

**SHEILA
PEPE**

MY NEIGHBOR'S GARDEN



Sheila Pepe

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My Neighbor's Garden

Madison Square Park Conservancy 2023

Sheila Pepe
My Neighbor's Garden

June 26, 2023-December 10, 2023

Madison Square Park
New York

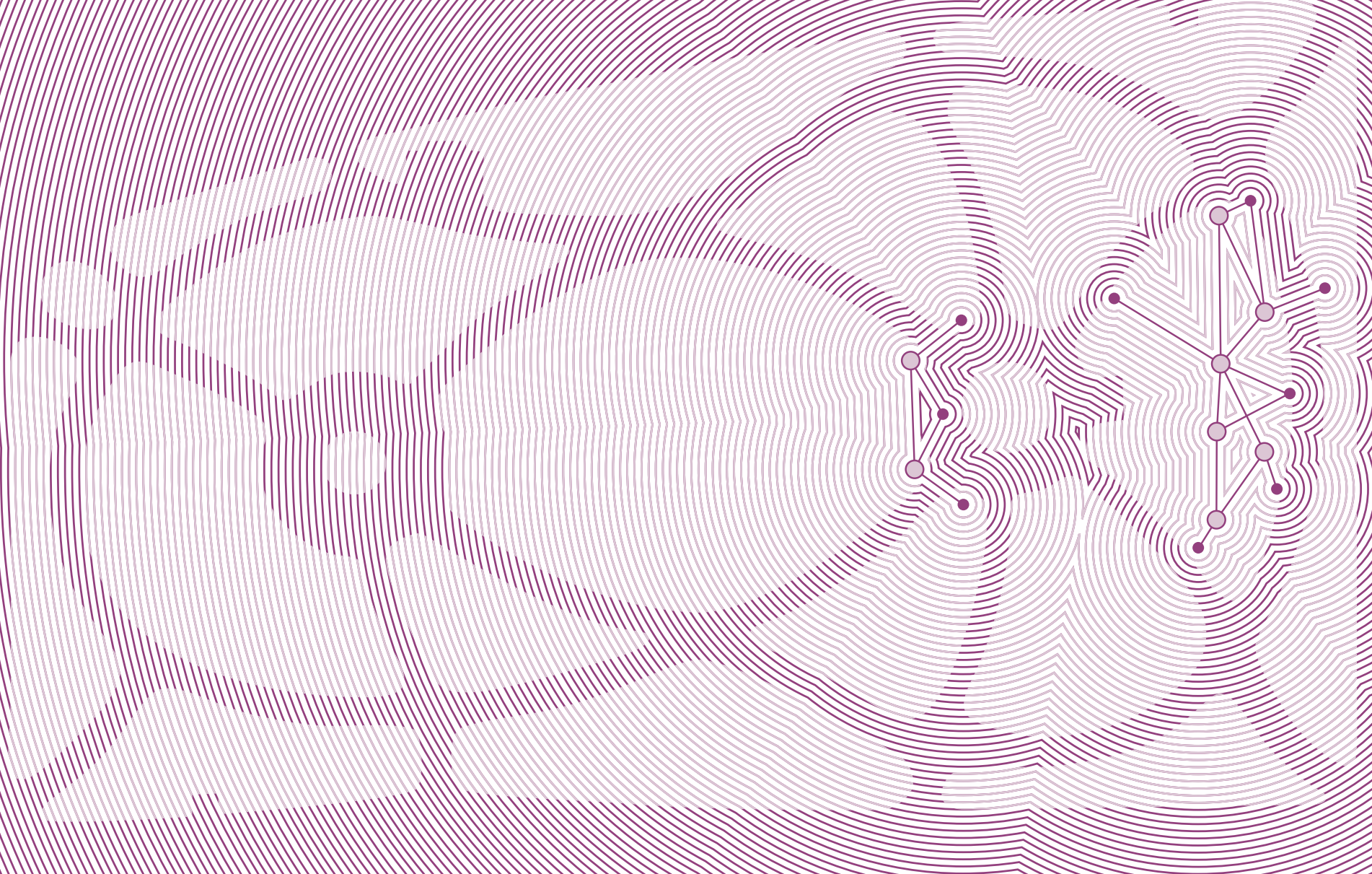
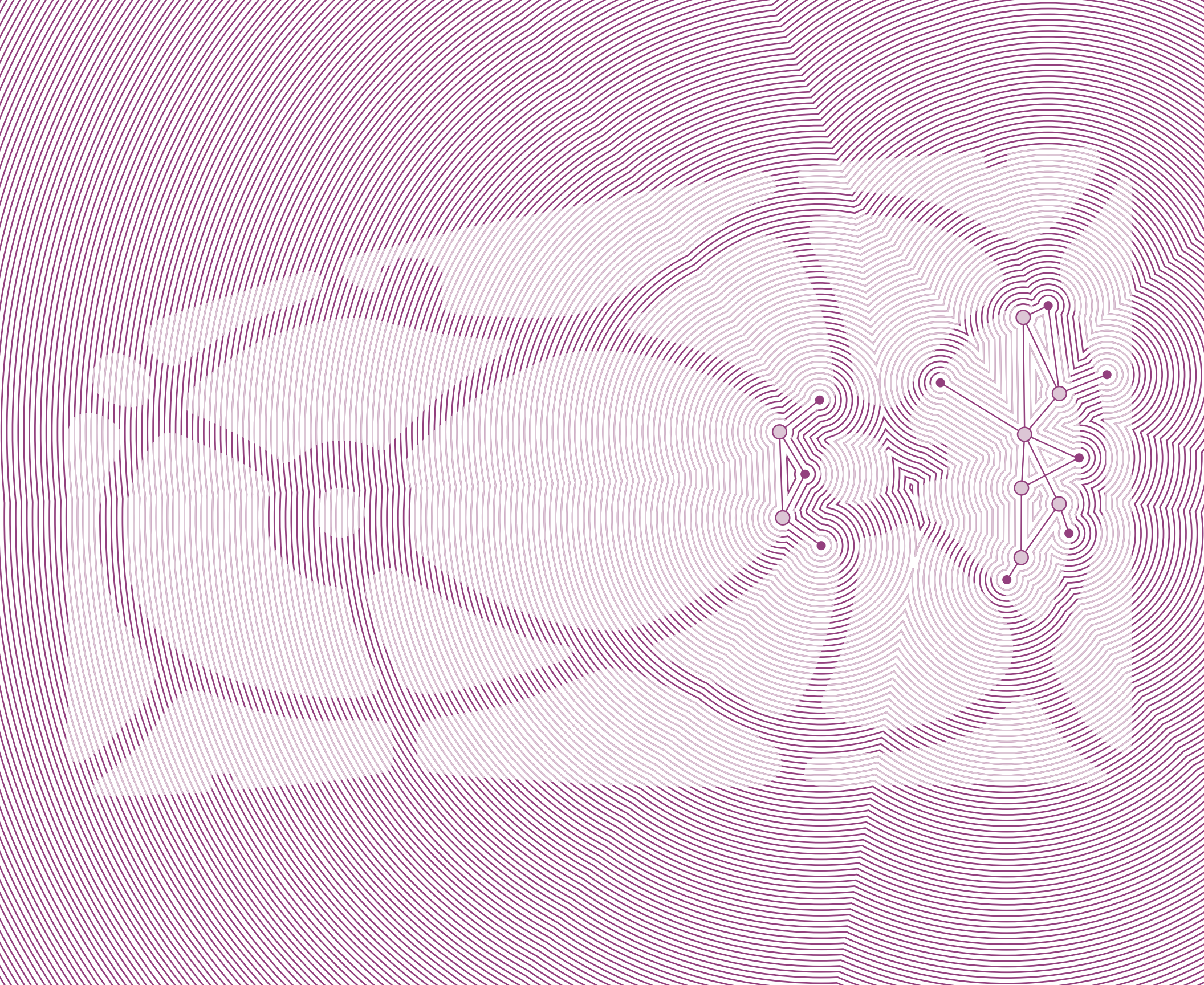
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Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York



Madison Square Park Conservancy

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FIG. 1



FIG. 2

Introduction

Brooke Kamin Rapaport

Sheila Pepe regularly looks at architectural-scale spaces from a lofty perch. She doesn't gaze down from the tower in a university library, or from the rooftop of a modernist building. Instead, Pepe's favorite spot is high in the bucket of a lift, where, with crochet hook in hand, she creates elaborate weblike structures that transform contemporary sculpture. Her numerous indoor works interrogate spaces that have literally and symbolically closed the door of potential to women. More recently, when invited to realize an outdoor commission for Madison Square Park Conservancy, the artist had to conceive a project that recognized the plane of the sky as the ceiling, stands of trees as extant columns, and scant limitations on the reach of her materials. For this, her first outdoor work, Pepe embraced the challenge and the options and found succor in restrictions: crochet couldn't attach to trees; tree roots had to be respected; string and yarn must accommodate weather, creatures, abundant sunshine, and even freezes and thaws. She welcomed a collaboration with a team of crocheters and partnered with the Conservancy's horticulturists, who planted climbing vines that she hopes will assume extreme growing patterns, ultimately commingling and overtaking the crochet. Pepe explained: "It's me connecting to context. It's marking the space, driving work into a piece of architecture to say that this is here. The outside is seasonal; time is a big part of the piece. Public art has been the same thing forever, like the guy on the horse. Or it could be a magnificent piece of public art and you're happy to see it again. I come from a place that is domestic inside. I want to live in a big world with many different ideas. My world is being expanded by this participation."

My Neighbor's Garden is made of 15,000 yards of crocheted materials and climbing plants and heirloom vegetables. Pepe's canopies and webs are made of garden hose, weed-whacker line, zip ties, paracord, shoelaces, outsize sustainable rubber bands, and plant materials, attached to eight twenty-foot-high poles on the park's Oval Lawn and Farragut Lawn and distinguishing the park's

extant light poles. The textiles span several pathways for parkgoers to walk beneath. Uncommon heirloom vegetables and flowering vines intermingle with the crochet, supporting interaction between artist materials and natural materials such as bitter melon, sour gherkin, long bean, and morning glory vine.

Pepe, a feminist and lesbian artist whose elaborate weblike structures summon and critique conventional women's craft practice, uses crochet to question stubborn limitations on contemporary sculpture. Her mother taught her to crochet in the 1960s. For the outdoors, her stitches have grown, her crochet hooks are larger, and her materials have a durability for weather. In various city neighborhoods, crocheted hearts, flags, banners, and other shapes can be seen affixed to fencing, sidewalk trees, poles, even bicycles—a type of street art known as “yarn bombing” or “guerrilla knitting.” Pepe, in contrast, uses the materials she has installed in indoor spaces such as museums or galleries and harnesses them for the outdoors.

Pepe is unexpectedly confirming and affirming urgency through crochet. She uses the material as an agent of activism by responding to collective gatherings, gender identity, and access as part of her long-term studio practice. In the lead-up to the project, groups of crocheters—novice, expert, queer and not—met in the artist's studio to create the wildly colorful, expansive strands that soar and linger above our heads in the park. In *My Neighbor's Garden*, Pepe considers public space to formulate physical positions that welcome all parkgoers through a fabricated city garden.

My Neighbor's Garden parallels the sky. Walk into the center of the Farragut Lawn and look up at the exultant, humorous, and optimistic crocheted planes and lines in pinks, oranges, and purples. You'll find crocheted forms that are nothing like the repeated patterning of granny squares, but that summon vaginal shapes of the female body. There are passages where students of art history may cite works by Anni Albers, Xenobia Bailey, Eva Hesse, Sheila Hicks, and Nancy Spero. You'll see vines that reach for the sky from the ground plane as they climb up steel cables, grabbing on to the artist's crochet. And you will discover Pepe's independent visual language that advances crochet as a vehicle of creativity. What we see when we look at this work: brilliant colorways, cascades of crochet, lattice-like drawing that has

become three-dimensional and that broadens ideas about what can be sculpture. This project soars over our heads and spans the park's green spaces and pathways.

And then there is what we can't immediately see. How Pepe has radicalized the kindly constitution of crochet into a paradigm of feminist action, drawing on histories of women who convened in sewing circles, knitting clubs, and quilting bees. These forums were historically spaces to discuss human rights and women's rights, to advocate for and propel the abolition of slavery, and often for immigrants to create garments or blanketing for sale to provide income. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographers documented such circles. Black, Native American, Asian, Latinx, and White people across generations participated. More recently, resettled refugees to the United States have joined sewing circles in their communities. When Pepe convened groups of New Yorkers—some of whom crochet for their livelihoods—in her Brooklyn studio to collectively work on this project, it was a convention that is a natural extension of her decades of teaching at many institutions, including Bard College, the New School, MassArt, Pratt Institute, Rhode Island School of Design, Smith College, Virginia Commonwealth University, Williams College, and, this winter, Dartmouth College. What we can't immediately see is the labor—often hidden from public view—that went into this work: how people came together in a circle to work as makers. Pepe has taken crushing times for women and for queer people and has produced a glorious sculpture through novel materials.

At Madison Square Park Conservancy, we thank Holly Leicht, Executive Director, for her enthusiasm for Pepe's work. Our exceptional colleagues in horticulture—Jessica Kaplan, Stephanie Lucas, and Aiyanna Milligan—worked closely with Pepe on the living materials in *My Neighbor's Garden*. Truth Murray-Cole, Senior Curatorial Manager, as a crocheter herself with an eye to the impact of social media on convening communities of makers, organized the crochet circles. Tom Reidy, Director of Capital and Special Projects, brought great and thoughtful expertise to every aspect of this exhibition. Ian Devaney, Yah Jeffries, Tasha Naula, Nicole Rivers, Rosina Roa, Amelia Rogers, Deepka Sani, and Stephanie Stachow have contributed enormously to this undertaking. Please join me in expressing thanks to



Madison Square Park Conservancy's dedicated staff, listed on page 53 of this volume. Rina Dweck and Michelle Girardello from the Pepe studio created the work with the artist, as did all of the crocheters: Moe Angelos, Carmen Burbridge, Petrina Cheng-Tatara, Gab Corvese, Lauren Filipink, Lillian Fox Peckos, Jennifer Hickson, Fanya Imholz, Jessica Kaplan, Zoe Keller, Hope Kelly, Lauren Lampasone, Itai Lavie, Xochitl Lozano, Stephanie Lucas, Stephanie McGovern, Aiyanna Milligan, Grace Morris, Silvia Muleo, Rachel Ninomiya, Jacob Olmedo, Amelia Rogers, Dae Sapit, Mika Steele, and Elliot Tellef.

FIG. 3

My Neighbor's Garden is complemented by free public programs. Madison Square Park Conservancy's annual symposium, held on June 2, 2023, featured Pepe in conversation with Whitney Museum of American Art curator Jennie Goldstein. The symposium is supported through the ongoing generosity of The Henry Luce Foundation. We are grateful to Dr. Mariko Silver, President and Chief Executive Officer, and Dr. Teresa A. Carbone, Program Director for American Art. Our series of free concerts with Carnegie Hall Citywide is always a highlight of the summer season in the park. The Aizuri Quartet and the Aeolus Quartet delighted

audiences. Enormous gratitude to our Carnegie Hall colleagues—Catherine Heraty, Nolan Robertson, and Wendy Magro—for this important collaboration.

On-site in the park, a series of evening Art Talks included artist Sagarika Sundaram. A public conversation on the growing of *My Neighbor's Garden* with Pepe and Jessica Kaplan, Stephanie Lucas, and Aiyanna Milligan discussed urban gardens. Makers' Circles, held outdoors monthly on the Farragut Lawn, encouraged creative neighbors to bring their work to the park for a meetup.

Like all of Madison Square Park Conservancy's exhibitions, *My Neighbor's Garden* could not have been realized without the consistent and generous support of the Conservancy's Board of Trustees, including Sheila Davidson, Board Chair, and David Berliner, Chair Emeritus. Deepest thanks to Ron Pizzuti, Art Committee Chair, for his unending commitment to artists and public art, and to Sarah Stein-Sapir, Art Council Chair, who has energized a community around the art program.

My Neighbor's Garden has received wonderful support. All of us at Madison Square Park Conservancy, the artists whose work we commission, and the communities who view

the work are indebted to those listed on page 51 of this volume, who have been so generous to the exhibition and who continue to ensure that the art program realizes work that can be seen by visitors in a democratic environment.

We appreciate support from our colleagues at the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation: Jonathan Kuhn, Jennifer Lantzas, and Elizabeth Masella. Elisabeth Bernstein, Hunter Canning, Rashmi Gill at Vivid Clicks, and Austin Ruffer have trained their lenses to document the work.

Public art can carry stunning inspiration and take on dialogue. It is out in full view, not physically harbored by the institution. Artists who work outdoors often bring forth work of great nuance from the deepest spaces that reflect human consciousness.

Why would Sheila Pepe want to take on the messy joy and vulnerability of working outdoors, especially in a public park that is traversed by 50,000 people every day? Because she works toward transforming ideas, materials, contexts, and constructs. This is a way to shape an optimistic and open future, in a civic space for public viewing. This has been the impetus for *My Neighbor's Garden*.

FIG. 4





FIG. 5



FIG. 6

Artist's Statement

Sheila Pepe

In 2017, Gilbert Vicario, then chief curator at the Phoenix Art Museum, curated my first midcareer traveling survey, which was accompanied by a catalogue that revealed a much broader array of works that live alongside the better-known large-scale crocheted installations made from domestic and industrial materials. The exhibition *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism* showed more than thirty years of accumulating a family resemblance (see Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*) of works in sculpture-installation-drawing and other singular and hybrid forms. Some are drawings on paper, or that live in space as sculpture—or sculpture that is furniture, fiber works that appear as paintings, and tabletop objects that look like models for monuments, and stand as votives for a secular religion. The cultural sources and the meanings twisted together are from canonical arts of the twentieth century; home crafts; lesbian, queer, and feminist aesthetics; Second Vatican Council American design; an array of Roman Catholic sources, as well as their ancient precedents.

My Neighbor's Garden joins this family of things that share both similarities and differences while advancing my mission to tussle with received knowledge, opinions, and taste. It is my first major outdoor installation. While it uses many material methods I have honed over time—crocheted shoelaces, string, and paracord pulled across spaces to draw in space—changing the context, from white box to urban park, changes nearly everything about the work. At the outset, when I first crocheted in space twenty-five years ago, it was a shout-out to challenge the hegemony of sculpture materials. Making contingent structures within the white walls of galleries and museums was a critical aspect of the work, infiltrating the masculine institutional space with chains of feminist stitches. Back then, crocheting was the outlier; knitting was the rage. Fiber work now seems ubiquitous, albeit we are likely still battling a few holdouts.

For me, the mission of the work has shifted. As I perform large ephemeral fiber installations in small towns and cities across the country (and around the world), the formal elements change as variations on a theme, the way a painter's work might evolve. At the same time, the preparation and programming around the work aim to make human connections as solid and honest as the many connections visible in the thousands of knots throughout the piece.

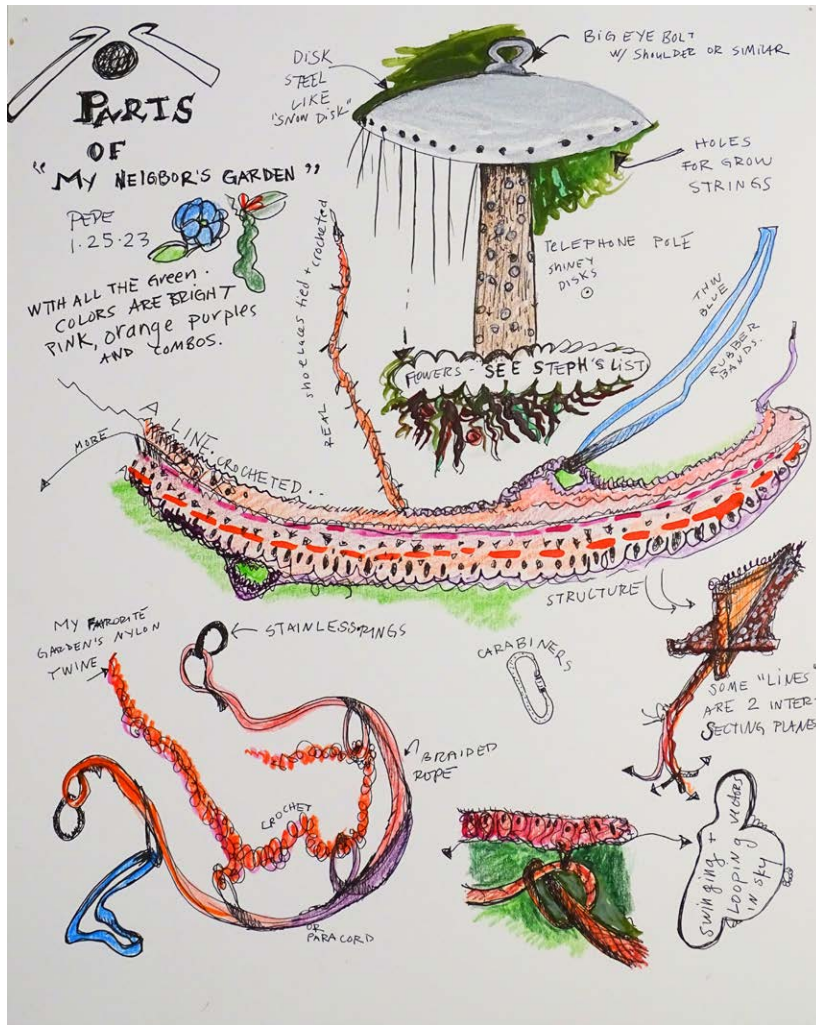


FIG. 7

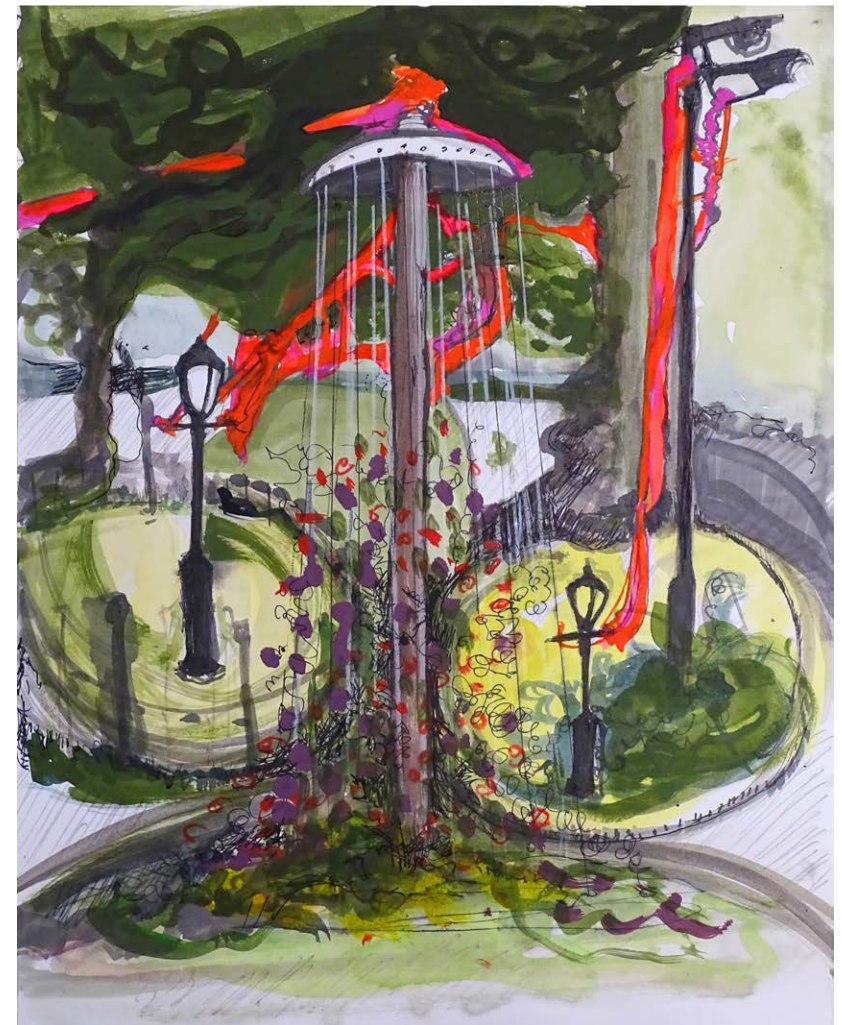


FIG. 8

Moving out of the white box allows me the simple joy and challenge of sharing awareness with an audience not necessarily there for the art. The program is equally fundamental—affirming the fabulousness of an environment beyond my making and collectively celebrating everything and anything we might share in that space.



FIG. 9



FIG. 10

Cultural Ties to Community Gardens in *My Neighbor's Garden*

Stephanie Lucas

New York is a city of small shared gardens, many often found in reclaimed spaces. Private gardens adorn balconies and backyards, while some gardens remain hidden from view on rooftops. There are more than 550 community gardens, nearly 800 school gardens, and at least 700 public housing gardens in New York City Housing Authority developments alone. These shared gardens reflect the wide variety of experiences of the gardeners who tend them. Only about 46 percent of New York City's population can boast of being native New Yorkers. The city's gardens are a true testament to urbanites' determination to find space to grow plants, while reflecting a melting pot of cultures.

Gardens help us form communities. Shared gardens have played a powerful role in bolstering communities who have experienced the traumas of displacement, such as new immigrants and refugees. For these populations, shared gardens can be a vehicle for reestablishing a sense of place, building new social ties, and celebrating and maintaining cultural traditions. As you stop and view the exhibition, take a moment to admire the fabric of plants and crochet evoking generations of shared cultural experiences.

These practices are not new to city life. In Madison Square Park, the early gardens were planted primarily with trees. Today an English elm still stands tall on the north end of the park, a favorite of English colonists, while a horse chestnut tree, favored by Dutch settlers, continues to bloom on the Oval Lawn.

Gardens are also a great place to establish connections to traditional food and medicine, especially those that may not be commonly available in local groceries. *My Neighbor's Garden* features a number of plants with ties to Asian dishes and Caribbean culture, including long beans, bitter melon, and Malabar spinach.



FIG. 11

Sheila Pepe: Solving Above the Ground

Jennie Goldstein

Sheila Pepe's *My Neighbor's Garden* brings a buzzing visual disorder to an otherwise refined public park. In this outdoor exhibition commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy, she uses bright, "femme"-coded colors—pinks, purples, oranges—looping shoelaces, paracord, and even garden hose to create strips and panels spanning as much as ninety-five feet. These are suspended from existing lampposts and additional poles, at the base of which gardeners have planted bitter melon, sour gherkin, long beans, and morning glory vine.¹ The vining plants have flourished during sun-drenched summer months, wending their way up the poles and entwining with cords that hang down to meet them.

With the work installed from above but experienced primarily from below, the composition makes use of spaces not typically associated with public art. Orchestrating from a lift, Pepe followed lines from twenty feet in the air while imagining them from ground level. The resulting vantage points can include those of birds alighting on taut strands, of office workers looking up as they traverse the crochet's vibrant passages, even of plants' roots stretching into the dirt. These relationships to the work deepen the frenetic energy Pepe activates within this carefully manicured setting. *My Neighbor's Garden*, with its seeming messiness, its openness to uncertainty—what if, in a summer storm, broken bits of branches get stuck in the fibers? what if the vines overtake the crochet?—demonstrates a purposeful resistance that grows from Pepe's life.

Resistance has taken many forms for Pepe. As a young person she bristled at the gendered expectations of her working-class Italian immigrant upbringing. Her Catholic mother, who, along with Pepe's father, owned a deli in New Jersey, had a short list of acceptable occupations for women; artist was not on it. Pepe later spurned the heteropatriarchy that dominates much of the art world, living for most of the 1980s in a separatist feminist community in



FIG. 12

To categorize these acts of resistance as outright rejections is to miss her point, however. For Pepe, these journeys with and through cultural heritage, identity, and modes of art making manifest her perpetual curiosity. Pepe revealed a private passion underlying the work: an ongoing fascination with the idiosyncratic details of small urban gardens in her Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, neighborhood. She took observations of neatly planted rows of flowers and wildflowers growing from sidewalks cracked by tree roots, threaded them through her personal history with gardening, and pulled them into the infrastructure of the park.

Through this process she discovered unpredictable limits. To connect to the “program” of the site, as she put it, she initially set out to work directly with the trees. This proved impossible, since their branches can be vulnerable, so instead she oriented toward plant life on the ground. In the end, the whole project depended on the trees after all: their roots dictated where holes could be sunk for the added poles. She had to, in her words, “solve for whatever I could do above the ground,” to manage the exhibition’s architecture.⁴ This parameter turned out to be formally exhilarating for Pepe; it could never happen inside a white cube.

Similarly, Pepe had long wanted her installations to reach beyond the self-selecting audience of the art museum.⁵ Happily, in Madison Square Park, the audience is primarily people who are there anyway, whose paths through the city bring them beneath these day-glo canopies regularly. The art audience who comes to see the installation might use the park incidentally; they become secondary.

In order to produce the thousands of yards of crocheted elements necessary to make an installation at this scale, Pepe convened several (compensated) crochet circles. It is often assumed that artists aspire to have more assistants, to grow their studios into workshops. There are benefits to this: “I used to tie all the shoelaces together and now I don’t,” Pepe recounted.⁶ Yet more central to Pepe’s practice was the community that this created. Scaling up for *My Neighbor’s Garden* meant making space for sharing information and nurturing the same kind of culture one often finds in one’s neighborhood deli, the kind her parents once owned. She found great pleasure in these

western Massachusetts, working at a lesbian-owned-and-run restaurant and on a farm, where she developed an intense relationship to gardening.²

As an artist, she has ducked pressure to produce work that is palatable to entrenched systems of display, categorization, and preservation. Instead, she has experimented with numerous materials, including brick, clay, video, and textiles, to name only some. Crochet, which Pepe has explored for decades, offers the crucial throughline. Her project extends beyond identity and chosen materials: it signals a resistance to binaries. Julia Bryan-Wilson has described Pepe as “a hero among the resurgent queer textile scene.”³ She displaces a method most commonly associated with domestic, feminized functionality from the home and into the enterprise of visual art. But she doesn’t stop there. Pepe further destabilizes traditions of crochet, looping shoelaces or rubber bands over her hook instead of yarn, insisting that an art form typically produced on women’s laps actually belongs anywhere and everywhere. Pepe’s tangled installations foreground exuberance over orderliness; their site-specificity points to monumentality while allowing for precariousness and ephemerality.

gatherings; “there is something about a crocheting circle, where stitches are shared,” she explained, along with “information that might be useful.”⁷

The exhibition’s curator, Brooke Kamin Rapaport, describes *My Neighbor’s Garden* as a project engaged in publicness.⁸ This description offers a reminder that it is not “public art” in the manner of the monumental, subject to laborious governmental review, or seeking permanent placement. Instead, publicness, for Pepe, is a politics of the deli. It is a place visited by regulars and passersby alike, a place that can provide a necessity in a pinch, or a respite between work and home, a place to chat, like a crochet circle.

So much is beyond her control, from her familial roots to the roots of the trees in the park to the information and work brought by others to the crocheting circle. But the tangled result is life-affirming. “It’s a privilege to say ‘I don’t know’ in public,” Pepe has observed.⁹ We should all be so fearless.

1. Sheila Pepe collaborated with Stephanie Lucas, Director of Horticulture and Park Operations, Madison Square Park Conservancy, to select plants that are indigenous to the region.
2. Pepe, quoted in Hilarie M. Sheets, “Imagine Spider-Woman with a Crochet Hook,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/22/arts/design/sheila-pepe-madison-square-park-crochet.html>.
3. Julia Bryan-Wilson, “A Tale of Two Sheilas,” in *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism*, ed. Gilbert Vicario (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, and New York: DelMonico Books, 2017), 17.
4. Conversations with the artist, May 7 and July 8, 2023.
5. Conversation with the artist, July 8, 2023.
6. Conversation with the artist, July 8, 2023.
7. Pepe, quoted in Sheets, “Imagine Spider-Woman with a Crochet Hook.”
8. Conversation with the exhibition curator, May 7, 2023.
9. Conversation with the artist, May 7, 2023.





Crocheting *My Neighbor's Garden*: A Roundtable Discussion

Moe Angelos, Petrina Cheng-Tatara,
Lauren Filipink, and Sheila Pepe
Moderated by Truth Murray-Cole

In the months preceding *My Neighbor's Garden*, a community of crocheters gathered weekly at Sheila Pepe's studio to fabricate the work. In this roundtable discussion, held on Zoom on July 17, 2023, Sheila Pepe and three crocheters reflect on the crochet sessions and the impact of the exhibition. The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

TMC: Let's begin with Petrina, Lauren, and Moe. How did you hear about the crochet sessions for *My Neighbor's Garden*?

LF: I saw an Instagram story posted to Madison Square Park Conservancy's account that called for crocheters of any ability to contribute to an art exhibition in the park. I filled out the Google form and two weeks later I was at Sheila's studio for the first crochet session. Before this experience, I was a hobby crocheter who had made a few things for friends. I was worried I was not experienced enough to contribute. In the end, it was amazing to see how crochet could bring a diverse group of people from all around the city together.

PCT: Someone also sent me the Instagram story. I remember thinking, "Should I do it? Why not just give it a shot?" I was still nervous right up until the first crochet session. When Sheila opened the door smiling on that first day, I thought, "Okay, this is a good thing."

MA: I have known Sheila Pepe as a friend and artist for many years. Sheila and I were walking near Madison Square Park one day, and she said, "Oh, I have this proposal in. Let's go look at the park." So we walked through the park and considered what was possible. I'm not a very

FIG. 14

skilled crocheter, but I have determination, and I did other fabrication tasks to help the project.

TMC: Moe, did you learn how to crochet during this project? Petrina and Lauren, who taught you how to crochet?

MA: I learned to crochet when I was a kid. I grew up in Washington, D.C., and there was a Parks and Rec program for city kids that taught us all kinds of crafts.

PCT: My mom taught me how to crochet. I remember I was really bad at it, so I stopped, and then I picked it up later in life. When I moved to the city after graduation, out of the blue I decided to make an Etsy shop. Now I crochet nonstop.

LF: Similarly, I've been crocheting since I was young. My mom taught me the basics of crochet, about gauge and tension. She was so jazzed about *My Neighbor's Garden*. I'm a teacher, and creating aligns with my work. So much of teaching is creating. You're creating plans, materials, learning experiences.

TMC: It's interesting that everyone learned how to crochet as children. And now the craft has become a surprisingly large and meaningful part of your lives.

Petrina, Lauren, and Moe, as hobby crocheters you are used to making small objects out of yarn. *My Neighbor's Garden* required you to stretch your practices. You were no longer working in the scale of inches, but feet. The shortest length that was crocheted was thirty-five feet long. And instead of wool yarn, you used paracord and other unexpected materials. What was it like to scale up your crocheting?

PCT: My projects tend to be quite complicated and detailed. So crocheting for *My Neighbor's Garden* was interesting because it required me to make very simple stitches. I was also not used to working with such a large hook. Working with paracord and at that scale, you really have to sculpt the stitch.

LF: This was also my first time working with any of these materials and at this scale. I remember the first day Sheila was like, "Okay, chain thirty-five feet." And all of us were like, "Thirty-five feet?! That's how long you want this to actually be?" For the average crocheter, nothing is thirty-five feet long. Immediately I thought, "Wow, this is really going to be seen in the park. How could you not see something this long?" It was freeing to not have to count stitches and to just work with length. It allowed us to chat with one another in the collaborative sessions. You could lose yourself in getting to know people. It wasn't just about the accuracy of the crochet; it was about the community as well.

MA: The crochet sessions were just fun. The conversation was hilarious. There were a lot of younger folks than me, so I went to see what the kids were up to.

SP: It was a serious multigenerational event and it was very funny. In the later crochet sessions, there were theater people involved and former students of mine, so there was a great mashup of topical queer arts things. The theater people were learning from the art people and the art people were learning from the theater people.

MA: It is wonderful, though, that mix. I always like working, even in my theater projects, with a range of people because everyone has a perspective and looks at the problem differently. Solving the creative problem that Sheila had set out for us was delightful.

TMC: I love how the crochet sessions fostered new connections. When our hands were busy, conversation flowed easier and deeper.

I am going to turn to Sheila now. This is your first major outdoor work. There are more than 15,000 yards of crocheted material in *My Neighbor's Garden*, which necessitated you to include a group of fabricators for the first time in your practice. Can you speak to your experience of including a team of people in the fabrication? Did it necessitate a new kind of collaboration?



SP: A lot of the project was learning how to be a little bit more of an administrator and a little less of a maker. In the beginning, when I handed people two colors and asked them to crochet thirty-five feet, it was like, “What are you talking about?” I never learned the language of crochet because I never follow patterns. Instead of a pattern, I gave broad parameters and instructions so there was room to breathe. My rules were: Don’t count, don’t match [colors], don’t worry. If it’s structurally sound, you’re good. I like that kind of crocheting best.

TMC: I find it interesting that you felt you had a lot to learn from this experience, because I saw you more as a teacher during the crochet sessions. The nonhierarchical and porous relationship between teaching and learning you are proposing is exciting.

My final question to all: What are some of the take-aways from this experience you will carry with you?

MA: Crochet is in the craft realm, the decorative realm, which usually becomes gendered. It is amazing to me how Sheila subverts the gendered connotations of crochet by using it in a structural way. It’s engineered crochet. In *My Neighbor’s Garden*, we see these tremendous stretches of crochet overhead. It is like architecture.

FIG. 15

FIG. 16

FIG. 17

PCT: Working on this project challenged me to see crochet as an art form as opposed to just a skill or hobby. It led me to think about leveling up my crochet practice in skill and experience. I ended up submitting to two galleries and got accepted. I thank Sheila for giving me that push off the cliff.

SP: Congratulations. That’s great. Lauren, what about you?

LF: I took a lot away not only for my crochet practice, but also for my teaching practice. I learned a lot by watching Sheila as a facilitator in these crochet sessions. I admired the way she approached connecting with us through the work. I will continue to think about that when I resume teaching in the fall.

SP: You and Petrina were both teaching people on the spot during the crochet sessions. It was like a cascade of teaching and everybody had something to offer. It was great. I am grateful that we created these networks of workers and people and that we will all be tied together in some way forever.

Having grown up in a family business, I believe that the very fundamental thing that gives us pleasure is pride in our work. I relate to people through work, so I hope everyone at these crochet sessions felt pride in their wonderful work. That’s a sentiment I would like to reanimate in the world.



FIG. 18



FIG. 19

Sheila Pepe

WORK IN THE EXHIBITION

- 2023** *My Neighbor's Garden*
Wooden poles, rigging hardware, nylon string, shoelaces, paracord, rubber bands, garden hose, polyester arborist rope, weed-whacker line, plant materials
Dimensions variable
Collection the artist
Commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York

DETAILS

- 1959** Born in Morristown, New Jersey
- 1981** BA, Albertus Magnus College, New Haven
- 1983** BFA, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston
- 1995** MFA, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

To learn more about *My Neighbor's Garden*, please visit:
<https://madisonsquarepark.org/art/exhibitions/sheila-pepe-my-neighbors-garden/>



FIG. 20

BIOGRAPHY

Sheila Pepe (American, b. 1959) lives and works in Brooklyn. Pepe received a BA from Albertus Magnus College in New Haven; a BFA in ceramics from Massachusetts College of Art and Design, 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 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, at, among others, Des Moines Art Center; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum; University Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina; and Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio. She contributed to *Liquid Sky* (2007), which was on view at MoMA PS1. Pepe's *Research Station: For the People* (2014) was featured in the 8th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, OCAT, Shenzhen, China. *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism* (2017), the artist's midcareer survey, was organized by Phoenix Art Museum and traveled to Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha; and deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts. *Tabernacle for Trying Times* (2020), an exhibition with painter Carrie Moyer, was organized by Portland Museum of Art in Maine and traveled to the Museum of Arts and Design, New York. Pepe's work is in private and public collections, including Harvard University Art Museums; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University; Rutgers University; Smith College Museum of Art; and Zimmerli Art Museum. She has had residencies at the Bunting Institute, Radcliffe College at Harvard University, and Civitella Ranieri, Umbertide, Italy. Pepe is the former assistant chair of fine art at Pratt Institute. She will be artist-in-residence at Dartmouth College in winter 2024.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018** *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism*, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha
- 2017** *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism*, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix
- 2013** *T-7 Pauseway*, international art fair at PASAJ, Istanbul
- 2012** *Common Sense Athens*, American College of Greece, Aghia Paraskevi, Greece
- 2011** *Common Sense and Other Things*, Carroll and Sons, Boston
Common Sense, He Said She Said, Oak Park, Illinois
- 2009** *Yo Mama*, Dust Gallery, Las Vegas
Common Sense (collaboration with curator Elizabeth Dunbar), testsite, Fluent~Collaborative, Austin
- 2008** *Red Hook at Bedford Terrace*, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts
- 2007** *Bus Lines*, The Drawing Center and River to River Festival's "Big Draw," World Financial Center Plaza and Winter Garden, New York
- 2005** *Mind the Gap*, University Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Hot Lesbian Formalism, Sesnon Gallery, University of California, Santa Cruz
Tunnel, Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, New Jersey
- 2004** *Bridge and Tunnel*, Susan Inglett Gallery, New York
I Love New York, Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston
- 2003** *From Delancey and Clinton*, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, California
Under the F & G, Visual Arts Center of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia
- 2002** *Sheila Pepe*, Susan Inglett Gallery, New York
Come Fly with Me, Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro
- 2000** *Shrink*, Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut
Josephine, Thread Waxing Space, New York

SELECTED TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

- 2021** *Carrie Moyer and Sheila Pepe: Tabernacles for Trying Times*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York
- 2020** *Carrie Moyer and Sheila Pepe: Tabernacles for Trying Times*, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine
- 2016** *Carrie Moyer and Sheila Pepe*, The Suburban, Milwaukee
- 2015** *Sheila Pepe: A Place for Looking with Paola Ferrario, Fabiola Menchelli, and Julie Ryan*, Carroll and Sons, Boston
- 2012** Collaboration with shoe designer Alejandro Ingelmo for New York Fashion Week, High Line Room, The Standard, New York
Pepe & Puntar's Lucid Dream Lounge with Special Guests . . . with Diana Puntar, Participant Inc, New York
Untold Stories: Alexandre, Yulim, Sheila Pepe, Tea for Three Curatorial Group, RAM Studios, Milan
- 2011** *A Room, in Three Movements: Katy Heinlein, Sheila Pepe, and Halsey Rodman*, Sue Scott Gallery, New York
- 2007** *Liquid Sky*, collaboration with Ball-Nogues Architects, Young Architects Program International, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021** *AbStranded: Fiber and Abstraction in Contemporary Art*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
- 2019** *Queer Abstraction*, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, Kansas
- Even thread [has] a speech*, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
- Yoko Ono: Remembering the Future*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
- Give me your hand, dove, so that I may climb into your nest*, Ten at Seven, SJ Weiler Fund, New York
- 2018** *Towards a New Archaeology*, Peter Jay Sharp Building, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, New York
- Objects Like Us*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut
- Women House*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.
- 2017** *Elaine, Let's Get the Hell Out of Here*, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York
- Without God or Governance*, Marinaro, New York
- Women House: La maison selon elles*, Monnaie de Paris, Paris
- 2016** *Queering Space*, Yale School of Art, New Haven
- Ceramics Now*, Jane Hartsook Gallery, Greenwich House Pottery, New York
- Love*, LeRoy Neiman Gallery, Columbia University, New York
- Sew What?*, Children's Museum of the Arts, New York
- Queer Threads: Crafting Identity and Community*, Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston
- 2015** *Fiber: Sculpture 1960–Present*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio
- A Tendency Toward Textiles*, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
- Sampling*, Pavel Zoubok Fine Art, New York
- 2014** *Queer Threads: Crafting Identity and Community*, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York
- 2013** Invitational Exhibition of Visual Artists, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York
- Come Together: Surviving Sandy*, Industry City, Brooklyn, New York
- 2012** *ARTInRETI: Artistic Practices and Urban Transformation in Piedmont*, Cittadellarte–Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy
- Paper Space: Drawings by Sculptors*, Inman Gallery, Houston
- B-Out*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York
- Studi Aperti, Ameno, Italy
- VOLTA 8 (with Sue Scott Gallery), Basel
- 2010** *Chime In*, Artisterium International Exhibition, Tbilisi
- Hand+Made: The Performative Impulse in Art and Craft*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston
- 2008** *The Future Must Be Sweet: Lower East Side Printshop Celebrates 40 Years*, International Print Center New York
- Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting*, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, Arizona
- This Show Needs You*, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, California
- Break the Rules!*, Mannheimer Kunstverein, Mannheim, Germany
- 2007** *Material Pursuits*, Robert Hull Fleming Museum, Burlington, Vermont
- Arte Povera Now and Then: Perspectives for a New Guerrilla Art*, Esso Gallery, New York
- Shared Women*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles
- 2006** *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York
- When Artists Say We*, Artists Space, New York
- Decelerate*, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri
- New Prints 2005/Winter*, International Print Center New York
- 2003** *Main Space = Project Spaces*, Artists Space, New York
- 2002** *The Photogenic: Photography Through Its Metaphors in Contemporary Art*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
- Next Wave Art*, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, New York
- 2001** *Verging on Real*, Wave Hill, The Bronx, New York
- Energy Inside*, Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa
- 2000** *Greater New York*, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York
- The End*, Exit Art/The First World, New York

COMMISSIONS

- 2018** *Softly . . . Before the Supreme Court*, site-specific installation, Minnesota Museum of American Art, Saint Paul
- 2014** *Put Me Down Gently*, site-specific installation, *Fiber: Sculpture 1960–Present*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
- Research Station: For the People*, site-specific installation at *We Have Never Participated*, 8th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, OCAT, Shenzhen, China
- 2010** *Simple Drawing*, museum commission, Arts on the Point, University of Massachusetts, Boston

SELECTED AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2021** Distinguished Alumni Award, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston
- 2011** Art Matters Foundation Grant
- 2011** Anonymous Was A Woman Environmental Arts Grant, New York Foundation for the Arts
- 2009** Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant
- 2001** Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Competition Award
- 1999** Art Omi Artists Residency, Ghent, New York
- 1998** Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute Fellowship, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- School of the Museum of Fine Arts Traveling Fellowship, Tufts University, Boston
- Provincetown Art Association and Museum National Annual Award, Massachusetts



FIG. 21

Support

Major support for this exhibition is provided by The Coby Foundation, Ltd. and the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation. Substantial support is provided by Anonymous and a Craft Research Fund grant from the Center for Craft. Additional support is provided by Anonymous, The Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the James Howell Foundation.

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

Acknowledgments

Madison Square Park Conservancy

Madison Square Park Conservancy is the not-for-profit organization whose mission is to protect, nurture, and enhance Madison Square Park, a dynamic 6.2-acre public green space, creating an environment that fosters moments of inspiration. The Conservancy is committed to engaging the community through its dynamic public art program, beautiful gardens, and inviting amenities. Madison Square Park Conservancy is licensed by the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to manage Madison Square Park and is responsible for raising 100 percent of the funds necessary to operate the park, including the brilliant horticulture, park maintenance, sanitation, security, and free cultural programs for park visitors of all ages.

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Land Acknowledgment

Madison Square Park is located on Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape (Delaware) people. We recognize that this land was forcibly taken, resulting in the displacement and genocide of the Lenape (Delaware) Nations. Madison Square Park Conservancy respectfully acknowledges the Lenape (Delaware) people—past, present, and future—who continue to live, work, and connect to this land.

The Conservancy honors the Lenape (Delaware) people, the original stewards of this land, through our commitment to a series of sustainability and restoration initiatives. In the coming years, we aim to reduce our carbon imprint, promote sustainable land management, and reintroduce to the park species of fauna and flora indigenous to Lenapehoking.

For more information on Madison Square Park Conservancy and its programs, please visit madisonsquarepark.org

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Public Programs

JUNE 2, 2023

Transforming Public Art
Public Art Symposium at SVA Theatre with
Xenobia Bailey
Zoë Buckman
Tom Finkelppearl
Jennie Goldstein
Ana María Hernando
Dr. Karen Lemmey
Sheila Pepe
Legacy Russell
Shahzia Sikander
Gregorio Uribe
Gilbert Vicario

JULY 12 AND 26, 2023

Carnegie Hall Citywide Concerts: Aizuri Quartet:
Aria Cheregosha, Hannah Collins, Emma Frucht,
Miho Saegusa, and Caleb van der Swaagh
Madison Square Park

JULY 19, 2023

Carnegie Hall Citywide Concerts: Aeolus Quartet: Jia Kim,
Caitlin Lynch, Rachel Shapiro, Nicholas Tavani
Madison Square Park

WEDNESDAYS THROUGHOUT THE EXHIBITION

Lunchtime Tours of *My Neighbor's Garden*
Madison Square Park

JULY 18, AUGUST 15, AND SEPTEMBER 19, 2023

Makers' Circle
Madison Square Park



FIG. 22

AUGUST 2, 9, AND 16, 2023

Botanical Book Club:
Beronda L. Montgomery's *Lessons from Plants*
Madison Square Park

SEPTEMBER 13, 2023

Art Talk with Sagarika Sundaram
Madison Square Park

OCTOBER 18, 2023

Art Talk: *Growing My Neighbor's Garden*
with Jessica Kaplan, Stephanie Lucas, Aiyanna Milligan,
and Sheila Pepe
Madison Square Park

Madison Square Park Conservancy Exhibitions

2023 Shahzia Sikander *Havah . . . to breathe, air, life*

2022 Cristina Iglesias *Landscape and Memory*
Hugh Hayden *Brier Patch*

2021 Maya Lin *Ghost Forest*

2020 Krzysztof Wodiczko *Monument*
Abigail DeVille *Light of Freedom*

2019 Leonardo Drew *City in the Grass*

2018 Arlene Shechet *Full Steam Ahead*
Diana Al-Hadid *Delirious Matter*

2017 Erwin Redl *Whiteout*
Josiah McElheny *Prismatic Park*

2016 Martin Puryear *Big Bling*

2015 Teresita Fernández *Fata Morgana*
Paula Hayes *Gazing Globes*

2014 Tony Cragg *Walks of Life*
Rachel Feinstein *Folly*
Iván Navarro *This Land Is Your Land*

2013 Giuseppe Penone *Ideas of Stone (Idee di pietra)*
Orly Genger *Red, Yellow and Blue*
Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder *Topsy-Turvy: A Camera Obscura Installation*

2012 Leo Villareal *BUCKYBALL*
Charles Long *Pet Sounds*

2011 Jacco Olivier *Stumble, Hide, Rabbit Hole, Bird, Deer, Home*
Alison Saar *Feallan and Fallow*
Jaume Plensa *Echo*
Kota Ezawa *City of Nature*

2010 Jim Campbell *Scattered Light*
Antony Gormley *Event Horizon*
Ernie Gehr *Surveillance*

2009 Shannon Plumb *The Park*
Jessica Stockholder *Flooded Chambers Maid*
Mel Kendrick *Markers*
Bill Beirne *Madison Square Trapezoids, with Performances by the Vigilant Groundsman*

2008 Olia Lialina & Dragan Espenschied *Online Newspapers: New York Edition*
Richard Deacon *Assembly*
Tadashi Kawamata *Tree Huts*
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer *Pulse Park*

2007 Bill Fontana *Panoramic Echoes*
Roxy Paine *Conjoined, Defunct, Erratic*
William Wegman *Around the Park*

2006 Ursula von Rydingsvard *Bowl with Fins, Czara z Babelkami, Damski Czepek, Ted's Desert Reigns*

2005 Jene Highstein *Eleven Works*
Sol LeWitt *Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers*

2004 Mark di Suvero *Aesop's Fable, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond*

2003 Wim Delvoye *Gothic*

2002 Dan Graham *Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve*
Mark Dion *Urban Wildlife Observation Unit*
Dalziel + Scullion *Voyager*

2001 Navin Rawanchaikul *I ♥ Taxi*
Teresita Fernández *Bamboo Cinema*
Tobias Rehberger *Tsutsumu N.Y.*

2000 Tony Oursler *The Influence Machine*

From 2000 to 2003, the Public Art Fund presented exhibitions on behalf of the Campaign for the New Madison Square Park.

Photography and Figure Credits

Unless otherwise noted, all works by Sheila Pepe (American, b. 1959)

My Neighbor's Garden, 2023

Wooden poles, rigging hardware, nylon string, shoelaces, paracord, rubber bands, garden hose, polyester arborist rope, weed-whacker line, plant materials

Dimensions variable

Collection the artist

Commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York



COVER

Photo by Hunter Canning



BACK COVER

Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 5

Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 6

Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein



FIG. 1

Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 2

Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 7

Sheila Pepe
(American, b. 1959)
Proposal for *My Neighbor's Garden* in Madison Square Park, 2023
Collection the artist



FIG. 8

Sheila Pepe
(American, b. 1959)
Proposal for *My Neighbor's Garden* in Madison Square Park, 2023
Collection the artist



FIG. 3

Photo by Rashmi Gill



FIG. 4

Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 9

Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein



FIG. 10

Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 11
Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 12
Photo by Ian Devaney



FIG. 18
Photo by Hunter Canning



FIG. 19
Photo by Rashmi Gill



FIG. 13
Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein



FIG. 14
Photo by Austin Ruffer



FIG. 20
Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein



FIG. 21
Photo by Hunter Canning



FIGS. 15-17
Photos by Austin Ruffer



FIG. 22
Photo by Olivia Lima

