



THE

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## The Arts

### Love for Nature Sparks C.J. Lori's "Trees Leaving" Series

BY LESLIE POND

For many of us, trees and plants are mostly a backdrop to our day-to-day lives. If you're like me, you may not know the names of most flora that you walk by every day. Not so for artist C.J. Lori, whose passion for trees shines through in her paintings and in conversation. We sat down in her home/studio recently for a wide-ranging discussion about her influences, motivations, and



C. . Lori's "Emigres," oil on canvas, 24 x 30, 2022



C. . Lori's "Take Me With You," oil on canvas, 30x40, 2018

IMAGES COURTESY OF C.J. LORI



"Trees Leaving" series; the trees in our community; space exploration; climate-oriented art; and more.

Lori is a self-

taught painter who lives in Brookline, near Audubon Circle. She started drawing in her tween years, with pen and ink, and nature has been a constant theme in her artwork from the beginning. "I grew up loving animals a lot...and I find it hard to ignore nature," she says.

Since 2005, Lori has created "Trees Leaving," a signature series with close to 80 oil paintings and counting. "When I do a series of paintings, usually I have five maybe, but not this many...I find that there's always new places for them to leave," she says. "It's all about wanting other people to see what I see, the way I see it, and the trees are a big part of it."

Originally inspired by a tree-impooverished agricultural landscape in southern France and René Magritte's surrealist paintings of floating men in bowler hats, Lori's paintings show trees soaring into the atmosphere. For Lori, "Trees are people...and basically we are the

trees, so I try to make some of my trees anthropomorphic."

Some of Lori's favorite trees show up in her paintings. The airborne tree with three trunks in "Sic Transit Birch" lived on the Brookline side of the Muddy River, between the Carlton Street Footbridge and Park Drive. "I painted it so many times because I just have a thing for it," says Lori. The traditional phrase "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi" [thus passes away the glory of the world] and an episode of the 1990s sci-fi TV series "Babylon 5" inspired the painting's title.

In "Take Me With You," a large American beech tree, which also lived along the Muddy River, remains firmly rooted as a constellation of trees takes flight from a verdant landscape. With one of these trees is a human, kneeling and holding onto its trunk. A comment from a viewer of Lori's paintings at an art reception, not long after the 2016 U.S. election, inspired the painting.

That both trees have since died adds to the poignant, spiritual, and rather alarming effect of seeing trees leave our earth. The paintings become memorials to fallen trees. Lori says, "I've lived here since 1979, and I've painted so many trees that don't exist anymore." Yet for Lori, "It's all about trying to synthesize the horror and the beauty, the hope and the despair. It's always about

trying to embrace the multiplicity of reality." In their places, Lori has seen young birch and beech trees take root.

Lori's experience in France sparked her concern about the damage that humans cause on our planet, from clear-cutting old-growth trees to animal and plant species going extinct, and the impact of climate change on people. Her painting "Émigrés" is a metaphor for those who have to flee their homes due to climate change. (The maple tree on the left is another favorite that Lori has painted many times. It continues to reside along the Muddy, near the place of her favorite birch.)

Lori has also advocated for tree preservation. "Brookline passed a law so that you can't just willy-nilly cut down trees on your property anymore. That's something I was pushing for," Lori says.

Lori is a member of two climate change-oriented artists' groups, Shared Habitat Earth (SHE) and Inspiring Change for the Climate Crisis (i3C); both groups frequently exhibit at venues in the Boston area and beyond. "Each is run by a woman with a strong vision," says Lori. "It is always meaningful and energizing to connect with other artists whose work confronts issues akin to my own. Adding to that is the excitement of the variety of styles, media, and methods used to create the work.

"And both groups do a good job of bringing climate change to a human level: here's what you can do in your home, here's what you can plant, here's who you can write to."

"I do believe that art can catalyze people to take action," Lori emphasizes. "Shared Habitat Earth had an exhibition where two large paintings with lush green backgrounds were covered with many photos of drought. Viewers were encouraged to remove a drought photo and write on the back one thing they would do to help the environment. Plenty of reference materials were offered to help them select something. I saw several folks very excited by the process and the simple idea that we can all make a difference.

"The i3C Artists group has given away native plants for people to put in their gardens and are doing it again this spring. In conjunction with the shows, i3C offers workshops for creating art from recycled materials. Art can really help change people's thinking and actions."

To learn more about Lori's artwork and current exhibits, visit [cjlori.com](http://cjlori.com). For Shared Habitat Earth exhibits and events, visit [sharedhabitatearth.org](http://sharedhabitatearth.org). For the i3C Artists group, visit [i3cartists.com](http://i3cartists.com).

Leslie Pond lives in the West Fens.