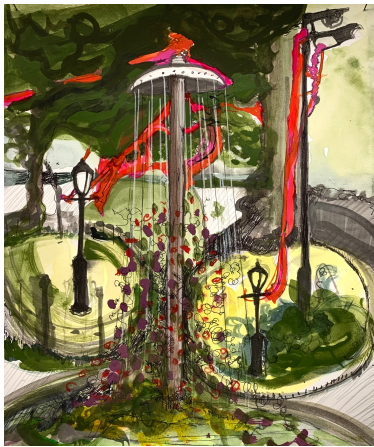




ARTIST SHEILA PEPE WILL CROCHET CANOPIES AND WEBS ON LAWNS AND ACROSS PATHWAYS IN MADISON SQUARE PARK FOR MAJOR PUBLIC ART COMMISSION

My Neighbor's Garden, Pepe's first outdoor exhibition, is realized with assistance from expert and novice crocheters, and commingles textile materials with climbing plants



Sheila Pepe (American, b. 1959). Proposal for *My Neighbor's Garden* in Madison Square Park, 2023. Telephone poles, yard hardware, nylon and cotton string, shoelaces, paracord, rubber bands, plant materials. Dimensions variable. Collection the artist. (left)



Crochet session with artist Sheila Pepe in her Brooklyn studio. March 2023. (right)

New York, NY | April 12, 2023 – Convening groups of novice and advanced crocheters, artist Sheila Pepe will create her first outdoor exhibition commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy and opening on June 26. In *My Neighbor's Garden*, Pepe upends a traditional American nineteenth-century urban park layout with a twenty-first century temporary installation that brings color, unexpected materials, and optimism outdoors. Pepe, a feminist and queer artist whose elaborate web-like structures summon and critique conventional women's craft practice, uses crochet to transform contemporary sculpture. Her canopies and webs of string and ties, paracord, shoelaces, outsize sustainable rubber bands and plant materials will attach to several twenty-foot high poles and distinguish the park's extant physical structures including light poles. The textile will span several pathways for parkgoers to walk beneath. Uncommon heirloom vegetables and flowering vines will intermingle with Pepe's crochet, supporting interaction between artist materials and the natural world. New York's fabric of community gardens feature a diverse array of unique heirloom plants. This diversity is reflected in the work with vining plants such as bitter melon, sour gherkin, long bean, and morning glory vine weaving around the crocheted constructions. *My Neighbor's Garden* will be on view through December 10, 2023.

"Simultaneous to creating *My Neighbor's Garden* in her Brooklyn studio, Sheila Pepe gathered a community of crocheters to make this vibrant work within the context of her decades-long practice," said Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Artistic Director and Martin Friedman Chief Curator, Madison Square Park Conservancy. "Pepe's hand has touched every stitch in this work as have her questions about traditional sculptural materials and ideas around neighborhood gardens throughout the city. Madison Square Park is the ideal setting for the artist to continue to test the reach of textiles."

"*My Neighbors Garden* is truly rooted in the park," said Stephanie Lucas, Director of Park Operations and Horticulture, Madison Square Park Conservancy. "Each vine, flower, fruit, and stitch reflects the whimsy of community effort and the joy of seasonal change."

Pepe's work has long questioned indoor space as literally and symbolically closing the door of potential to women. Here, within the context of a park setting, the artist considers publicness to create physical positions that welcome all parkgoers through a fabricated city garden.

Pepe's plan to convene neighbors in her studio and in the park is the conceptual warp and weft of *My Neighbor's Garden*, an experiment where makers find a community for support and identity. Pepe and the Conservancy plan to continue these gatherings during public programs in the park throughout the exhibition. This methodology of learning through and disseminating expertise is central to her practice. The artist estimates that 15,000 yards of materials have been crocheted over a six-month period.

My Neighbor's Garden will be accompanied by public programming that builds on the exhibition's themes, including three free outdoor concerts with Carnegie Hall Citywide, the Aizuri Quartet on July 12 and July 26 and the Aeolus Quartet on July 19; Art Talks with artists, horticulture experts, and cultural leaders; Botanical Book Club selections; and a reflection board where parkgoers respond to a question inspired by the exhibition.

Pepe's project in Madison Square Park is organized by Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Artistic Director and Martin Friedman Chief Curator; Tom Reidy, Deputy Director for Finance and Special Projects; and Truth Murray-Cole, Senior Curatorial Manager. Stephanie Lucas, Director of Park Operations and Horticulture; Jessica Kaplan, Horticulture Manager; and Aiyanna Milligan, Horticulture Associate are working closely with the artist on horticulture selections. Holly Leicht is the Conservancy's Executive Director.

About the Artist

Sheila Pepe was born in Morristown, New Jersey in 1959. She lives and works in Brooklyn. Pepe received a BA from Albertus Magnus College in New Haven; a BFA in ceramics from Massachusetts School of Art, Boston and an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The artist's mother taught her to crochet in the 1960s. Pepe discovered women artists who were a generation or two older and associated with the feminist art movement – Lynda Benglis, Eva Hesse, and Nancy Spero – as a crucible to launch her sculptural investigations. Those women responded to the fury of the Vietnam War and became agents of activism for Pepe who overturned hoary assumptions by responding to gender, queer identity, and civil rights. She also questioned the materiality in sculpture, so closely linked to gender. Pepe radicalized the grandmotherly constitution of crochet into a paradigm of feminist action. She studied blacksmithing at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine and received a fellowship to attend the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Pepe has had numerous solo and group exhibitions including Des Moines Art Center; ICA Boston; Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum; University Gallery at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Weatherspoon Art Museum, North Carolina; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus. She contributed to *Liquid Sky* (2007), which was on view at MoMA PS1. *Research Station for the People* (2014) was included in the 8th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennial, OCAT, Shenzhen, China. *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism* (2017), the artist's mid-career survey, was organized by Phoenix Art Museum and traveled to Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha; and deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln. *Tabernacle for Trying Times* (2021), an exhibition with painter Carrie Moyer, was organized by Portland Museum of Art, Maine and traveled to the Museum of Arts and Design, New York. Pepe's work is in private and public collections including Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University; Rose Art Museum at Brandeis; Smith College Museum of Art; and Harvard University Art Museums. She has had residencies including the Bunting Institute, Radcliffe College at Harvard University, and Civitella Ranieri, Umbertide, Italy. Pepe is the former Assistant Chairperson of Fine Art at Pratt Institute. She will be Artist-in-Residence at Dartmouth College for the 2024 winter term.

Exhibition Support

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My Neighbor's Garden is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature.

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Madison Square Park Conservancy is a public/private partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

About Madison Square Park Conservancy

Madison Square Park Conservancy (MSPC) is the not-for-profit organization that raises one-hundred percent of the funds to maintain, operate and program Madison Square Park, a dynamic 6.2-acre public green space in the heart of Manhattan. As stewards of this urban oasis, MSPC strives to create an environment that fosters moments of inspiration through visionary public art, acclaimed gardens, inviting amenities, and thought-provoking programming.

Since 2004, Madison Square Park Conservancy has commissioned and presented premier installations by dynamic artists ranging in practice and media. The program has exhibited works by artists including Diana Al-Hadid, Tony Cragg, Abigail DeVille, Leonardo Drew, Teresita Fernández, Cristina Iglesias, Hugh Hayden, Maya Lin, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Josiah McElheny, Giuseppe Penone, Martin Puryear, Erwin Redl, Alison Saar, Shahzia Sikander, Ursula von Rydingsvard, and Krzysztof Wodiczko. In 2019, the Conservancy served as the commissioning institution for the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, marking the first time that an organization whose visual art program focuses exclusively on public art has received this honor. With Rapaport serving as Commissioner and Curator, the Conservancy presented new work by Martin Puryear.

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