

Art in Review

Arlene Shechet

New Work

Elizabeth Harris Gallery
529 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Oct. 6

Arlene Shechet has certainly not rushed anything. After 23 years, five solo gallery shows in New York, frequent oscillation among glass, plaster and clay and a raft of Buddha and stupa sculptures, she is doing work that really feels like her own. Her new glazed ceramic vessel-sculptures are terrific, full of references yet almost debt-free. (The main one

is to Andrew Lord's Process Art ceramics of the early 1980s.)

Sexy, devout, ugly and beautiful all at the same time, they move effortlessly between art and religion and East and West, and from painting and sculpture to craft and ritual. Plus they often have distinctive bases, including smooth cow pies of pure white plaster.

One group of bulbous pieces assimilates Indian sculpture, Chinese scholars' rocks and Persian metalwork. The glazes result from repeatedly disregarding firing temperatures and are flat gray or luminously dark silver subtly spotted with gold and, in one case, with blood-red. The forms suggest magic lamps with billowing genies or hookahs emitting clouds of smoke, but they also have a fleshy quality that evokes ungainly dancers. Spouts protrude here and there like extended limbs or snouts. Ganesh, the beloved elephant god, comes to mind.

A second group takes inspiration from the bowls and water jars of the Japanese tea ceremony, while also resembling much-used cooking (or paint) pots or beat-up tree stumps. Instead of being precariously hand built, like their neighbors, they are fat cylinders roughly scooped out by hand, poked and gouged. With their layered, blotchy colors they are as unpredictably variegated as the first series is monochromatic. They remind us that abstract painting was more or less born in the glazes of Chinese and Japanese ceramics. And Ms. Shechet's inspiring exhibition reminds us that talent moves in mysterious ways, often taking its own sweet time.

ROBERTA SMITH