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Summer Wheat's Immersive Exhibit Expands World of Vermeer's *Milkmaid*

Summer Wheat's exhibition is a homecoming. Born and raised in Oklahoma City, she's returned from New York to create a site-specific installation for Oklahoma Contemporary. Weaving together color, form and media, *Pry the Lid Off* showcases the space beyond the frame of Johannes Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*, depicting the four rooms of the maid's personal chambers.

The exhibition opens with a 5:30 p.m. artist talk and 6 p.m. reception on Thursday, Feb. 25. It will remain on view through Aug. 12.

Each room utilizes a wide range of materials, from faux stained-glass panels made of Mylar and resin to silhouetted dishes cut out of wood and a series of paintings depicting objects found within dresser drawers.

"I look inside the space of (*The Milkmaid*) and ask questions about what is hidden from the viewer," Wheat says. She wonders: "'What was under her table? What's inside her pocket? What's happening in the next room? How can I recreate her spaces as if she lived today?'"

Wheat's installations use architectural space to depict the milkmaid's individuality: "I want to expand her beyond the two-dimensional plane and reveal the world behind her white kitchen wall."

Previously the maid's rooms have been re-created in exhibitions and works such as *Mudroom* (2012) and *Walk-In Pantry* (2015). Of *Pantry*, installed in New York City's Fridman Gallery, Hyperallergic said, "To fully understand the Vermeer connection, gallerygoers will have to linger a bit, and absorb in turn each element of this exuberant, free-wheeling installation. Once the multilayered concept sinks in, it all makes sense, in a circuitous way."

Each of Wheat's *Milkmaid* installations is like another room within a large-scale doll house. By entering these immersive environments, the viewer takes part in the textures of her world. "*Pry the Lid Off* brings the world of this 17th century laborer into conversation with our chaotic, colorful, changeable existence," says curator Julie Maguire. "Wheat's work brings history into contact with the present, creating a flickering three-dimensionality where silhouettes become solid, metal mesh becomes medieval tapestry and an historic work of art is expanded and transformed by imagination."

This exhibition offers unique educational opportunities for Oklahoma Contemporary: Spring and summer campers, as well as students on field trips and visitors to the gallery, will learn how contemporary artists respond to historical pieces, creating new artwork that is thought-provoking and inventive. Instructors will engage children's imaginations through painting and sculpture as they explore what may be happening outside the borders of their favorite pieces of art.

Throughout the exhibit, hands-on family activities are available in the Circle Gallery: a light table to explore color, a still-life sketching area, an imagination kitchen (a place to dress up and take photos), a collaborative tapestry

project and a reading area. Children are encouraged to investigate a number of themes throughout the exhibit, including light, texture and a sense of place.

Wheat has a bachelor of arts from the University of Central Oklahoma and a master of fine arts from Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia. She lives and works in New York City. Her brother, Hunter Wheat, owns Bleu Garten, a food-truck park in Midtown, and her father, Bill, owns Oklahoma City's Trilink Restoration Group.

In addition to the opening reception, a series of immersive special events around Wheat and her exhibit, including both visual and performance art, are planned for June. Details to follow on oklahomacontemporary.org.

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Summer Wheat and curator Julie Maguire are available for interviews. Contact Lori Brooks (lbrooks@okcontemp.org or 405-951-0000) for details. A media kit, including this press release, portraits of Summer Wheat and high-resolution images of artworks, is available at bit.ly/OCSummerDrop. Past press releases and additional information are archived at oklahomacontemporary.org/about/media.

About Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center: Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center is a regional 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization that encourages artistic expression in all its forms through education and exhibitions. Founded in 1989 by businessman and philanthropist Christian Keesee and Kirkpatrick Foundation Director Marilyn Myers, Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center offers contemporary arts exhibitions throughout the year, free to the public, as well as youth art camps, adult art classes, workshops and lectures. Marfa Contemporary is the organization's first regional extension.