. But I also wanted to curate a series of live performances to further utilize the pool as a classical amphitheater, a gathering place. The circular form of the pool creates a situation in which people view the performers and one another across the circle. This creates community and a sense of shared joy.

My collaboration with Dianne Wiest realized this idea. As she performed excerpts from Samuel Beckett’s Happy Days during five consecutive lunch hours, visitors would hear these free-floating words as they walked by. The fractured language of Beckett aligned with the public’s passing movement. Jonathan Kalb recalled John Cage, who “envisioned a continuously running event that people drop in on at will, that blurs the boundaries between art and life.” Notably, there was “no prefatory fanfare, no curtain, no stage, or framing gestures” which would have isolated the
performance from the fabric of daily life. With Beckett, each line is the whole story. This concept is an entry point into the installation: each sculpture individually contains the project’s complete vision yet may also be experienced on its own terms. The other programs I’ve organized—talks with artists, spoken word and musical performances—will take a similar form, weaving through the space seamlessly.

My studio work has improvisation at its core. But in this case, the improvisation extends to external conditions such as weather, sunlight, the seasons, and wonderfully (mostly) unpredictable humanity. This is terrifying and thrilling. The project’s evolution is out of my control and its meaning is indeterminate, contingent, and fluid. In its open-endedness it embraces the everyday and the facts of being alive. I join the ranks of observer with delight and wonder.

Arlene Shechet
Parks and gardens underwent a transformation at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, shifting from the grand, formal, rigid geometries epitomized by French landscape architect André Le Nôtre’s gardens of Versailles to more intimate, human-scale spaces. Antoine Watteau’s paintings illustrate this change, celebrating small pockets of nature in which human beings, statuary, architecture, and plants offer areas of fantasy and reverie (fig. 13).

The rococo aesthetic is typified in part by the merging of nature and ornament, in some cases producing completely artificial garden spaces, often expressed most fully in the graphic arts and in the decorative form known as the arabesque. 1 In an etching by Gabriel Huquier after Watteau, The Temple of Neptune, for example (fig. 14), a slice of earth with a shallow, stagelike perspective provides a base for fountains, statues, and mythological creatures. As is typical of this particular strain of the arabesque form, the relatively realistic space, architecture, and statuary in the center of the composition intertwine and dissolve into abstract ornament, stylized vegetation, and flattened space as one moves toward the perimeter.

Another rococo print helps us understand how ornamentation, architecture, statuary, and people could coalesce in both the real gardens of the eighteenth century and the artificiality of an arabesque. It is a fascinating image to compare with Shechet’s rococo preoccupations in the twenty-first century. Charles-Nicolas Cochin’s depiction of an actual event, the fireworks presented in 1735 for members of the royal

1 The term has multiple meanings and connotations, but I refer here to the form as it manifested itself specifically in France in the first half of the eighteenth century.
concentrated and defined area in which to place her work. Furthermore, it allowed her to respond and effectively appropriate the existing monument into her own installation. This parallels the history of temporary festival design in European gardens, in which permanent statuary might be incorporated into the iconographic program or decorative compositions of festival design.

Shechet’s chief rococo inspiration here is of another sort, however, than the delicate language of the arabesque and the rocaille (rock and shell) motifs that typify its most common ornamental language. The rococo was also a golden age of the small-scale porcelain figurine and of astonishingly hued and elaborate ceramic table settings; the Meissen factory in Germany and the Sèvres factory in France were the two most famous manufacturers of such objects. The artist’s work at Meissen, at the RISD Museum and the Frick, and later at the Kohler manufacturing company in Wisconsin (perhaps best known for its porcelain plumbing products) primed her to deploy her mastery of the material but to scale it up hugely. Her bosquet concept is clear in an early working collage (fig. 17) in which she began figuring out the placement of her objects and establishing their relationship to the Farragut monument, to one another, and to the circular space and the paths leading to it. While at Meissen, Shechet had also begun a series of miniature sculpture gardens that riffed on the platter form as well as the object known as a deser—a whimsical and elaborate table centerpiece that took a variety of forms, sometimes architectural, and often with porcelain figurines (fig. 16). Looking at one of these is like looking into a mini imaginary bosquet from above, and they perfectly encapsulate the idea of an outdoor garden room as a site of decorative fantasy. Full Steam Ahead became a logical—if much-enlarged extension—of the artist’s neo-rococo plates, and functions in some ways like a life-size deser in which the figures are the real people who circulate in and around its objects.
The visitor who fully explores the space Shechet has defined here may eventually come to settle naturally in the center of the dry fountain, adjacent to the set of reflective tiles set into its bottom called *Ghost of the Water*. This seems the ideal vantage point for taking in all of the sculptures together—one can rotate in place and see almost every element—and understand how they frame and co-opt the Farragut monument. For, in addition to the fantasy and garden play of the rococo, Shechet probes the idea of the public monument, toying with its traditional, patriarchal seriousness. In Cochin’s fireworks print, allegorical gravitas in the form of Hercules slaying a dragon is in the center of the airy, filigreed lightness of a rococo decorative ensemble. In *Full Steam Ahead*, Farragut and his allegorical female attendants below, Courage and Loyalty, no longer dominate their circle but seem to be set free to play with their temporary mates. Shechet’s wooden seated female figure *Forward* becomes like a third allegory to the admiral and also seems to refer to statues like the *Little Mermaid* in Copenhagen (and its progeny around the world), allowing us to imaginatively reinterpret Farragut’s relationship to the sea. Nodding to the role monuments and statues play in establishing and embellishing historic and nationalistic narratives, Shechet gives us prompts, tools for creating our own stories. Her lion’s head is, for instance, very much part of the lingua franca of monuments in Western art. In New York, it resonates with Patience and Fortitude, the feline allegories who famously guard the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue. But it could also be many other things. The other recognizable elements in Shechet’s garden—a bird’s wing, the lion’s disembodied paws, a monumental feather, a piece of rope—may suggest to us other aspects of the American story, or of those told throughout the world in the language of sculpture and allegory. However, their meaning is left unfixed, just as the meaning of any monument will change over time as new histories and contexts emerge. Here, contemplating Shechet’s array during the run of *Full Steam Ahead*, our minds are joyously free to play for a bit, as one should in a park.

*Carter E. Foster*

As with her work at Meissen, the formal language Shechet chose to explore for Madison Square Park took its cues from sculptural processes. The objects she had made in Germany employed the forms of the many historic molds still in use at Meissen. Back in New York City and Kingston, New York, where she rented a large studio to work on *Full Steam Ahead*, the shape of the sprue began to interest her. A sprue is the channel through which liquid medium is poured into a sculpture mold, and Shechet relied on its sinuous form for several of the large pieces in the Park. The curves and countercurves she fashioned with them are, broadly, also fundamental to the curling scrolls of rococo’s basic decorative language, and hark back as well to arabesque lines typical in classic French garden parterres through patterned plantings. Deploying porcelain as she does here completely turns tradition on its head, using a material associated with delicate, precious, small objects for big, bold things people can, and are in fact encouraged to, touch. The sensuousness of the material’s smooth, hard surfaces generously invites the viewer to haptically test the forms, without breaking any rules or putting the pieces in jeopardy.
Fig. 18
For centuries, parks and gardens have expressed the intersection between nature and culture. The gardens and grottoes of seventeenth-century Versailles, for example, embody the idea of the designed natural world as a form of cultural enlightenment, wherein various art forms—such as dance and music—were mediated through nature, and nature was thereby remade as culture. The swamp that would become Madison Square Park was designated as public land in 1686, and subsequently used for a variety of purposes. In 1847 it officially became a park; it was redesigned later in the century, with various monuments and statues added over time, and was further upgraded in 1997. In 2018, alert to this history, Arlene Shechet explores the Park as a platform for aesthetic jouissance.

In the works constituting *Full Steam Ahead*, the artist has reimagined a section of the Park as a stage upon which to assemble a constellation of distinct yet interrelated sculptures. It might even be suggested that Shechet approached the Park as a readymade available for adjustment, or to be assisted (in a post-Duchampian sense). Her works perform a kind of meta-theater of interconnections, inviting visitors to rethink how they interact with the Park, with one another, and with art. The locus of her intervention is the pool on the north side of the Park. With the water removed from the pool, she reveals the Park’s design infrastructure, repurposing it as a stage of sorts, and creating a theater of art-in-the-round. In addition to the pool, Shechet’s project involves subtle material inflections and supplements to other elements of the Park’s intrinsic design. In *Threads*, selected wooden slats from the benches surrounding the pool have been replaced by elements made of Krion, a state-of-the-art pigmented synthetic resin that simulates the look and feel of stone, or even porcelain. This material was also used for the twelve *Skirt Seats* that have been arranged as an alternative seating system, which indicates Shechet’s interest in staging new forms of social interaction. These playful and somewhat enigmatic utilitarian objects, resembling inverted buckets with patterning, amusingly allude to clothed humans.

Not only are Shechet’s works hybrid on formal, material, and conceptual terms, but they are also about hybridization, often referring to the conditions and processes of their own production. Composed of various materials—porcelain, wood, steel, resin, glazed kiln bricks, tiles, among others—her sculptures reveal that distinct forms, made using a range of methods, possessing distinct kinds of tactility, and carrying diverse referential meanings, can inhabit the same object. And that seemingly contradictory genres can be brought into relation with one another within the same work. We are reminded that the cliché notion of separating visual art and craft as uncontaminated aesthetic categories requires continuous debunking.

*Full Steam Ahead* finds precedent in Shechet’s intimate, whimsical, imaginary landscapes, wherein fragments of utilitarian and decorative objects are arranged on porcelain plates. Like an after-the-fact three-dimensional sketch, these plate works, created some five years before the Madison Square Park project, introduce not only central aspects of its iconography, but also presage how Shechet would determine the size of the sculptures in relation to the site. For those precursor plate works, the artist chose elements from Meissen’s centuries-old design grammar, which she studied.
Channel Liberty (with Fallen Arm) takes the viewer back to a particular moment in the Park’s history. From 1876 to 1882 an important modular element of the Statue of Liberty—the hand and the torch it is holding—was displayed in the Park, before the statue was fully assembled on its island in Upper New York Bay. Shechet often works modularly, with fragments, and reassembles her works. In Channel Liberty (with Fallen Arm), materials such as sand-cast iron, steel, and powder-coated cast aluminum are used in unexpected ways. Here, the inverted sprue form invokes Lady Liberty’s outstretched arm, but it holds not a torch, but rather a curvilinear Meissen-derived ornament that one might find adorning a teacup.

In the aforementioned two works, and in others, such as Pink Boat (2012; fig. 21) and Channel Liberty (with Fallen Arm) and Tilted Channel (fig. 22), the artist repurposed sprues—the hollow channels that are used to pour liquid porcelain into molds to form teacup handles and that are discarded after the casting process—by redeploying this leftover part, but upside down, so that it resembles a convergence of outstretched human limbs and a tree. In this gesture, she ingeniously transforms an essential yet unseen component of what makes a porcelain cup a porcelain cup into something that moves beyond the ontology of the cup into realms of abstraction and figuration.

In the plates that Shechet transformed into miniature sculpture gardens with the material and human resources available at Meissen, one observes an enchanting transfiguration of fragments of the factory’s repertoire—such as a lion’s head and paws, and bird wings and feathers—into suggestive forms and evocative objects (figs. 25, 26). Although the scale of these pieces is limited, they feel like immersive environments. They might be called “platescapes,” each invoking a distinct world. They at once celebrate and challenge certain established ideas about what porcelain can be: namely, a material and vocabulary of contemporary art making that also entails the deep
history and present significance of craft and design aesthetics. These platescapes can be imagined as the precursors for how Shechet approached the Madison Square parkscape as an existing outdoor social-environmental ecosystem that could be temporarily altered, transformed into another kind of world. Shechet sited the human-scale works within the parkscape in a way that echoes how she distributed the small fragments of objects in her hand-built gardens-on-a-plate.

*Tall Feather* (fig. 27), located just outside the periphery of the pool, is composed of a squarish structure of interlocking pieces of wood sitting on a cast-concrete pedestal, on top of which rises a majestic white glazed porcelain sculpture of a bird feather. While the feather element can be traced directly to one of the found porcelain fragments in *Crazy Yolk Garden* (2012), Shechet is also at once referring to and challenging the traditional relationships between base/pedestal and figure found within the historical monuments in the Park. Adding yet another layer, *Tall Feather* sits on a blown-up image of another platework that Shechet made during her residency at Meissen (fig. 28). The image has been laminated onto the stonework that surrounds the pool, and it extends into the surface of the pool, so that the outer rim of the circular pool overlaps with the outer part of the circular plate image, suggesting a contextual feedback loop of forms. With this gesture, the artist returns the sculpture to its original locus within a microcosmic system of craters, lakes, and valleys of fired glaze, thereby visualizing the interrelationship between her platescapes and her parkscape. The glazed white porcelain component of this work—as well as *Low Hanging Cloud (Lion)* and *Kandler to Kohler*—exposes the seams and joints, denoting the intricate casting process and the method of assembly. These works were produced in collaboration with another factory, Kohler, the long-standing American manufacturer of porcelain toilets and sinks, where Shechet also had an artist’s residency. Might there be a furtive allusion to Duchamp’s *Fountain* here?

In *Ghost of the Water*, the absent pool water regains a surrogate presence: the artist replaced one hundred stones that make up part of the bottom of the pool with electroplated sand-cast iron elements, each of which carries on its surface an almost imperceptible image of the sky and clouds as if reflected in the water of the pool. Shechet’s accomplishment in *Full Steam Ahead* is to have created a synergetic network of sculptures that constitute their own world, while gently coaxing us to navigate the site in new ways. With her complex, sophisticated, humorous, and convivial artworks, Shechet has invented subtle new geographies and spatial dynamics for this place. Full speed ahead, but slow down in the Park.

*Lilian Tone*
Arlene Shechet

BIOGRAPHY

1951
Born in New York, NY
Lives and works in New York City and the Hudson Valley

EDUCATION

1970
New York University, B.A.
1978
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, MFA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It takes a village...
With gratitude,
Arlene Shechet
SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018
- Full Steam Ahead
  Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York
- More Than I Know
  Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha
- Arlene Shechet: Some Truths
  Almine Rech Gallery, Paris

2017
- In the Meantime
  Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

2016
- From Here On Now
  Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.
- Turn Up the Bass
  Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York
- Still Standing
  The Box, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London
- Porcelain, No Simple Matter: Arlene Shechet and the Arnhold Collection
  The Frick Collection, New York
- Urgent Matter
  Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

2015
- All at Once
  Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
- Blockbuster
  Lora Reynolds Gallery, Austin

2014
- Meissen Recast
  RISD Museum, Providence

2013
- Slip
  Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York
- Arlene Shechet: That Time
  Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC

2012
- Breaking the Mold
  Nature Morte, Berlin
- Arlene Shechet: That Time
  Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, Richmond, VA

2011
- The Thick of It
  James Kelly Gallery, Santa Fe

2010
- The Sound of It
  Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

2009
- Here and There
  Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver

2008
- Now & Away
  Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- New Work
  Elizabeth Harris Gallery, New York

2006
- Thin Air
  Sun Valley Center for the Arts, Sun Valley, ID

2004
- Deep Blooze Series
  Hemphill Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.

2003
- Turning the Wheel
  Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, NY

2002
- Flowers Found
  Elizabeth Harris Gallery, New York

2001
- Puja
  A/D Gallery, New York

2000
- Arlene Shechet
  Galerie René Blouin, Montreal
SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018

Class Reunion: Works from the Gaby and Wilhelm Schurmann Collection
Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna

The Domestic Plane: New Perspectives on Tabletop Art Objects
The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT

Paper/Print: American Hand Papermaking, 1960s to Today
International Print Center, New York

Scenes from the Collection
The Jewish Museum, New York

Taurus and the Awakener
David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Out of Control
Venus Over Manhattan, New York

By Fire, Ceramic Works
Almine Rech Gallery, New York

2017

Sculpture Park at Madhavendra Palace
Nahargarh Fort, Jaipur, India

Something Living
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Mutual Admiration Society
Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Los Angeles

A Dazzling Decade
Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS

Gray Matters
Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus

99 Cents or Less
Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit

The Tyranny of Common Sense Has Reached Its Final Stage
The LeRoy Neiman Gallery,
Columbia University School of the Arts, New York

The State of New York Painting
Kingsborough Community College (CUNY) Art Gallery, Brooklyn

Vitreous Bodies: Assembled Visions in Glass
Bakalar & Paine Galleries,
Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston
2016

Infinite Blue
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn

Pioneer Lust
Lora Reynolds Gallery, Austin

A Whisper of Where It Came From
Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO

Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY

2015

CERAMIX: Art and Ceramics from Rodin to Schütte
Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht

Bottoms Up: A Sculpture Survey
University of Kentucky Art Museum, Lexington

Other Planes of There
Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms
Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

Le Souffleur: Schürmann Meets Ludwig
Ludwig Forum Aachen, Germany

2014

The Botanica
Invisible-Exports, New York

Now-ism: Abstraction Today
Pizzuti Collection, Columbus

2013

Jew York
Zach Feuer Gallery, New York

Ceramics
Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

2012

East
Kunstsele Berlin

2012

Le Beau Danger
Sassa Trulzsch Galerie, Berlin

Peepeekskill Project V: The New Hudson River School
Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (HVCCA), Peekskill, NY

2011

Economy of Means: Towards Humility in Contemporary Sculpture
Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ

Textility
Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, NJ

Free from Order: A Delight of Inconsistencies (Amy Gartrell, Cordy Ryman, and Arlene Shechet)
University of Connecticut School of Fine Arts, Contemporary Art Galleries, Storrs, CT

Invitational Exhibition of Visual Artists
American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York

2010

XXI International Ceramic Biennial (BICC)
Vallauris, France

Dirt on Delight
Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia

New Works / Old Story
Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco

Seriously Funny
Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ

New Now
Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS

2009

2008

True Grit
McColl Center for Visual Art, Charlotte, NC

Present Tense
Spanierman Modern, New York

2007

Shattering Glass
Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY

Written on the Wind: The Flag Project
Rubin Museum of Art, New York

2006

The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama
Fowler Museum, University of California, Los Angeles
Acknowledgments

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Madison Square Park Conservancy

Madison Square Park Conservancy is the not-for-profit organization whose mission is to protect, nurture, and enhance Madison Square Park, a dynamic seven-acre public green space, creating an environment that fosters moments of inspiration. The Conservancy is committed to engaging the community through its beautiful gardens, inviting amenities, and world-class programming. Madison Square Park Conservancy is licensed by the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to manage Madison Square Park and is responsible for raising 100% of the funds necessary to operate the Park, including the brilliant horticulture, park maintenance, sanitation, security, and free cultural programs for Park visitors of all ages.

For more information on Madison Square Park Conservancy and its programs, please visit madisonsquarepark.org.
Works in the Exhibition

*Channel Liberty (with Fallen Arm),* 2018
Sand cast iron, steel, and powder-coated cast aluminum
72 x 57 x 108 inches

*Double Arm Channel in Proud Bird Pool*, 2018
Enamel-coated cast iron, solid sand-cast brass, powder-coated cast aluminum, and concrete
Pool: 130 1/2 x 68 1/2 inches; sprue: 76 1/2 x 102 x 18 1/2 inches; base: 44 x 28 inches

*Forward*, 2018
Cherrywood
72 x 120 x 24 inches

*Ghost of the Water*, 2018
One hundred electroplated sand-cast iron tiles
Each 6 x 6 inches

*Kandler to Kohler*, 2018
Glazed porcelain and steel, three parts
6 1/4 x 12 x 42 inches; 14 x 31 1/2 x 16 3/4 inches; 16 1/4 x 55 x 22 inches

*Low Hanging Cloud (Lion)*, 2018
Glazed porcelain, painted plywood, and steel
58 1/2 x 62 x 66 3/4 inches

*Skirt Seats*, 2018
Pigmented resin (Krion), twelve seats
Four seats, 16 inches high; four seats, 20 inches high; four seats, 24 inches high

*Tall Feather*, 2018
Glazed porcelain, white oak, cast concrete, and steel
72 x 120 x 72 inches

*Threads*, 2018
Pigmented resin (Krion), sixty slats
Forty slats, 6 feet long; twenty slats, 8 feet long

*Tilted Channel*, 2018
Powder-coated sand-cast iron, powder-coated cast aluminum, cast iron, glazed firebrick, and steel
65 x 96 x 32 inches
Fig. 15
Charles-Nicolas Cochin II
(French, 1715–1790)
Fireworks Display
Presented to the Dauphin
on his Sixth Birthday on
September 3, 1735, in the
Gardens at Meudon, 1736
Etching and engraving
16 3/4 x 20 1/4 inches
(42 1/2 x 51 2/5 cm)
Minneapolis Institute of
Art, Gift of funds from
the Print and Drawing
Council
Photo: Minneapolis
Institute of Art

Fig. 16
Garden Lion, 2012
Glazed Meissen porcelain
3 1/2 x 10 3/5 x 10 3/5
inches
Photo: Jason Wyche

Fig. 17
Artist rendering for
Full Steam Ahead, 2017
Photo: Arlene Shechet

Fig. 18
Double Arm Channel in
Proud Bird Pool, 2018
Photo: Kris Graves

Fig. 19
Pool Garden, 2018
Glazed Meissen porcelain
2 1/3 x 10 1/4 x 10 1/4
inches
Photo: Jason Wyche

Fig. 20
Double Arm Channel in
Proud Bird Pool, 2018
Photo: Hadassa Goldvicht

Fig. 21
Pink Boat, 2012
Glazed Meissen porcelain
3 1/4 x 10 3/5 x 10 3/5
inches
Photo: Jason Wyche

Fig. 22
Tilted Channel, 2018
Photo: Jonathan Nesteruk
Fig. 23  
Low Hanging Cloud (Lion), 2018  
Kandler to Kohler, 2018  
Photo Rashmi Gill

Fig. 24  
Newly cast porcelain paw at Kohler Factory, 2017  
Photo Arlene Shechet

Fig. 25  
Lion Sculpture Garden, 2012  
Glazed Meissen porcelain 2 1/8 x 11 x 11 inches  
Photo Jason Wyche

Fig. 26  
Detail, Lion Sculpture Garden, 2012  
Glazed Meissen porcelain 2 1/8 x 11 x 11 inches  
Photo Jason Wyche

Fig. 27  
Tall Feather, 2018  
Photo Kris Graves

Fig. 28  
Detail, Raspberry Twist, 2012  
Glazed Meissen porcelain 5 1/8 x 16 1/2 x 11 inches  
Photo Jason Wyche

Fig. 29  
Iron pour at Kohler Foundry, 2017  
Photo Arlene Shechet

Fig. 30  
In-process casting porcelain; deconstructed plaster mold, 2017  
Photo Arlene Shechet

Fig. 31  
Shechet’s Kingston studio showing porcelain elements before assembly, 2018  
Photo Yasunori Matsui

Fig. 32  
Shechet’s Kingston studio showing Forward before carving but after cherry wood was glued, 2018  
Photo Yasunori Matsui

Fig. 33  
Arlene Shechet during fabrication of Full Steam Ahead, 2018  
Photo Jeremy Liebman

Fig. 34  
Studio self-portrait reflected in electroplated cast iron tiles, 2018  
Photo Arlene Shechet

Fig. 35  
Tilted Channel, 2018  
Photo Rich Lee

Fig. 36  
Skirt Seats, 2018  
Photo Arlene Shechet

Fig. 37  
Madison Square Park reflecting pool after the rain, 2017  
Photo Arlene Shechet

Fig. 38  
Ghost of the Water, 2018  
Photo Jessica Gaddis
Fig. 39
Low Hanging Cloud (Lion), 2018

Photo
Kris Graves

Fig. 40
Tilted Channel, 2018

Photo
Elizabeth Felicella

Fig. 41
Ice sculpture from Okamoto Studio in collaboration with Arlene Shechet. February 1, 2019, in Madison Square Park

Photo
Rich Lee

Fig. 42
Dianne Wiest performance of Samuel Beckett’s Happy Days October 22–October 26, 2018, in Madison Square Park

Photo
Rich Lee

Fig. 43
Winter Solstice Procession: Will Epstein in Collaboration with Kenny Wollesen December 21, 2018, in Madison Square Park

Photo
Rich Lee

Fig. 44
Ghost of the Water, 2018

Photo
Arlene Shechet

Fig. 45
Installation view of Full Steam Ahead, 2018

Photo
Elizabeth Felicella
Previous
Mad. Sq. Art
Exhibitions

2018
Diana Al-Hadid Delirious Matter

2017
Bill Beirne Madison Square Trapezoids,
with Performances by the Vigilant Groundsman
Erwin Redl Whiteout
Olia Lialina & Dragan Espenschied
Prismatic Park
Online Newspapers: New York Edition
Josiah McElheny
Richard Deacon Assembly

2016
Martin Puryear Big Bling
Tadashi Kawamata Tree Huts

2015
Teresita Fernández Fata Morgana
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer Pulse Park
Paula Hayes Gazing Globes

2014
Tony Cragg Walks of Life
Bill Fontana Panoramic Echoes
Rachel Feinstein Folly
Roxy Paine Conjoined, Defunct, Erratic
Iván Navarro This Land Is Your Land
William Wegman Around the Park

2013
Giuseppe Penone Ideas of Stone (Idee di pietra)
Jene Highstein Eleven Works
Orly Genger Red, Yellow and Blue
Sol LeWitt Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers
Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder Topsy-Turvy:
A Camera Obscura Installation

2012
Leo Villareal BUCKYBALL
Mark di Suvero Aesop’s Fables, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond
Charles Long Pet Sounds
Wim Delvoye Gothic

2011
Jacco Olivier Stumble, Hide, Rabbit Hole, Bird, Deer, Home
Dan Graham Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve
Alison Saar Feallan and Fallow
Mark Dion Urban Wildlife Observation Unit
Jaume Plensa Echo
Dalziel + Scullion Voyager
Kota Ezawa City of Nature

2010
Jimi Campbell Scattered Light
Navin Rawanchaikul I ♥ Taxi
Antony Gormley Event Horizon
Teresita Fernández Bamboo Cinema
Ernie Gehr Surveillance
Tobias Rehberger Tsutsumu N.Y.

2009
Shannon Plumb The Park
Tony Oursler The Influence Machine
Jessica Stockholder Flooded Chambers Maid

2008
Mel Kendrick Markers
From 2000 to 2003, exhibitions were presented by the Public Art
Fund on behalf of the Campaign for the New Madison Square Park.