

FOUNTAIN STREET

for immediate release

What We Make of This World

Melissa Shaak + Sylvia Vander Sluis

April 6–30, 2023

SoWa First Friday Art Walk: April 7 | 5–8 PM

Closing Reception: Sunday, April 30 | 3–4 PM

FOR PRESS-READY IMAGES CONTACT: Marie Craig at director@fsfaboston.com, (774) 286-1800



WHAT WE MAKE OF THIS WORLD

Melissa Shaak + Sylvia Vander Sluis

BOSTON, MA – Beginning April 6th, Fountain Street Gallery will exhibit “What We Make of This World,” featuring the work of Melissa Shaak and Sylvia Vander Sluis. The artists have transformed the stuff of their lives into invented worlds in video and sculpture. Shaak, in her videos, personifies a “seeker” who responds to puzzling situations in the landscape with improvisational movement—reaching for the sky, touching the earth, and entertaining the birds along the way. Vander Sluis’s sculpture, with its unpredictable mix of insulation board, decorative eggs, weaving and feathers, presents “home” as a stage for our lives that reflects cycles of creation, decline, grief, and peace.

The exhibition is full of circles and circling, totems and towers, spirals and spheres. It is both playful and sober. In reflecting the artists’ explorations, how they make meaning, and important parts of their respective life journeys, it offers a window into artists’ place in the world. The exhibition includes audio of the artists’ voices, emanating from Vander Sluis’s sculpture of giant, inedible candies and Shaak’s assemblage of objects from her videos. The audio tracks were conceived and produced by guest audio creator Katie Semro.

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In an ensemble of videos, **Melissa Shaak** embodies a seeker whose exertions reveal a deep desire to connect interior and exterior worlds. She appears alone in a landscape, with an object that doesn't fit the scene. Her exploratory efforts—reaching, circling, spinning—are akin to ritualized gestures. In each of Shaak's performances, she responds in real time, in an authentic way, to a contrived and illogical situation. Taken together, her videos are meant to offer a paradigm of the artistic process as well as a reminder that we are all seekers in this world. The installation brings together evidence of the quest, including objects used in the videos and an homage to the pathbreaking video and performance artist Nam June Paik.

Shaak works at the intersection of experimental video and performance art, as well as in acrylics and mixed media on paper. She has taken coursework at Tufts School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Mass College of Art, completed a residency at Vermont Studio Center, and is a longstanding member of the Creativity Lab at New Art Center. Shaak has a studio at Waltham Mills, MA, and is a Core Member of Fountain Street.

The work by **Sylvia Vander Sluis** focuses on the disorienting experience of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's and other chronic diseases during the pandemic. A mix of outsized confections and precarious towers reflects the profound dichotomy between life before and life after disease begins to take its toll. Eggs, toppling on the icing of a cake, mix incoherently with medical supplies. A tree house represents both the desire to play and the desire to escape. Quiet totems combine energetic color with more meditative forms that point to a hope for serenity.

Vander Sluis graduated with an MFA from Western Michigan University and BFA cum laude from Syracuse University. She has been an associate member of Boston Sculptors Gallery, an artist resident at Vermont Studio Center, and has exhibited in numerous venues including New York Artists Equity Gallery, Upstate NY, and galleries in the Greater Boston area. Vander Sluis works from her studio in Lancaster, MA, and is a Core Member of Fountain Street.

Katie Semro creates audio art installations, non-narrated documentaries, and sound worlds. Her installation "Trust Me, I'm a Doctor" was exhibited at Sound Scene at the Hirschhorn Smithsonian Museum in 2022. She created 75 audio snapshots with voices from 30 countries for her Mother Mine Project, and her Transmission Times Podcast was broadcast on radio stations across the country during the first year of the pandemic.

Image Information

Left: Shaak, *Homage to Nam June Paik*, archival metal print, 35 x 35 inches (image credit Kurt Klinzing)

Right: Vander Sluis, *Life is Messy* (detail), insulation board, toys, acrylic, cardboard rolls, miscellaneous plastic items, 45 x 34 x 23 inches

About Fountain Street

Fountain Street is a contemporary gallery in the SoWa Art + Design District of Boston. We exhibit a wide array of media from over 30 emerging and mid-career artists in our main and annex galleries, and 24/7 at our sidewalk video gallery. Founded in 2011, our passion has always been about connecting art seekers and makers through thoughtfully curated exhibitions, juried shows, collaborative projects and installations. Our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is reflected in the media that we exhibit, artists and curators that we promote, and audiences that we seek to engage.

Contact

Marie Craig, Director, (774) 286-1800

Fountain Street Gallery, 460C Harrison Ave. Suite 2, Boston, MA 02118

marie@fsfaboston.com www.fsfaboston.com