

REVIEWS

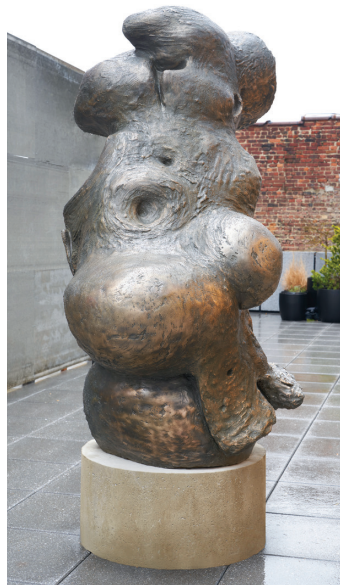
NEW YORK

Arlene Shechet Pace Gallery

The 14 large sculptures in the suggestively titled “Skirts,” Arlene Shechet’s recent exhibition, appear to have both hidden and overt agendas. The title word, as noun and verb, conveys ideas of outskirts and borders, as well as dodgy movement; it also describes an item of female clothing and can double as (disrespectful) slang for women themselves. Each sculpture responds to the worlds of nature, art, and culture, displaying disparate faces and views replete with composite parts, openings, protuberances, and contrasting materials, textures, and hues.

Iron Twins is simultaneously literal and figurative in its imagery, stylized profiles, breasts, and other anatomical possibilities perhaps winking at different periods in art history. Placed about an inch apart yet “facing” in opposite directions, the forms may or may not be identical. They seem to have embedded signs of individuality. From one direction, the two parts create a T shape. Their abstracted forms could point to Cycladic sculpture (c. 3000–1000 BCE), while the use of iron calls to mind the Iron Age (about 500 years later). The twins may make a further allusion to

the Industrial Revolution, around 1760, when machines improved cast iron production and products. Regardless of historical inspirations, for me, *Iron*



Twins raises philosophical questions about how and why similar identities may turn out differently. Most striking is the beauty of the tall “necks” and squarish, eyeless “heads.”

In terms of disposition and persona, *Via the Moon* differs radically from *Iron Twins*. The white oak trunk base, weathered by heat and water treatments, is riddled with intentional vertical cracks. Three wooden butterfly joints bridge the largest splits. The water-soaked, hand-painted acrylic pastel finish seems both natural and unnatural. On top of the base, a roundish, many-layered ceramic construction with a mottled, pock-marked surface evokes the moon. The many holes, fissures, sprues, valleys, and interior chambers may also

suggest bodily organs or ancient caves; most of all, it’s a hyper-convoluted abstract form. The title suggests madness disguised as beauty—going way, way out of the way to arrive at a destination. *Via the Moon* is more wound up than Tony Cragg’s most convoluted sculptures.

Each human-size to larger piece featured in this exhibition has its own embedded secrets and stories, from the cast bronze *Oomph* (installed on the terrace) to the equally bulbous *Grammar*, to the elongated forms of *Fancy* and *Magic Matters*, to the somewhat figurative *Under cherry trees/ There are/ No strangers. Deep Dive*, like *Iron Twins*, is a unique marvel. Its wood and steel base curves like a favorite sofa to hold three clay parts with alternating smooth or velvety surfaces colored chartreuse, pale green, and bold blue. Seen together, this new body of work demonstrates bold approaches to the juxtaposition of abstract forms, processes, and elemental materials. Shechet has maintained her trademark trajectory as an artist, keeping in the outside lane and not repeating herself.

—JAN GARDEN CASTRO

LONDON

Kara Walker Tate Modern

Kara Walker’s *Fons Americanus*, created for Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, is a brilliantly trenchant and brutal anti-monument to Britain’s shameful, often overlooked role in the slave trade. Rich in allegorical detail, it loosely echoes the



LEFT TO RIGHT:
ARLENE SHECHET
Deep Dive,
2020.

Glazed ceramic, painted hardwood, and steel,
40 x 40 x 23 in.

Installation view of
“Skirts,” 2020.