

# ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

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## Artists on Coping: Orly Cogan

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



Orly Cogan in front of POW (Power of Women), hand stitched embroidery, paint and appliqué on vintage bed linen, from her solo show at The Brattleboro Museum of Art

New York artist Orly Cogan was born in Israel and educated at Cooper Union and the Maryland Institute College of Art. Working with vintage printed fabrics and found embroideries, she has been at the forefront of the fiber arts movement, with an emphasis on Feminism. Notable exhibitions include the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, CT, Museum of Arts & Design, NY, Riverside Museum, Riverside, CA, Hudson River Museum, NY, Textile Museum of Toronto, Brattleboro Museum VT, San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, Woodson Art Museum, Wausau, WI, Fresno Metropolitan Museum, CA, Musee International Des Arts Modeste, Sete,

France, Rijswijk Textile Biennial in the Museum Rijswijk, and the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design.



*Childs Play, 48 x 36 inches, hand stitched embroidery, appliqué and paint on vintage baby linen (detail)*

**AS: How are you coping?**

**OC:** For now, pretty well. But it's day-by-day, depending on what I read or see on social media. This epidemic is unlike anything we've experienced—surreal, with so much information on how to conduct one's life to stay healthy. It's especially challenging for children who need structure to feel safe and know what comes next. I'm working to keep things lighter around my daughter.

I'm an only child, and have always been comfortable being solo and occupying myself, and as an artist, feel like I've been trained in social distancing, lol! If they're lucky, artists spend a lot of time alone in their studios because you need that kind of solitary time to ruminate on ideas and work out visual problems. But I'm a social spirit, and it's challenging not being able to go out, but crucial that we all keep our distance, and stressful to read about people who are not doing so.

My work takes a long time to create and I listen to public radio. I'm riveted now to news about this mysterious, highly contagious virus because so much is changing so

fast. I'm thankful that so far my immediate family isn't sick, and my heart goes out to all who are suffering and to all the people out there doing what they can to help!



*Life Force, 80 x 90 inches, lace, hand-stitched embroidery, crochet appliqué, and paint on vintage bed linen (detail)*



*New Way to Play, 28 x 22 inches, pencil on paper*

**AS: Has your routine changed?**

**OC:** I'm mostly working from home now as I need to oversee my daughter's home schooling, figure out how to keep a somewhat sterilized household, and make food runs as safely as possible. I'm not crazy about the added screen time, an issue we're constantly trying to navigate. It's a slippery slope, but clearly an essential tool during a time when we're not able to physically interact with others. I'm fortunate to have my little family and know how difficult it is for people who live alone, like my mother. I now FaceTime my parents regularly and long to hug them. I'm grateful to have my dogs to cuddle with. The power of touch is important, and with physical connection not an option, having a pet to snuggle with makes a big difference. If reading this strikes a heartstring, now would be a good time to go to a shelter and adopt a pet.



*Detail of work in progress*

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

**OC:** It's possible to be alone and not be lonely, especially now when we are all in this together! The virus doesn't differentiate between color, sex or status, which makes it a universal experience. Many businesses are frozen, with no sense of when or how we'll recover from this global assault. People in the arts are especially hit hard, and I'm particularly concerned how artists and galleries will survive. My husband owns a gallery, and I'm deeply concerned how his business will weather this crisis. Maybe the whole industry will have to reinvent itself. I also think about my father who's a doctor in his seventies and still seeing patients every day. He is passionate about

this important work and I have to understand and commend his dedication to the greater good.



*Detail of work in progress*

**AS: What matters most right now?**

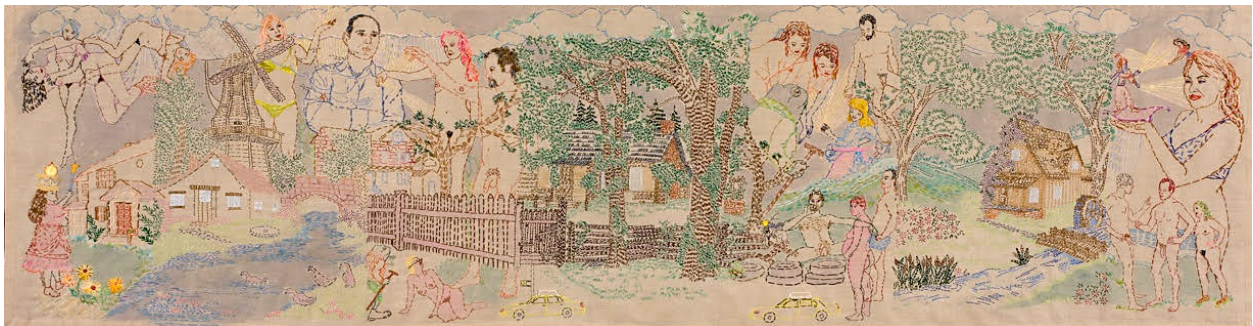
**OC:** Finding a remedy, a vaccine, a cure. Despite the horrible number of deaths, I know several people who've recovered from the virus, which has given me some solace. In some ways I feel this is a wake-up call, and hope when this is over we remember the missteps that got us here. Politically, the US has become extremely polarized and this needs to change. Perhaps during self-isolation we can reflect on changes needed to improve our lives and function better as world citizens and custodians of the planet.



*Site specific wall installation, granite, thread, beads, buttons, embroidery, crochet, vintage handkerchiefs (detail)*

**AS:** Any thoughts about the road ahead?

**OC:** Many topics and concerns that inform and inspire my work will probably remain in place until a new regime forces progressive change. Injustices, especially control issues between the sexes, has been one of my chief narratives, though recent pieces also address environment and animal welfare issues. My work usually reflects some autobiographical aspect of how I process the world I see through visual story telling. I hope the road ahead enables renewed traction on these topics where we've recently lost so much progress.



*East of Eden, 24 x 80 inches, hand stitched embroidery and paint on vintage linen*  
All photos courtesy of the artist.

Catherine Kirkpatrick is a writer and photographer based in New York. She wrote the introductions to Meryl Meisler's two books, and is currently working on an oral history about recent changes in photography.