

ESCAPE ARTISTS

BY TAISHA CARRINGTON

RITUAL, RELIGION, AND SPIRITUALITY CAN be a balm in times when our daily lives are disrupted. On the other hand, we may find them limiting when we feel settled and confident. *Escape Artists* presents work that explores the duality of these practices as both restrictive and freeing. Each artist traverses this contrast in their work in response to their social environments, whether that be a political movement, the aftermath of a natural disaster, global pandemic, or a combination of all of these and more.

Through repetitive tasks or being on “autopilot” during the making process, these artists find comfort in familiar materials—or by creating alternate, immersive, or escapist routines and objects that build worlds outside of our reality. Naama Levit weaves ritual into their practice by creating temporary, intimate spaces that tap into sensory memory to investigate control. Jason Stein finds comfort in manipulating the materials he works with,

while encoding messages of vulnerability through Morse code. Leslie Shershow and Megan Gottfried create playful alternate spaces, one on a micro and the other on a macro level respectively, offering places for brief escape from reality. The works of Melis Agabigum and Tracy Welling evoke otherworldly topographies. Other artists, such as Ariella Har-Even and Hilla Shapira, present their questions through pieces that rely on the wearer for presentation. And MJ Tyson takes an introspective approach, creating works in which the ritual is inherent in the materials—other people’s discarded keepsakes.

These artists, through the rituals of art practices and self-defined spiritual acts, offer ways to contemplate moments of transcendence in our own lives.



Ariella Har-Even

Listen, 2019

Patinated bronze and copper,
sterling silver, leather cord
4½ x 14½ x 6 in.

Photo: Sydney Givens

“The chaos that surrounds us is often so loud it easily becomes overbearing. We search and yearn for peace yet hope to find it in the noise that surrounds us. In this state of engulfment, we become still and motionless, we acquiesce to a numbness fed by fear of moving forward. But it takes movement—sometimes slow, sometimes gentle. Connection to the divine, to that which is elusive yet ever-present, that which is ubiquitous and lost—move and you will call it, take action and you will hear it answer.”

@ariella.hareven



Megan Gottfried

Room to Room, 2021

Fiber, synthetic and natural
dyes, 60 ft. of wire, rug, wood,
slides, airplane cables
64 x 105 in. (folded, not
including cables)

Photo courtesy of the artist

"Room to Room resembles a playful pillow fort. I hope to invite viewers to find comfort in familiarity and escape into their imagination. My work is about providing a safe space for creativity. The soft fabric is hung at a low height to resemble the intimacy of a small, handmade space."

[@gottfried.megan](https://www.instagram.com/gottfried.megan)

"O Mary is made from collected devotional medals. It's a gathering of tokens, of hopes, and of lives. How do these charms express devotion? Perhaps, at least, they tie our scattered lives together."

@mj_tyson



MJ Tyson

O Mary, 2021

Sterling silver, devotional medals

12 x 6 x 1 in., 22 in. long

Courtesy of Sienna Patti

Contemporary

Photo courtesy of the artist

Jason Stein

Cry for Help, 2018

Steel, gold-plated

brass, copper,

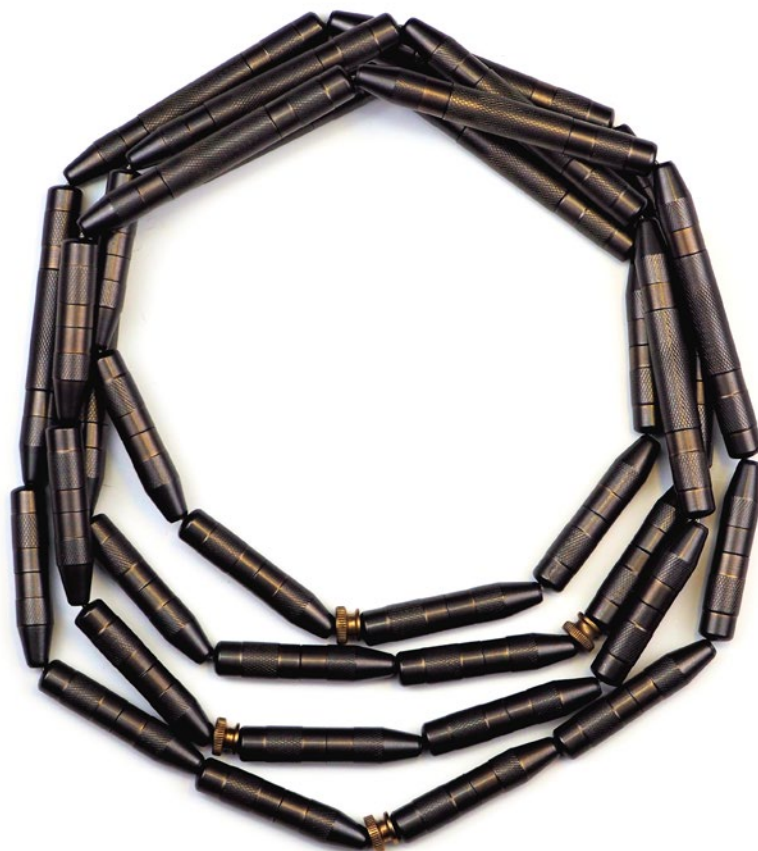
stainless steel

104 x ½ x ½ in.

Photo: Jason Stein

"The 104 in. long loop can be worn as a necklace or held in the hand and used as prayer, meditation, or komboloi beads...The elements of the piece form the international Morse Code distress message 'SOS' through the use of long and short found object units in the standard pattern of three dots, three dashes, and three dots or '... - - - ...'. The code repeats in the necklace three times."

@jasonsteinmetals





Hilla Shapira and
Naama Levit
SITE NON-SPECIFIC, 2021
Cotton, polyfill,
copper, Jerusalem
stone (limestone)
39 x 33 in.
Photo: Hilla Shapira

"This project is examining notions of utilitarian objects during everyday rituals. These objects carried on the body move and change through time and context. Everything is specific and random at the same time. Things can have more than one purpose, practical or spiritual. Fluidity of forms and functions, repetitiveness, and multiplicity are the principles that guide us."

@hilla_shapira



Naama Levit
Matter to dust, 2021
 Crushed Jerusalem stone,
 polymer
 7 x 8 cm
 Photo: Benedikt Adler



“Can you sense the smell of the land? The touch of a stone picked from the ground? Does the feeling of familiarity bring comfort or distress? What is it about physical material that can transcend us, and create a trick of the mind or a trick of the heart? Setting out to explore these questions I took stones from my own landscape and broke them down by crushing and sifting repeatedly to achieve a compilation of ‘land samples’ in the form of sand in different grits and tones. I used the sand as raw material to make new formations.”

@naamalevit

“My work represents ideas of escape through both process and concept. It is possible to lose oneself through the traditions and techniques of papermaking and stretching individual pieces of fiber. The act of drawing as a response to texture becomes a soothing ritual itself. These pieces were made in response to both the private and public grief and tragedy that 2020 brought to us.”

@tlwelling





Tracy Welling
Weeping Wisdom, 2021
(detail left)
Handmade abaca paper,
hand stretched kozo fiber,
copper net, paint, ink,
pearls, wood glue, felt
11 x 9½ ft.
Photo courtesy of the artist

"Repetitive processes are outlets. I am a machine when I enter my studio: walk in, sit down, turn 'off' brain, let my hands take over. My hands repeat the same motion again and again till they cannot go any longer...My thoughts go in circles, my crochet hook builds upon segments of circles. Repetition, and internalization of that repetition, becomes ritual, myth, and ultimately wisdom through consciousness. By participating in an action repeatedly, I create a narrative that exists through the life of that repetitive experience."

@ms_melisbanu



Melis Agabigum

When the sun rises, sometimes it's hard to believe there ever was a night, 2016

Copper, spray paint, graphite
Various dimensions depending on installation
Photo courtesy of the artist



Leslie Shershow

Short-Cut 3 (front and back), 2021
Copper, aluminum, luminescent film,
resin, fake pearls
12 x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Photos courtesy of the artist



"Guided by horror vacui, the fear of empty spaces, *Short-Cut* exposes an insatiable seeking, and a desire to evade unwanted thoughts by distracting myself with things...It comes together in an articulated, chaotic, and often indiscernible jumble, representing a put-on magic, and an attempt to aggressively find joy within my work."

@shersh_oh

