

24 Questions for Sculptor Alyson Shotz

BY ASHTON COOPER | SEPTEMBER 24, 2014



Name: Alyson Shotz
Occupation: Artist
City/Neighborhood: Brooklyn

This October you have a show at the Wellin Museum in upstate New York, for which you will create site-specific installations in response to light in that space. What is the defining quality of the Wellin's light? What kinds of works did it provoke?

I'm making a few site-specific works for the Wellin Museum show. One is an expandable sculpture shaped by gravity and the material properties of the piece itself. It's made of stainless steel wire and glass beads, and the scale is about 18 feet high by 16 feet in diameter. This sculpture in particular will reflect the sunlight as it passes through the space and it will seem to materialize and dematerialize depending on the way the light hits it at any particular moment. Also, I just finished installing a 49-foot wall drawing there, which will also react to the light. The drawing, made with linen thread and pins on the wall, is something between a two-dimensional and three-

dimensional entity. The thread creates a kind of surface plane, raised two inches off the wall, and this plane casts shadows on the wall behind. The shadows and the density of the thread create an illusion of three-dimensionality that shifts as one walks along it. In addition there will be an etched vinyl piece (also site specific) going into Archive Hall, which will also react and change with light and one's position in relationship to it.

You also have two gallery shows this fall at Derek Eller and Carolina Nitsch. How does your process change when you are making work for a gallery? Is it on a smaller scale?

I try always to scale and shape the work to the space. At Derek's I'll be showing work in two locations, which is a very special occurrence. In the main space will be a series of linon drawings on panel and become sculptures that both deal with the idea of progression through time. In the second space I'm installing a 20-foot long floating glass bead sculpture, "Invariant Interval #4." For the past few years I've been trying to gain a better understanding of time. Without time, there is no space and vice versa, so the two are intimately linked, as Einstein described many years ago. As a sculptor, space is a primary subject for me, but I've just begun to think about time and its relationship to space. I see these works in the Eller show as ephemeral moments contained within a specific event, rendered in the very slow materials of thread, glass, and bronze.

Do you consider your work to be in dialogue with Light and Space or other artists who work with light?

I hope it's a continuation of the conversation.

What project are you working on now?

I'm still trying to finish work for the upcoming shows opening in October. I've been doing some work in porcelain, which is an incredibly pernickety material, and if they work out, they should be done just in time.

What's the last show that you saw?

Christopher Williams at MoMA.

What's the last show that surprised you?

"The Photographic Object, 1970" at Hauser and Wirth uptown. Incredible dense photographic objects made by many artists who I regret to say, I'd not heard of until this show, like Carl Cheng who made some bubbly molded plastic photo things which I really loved.

Describe a typical day in your life as an artist.

Yes.

What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

Maybe the studio itself.

Where are you finding ideas for your work these days?

Mostly from reading; a combination of science, fiction, and some science fiction. I'm also in the midst of a research residency at Stanford University, and I've had some really interesting conversations with a few people, which I think will lead to some new work.

Do you collect anything?

Not really... maybe interesting natural stuff you find on the beach or in the woods.

What's the last artwork you purchased?

I've not yet had the opportunity to buy art.

What's the first artwork you ever sold?

A drawing on brown paper with Sumi ink and gouache, I think.

What's the weirdest thing you ever saw happen in a museum or gallery?

Everyone looking at their phones, standing in front of some really amazing work.

What's your art-world pet peeve?

It feels like an intellectual loss that the people running galleries are not as accessible as they were in the '90s when I first moved to New York. I have some very good memories of inquiring spontaneous conversations that broke out between dealers, artists, and patrons who all happened to be in a gallery at the same time. The art world was definitely more casual at that time and ideas seems to be afloat in the streets. Or maybe I was just young and idealistic?

What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant?

I don't go out that much, so usually home.

Do you have a gallery/museum-going routine?

I used to go once a month to see what's around, but lately it can be a few months in between visits, because of my travel schedule. Walking around to look at art is still one of my favorite things to do.

What's the last great book you read?

"The Round House" by Louise Erdrich; anything by Alice Munro.

What work of art do you wish you owned?

A Suzumoto seascape.

What would you do to get it?

I'm not that acquisitive.

What international art destination do you most want to visit?

Japan, again.

What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?

I recently encountered "The House of the Future," a piece by David Hammons permanently located on two vacant lots on the east side of Charleston, South Carolina. It was part of the exhibition "Places with a Past," 1991, and it's a "Skinny House" — 6-feet wide, two stories high — built with local contractor Albert Abston. I thought it was absolutely incredible.

Who's your favorite living artist?

That's a toss up between David Hammons, Rosemarie Trockel, and Leo Bontescu, and I'm sure I'm forgetting others.

What are your hobbies?

Walking the dog, being an avid bike commuter. Not too much time for other hobbies at the moment.