

# Arlene Shechet: Urgent Matter

Across plaster, porcelain, clay, and paper, New York-based artist Arlene Shechet's intensive, playful practice consistently pushes the boundaries of what sculpture can be. Over the last decade, she has worked extensively in ceramics, crafting a visual language that breaks many of the medium's given rules—for example, firing clay at odd temperatures, applying glaze where there should be paint, and incorporating kiln bricks into the armature of the sculpture itself. She takes advantage of the inherent hollow nature of ceramics to produce astonishing, often lopsided objects that challenge gravity to hover on the brink of collapse. With their visceral texture and suggestive forms, Shechet's works toe the line between the beautiful and the grotesque.

Shechet often employs cast molds in her work, not only to give shape to her sculptures but also to record her process. During a recent residency at New York City's Dieu Donne Paper Mill, she cast ceramic shards culled from her studio work table. The results capture the contour of a surface, the imprint of her fingertips, or cross-hatching embedded in clay. These became the bases over which she draped and sculpted pigmented paper fibers that, when dry, inherited the formal details of their cast antecedents. The resulting project, *Parallel Play*, gives new meaning to the idea of a "work on paper." A series of abstract blocks of color, they occupy a space between two and three dimensions and offer a more immediate and spontaneous foil to her time-consuming and laborious sculptural practice. For her exhibition at CAM, Shechet premieres a new series of free-standing sculptures as well as several brand new works from the *Parallel Play* series.



*Idle /doi*, 2013. Glazed ceramic, wood base. Ceramic: 30 ½ x 15 x 12 inches  
Overall: 89 ½ x 13 ½ x 13 ½ inches. Courtesy the artist and Sikkema, Jenkins & Co., New York.



## Audio Tour

Visit [camstludio.org](http://camstludio.org) or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the artist and curator on the audio tour.

**Arlene Shechet** (b. 1951, New York) lives and works in New York City and upstate New York. She has had recent solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art/ Boston (2015); RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island (2014); Weatherspoon Museum of Art, Greensboro, North Carolina (2013); Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, Kansas (2012); Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College, Sarasota Springs (2009); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver (2009). Shechet is the recipient of many awards, including a John S. Guggenheim Foundation Visual Artist Fellowship (2004), a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant (2010), and an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Art (2011).

This exhibition is generously supported by Bunny and Charles Burson; Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York; and Lora Reynolds Gallery, Austin.

*Arlene Shechet: Urgent Matter* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Kelly Shindler, Associate Curator.



*Blue Out*, 2012. Glazed ceramic and concrete, 43 × 17 × 18 inches. Collection of Josh Rechnitz, New York.

## Related Events

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### Contemporary Class: Sculpture at 2400 Degrees

Thursday, February 18, 6:00 pm

*\$10; free for members; or subscribe to Take 5 series at [camstl.org/class](http://camstl.org/class)*

Associate Curator Kelly Shindler and Stefanie Kirkland, Director of Exhibitions at Craft Alliance Center for Art & Design, look at Arlene Shechet's work within the larger context of ceramics and contemporary abstract sculpture.

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### Sunday Studio: Unmodeling Clay

Sunday, February 28, 1:00 pm

*\$10; free for members; or subscribe to Take 5 series at [camstl.org/studio](http://camstl.org/studio)*

Inspired by Arlene Shechet's gravity-defying sculptures, Craft Alliance artist-in-residence Virginia Eckinger leads a hands-on workshop on new and surprising ways to create with clay.



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