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An Interview with Artist Eve Wood

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Eve Wood: Hanging in There to Hang On

at [Track 16 Gallery](#), Los Angeles (opening reception: Saturday, September 10, 7-10pm)

by **Julie Adler**

I met Eve Wood at Holly Matter, an art gallery on Heliotrope in East Hollywood, 22 years ago now. I recall she got up and read some of her poems. Incisive, cutting, direct, I thought, “wow, what a master,” and also “ouch,” but in a good way. We became friends there, and a few years later she brought out some drawings at a meal we were having, of people, animals with wide eyes, craggy lines. Sparse, comical and awkward, eyes staring back at you or away. Up until that point I had no idea Eve was also a visual artist. I had come from a performance art background but was also starting to get more engaged in 2 dimensions. She was eager to do a trade. It seemed we shared a similar concern for the human condition. And because we humans are funny in our grotesqueness, our derangement, our folly, we didn’t think it unusual to portray that. We also felt the comradeship of being outsiders, even though we both grew up here in LA and went to art school here.

So, when Eve asked me to interview her for this publication, I did not hesitate. It's been wonderful to burrow in with her on the ways and means of her process. She's really not an outsider (nor am I.) She is as inside as it gets.

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JULIE ADLER: Let's talk first about your upcoming show title, *Hanging In There to Hang On*. The play on words seems obvious in a lot of your drawings where hangers figure prominently: hangers in the teeth, hanger nooses around necks, hangers as part of a wardrobe, hangers either entering or exiting the mouth, hoodies hanging in space, a comical man yogically displaying his wares, straight jacket hanger man, Van Gogh's ears on hangers...and so on. What gives?

EVE WOOD: When I was initially thinking about the show, I wanted the title to reflect the objects that appear again and again in the exhibition. I think of the title as open ended, touching on this idea of trying to stay alive, to keep going, despite difficulties in the world and within my own life. But, it's not specifically about me; it's also about all of us just hanging in there as best we can. And hanging on, considering all the things that have happened in the past two years with Covid, overturning Roe v. Wade, being entrenched in the age of Trumpism, etc. It's very frightening to me and so I wanted to come up with a title that reflected that fear but was



Eve Wood, *Hanging in there to hang on*. 2021.

All images courtesy of Track 16 Gallery.

also present within that fear.

ADLER: Did the idea of the hanger imagery precede these ideas?

WOOD: Hangers formally are quite beautiful objects, because they are essentially triangles, the most perfected shape, embodying unity, balance and harmony. I was attracted to it formalistically, and then I thought, “Can I use this and then subtly alter it?” I’m very influenced by Richard Tuttle and so, it was kind of a Richard Tuttle experiment — to pack the biggest punch with the least information.

ADLER: When I think of Richard Tuttle, I see delicate installations, like the ones with little wires coming out the floors and walls. Your drawings also play with space minimally. And of course, there’s the play on the word “hanging.” Just having the awareness of yourself hanging on but not necessarily understanding what you’re hanging on to feels important to me. I feel like the drawings are open that way — they present these uncomfortable human conundrums, but you don’t give any solutions.

WOOD: No, because I feel that in my life, there’s no solution, there’s no, “If I do that, this will happen.” The older I get, the more I have to relinquish any sense of knowing. I think of my drawings and sculptures as strange tentacles, tentatively reaching out to make contact.

ADLER: Much of these works also feature a lone person in various positions. Somehow it feels like mood swings. Are they your moods: frightened, ecstatic, joyful, etc?

WOOD: Well, it’s more like the work is delineating moments in time, emotional cadences rather than mood swings. Some pieces are disturbing, some are funny and some are ecstatic. And as far as featuring ‘lone’ figures, I spent a lot of time alone as a kid, raised by a single dad, so I am very comfortable being alone and actually prefer it.

ADLER: You mention the word ‘disturbing.’ That word comes up a lot in relation to art that makes people uncomfortable and want to turn away from. How do you feel about that word?

WOOD: I used to feel like I should make work that was somehow less disturbing and more saleable, but I really can’t. It’s not in my visual lexicon to make work that is simply mundane and asks nothing of the viewer. I think people need to be disturbed, to get them to finally pay attention. But it also

can't be so disturbing that there's no point of entry. I deliberately try to create openings, so viewers don't feel overwhelmed or barraged. My drawings are also comical, endearing, tender (I hope). You can sit with them and feel "disturbed," but you can also feel other things at the same time.

ADLER: In a way, artists are conjurers, conjuring up something from a different realm or from outside another person's experience and they show it to you, the viewer. I feel that the word 'disturbing' has become stereotypical and people's response generalized.

WOOD: Absolutely. I think that people categorize. Maybe I'm trying to reclaim that word.

ADLER: Let's talk about birds, I know you love them. You rescue them. Well, you rescue so many animals. But birds, they seem to take up a lot of space in your art and life. Sometimes they overshadow humans for you.

WOOD: I've been mesmerized by them since I was a kid. I have a special connection to all kinds of birds but the ones that seek me out are ravens and crows. I have all these ravens that come to sit in the front yard. I call them the "Rebel Crew." All that extra fat is cut away from your relationship with an animal. It's right there, pure and unmitigated. They are a sort of avatar for me.

ADLER: In what ways?

WOOD: I identify with their fragility, but also their strength. Birds are incredibly intelligent and have complex social and



emotional lives.

Eve Wood, *My Date to the church formal*. 2021.

ADLER: You have that drawing of the very big raven sitting next to a little man, called *My Date to the church formal*. Can you please tell me more about that one?

WOOD: It's kind of comical. It really speaks to the hierarchy in my heart of animals and humans. Birds are so much more significant in my psyche than humans. I started out drawing this huge raven and I originally sketched the man to be the same size, but as I kept going, he got smaller and smaller. That happens often when I draw people. Sometimes they disappear completely.

ADLER: Regarding the title, who is dating whom? Is it the raven's date or the little man's?

WOOD: Yeah, that's the question. Who knows.

ADLER: And why the church?

WOOD: Again, it's a kind of a humorous moment, I was thinking about people going to proms, date nights and how formulaic it is and especially within the church; I have no interest in organized religion at all. I was thinking about how the church is so controlling. The thought occurred to me — "You know, why not bring a raven to the church social?"

ADLER: Do you get, like, "Ah, that was so satisfying; That was a nice *fuck you...*" to whatever or whoever when you finish a drawing?

WOOD: Yes, that one felt satisfying for sure.

ADLER: Do you feel compelled with your titles, that you always *have to* put words to your pieces? Because I feel like words are always spilling out of you, like you can't help yourself?

WOOD: Yeah definitely, I think the imagery has a poetic quality to. And, being a writer, I think narratively. There's a narrative structure. Words are very important.

ADLER: Can you talk more about your life as a poet?

WOOD: Everything with me is story. That's what all our lives are, stories. We live inside of stories, and in other peoples' stories. They encircle our lives. It fascinates me. The poems delineate emotional moments, lyrical exchanges.

ADLER: You seem to be giving voice to all these images, these characters. Let's take the yoga guy for example, in tree pose with the two hangers. He's such a personality with these very flamboyant trousers on. Are your characters are based on real people?

WOOD: None of them, actually, except for my girlfriend, much to her chagrin!

ADLER: I'm particularly intrigued by the guy sitting, in meditation posture, on the head of a dinosaur. It's so loaded. Like with some of your other drawings, this left me scratching my own head. What does this drawing have to do with its title, *Daily mantra*?



Eve Wood, *Daily mantra*. 2021.

WOOD: That drawing for me is very personal. Instead of trying to contain your monsters, i.e., beasts — dinosaurs — you ride them. You float on them, and you try to understand them through meditation and yoga.

ADLER: So, you're that guy in that drawing?

WOOD: I suppose I am and there's no taming him. When you meditate, dinosaur type thoughts come charging full tilt into your head. They try to take you away from yourself and eat your brain or whatever, so you acknowledge them, saying "ok, here you are again." And that's the daily mantra.

ADLER: Is he taming the dinosaur or is he awkwardly positioned on top of the dinosaur and he can't get off? He seems kind of stuck there.

WOOD: Actually, it's kind of an acceptance. This is what I've been given so I better make the best of it and so instead of fighting it, I'm going to meditate on it.

ADLER: Are dinosaurs new in your arsenal of characters, emerging more recently?

WOOD: Yes, they are but also, they are birds, the original birds. Birds are the last living thread to dinosaurs and as a kid, I was obsessed with them. I had all of the little dinosaur figurines from the La Brea Tar Pits. As a kid, my dad took me to there every Sunday. I was mesmerized by the stories of mastodons being trapped in the tar. I would sit at the tar pits for hours, obsessed. That really hasn't changed.

ADLER: Any correlation to your current view of the world now?

WOOD: Yes. The dinosaurs didn't do anything to bring on their extinction. I often wondered what would have happened had the meteor not hit. Would they have just continued on and evolved into more amazing sentient creatures? Where would they be now? Who knows what the dinosaurs could've become. Maybe they would have been these crazy ass lizards living in high rises and smoking cigars . . . I don't know . . . but I think about our own extinction event and eventually the planet will shake us off like a dog shakes off fleas.

ADLER: Do you think art can make a difference? I ask because I see that you care, and you make



Eve Wood, *Flagrant Red Chair*. 2021.

work about human foibles, conditions, struggles. The characters don't seem that self-aware. But do you think your pieces can make a difference? Or is it more to make you feel better?

WOOD: I have an impulse to reach out and create a connection with others, or I would not be making art. Sometimes I make art to translate something to myself, something that I just haven't understood or am resisting. Sometimes, though, people say, "Oh I feel that way too." The act of making art is maybe a way for me to not feel so much despair and to try and be hopeful that we will somehow not kill the planet.

ADLER: In terms of the artwork, how do you use gender? Because it sometimes seems like you are blatantly mocking men. And sometimes it feels like the women are less identifiable as women.

WOOD: So, there are a lot of men with chest hair.

ADLER: Yeah! What's up with that? Did you have a traumatic experience with chest hair at some point?

WOOD: I was married to a man for 9 years and he had a lot of chest hair. I don't dislike it at all, though I live as a lesbian now, but I'm really into chest hair, so what the hell does that say?

ADLER: So, I have a question now about the lines of your drawings, they're kind of gritty and flat. I know you're really affected by and a fan of Egon Schiele. Can you talk more about that, vis a vis the way you depict the figure?

WOOD: I love Egon Schiele's work. He's had the most profound effect on my own practice. I particularly respond to the agitation in his line work. Even if he's drawing a cat, it doesn't matter. The line is troubled. That's not something you can teach. It's just there. I think all great art has this quality of chaos and agitation. With Egon Schiele, if you read his letters, he feels that each line is a spark or a streak of fire. Every single line must be its own individual entity and then they build on each other to create this other palpable "thing". But each line is singular. So, I just sort of assimilated that and I think about it when I'm drawing. I look at his work all the time.

ADLER: Your imagery suggests that we're all caught but we don't have the ability to get out. We don't have the ability to self-reflect enough. Am I onto something here?

WOOD: Absolutely. Like the guy without the hands who can't remove the hanger. He could drop it, but there is this sense of helplessness and not really knowing how he got into the predicament he's in. Is there an exit strategy?

ADLER: I don't think your work gives a way out.

WOOD: There *is* no way out. According to Buddhist teachings, based on something I heard Pema Chodron once say, 'when you die, that's no exit strategy. Dying is not an exit, it's another beginning.' Which is kind of terrifying. Someone said the other day, "When I'm going to die, it's going to be fine. I'll just be nowhere. Or go to heaven." I don't think that's the case. There's no way out. Is there a point where you're just out, gone? Or you're not gone but you ARE completely. I don't know but I think about those things a lot.



Eve Wood, *And then suddenly four cardinals flew out of my *#!*&!* (2022).

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Featured Image: Eve Wood, *Ostrich Pretending To Be A Francis Bacon Painting*. 2021.

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Julie Adler is frequently uncomfortable. So is her art, which comes out of this awkward ‘in-between’ place. Born and currently based in Los Angeles, she is an interdisciplinary artist who employs a wide spectrum of mediums from painting to performance to singing to writing to explore things like having a body and the inevitable dissolution of it. She is also a heavy user of Buddhism and yoga. She has presented her work in places like REDCAT, Armory Center for the Arts, Highways, POST, The Situation Room, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, VICE Magazine and 7×7. She has an MFA in Visual Arts and Music from Cal Arts and BFA from Cooper Union.