

# White Columns

Amy Sheffer

*I AM SHEE*

---

September 12 – October 25, 2025

Opening Reception + Performance by Amy Sheffer: Friday, September 12, 2025 from 6-8pm.

White Columns is pleased to present *I AM SHEE*, a solo exhibition by the artist and musician **Amy Sheffer** (b. 1944, Richmond, VA.) The exhibition has been organized in collaboration with RVNG Intl., the eclectic and consistently innovative New York-based music institution. A visual artist, composer and musician, Sheffer resides in Great Neck, Long Island, where she continues to make vivid, quasi-surrealist paintings inflected with a distinct lyricism. In her multilayered compositions, Sheffer combines dreamlike motifs teeming with scenes of wild and domestic animals, bodily forms and the artist herself, all suffused with the sense of a dense, ecstatic psychological realm that threatens to spill over into the world of the mundane. Sheffer's visual artwork has primarily been shown in the context of musical happenings and performances. Her exhibition at White Columns is the artist's first solo show in New York.

Born in Richmond, Virginia and raised in Washington, D.C. and Great Neck, Long Island, Sheffer trained as a visual artist throughout her childhood and teenage years. An itinerant college education in the arts led her through Cornell, Cooper Union and finally NYU; though her degree was in arts education, it was at the latter two institutions where she began to embrace abstraction within her own practice after a longstanding preference for representation.

Around this time, Sheffer began LSD therapy under the supervision of Dr. Mortimer Hartman, the psychiatrist best known for administering over 100 acid trips to Cary Grant (which the actor later credited with "saving his life.") In the wake of this therapeutic experience, Sheffer's painting took a turn towards the phantasmagoric as she began to experience visions, which she subsequently painted. Sheffer's paintings share with her music a quality of improvisation or responsiveness. While she was drawn to music as much due to an intellectual interest as for its social capacity, her paintings are dialectal in the extent to which they seem almost to respond to themselves. Sheffer herself sees this as intrinsic to their quality of becoming, as she feels that her paintings can begin to take on their own beings, "wanting" things— or indeed rejecting the things that she wants out of them.

Throughout the 1980s, Sheffer released a series of three albums — *Sanctuary Mine* (1980), *Where's Your Home?* (1985) and *We'um* (1987) — working and performing with a rotating cast of collaborators including Marzette Watts, Curtis Fields, Patty Waters, William Parker, Billy Bang, Perry Robinson, Steve Tintweiss and many others. All three records were initially self-released by Sheffer under the moniker "I Am Shee Records." As a phrase, "I Am Shee" functions as a sort of mnemonic for Sheffer's larger project: a proclamation of selfhood that is simultaneously coupled, as is often the case with Sheffer, with a slight distortion that troubles the boundaries of that self.

Despite, or perhaps because of, her formal training in the visual arts, Sheffer was drawn to music both for its collaborative social nature and the directness with which she found she was able to communicate emotion. “I was a very untrained musician, but I was a very trained artist,” she explains. “But because I was untrained, I felt I could be experimental in a way that maybe trained people couldn’t.” Her musical efforts were well-received — a 1989 review of *We’um* by Byron Coley in SPIN Magazine noted that Sheffer’s voice “possesses an enormous emo-reservoir that she turns into great, bent, soary word-clouds” — and throughout the decades she spent in New York Sheffer performed at venues including The Living Theatre, CBGBs, Tonic, and the Brecht Forum. Painting remained a more private undertaking. Though she sometimes displayed her artwork during her jazz performances and occasionally incorporated live drawing sessions into her performances, for the most part, Sheffer notes, she felt she was living a “double life,” vacillating alternately between two modes of artistic production. Whereas music and composition were for her the radical expression of ideas through sonic forms, painting, Sheffer says, was simply something she had always done, “like breathing or digestion. It was just a thing that was part of my being.”

Sheffer resided in New York for three decades beginning in the early ‘60s. Finally fed up with the rising costs and declining living conditions associated with living in New York, she moved back to Great Neck in the ‘90s, where she continues to live and work. As she ages, painting has become the more accessible art form. It is, Sheffer notes, a way to access a “higher part of herself.” In one haunting self-portrait made around the time that she returned to Great Neck, Sheffer has depicted herself at work on a painting: one hand, holding a brush, just completes a small figure, the other hand is raised as if in the midst of an incantation. Just to the right of the painting-within-a-painting is a patch of white, such that the boundary between creator and creation, painter and painting, is blurred, both depicted in the act of becoming.

---

This exhibition has been developed in close collaboration with Matt Werth, founder of the New York record label RVNG Intl. *I Am Shee: Original Recordings, 1979-1987*, an anthology of Sheffer’s music and image capsule of her visual art, will be released alongside the exhibition by Freedom to Spend, a reissue imprint of RVNG Intl. Writing about his initial encounter with Sheffer’s work, Werth has written: “I discovered Amy Sheffer’s music through the incredible She Ye Ye, a record store in Niigata, Japan that has been the cradle of so much crucial esoteric music discovery for many for so long. While I loved the music contained in *Sanctuary Mine*, the first, self-published album by Amy Sheffer, the cover and back artwork absolutely astounded me.”

White Columns would like to thank Matt Werth of RVNG Intl. for the introduction to Amy Sheffer’s art. This exhibition marks the fourth collaboration between White Columns and RVNG Intl.: In 2010 White Columns invited RVNG Intl. to develop an exhibition at White Columns, a project that resulted in the production of a new collaborative vinyl recording by Juilanna Barwick and Ikue Mori. In 2013, White Columns co-released *FRKWYS Vol. 10: Fits & Starts*, a vinyl album of new recordings by the legendary downtown percussionist David Van Tieghem. In 2021, White Columns presented *Internal Landscapes: Paintings 1967-2005*, an exhibition of work by the artist-musician Norma Tanega. To learn more about RVNG Intl. and Freedom To Spend, visit: [www.rvng.com](http://www.rvng.com) and [www.freedomtospend.org](http://www.freedomtospend.org)