



deCordova
Sculpture Park and Museum

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DeCordova Presents *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism* this October *Major survey includes expansive fiber-based sculptures and small-scale assemblages*

Lincoln, MA, August 13, 2018—Beginning October 19, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum presents [*Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism*](#), featuring more than seventy works of art including large-scale fiber installations, sculptures, works on paper, and video. The exhibition, organized by Phoenix Art Museum, sheds light on Pepe's practice as it developed in the 1980s to the present. It will be on view through March 20, 2019.



Hot Mess Formalism celebrates an under-recognized artist who has played an important role as thinker, innovator, and mentor within the field of contemporary art for almost thirty years. The first mid-career survey of Pepe's work, it examines how the artist plays with feminist and craft traditions to counter patriarchal notions of art making. While Pepe incorporates personal and cultural narratives into her work, she also invites a broad range of viewers' interpretations.

"Sheila Pepe's installations are energizing and challenging: they spill onto and around architecture and in so doing, often reveal biases embedded within institutions or artistic mediums," says deCordova Curator Sarah Montross. "Her fiber pieces are never installed the same way twice, so we're eagerly anticipating how they will respond to and be influenced by deCordova's galleries—and how our visitors, in turn, respond to and are influenced by the exhibition."

Pepe is best known for her fiber-based, site-specific installations that challenge preconceived notions of domestic crafts, such as crocheting and "women's work." These web-like structures intervene in architectural spaces and galleries, creating volumes, lines, and shadows that are always subject to the changing conditions of the environments they occupy. At deCordova, the works will wind between two separate floors of the building—up staircases and within multiple galleries, creating an immersive and colorful experience for visitors.

The exhibition also includes an extensive selection of the artist's sculptural assemblages known as her Votive Moderns, dating from as far back as 1994. These works are made out of disparate media ranging from found, industrially manufactured materials—like rubber bands, wires, springs, and plastics—to ceramics and plasters.

Installations and themes featured in *Hot Mess Formalism* include:

- ***Women are Bricks (Mobile Bricks)***: This piece—a grid of triangular-shaped bricks on ceramic rollers placed atop a used carpet—joins feminist methods of gathering, mobility, and resistance with a post-Minimalist sculptural vocabulary. Pepe's unexpected arrangement of a domestic object and handmade bricks also complicates long-held assumptions around masculinity and labor.
- ***Put me down Gently (2014)***: The improvisational, drawing-like quality of Pepe's work is intertwined with her use of techniques and materials linked to family traditions. These include crochet, a skill passed down from her mother, and shoelaces that reference her grandfather's work as a cobbler. Works such as *Put me down Gently* (2014, pictured right) are never installed the same way, as they always respond to the particular characteristics of the galleries in which they are placed.
- ***91 BCE & Not So Good for Emperors***: The artist invited volunteers to help her create this work at the Phoenix Art Museum for this traveling exhibition—an example of her long-standing engagement with collective and participatory making.



Pepe has strong, ongoing connections to New England. Many of the artworks in this exhibition were made while she lived in the area, both for educational projects or museum exhibitions. For example, Pepe created *Women are Bricks (Mobile Bricks)* for her BFA thesis project at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and *Put me down Gently* is a site-specific installation she first installed at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston in 2015.

Montross adds, "Bringing this traveling exhibition to deCordova is like a homecoming for Sheila Pepe, who spent many years in the New England region as a student, professor, and exhibiting artist. Like the webbed forms of her massive installations, Sheila has created networks of friends and followers in the area. We are also delighted to introduce her work to new audiences and foreground her many contributions across Massachusetts and beyond."

Pepe earned a BFA in Ceramics from Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston, and an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University. She was also a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, from 1997 to 1998, and has held teaching positions

at many area institutions, including Rhode Island School of Design, Brandeis University, and Williams College.

Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism was organized by Phoenix Art Museum and curated by Gilbert Vicario, the Museum's Selig Family Chief Curator. It was previously shown at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, and is currently on view at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog, with contributions by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Elizabeth Dunbar, Lia Gangitano and Gilbert Vicario. The presentation at deCordova is organized by Sarah Montross, Curator.

Related Programs (more may be added at a later date)

Curator-led Tour of *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism*

Thursday, November 8, 12 pm

Free with admission or membership

Curator Sarah Montross provides an in-depth exploration into the remarkable bodies of work on view in this exhibition.

Conversation with Sheila Pepe and Nancy Bauer

Thursday, November 29, 6:30–8:30 pm

Free

Join us for a conversation between artist Sheila Pepe and Dr. Nancy Bauer, Dean of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts, to learn how themes of philosophy, gender, and feminism inform Pepe's work.

Image Captions (top to bottom)

Sheila Pepe, *Red Hook at Bedford Terrace* (detail with artist), 2008, shoelaces, cotton yarn, and nautical towline, variable dimensions, Smith College Museum of Art, Purchased with gifts from members of the Museum's Visiting Committee in honor of the retirement of Ann Johnson.

Sheila Pepe, *Put me down Gently* (detail), 2014, parachute cord, laces, yarn and hardware, Installation view, Des Moines Art Center, Iowa, Collection of the artist, Photo by Rick Lozier Photography.

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About deCordova

Established in 1950 and located just twenty miles west of Boston, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum is dedicated to fostering the creation and exploration of contemporary sculpture and art through a dynamic slate of rotating exhibitions, innovative learning opportunities, a constantly changing thirty-acre landscape of large-scale, outdoor, modern and contemporary sculpture, and site-specific installations.

General Information

DeCordova's summer hours (Memorial Day weekend through Columbus Day weekend) are every day, Monday–Sunday, 10 am–5 pm. DeCordova's winter hours (beginning after Columbus Day weekend) are Wednesday–

Friday, from 10 am–4 pm, and Saturday and Sunday, 10 am–5 pm. Admission: \$14 for adults, \$12 for seniors, \$10 for students (ages 13 and up), and free for children 12 and under. Members, cyclists, Lincoln residents, and active duty military personnel and their families are admitted free of charge with proper ID. Visit decordova.org or call 781.259.8355 for further information.

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