

# Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum  
Busch-Reisinger Museum  
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

## Press Release

### Sculptor Arlene Shechet Disrupts the View in New Installation at Harvard Art Museums



*Polymnia* (c. 1744–45), a Meissen porcelain figure from the collection of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, beside Arlene Shechet's *Sexy Baby Eyes* (2012). © Arlene Shechet; image courtesy of the artist.

Cambridge, MA  
October 7, 2022

The Harvard Art Museums have unveiled a new, one-of-a-kind installation designed by contemporary American sculptor Arlene Shechet. ***Disrupt the View: Arlene Shechet at the Harvard Art Museums*** presents recent work by the artist alongside historical German, Japanese, and Chinese tableware and figures from the museums' collections, encouraging visitors to look anew at works of porcelain and other objects. The multiyear installation is on view through July 6, 2025, in Gallery 1510 (Level 1).

To celebrate the installation, Shechet will speak about her artistic process and installation practice at a free in-person lecture at the Harvard Art Museums on Friday, October 7, 2022, at 6:30pm. Further details can be found below, under "Programming."

*Disrupt the View* was organized by **Lynette Roth**, Daimler Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum; **Jessica Ficken**, Cunningham Curatorial Assistant for the Collection in the Division of Modern and

Contemporary Art; and **Gabriella Szalay**, former Renke B. and Pamela M. Thyne Curatorial Fellow in the Busch-Reisinger Museum (2018–20).

In *Disrupt the View*, Shechet's creative take on hundreds of years of porcelain—from its initial Asian manufacture to European imperialist imaginings of life in Asia—encourages visitors to see these objects with fresh eyes—as handmade and industrially manufactured and as painterly and sculptural. The installation—displayed inside one of the museums' outdoor-facing glass-walled galleries—includes 24 works made by Shechet during her 2012–13 residency at the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory in Saxon, Germany, which respond to the factory's history of porcelain production in a playful, disruptive blurring of the binaries between historical and contemporary, production and final product, and utilitarian and decorative. These works, as well as a recent sculpture, *Grammar* (2020), are intermingled with 64 examples of historical porcelain figures and tableware, ranging from the 12th through the 20th century, and from the Meissen, Höchst, Fürstenberg, and Nymphenburg manufactories in Germany, as well as from artisans in China and Japan.

"Arlene Shechet has breathed new life into an extensive yet overlooked part of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, namely its 18th-century porcelain collection," said Roth. "With a sculptor's sensitivity, she attends to the formal, material qualities of these historical objects, but also to the sociopolitical context of their making, thereby transforming them—almost magically—for today's audiences."

"The allure of spending time inside a functioning factory [was] extremely compelling," said Shechet. "As a child in New York, I used to tell my parents there were two things I wanted to be when I grew up: a farmer or a factory worker. Thinking about that in recent years as I work in my studio, I realize that being an artist is, in many ways, like being both a farmer and a factory worker. I'm growing things and generating a vision. I'm not completely in control and am always aware of a process that's bigger than me."

Decorative arts are typically displayed in museum galleries dedicated to the same culture and period, often in isolation from other media. In *Disrupt the View*, however, Shechet mirrors her approach to artmaking in the curatorial process by playing with display conventions. She creates sculptural arrangements in narrow custom-made rectangular vitrines placed in the middle of gallery and in wall nooks where the works are upended, stacked, and pushed up against each other, as though colliding. Two constellations of plates—from 17th-century blue-and-white ware produced in China, to 18th-century colored enamel plates adorned with scenes based on the European graphic arts, to Shechet's own inventive sculptures—hang from the gallery ceiling, emphasizing the unique material qualities of plates as sculptural design. Shechet also incorporated *Woman with Animals* (c. 1912), a large, rare surviving stained-glass work by German artist Max Pechstein from the Busch-Reisinger Museum's collection, thereby connecting to a related tradition in the applied arts. The positioning of these works in a gallery with three walls of glass allows natural light to filter in and for visitors to view the installation from outside the building. Detailed information for many of the individual objects in the installation is [available online](#) and accessible through QR codes placed on the gallery walls.

To realize the unusual installation, Shechet worked very closely with the curatorial team and with many other Harvard Art Museums staff. Members of the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies and the Collections Management department made recommendations on the overall layout of the gallery, designed the metal armatures for the plate constellations, and created the custom mounts needed for each of the artworks. Conservation staff advised on and tested a unique adhesive method used to safely attach each delicate plate to the constellation armatures.

## About the Artist

Arlene Shechet 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*, which *The New York Times* called “some of the most imaginative American sculpture of the past 20 years, and some of the most radically personal,” was on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, in 2015, with an accompanying monograph. Shechet’s work also includes historical museum installations. *Porcelain, No Simple Matter: Arlene Shechet and the Arnhold Collection* was on view at The Frick Collection, New York (2016); and *From Here On Now* at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (2016). An ambitious large-scale public project by the artist, including monumental porcelain and mixed-media sculptures, opened in September 2018 at Madison Square Park in New York.

Shechet was featured in PBS’s Art 21 (2014) as well as in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *The Artist Project* (2016). She is the recipient of 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.

Shechet’s work is held in many distinguished public collections, including the Brooklyn Museum, New York; CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; 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.

## Programming

A range of public programs will accompany the exhibition over the coming months, including an in-person lecture by the artist and gallery talks. For updates and full details, please see our calendar: [harvardartmuseums.org/calendar](https://harvardartmuseums.org/calendar).

Lecture (in-person)

Friday, October 7, 2022, 6:30–8:00pm

*Disrupt the View: A Conversation with Arlene Shechet*

Harvard Art Museums, Menschel Hall, 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge MA

Free admission; reservations are required. To attend, please [fill out this online form](#).

Join curator Lynette Roth as she talks with Arlene Shechet about her artistic process, her past collaborations with German porcelain manufactory workers, and how she recontextualizes these remarkable objects to speak to the larger history of labor, class, and global trade. Before the lecture, guests are invited to visit the installation on Level 1.

## Website

Learn more about the installation at [harvardartmuseums.org/arleneshechet](https://harvardartmuseums.org/arleneshechet)

## Credits

This installation and related programming are supported by the Charles Kuhn Endowment Fund in the Busch-Reisinger Museum. Support for the lecture is also provided by the M. Victor Leventritt Fund, which was established through the generosity of the wife, children, and friends of the late M. Victor Leventritt, Harvard Class of 1935. The purpose of the fund is to present outstanding scholars of the history and theory of art to the Harvard and Greater Boston communities. Modern and contemporary art programs at the Harvard Art Museums are made possible in part by generous support from the Emily Rauh Pulitzer and Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., Fund for Modern and Contemporary Art.

## **About the Harvard Art Museums**

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, comprising three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on art from Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. [harvardartmuseums.org](http://harvardartmuseums.org)

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

## **Hours and Admission**

Open Tuesday–Sunday, 10am–5pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission: \$20 adults, \$18 seniors (65+). Free to all visitors on Sundays; on other days, free to: members, all students (with valid ID), youth under 18, Cambridge residents (proof of residency required), Harvard ID holders (plus one guest), active duty military personnel (NEA Blue Star Museums), and individuals with SNAP benefits or an EBT card. On Saturdays, 10am–noon, Massachusetts residents receive free admission (proof of residency required). For further information about visiting, including important COVID-19 policies, see [harvardartmuseums.org/visit](http://harvardartmuseums.org/visit).

## **For more information, please contact**

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