

ARTFORUM



View of "Arlene Shechet: Turn Up the Bass," 2016.

NEW YORK

Arlene Shechet

SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

530 West 22nd Street

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One of the first sculptures you encounter in Arlene Shechet's current exhibition is *I Saw the 18th Century* (all works 2016), which is crowned by a block of wood carved to resemble a circular saw blade. This tongue-in-cheek object sets the tone for the paradoxical and polymorphous works within. Though perhaps most widely known for her genre-defying ceramics, Shechet has shifted among

mediums for her entire career, never settling on one long enough for it to become predictable. Here, she combines her explorations into a new material—hardwood—with expertly glazed ceramics.

Shechet has used wood as a raw base for her ceramics in the past. The pedestal, an integral element of her work, now merges with the sculpture. *All in All* and *The Body Is an Ear* are assemblages of stacked plinths seeming to anticipate displaying objects—yet in their listing, figural stances, they become the objects themselves. Shechet's playful alchemy also upends medium specificity, producing forms that are at once organic, architectural, and mechanical. She molds clay shims, wedges, and braces to fill the wood's fissures—we see this most in the prismatic pair titled *Jewel* and *Peg Leg*. *Roundabout* amusingly joins two columns of wood with a wad of bubblegum-pink clay, while *Taproot* is a mushroomlike knot of curvilinear, Gehryesque ribbons.

Shechet works with and against her materials. In *Full On*, she embraces the wood's irregularities, adopting its cracks, insect tracks, and scorched edges as drawn lines. She considers clay a tool for three-dimensional drawing, so it makes sense that she'd treat wood similarly. Here, Shechet continues to transcend the materiality and conventions that have characterized and burdened ceramics for so long. There is little reason to think she will not accomplish the same with wood.

— Chris Murtha

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