

The Transmuting Sculptures of Alyson Shotz

BY JULIET HELMKE | FEBRUARY 21, 2017



“Temporal Shift” on view at Derek Eller Gallery. (Courtesy Alyson Shotz and Derek Eller Gallery.)

For Alyson Shotz’s seventh show at Derek Eller Gallery (but her first in their new Broome Street location) the artist presents recent work that may seem preoccupied with materiality, but in fact uses material properties to examine the ineffable: the effect of light. “Object for Reflection,” a large-scale woven sculpture is made of thousands of tiny aluminum pieces that the artist has hand-folded around stainless steel rings. In a space of minimal lighting, the metal transmogrifies, appearing sometimes solid, at others opaque, depending on the light filtering in due to the time of day, reconfiguring what audience members might expect from monumental metal sculpture.

The work “Temporal Shift,” installed in the gallery storefront window, is made of frosted vinyl representing two orbits of the earth around the sun. A shadow, cast by the actual sun through this configuration, projects a slowly changing shape into the gallery, appearing static but actually in a constant state of imperceptible motion. On the wall, the “Broken Dark Earth” sculptural pieces similarly change with the passing hours. Shifting light subtly alters the color of each work, and leaves a shadow between the two layers of metallic-glazed porcelain: the top, a tangle of woven threads, the bottom heavy clay slabs. Shotz spoke with Artinfo about her interest in light and shadow, and the work currently on view.

Tell me about the new body of work that will be on view at Derek Eller.

“Night” is the name of the show and it’s comprised of work in an array of materials that change as a result of the variations of light and darkness.

What materials have you used?

“Object for Reflection” is made out of thousands of tiny aluminum pieces hand folded around stainless steel rings. There are also a series of porcelain wall relief sculptures and a vinyl etching on the gallery storefront glass

How long has this work been in progress/what does this follow on from, in your practice?

I started the work in this show about three years ago. It carries forward my exploration of light and space as mediums unto themselves, and also advances with my mission to create sculpture with a lot of volume out of very little mass. However there are some new ideas in there as well about fabric or woven materials vs. metal sculpture and the histories of both of those.

Your work often plays with space, in forms that shift and change depending on the viewer's position in relation to it. Why is this adaptability, so to speak, often an integral part of their makeup? What are some of the challenges in this? I imagine, for example, documentation might at times prove challenging.

I’m interested in art that’s not easily comprehended; in work that changes each time you see it, like looking at light on water. I want the work to look different close up than it does from far away and change with each angle. Sculpture is meant to be seen from all around. But yes, documentation is very difficult and this work needs to be seen in person.

Last year you created a new commission for the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Can you tell me a little about that work?

The sculpture I made for Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts was a precursor to the big sculpture in this exhibition. Though that project was a commission, it was commissioned for the collection—not for a permanent space so it will be shown in various places in the museum, I imagine.