Susan Eley
— Hudson —
Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 25, 2025

Cherry
Josie Tolliver Shaw

Susan Eley Fine Art, Hudson | 433 Warren Street, Hudson, NY 12534

On View: December 4, 2025 - February 8, 2026 | Opening Reception: Saturday, December 27, 4-6 PM

SEFA Hudson is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of new paintings by Josie Tolliver Shaw entitled *Cherry*. The presentation will feature seven recent paintings, all acrylic on canvas, including large-scale works such as *The Cake Cutters II*, which stretches over five feet tall. Tolliver Shaw's thoughtful renderings depict her interpretations of the female figures and the social interactions that center her life. The paintings can be read initially as portraits. Yet, they are layered with objects and words in their abstracted backgrounds, which are rich with kitsch and ephemera. The symbols within—notably the cherry—endow the artist's subjects with stories: both anecdotes of their collective experiences and nuances of their inner lives.

For Tolliver Shaw, the cherry became a primary motif. Growing up, a regular family destination was Door County, Wisconsin, famous for their rich cherry harvests. The fruit fused with the artist's formative memories, and its iconography is also often linked to the feminine. Blocky, graphic letters spell out "Cherry" in the bottom corner of *Allegedly Lucky Candle*, almost appearing as an old-fashioned advertisement. The Americana energy continues in this painting that features a young woman taking a selfie on her iPhone, crowned by an eagle with a banner reading "In Squad We Trust." The right hand side of the painting features numbers pulled from a "lucky" candle purchased from Walmart. Lore, belief and potential energy mediate the casual reality of the young woman sitting cross-legged in her t-shirt and socks.

In *Pearl with Apple*, the artist's sister is the primary subject. She is surrounded by ephemera: a bag, a coat, a candle and again cherries. Tolliver Shaw's life-size portraits are not whole without her decisive iconography developed in the backgrounds. To look only at the figure, is to read a biography without the footnotes. Her explorations elaborate on the narratives in and around each person. The artist asserts that she seeks "to make a modern still-life" that can be interpreted as a Wunderkammer or a Cabinet of Curiosities, in which objects can be collected and displayed to relay a narrative. Indeed, Tolliver Shaw creates physical altars for her subjects in her studio. She has provided SEFA with a sampling that features a cowboy boot pin from her grandmother, a Princess Diana mug from 1981 and a white shell that is featured in *Roadside Attraction.* This new body of work also reflects a shift in palette for the artist. Tolliver Shaw has selected darker tones for these works, relying more on the blacks and deep reds that are often associated with cherries.

Reflecting on queer spaces, Tolliver Shaw states: "I use scenic painting to create a matriarchal utopia and portray the integrity of female relationships. I harness my perspective as a lesbian woman and share that point of view with the viewer through scenic portraiture. My use of ornamentation, bright colors and female sociability purvey an alternative narrative to the viewer—one that is rid of patriarchal standards." In *Conditioner*, Tolliver Shaw renders herself and her partner in an intimate moment, marked with emblems of places like Las Vegas, Nevada and Wilson's ice cream shop in Wisconsin—tracking places as well as moments. From the window, visitors can see *The Lanes*, another portrait of her sister, Pearl, that encapsulates her interest in bowling with the shoes and pin that hover beside the figure.

The exhibition *Cherry* is on view in Hudson from December 4, 2025 through February 8, 2026. There will be an opening reception with the artist present on Saturday, December 27th from 4-6PM. The Gallery will be open Thursday-Monday from 11AM-5PM through 2025. Winter 2026 hours will be by appointment only; please email to schedule a visit.

— Text by Liz Lorenz, Associate Director

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Josie Tolliver Shaw was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY and is currently based in Los Angeles, CA. She graduated from LaGuardia High School in 2018. In 2022, Tolliver Shaw received a Bachelor in Fine Arts from Hunter College, NY where she focused on painting. The artist works with acrylic paint on canvas to construct figurative scenes that nurture female sociability. Her work employs kitsch and pattern to reject the patriarchal notion that sentimental art is frivolous. Also in 2022, her paintings were included in a group exhibition entitled *SPRUNG* at Susan Eley Fine Art, NYC. The exhibition *Cherry* marks her second presentation and first solo show with Susan Eley Fine Art, Hudson. Currently, Tolliver Shaw is pursuing her Masters of Fine Arts from ArtCenter, College of Design in Pasadena, CA.

ARTIST STATEMENT

At first glance, the primary subjects of my paintings are the people. But a closer look also reveals a collection of kitschy knickknacks and ephemera—which carry a lot of significance. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, with a mother who hated clutter. Not a whole lot of storage space, so not a whole lot of stuff. She did however, keep an ornately painted wooden box filled with trinkets from her childhood. I looked through it year after year, obsessing over the monogrammed bracelet from her high school boyfriend, the “ins and outs” lists in her yearbook and her first pair of baby shoes.

Now, I love to save my own odds and ends: birthday candles, refrigerator magnets, unfinished quilt blocks and my great-grandmother’s sewing box. But rather than tucking these objects away in a box, I paint them.

In these paintings, I aim to render these objects unforgettable; I piece together photos of friends, road trip souvenirs and altars on bedroom window sills to create an idealized matriarchal world. Though the framework of figurative painting is overwhelmingly patriarchal, I offer my work as a corrective to that viewpoint. My perspective as a lesbian also injects my work with an undeniably queer voice. I paint scenes of a definitively homosocial space, as free from the male gaze as possible. My sister and friends, frequent subjects of my paintings, confront the viewer with confidence, unaffected by voyeurism. I juxtapose their sense of security with palpable intimacy and vulnerability within the painted scene. Finally, the subjects are surrounded by carefully selected mementos and icons: a wall-mounted largemouth bass, a beloved sports team logo and a long-lost bracelet, as in *Breakup Painting*. These keepsakes function both as talismans and as windows into the internal landscapes of the women I paint.

When constructing the environments the figures in my paintings inhabit, I pull most of my inspiration from the man-made world. The man-made, and often kitsch, objects in my work are saturated with intention and association, heavy with meaning. Rather than detracting from their value, their mass production and subsequent accessibility are precisely what makes them all the more interesting to me. I like that the designer, maker, seller and collector all have different relationships with an object, yet are informed by one another. I'm also inspired by the sacred practice of collecting and how selection steeps objects in sentimentality. The plastic piña colada cup from my trip to Myrtle Beach is made sacred by the time I spent photographing it, sipping from it, and painting it. My paintings suggest that souvenirs and keepsakes are more than mere byproducts of capitalism. Instead, these objects tap into the human instinct to connect with and memorialize our experiences.

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