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Arts Arts Package 2020

LOCAL ARTIST ALICE PIXLEY YOUNG NAMED ONE OF FIVE WOMEN ARTISTS TO WATCH IN OHIO

The multimedia artist will be featured in Columbus's Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery exhibition, Paper Routes—Women to Watch 2020, July 30–October 17.

Kaileigh Peyton - September 4, 2020

In the 20 years since this multidisciplinary artist and Washington, D.C., native moved to Cincinnati, she's been exploring fine art through the lens of sculpture and materiality. Inspired by the natural world around her, Alice Pixley Young delves into themes and materials that tell the story of industrialism's impact on climate and nature. Last year her immersive mixed-media installation *Fearful Symmetry* was a contemporary counterpart to the Taft Museum of Art's *The Poetry of Nature: Hudson River School Landscapes* exhibition, juxtaposing the romantic 19th century paintings of artists such as Thomas Cole to the modern-day, human-driven deterioration of nature, captured in Young's piece.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ALICE PIXLEY YOUNG

Named one of Five Women Artists to Watch in 2020, her works are part of the *Paper Routes—Women to Watch 2020* exhibition at the Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery from July 30 through October 17. We caught up with Young to discuss how she crafts her installations and how she's been getting through "quarantining" during the coronavirus pandemic.

Themes around climate change recur in your work. Why is this an important topic to you, and how do you translate it through your art?

I've always been interested in cultural constructs, whether it's about feminism or how we live in the world. Because of my own upbringing and being very interested in conservation and nature, I've been really interested in how we live with nature and wilderness. That goes back to fairy tales, culture, folklore, and of course to the current situation where we are dominated by our idea of controlling nature—and it's biting back. The climate crisis is a completely out-of-control situation with wildfires, floods, etc. But of course all of these things are hurting us because of our incursions to the wilderness. I think it's interesting, the dichotomy of push-pull, that we always put ourselves in the way of this larger thing and feel like we can control it. It's so much bigger than us.

Could you describe *Fearful Symmetry* and the process that went into creating it?

I was asked by [Taft Museum of Art Associate Curator] Tamera Lenz Mente to create a piece for a show on the [19th century] Hudson River School [American art movement]. That has always been an influence of mine. Ever since I was a kid, I loved Thomas Cole's work—even though I'm completely different and opposite of it. I love this progression of the pristine wilderness going into decline.

When I was creating *Fearful Symmetry* I was intrigued by the concept of the idealized landscape and the ramifications of our current obsession with consuming images of nature on the computer but not really going out into wilderness. So the piece that I made was this giant tar paper papercut that was a [representation] of the photo documentation I had taken from Yellowstone during the wildfires and then this eye in the center which was a cast glass piece based on a mirror that projected video I created a double of to show the symmetry piece.

You've been named one of the Five Women Artists to Watch in Ohio for 2020 and you'll be contributing to the *Paper Routes* exhibition in Columbus. What do you have in store for that exhibit?

I have two pieces that they've collected that I've already made. One will be my ash wallpaper piece. My other piece is a paper cutting from the Campfire fires in California a couple years ago: It's basically power lines—the power utilities had a big role in the out-of-control fires that happened there. So that's one of the reasons that I create these paper cuttings of oil rigs and power lines, because they have a really strong connection with the climate crisis, and also because they're becoming the new landscape.

How has "quarantining" affected projects you've been working on?

Well, the "quarantine" has been actually really personal for me. I lost my mom a couple months ago to COVID-19. I'm from D.C., which was hit much earlier, and she passed away in May. So it's been very personal to me. I've also been teaching. For me it's been taking every day as it comes, and maybe going more micro than macro. I've been taking my own landscape, my backyard, and building a more sustainable landscape with a pollinator garden and working in my own space. I have a new project called *Ghost Grove*, which is about mapping trees blighted by climate change [and other issues]—chestnuts, ashes, etc.—and casting them in paper and glass, taking my personal space on a small scale and working with the forest around me and my backyard, and just trying to put one foot in front of the other. It's been a process.

Has art been a means for you to grieve?

It's really weird—before we even found out my mom had COVID-19, which happened on Mother's Day, I had just cast this mirror piece, and I had a piece of fabric draped over it, like the 19th century mourning, where they covered the clocks and mirrors as a process when someone dies. I had done it from a totally, you know, sort of mourning my previous 2020, *What happened to everything?* I was going to use that piece to cast a video of decimated landscape with a cloth coming over it—but, you know, it's a mourning piece. Just as soon as I had cast that piece, my mother went into the hospital and then palliative care. It was this crazy personal turnaround to a piece I was already working on. Now it has a dual effect—but it definitely wasn't intentional.

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