

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### *Listening Closely*

January 19 – March 23, 2019

Opening reception: Saturday, January 12, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Listening Closely*, an exhibition of work by N. Dash, Rosy Keyser, Arlene Shechet, and Michelle Stuart.

Where do we come from? Where are we going? Is there a bigger something out there that will always be out of reach? (And what might it mean to try to connect with it?) The artists in this show listen closely to their materials, history, the land, and the stars—and often end up hearing things they did not expect.

### **Michelle Stuart**

Michelle Stuart has been making drawings, sculpture, site-specific land art, and photographs since the late 1960s—all of which revolve around an interest in nature, geology, archaeology, anthropology, travel, and the age-old question: “Why are we here?” Since 2009 her output has focused on grids of mostly black-and-white photographs (made with as few as a half-dozen images or as many as 100), culled from an immense archive of images she has found or made herself.

One recent photo grid is in this show: *The Mysteries* includes fifteen black-and-white images of ancient cave paintings, fireworks, and a woven tribal mask. *Touching Infinity* is a single photograph from an ongoing series that depicts arrangements of deeply personal objects, things Stuart has collected over decades of extensive travel: jars of earth, a whale vertebra, a bird nest, dried mushrooms, postcards, pressed flowers, wooden model boats. *Touching Infinity*, specifically, features an antique wood frame (that contains a picture of a pair of mannequin hands) stacked on a star chart and a photograph of the Milky Way.

Curator Gregory Volk calls Stuart’s dreamlike tableaux “mesmerizing and transportive.” They often compress huge stretches of time in a single work. (*The Mysteries*, for example, includes several double exposures that overlay petroglyphs (rudimentary drawings of men hunting on horseback with spears, thousands of years old) with epic fireworks displays.) Stuart’s work takes us careening through the cosmos, across deserts, into jungles, sailing open seas, and crawling along the ocean floor—always with a curious, sensitive eye that is prone to awe, keen to investigate life of all kinds: whether plants, insects, dogs, indigenous peoples, or Parisians. Volk also writes, “As much as Stuart connects with scientifically minded naturalists and explorers, she equally connects with spiritually charged experiences in nature...her photographic works decisively upend a longstanding anthropocentric worldview and instead situate us (and all our artifacts, tools, and achievements) amid natural cycles of growth and decay, regeneration and entropy.”

## **Arlene Shechet**

Arlene Shechet's work bridges the history of ceramics, Meissen porcelain, Buddhist philosophy, craft, and conceptual art. Her time in the studio is grounded by a practice of deep attention and meditative consciousness—what she describes as a “call and response” with her work, wherein she listens to what the works need to become.

She began the work in this show—Buddha figures and busts, stupa drawings—in the late 1990s after the illness and premature death of her closest friend. “I was gripped by the need to pay attention and be more alive in every aspect of my life,” Shechet says about this period of grappling with the brevity and preciousness of all things.

The shortness of time was further emphasized by Shechet's lack of it. (In the 90s her schedule was overrun by looking after her young children.) When she could take a quick break from parenting, she would run downstairs to her studio, where she was beginning to experiment with a new material: plaster. She says “One day I was making something blobby and it looked, I thought amusedly, like a Buddha. In a different state of mind it would have looked like a pile of shit.” Although she had never made figurative work before, she says “It suddenly made sense to use the Buddha form as a signifier of my resolve to embrace aliveness. I became aware that having the physical presence of an icon functioned as a reminder to stay awake, in the broadest sense.” The New York art world of the time was primarily concerned with identity politics—gender, race, sexuality. Meanwhile, Shechet was busy trying to make a Buddha that was relevant to contemporary American life—a figure that, body to body, might arouse empathy in the viewer.

After several years of making these sculptural icons, Shechet worked with the expert papermakers at Dieu Donn e to explore the Buddha in another form—via two-dimensional blue and white paper compositions featuring floor plans of stupas (hemispherical structures built as spaces for meditation). The shape of a stupa represents the Buddha's body and mind; its round floor plan takes the shape of a mandala, a symbolic representation of the universe. As with her other paper works, Shechet has not painted *on* the surface—rather, she creates marks and shapes early in the papermaking process, before the piece has dried. She composes with pigmented paper pulp—quickly, while the piece is still a sort of liquid soup—as it drains through a rectangular sieve. Form and color are unified, one and the same.

Because Shechet works with paper and plaster in their liquid form, she is racing against the clock to make an artwork before her materials dry. Transformation is a key conceptual anchor for her. Similarly, circumambulating a stupa is supposed to aid in meditating on cycles of life, death, and rebirth. As her husband's Buddhist teacher told her when she lost her best friend, “Life is like fireworks—vibrant and alive, and then gone.”

## **Rosy Keyser**

Many of Rosy Keyser's paintings deal with having one foot in the physical world and one foot in another—psychological, spiritual, cosmic.

Her silver painting *Cosmic 88* is cantilevered so it angles up toward the ceiling, catching light almost like a parabolic reflector. It mimes the gesture of looking up, as if the painting were facing toward the stars, straining to hear or be heard. In addition to the reflective aluminum paint that dominates *Cosmic 88*, Keyser incorporated leaves, pebbles, grass, and weeds into the work—all things she found in the field behind the studio in Marfa where she made this painting. She thinks of this piece as a field recording of sorts, as if by making it she were walking around that quiet, dusty town with a microphone, recording the sound of the night and the clear, expansive sky. And running vertically through the painting is a skein of sawdust, which she got from the carpenter who built the stretcher bars for the canvas. Reusing this sawdust (a byproduct of the fabrication of its internal, physical structure) on the surface of the painting points to the oneness of all things. We are made from carbon—stardust—that will eventually be reabsorbed into the earth and reconstituted into a different touchstone.

Two small paintings on corrugated steel are also in this show. Keyser harvested the metal in these works from fields in upstate New York, where it had been abandoned and left exposed to the elements. The waves in the corrugation point to the rhythms of lived experience, the body, speech, music—and they alternate between rusted, raw, and painted. Tufts of horsehair push through gashes in the steel; pools of metallic silver paint have been left to dry into curious textures; a single strand of string seems somehow caught in the composition. The edges of the metal are irregular, making clear that Keyser has cut these pieces from a larger sheet. She thinks of them as exhibiting “brute force and tender articulation in varied and unpredictable intervals.”

Adaptability and recasting are concepts that connect Keyser’s work. She calls her studio an “untamed piece of turf,” a space where she tries to be present with her paintings, listen to them, respond, and let them show her places she could not have intentionally found. Her daily studio practice is an exercise in relinquishing full control and letting her work—and the world—wash over her.

## **N. Dash**

Touch is the generative element of N. Dash’s work. It is one of the primary senses we use to navigate the world, even though its centrality to our experience is perhaps under-acknowledged. Touch is inseparable from our understanding and perception of everything in the physical realm.

Dash makes paintings and fabric sculptures. The latter begin as small pieces of industrially produced cotton. They are continually handled/touched/rubbed—picking up both physical and immaterial information, including a patina of oil and dirt (transferred from the fingers)—until the fabric transforms and degrades. Each sculpture is a type of “alternative recording device” that registers a haptic, preverbal, and primal means of communication, in which energy is dynamically distilled from the body and indexed onto the material. Never exhibited

in their raw form, the sculptures are arranged in quick succession and photographed, lending them a measure of distance from their gnarled and grimy physicality. Recently, images of the fabric sculptures have been silkscreened onto adobe, returning them to their more visceral origins.

The paintings are frequently built across multiple panels with jute, linen, paint, graphite, string, insulation sheathing, and adobe. The adobe—made from dirt gathered in the high desert and brought to the artist's studio—is troweled onto panels before being covered with paint. Making adobe the ground for the paintings involves shifting dirt from the horizontal plane of the earth to the vertical expanse of the wall. The works recall corporeal and terrestrial topographies.

The paintings and fabric sculptures inform one another like two minds coupling, at play in an interrelated exchange.

### **Artist bios**

**N. Dash**, born in 1980 in Miami, lives and works in New York and New Mexico. Dash has mounted solo shows at Fondazione Giuliani (Rome), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), White Flag Projects (St. Louis), and this spring will open an exhibition at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Connecticut). Dash has participated in shows at American University Museum (Washington DC), FLAG Art Foundation (New York), Fowler Museum at UCLA (Los Angeles), Jewish Museum (New York), Les Brasseurs Art Contemporain (Belgium), Maxxi Museum (Rome), and Palazzo Strozzi (Florence). The work is in the collections of the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney), Blanton Museum of Art (Austin), Dallas Museum of Art, Frac des Pays de la Loire (France), Guggenheim Museum (New York), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), Margulies Collection (Miami), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Sammlung Goetz (Munich), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (Ghent), and Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).

**Rosy Keyser**, born in 1974 in Baltimore, lives and works in New York. She has participated in shows at Ballroom Marfa, Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art, Margulies Collection (Miami), MASS MoCA (Massachusetts), Oakland University Art Gallery (Michigan), and White Columns (New York). Her work is in the collections of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Denmark), Maxine & Stuart Frankel Foundation (Michigan), Portland Museum of Art, Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), and Zabłudowicz Collection (London).

**Arlene Shechet**, born in 1951 in New York, lives and works in New York. Her first major public art installation, commissioned by the Madison Square Park Conservancy, is currently on view at the Park through April. In 2015, ICA/Boston mounted a 20-year survey of Shechet's work and published an accompanying catalogue. She has had solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Dieu Donn  (New York), Frick Collection (New York), Henry Art Gallery (Seattle), Joslyn Art Museum (Omaha), Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Phillips Collection (Washington DC), RISD Museum (Providence), and Tang Teaching

Museum and Art Gallery (New York). Her work is in the collections of the Blanton Museum of Art (Austin), Brooklyn Museum (New York), Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Margulies Collection (Miami), Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), National Gallery of Art (Washington DC), Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art (Kansas), Phillips Collection (Washington DC), Pizutti Collection (Ohio), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), and Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).

**Michelle Stuart**, born in 1933 in Los Angeles, lives and works in New York. Recent exhibitions include *Viva Arte Viva*, curated by Christine Macel, at the 57th Venice Biennale; *Virginia Woolf: An Exhibition Inspired by her Writings* at Tate St. Ives (England); and *Cosmogonies, au gré des éléments* at Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain (France). In 2016, Stuart presented a solo exhibition at the Bronx Museum of Arts (New York). Her *Sayreville Strata Quartet* (1976) is currently on permanent view at Dia:Beacon, and her work is also currently featured in *A Body Measured Against the Earth* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, *After Babel* at Megaron—The Athens Concert Hall (Greece), and *Territorios que importan: Arte, género y ecología* at Centro de Arte y Naturaleza, Fundación Beulas (Spain). Stuart's most notable accomplishments include receiving the Anonymous Was a Woman prize (2017), American Academy in Rome Residency (1995), and the Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship Grant (1975). Her work can be found in public collections worldwide including the Art Institute of Chicago, Centre Pompidou (Paris), Glenstone Museum (Maryland), Menil Collection (Houston), Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Museum of Modern Art (New York), National Gallery of Australia, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Tate Modern (London), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), and Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).