

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

Artists on Coping: Wendy Letven

MAY 10, 2020 BY ETTY YANIV

During the coronavirus pandemic, Art Spiel is reaching out to artists to learn how they are coping.



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

Wendy Letven interprets natural form and pattern through a reductive creative process in sculpture, installation and painting. She received a B.F.A. from Tyler School of Art, an M.F.A. from Hunter College and is a MacDowell Colony Fellow. She's created installations for Urban Outfitter Headquarters (Philadelphia, 2020), Portal: Governors Island (New York, 2019), Art on Paper Fair (New York, 2019), Flatiron Prow Artspace (New York, 2018), and The Sheila R. Johnson Gallery at the New School (New York,

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2018) among others. Wendy currently has a solo show at Fou Gallery in Brooklyn, entitled, *Lines Falling Together in Time*.

AS: How are you coping?

WL: I think I am coping well, but I am definitely operating at a slower pace. Projects I had in the works have been stalled. My solo show at Fou Gallery in Brooklyn is on pause. It's taken me awhile to remember where I was in my work, and to dive back into it, but slowly but surely I am regaining my focus. It's important because art-making is my best coping mechanism. But some days I simply work at the dining table, so that I can enjoy the company of my family at the same time. My husband and son and I, our little "quaranteam", have been taking long hikes in the woods and in parks, exploring new places in our area of Montclair, New Jersey. It's amazing how nature revives us every time. I have a feeling those outings will be the bittersweet memories that will last. Time will tell.

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

AS: Has your routine changed?

WL: In the initial days I was hyper-focused on getting all the information I could about this virus and preparing for it. Then my priorities shifted to everything involved with teaching online, as I am teaching at two art schools this semester. As I've adjusted a rhythm to my days is emerging. Tuesdays through Thursdays I teach and the other days of the week are more open to spend time on my work. I find I don't mind cooking, cleaning and other simple domestic chores as much. It's been a great chance to get organized. In the evenings I watch movies with the family and draw in my sketchbook with color pencil, a new medium for me. From experience I know that work, done in reaction to changing circumstances, helps me process.

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Wendy Letven, Uprooted, 2019. Site-specific paper installation, Portal: Governor's Island, ©Wendy Letven, courtesy The Gothamist

AS: Can you describe some of your feelings about all this?

WL: The reality of this situation hits me immediately each day I awaken. The only other times in my life that I have had that heavy feeling were when family members passed away. So I recognize that it is grief that I am fighting. Other times I feel a sort of restlessness. On my worst day, the word “inconsolable” hung over me. The usual distractions wouldn’t chase it away, but a glass of wine worked. I have always been one to think ahead too much and worry, but I am also an optimist, so, for now, I am not too concerned that these negative feelings will be long lasting.

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Wendy Letven, *Mahogany Rift*, Ink on paper, 30 x 22 inch, 2020
©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery

AS: What matters most right now?

WL: A few people close to me were sickened by the virus but recovered. During those days, their health and my family's health and safety were the only thing that mattered. Protecting ourselves from this virus comes first. To get through these long days I also try to stay balanced through exercise and connecting with the people I love. I feel a responsibility to my students to provide inspiration and comfort on the days we meet on Zoom. The world is changing around us and it is going to be important to cultivate our resilience. Most artists thrive on change. I know that I do.

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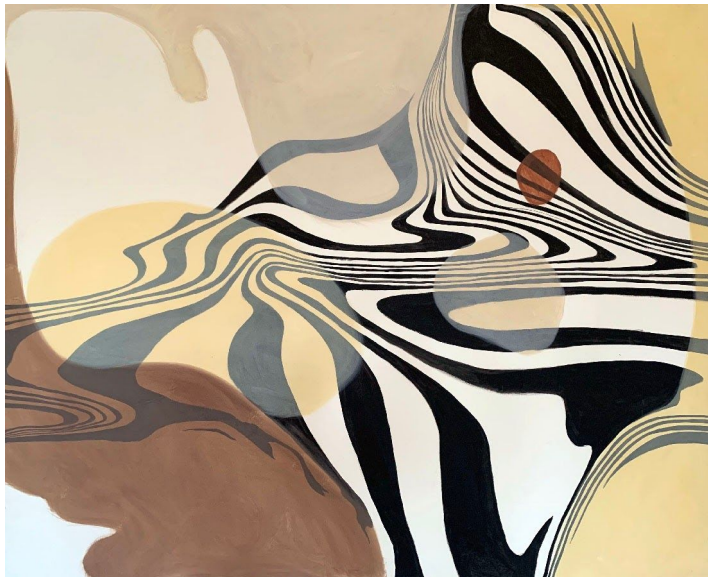
Wendy Letven, *Subterranean Greens*, Ink on paper, 30 x 22 inch, 2020 ©Wendy Letven, courtesy Fou Gallery

AS: Any thoughts about the road ahead?

WL: When the future is uncertain, I think we naturally focus on the present moment with more intensity. My hope for society is that we use this time to reflect on the past because our values need an adjustment, to put it mildly. I would love to see people move towards working at home more, because the positive impact on the environment is encouraging. This slowing of the frenetic pace of our lives also gives me hope. A friend of mine suggested that it is as if the whole world has been issued a time-out to go to our rooms and think about our actions that got us here in the first place. Most of all, I am just looking forward to the day I can actually hug my daughter who is living on her own. Air hugs are unsatisfactory.

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Wendy Letven, Undulation, Oil on Linen, 52 x 64 inch, 2020. ©Wendy Letven

<https://artspiel.org/artists-on-coping-wendy-letven/#more-6671>

Etty Yaniv works on her art, art writing and curatorial projects in Brooklyn. She founded Art Spiel as a platform for highlighting the work of contemporary artists, including art reviews, studio visits, interviews with artists, curators, and gallerists. For more details contact by Email: artspielblog@gmail.com