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ART IN REVIEW

Arlene Shechet: 'Slip'

By Roberta Smith

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Sikkema Jenkins & Company

530 West 22nd Street,

Chelsea

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In her latest, largely terrific exhibition, Arlene Shechet continues to expand upon the ceramic vessel as a one-stop art medium that combines painting and sculpture while pushing her work in increasingly diverse directions, with exuberant polymorphous, often comic results. Her lavishly asymmetrical, improvised forms — slumping this way, bugling that way — teem with references that are variously bodily, structural and cultural. They harbor unexpected apertures, tubelike appendages, Medusa-like mop tops and weird outcroppings that require complete, in-the-round exploration. Many suggest failed attempts at cylindrical vessels that have been elaborately messed with, repeatedly poked, layered with slabs of cutout clay or pocked with boxes both opened and closed.



“Stories” (2013), part of the Arlene Shechet show
“Slip.” Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Ms. Shechet’s glazed surfaces continue to astound. Some are full of painterly pentimenti. Others proffer strangely textured monochromes — the result of repeated firings — that look a bit like terry cloth, or fossilized moss. This surface blazes coral in “No Noise,” which evokes a flailing hot-water bottle and also an abstract SpongeBob SquarePants and has a large-pored proboscis-like bump. The same surface prevails as an elegant buff in a piece fittingly titled “Naked” and as a subtle tone-shifting brown in “Out and Out.” Here two sagging cylinders are strapped together in an intimate embrace reminiscent of kimono-clad lovers. In the white “No Matter What,” the white glaze has contracted into tiny beads, resembling a fine layer of lace, or sweat.

Most of the pieces punctuated with boxes are too obvious in their attempt to reconcile the organic and the geometric, although these succeed when the boxes are allowed to run amok — and alternate with sausagelike rolls — as in the whitish “Stories.” In addition, Ms. Shechet has stepped back from fully integrating her pieces with their pedestals, which she excelled at in her last show by making imaginative use of ceramic kiln bricks. But in the main, this exhibition shows her proceeding, as she has for the past decade, at full throttle, an example for all.