

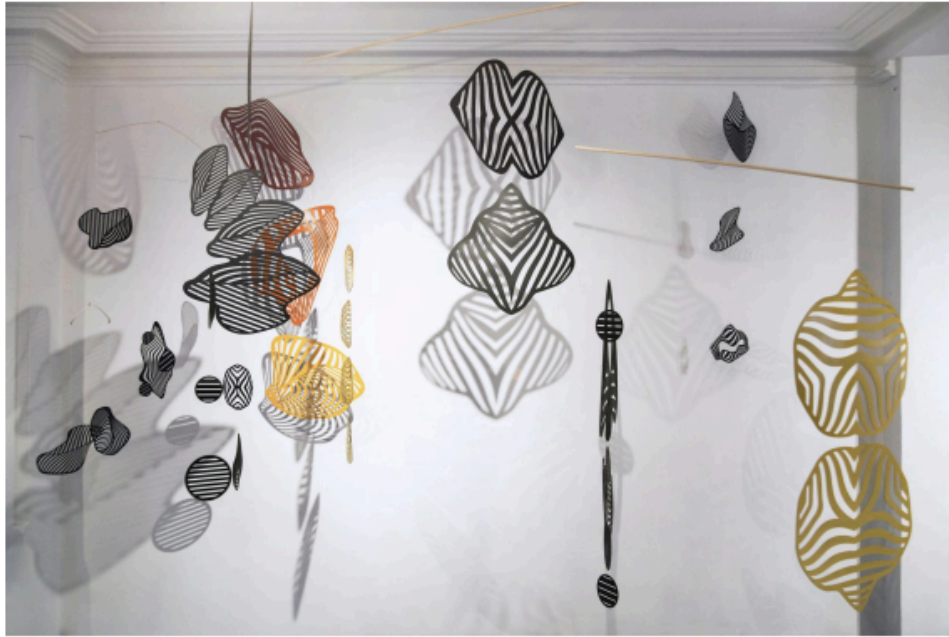
Wendy Letven: Acausal Connections Between Phenomena by Liang Hai

Wendy Letven's studio is located on a mid-slope of a mountain in a forest. Outside her balcony, city lights from far away float in darkness and blend with stars in the sky, leaves sing tirelessly whenever a breeze passes through. Inside her window, space is filled with abstract elements apparently generated from the human mind - lines, shapes, and symbols - weaving a complex but minimalistic world from emptiness.

While constantly being cheered and inspired by nature, Letven's art practice comes into relatively rational and symbolized forms that reflect her experience, ideology, and pursuit. Her creation includes installations, sculptures, drawings, paintings and artist's books, exploring a personal language of abstraction through different art mediums, with a focus on her interest in exploring and interpreting natural form, pattern, repetition, and rhythm through her reductive creative process.



Wendy Letven, *Gyre*, 2020. Site-specific installation, Cut paper, dimensions variable ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery



Wendy Letven, *Gyre*, 2020. Site-specific installation, Cut paper, dimensions variable ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery

Letven's installation and sculpture work blend forms and images that transform and redefine space and atmosphere in new ways. She develops her own vocabulary of evocative symbols to construct the syntax of a universal visual language. Her suspended installations and sculptures are dynamic ensembles of light, shadow, motion, and reflection as they are constantly activated by atmospheric factors such as airflow and shifting light. Her site-specific installation *Gyre* (2020) is very representative of both the making process and her personal vocabulary. Letven takes components to the site and creates spatial relationships between them according to the characteristics of the space. Both the creation and the outcome are non-repetitive, and only applicable to the specific occasion. The components in black, yellow and red colors in this installation are extruded from her line drawings. Their patterns, shapes, and shadows interact with one another, resonating within the space as an embodied material presence. Suspended in space, they generate motion, interaction, and interference that form the dynamic substance of this artwork.

Another of her site-specific installations, *Winding River* (2020), highlights her interest in deconstructing, interpreting and regenerating natural landscapes. The main body of this installation is composed of several white-painted aluminum strips bent into organic curves that easily arouses the impression of splashing water. It is an abstract river suggesting the flow of form, rhythm, and time, implying the entrance to an abstract landscape. A statement from ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu could precisely express the poetry of this abstract landscape, "Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like." Visitors are invited to perceive between physical and illusionary distortions of the changing surroundings through space and time.



Wendy Letven, *Winding River*, 2020. Site-specific installation, Painted aluminum, dimensions Variable ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery



Wendy Letven: *Lines Falling Together in Time* installation view. *Winding River*, 2020. Photograph by Lynn Hai. ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery.



Wendy Letven: *Lines Falling Together in Time* installation view. *Winding River*, 2020. Photograph by Lynn Hai.
©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery.



Wendy Letven, *Flowtopia II*, 2020. Site-specific installation, Urban Outfitters Headquarters ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Urban Outfitters Headquarters.

In the site-specific installation *Flowtopia II* (2020) created for Urban Outfitters Headquarters, Letven was concerned with the idea of alchemy - the desire to transform metal into a universal elixir. Her impressions of naturally occurring patterns and flows of energy observed in daily life and through her art practice come together in this work to create a mellifluous suspended

drawing. She references and contrasts a diversity of biologic and manufactured forms evocative of things as disparate as beehives, electric circuits, sound wave patterns and the branching patterns of veins in the human body. Unifying all of this through color and line, she has created a flowing composition to elicit a state of harmony and well-being in the viewer.

Letven is interested in finding ways of upending traditional art practices by integrating mark-making, painting, and drawing, that clearly show the hand of the artist, with high-tech processes, such as laser-cutting, which is more mechanical in nature. In doing so, her practice is congruent with her subject matter. It is a search for universal truths that govern all disparate things which she has observed to similarly form, grow and dissipate in time. Her installation works are time-based, with no beginning or end, being reconfigured and developed every time when they adapt to a different context. The process of manipulating the parts of her language is a reflection of the fluctuation of her thinking process. Evolutions in colors, arrangements and spatial relationships suit the need for perpetual changes.



Left: Wendy Letven, *In the Current*, 2020. Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery

Right: Wendy Letven, *Ebb and Flow*, 2020. Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery

Installations are Letven's critical art mediums in expressing her exploration with forms, phenomena, and space, while her more traditional practice also reflects her philosophies from a different perspective. Her oil paintings experiment through flatness and space in a similar manner to her installations and sculptures. The compositions always imply portions of a larger

infinite structure, constantly practicing the relationship of the parts to the whole. In her paintings *Ebb and FLOW* (2020) and *In the Current* (2020), color is a way of creating and manipulating a sense of visual space. Directly or indirectly, their palettes suggest distance, perspective, and even motion. The application of layered, vibrating lines create different spatial relationships within their surfaces as they rise and fall away. The lines synchronize in areas, and then appear and disappear from one to another space. The logic and mechanism of the painted forms suggest abstract landscapes within states of synchronicity, resonance, and transformative flux.



Wendy Letven: Lines Falling Together in Time installation view. Photograph by Lynn Hai. ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery.

Letven's ink painting series started in 2010 around the time of the oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana. Her worries about environmental changes, such as rising sea levels and superstorms, have inspired her to imagine doomsday scenarios. Abstract expressions of subverted landscapes and rivers in the sky are always depicted in her ink series. Her techniques in ink paintings also gradually shift to a more minimalistic but powerful expression. The latest *Mahogany Rift* (2020) and *Subterranean Greens* (2020) are almost monotone-colored, respectively in shades of red and green. Chroma is always used to address temperature, tone or mood, and different phases in time. Letven aims to emphasize the color relationship of the dark and the light by deliberately reducing her color palettes. With the images of abstract flows winding between positive and negative spaces, the dark implies the mysteriousness and unknowable aspects of nature, while the light implies emptiness and vastness. This idea is specifically tangible in the transparency of ink paintings where the paper surface is literally revealed. The ink series is less about the exploration of forms, as they are investigations into a

variety of physical rhythms. Their inquiry into the essence of flow stems from the painterly process of ink spills and liquid pours.



Left: Wendy Letven, *Mahogany Rift*, 2020. Ink on Arches Paper, 30 x 22 inches ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery

Right: Wendy Letven, *Subterranean Blues*, 2020. Ink on Arches Paper, 30 x 22 inches ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery



Wendy Letven: *Lines Falling Together in Time* installation view. Photograph by Lynn Hai. ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery.



Wendy Letven, *Flare Up*, 2017. Ink on Arches Paper, 30 x 22 inches ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery

Compared to her other types of artworks, Letven's sculptures seem more experimental and straightforward in exceeding the limit of possibilities to form, compose and manipulate abstract elements to practice her core idea. Both her paper assemblages and standing sculptures attempt to blur the lines between painting, drawing, and sculpture. By juxtaposing, separating or regrouping her own visual vocabularies, Letven creates an in-between state of two-dimensional and three-dimensional mediums and seeks for profound connections and resonance between phenomena.

Fascinated with pattern and spatial relationships for years, Letven always grows her works by combining unrelated lines, shapes, and symbols to pursue a deeper level of harmony from seemingly disparate visual entities. In the past years, her focus on creation has gradually transferred from interpreting the literal environment to exploring possibilities of abstraction. Her concerns regarding the destruction of nature have been relieved, as she develops her understanding of nature, human, time and space as a self-balanced and organic integration. Her recent works are always abstract visualizations of bigger images that imply the mechanism of space and time and the fabric of the universe. She believes in the importance of abstract connections between phenomena and seeks inspiration from other fields, including music, poetry, science, and philosophy to build up aesthetic synaesthesia shared among these different disciplines. A representative example is her collaboration with her husband Gary Fredriksen who is a sculptor and professional percussionist. Letven's sculptures made from a combination of sculpted aluminum shapes of different thicknesses, lengths, and forms are natural percussion

instruments that vibrate to create different sounds when struck. Fredriksen improvises tones of percussive sounds that are unusual, or even discordant, in the moment that combines with his tactile sensibility. The aspect of the performance mirrors a core value of Letven's creation that centers around the idea of convergence or a "falling together in time" (Carl Jung, Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle, 1960), by chance or by intention.



Wendy Letven: Lines Falling Together in Time installation view. Photograph by Lynn Hai. ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery.

Letven refers to Swiss psychologist Carl Jung's theory that there exists an acausal connection between two or more psychic and physical phenomena or meaningful coincidence because it expresses her strong belief in an omnipresent, deeper order of life rather than randomness. In essence, harboring a positive attitude towards the destruction, turbulence, and transformation of the world, Letven attempts to create joyful and exuberant artworks, in order to uplift her audience with peacefulness and optimism.

ARTIST - WENDY LETVEN (b.1962, Philadelphia, U.S.)

Wendy Letven is a multidisciplinary artist working in sculpture, installation, and painting in the New York area. Raised in Philadelphia, she received a B.F.A. from Tyler School of Art and an M.F.A. from Hunter College. She currently teaches Art and Design at New York University and at Parsons School of Design. She has created installations for Urban Outfitter Headquarter (Philadelphia, 2020), PULSE Art Fair (Miami, 2019), Portal: Governors Island Art Fair (New York, 2019), Art on Paper Fair (New York, 2019), Market Art + Design (Bridgehampton, New York, 2019), Flatiron Prow Artspace (New York, 2018), and The Sheila R. Johnson Gallery at the

New School (New York, 2018) among others. She is a MacDowell Colony Fellow and a recipient of a Workspace Grant from Dieu Donne Papermill in New York.



Wendy Letven: Lines Falling Together in Time installation view. Photograph by Lynn Hai. ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery.

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