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Otake on “An Artist’s Practice in the Year of Pandemic and Political Cries”

by [Olivia Drake](#) • November 16, 2020

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As a dancer and choreographer, Wesleyan’s Visiting Dance Artist-in-Residence [Eiko Otake](#) spent the past 45-plus years of her career presenting her work in theaters, universities, museums, galleries, outdoor sites, and festivals worldwide. But like other artists navigating through the crisis, Otake was forced to find creative ways to re-focus, re-imagine, and share her work during the ongoing pandemic.

In March 2020, the Center for the Arts invited Otake to begin a Virtual Creative Residency, during which she began shifting her performance-based art to an online venue named [Eiko Otake’s Virtual Studio](#). Here, Otake posts her new creations, dialogues, and reflections.

On Nov. 15, Otake led a virtual tour and conversation titled “An Artist’s Practice in the Year of Pandemic and Political Cries.” She was joined by two of her collaborators, [DonChristian Jones ’12](#) and [Iris McCloughan ’10](#). McCloughan also moderated the discussion.

The group shared works such as [Your Morning Is My Night](#), [Fish House](#), [Visit](#), [Attending](#), [A Body in a Cemetery](#), [Saving](#), and others.

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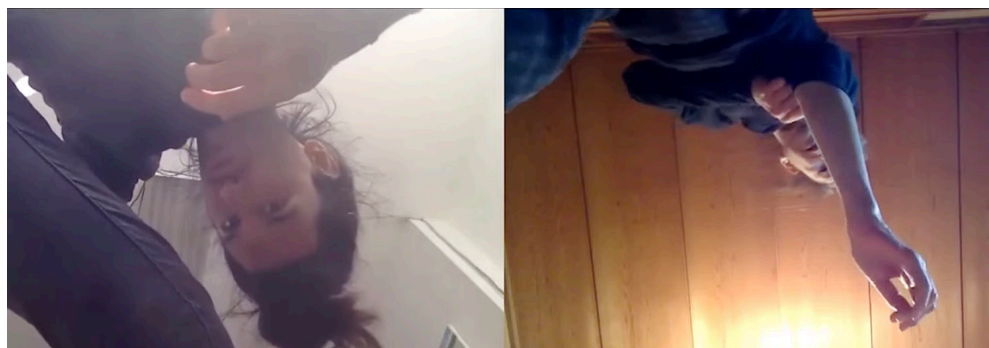
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On Nov. 15, Eiko Otake, DonChristian Jones '12, and Iris McCloughan '10 presented a live, virtual conversation titled "An Artist's Practice in the Year of Pandemic and Political Cries." McCloughan also moderated the discussion. In 2020, Otake was invited by Wesleyan's Center for the Arts (CFA) to its first Virtual Creative Residency. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Otake created Virtual Studio, a space to share newly created and newly edited video works, written reflections, the voices of her collaborators, dialogues with artists and writers, and response from viewers.



In April 2020, while McCloughan was quarantined in their studio in Brooklyn, N.Y., and Otake was more than 6,760 miles away in Toyko, Japan, the duo decided to collaborate on an experimental piece over Zoom. Based on a poem written by McCloughan, they released the 4-minute, 40-second piece *Your Morning Is My Night* on May 5. McCloughan, a trans artist and writer, has worked with Otake since 2014 as a dramaturg for her solo project *A Body in Places*. McCloughan's practice spans text, performance, and image-making to explore the queer body, its physical and discursive constructions, and its expansive potential. "Both of us at that time were really struggling . . . from the sudden closure of all of those structures of engaging with people through performance. [Otake was] insistent that we do something over Zoom. I was a little skeptical. But it was [Otake] that made me be able to ask the question for the first time: 'What is possible in this new configuration that may have not been possible before?'" McCloughan said.



During her Virtual Creative Residency, Otake edited *Attending* footage from her duet with McCloughan as a part of the premiere performance of *The Duet Project: Distance is Malleable* at 2019 American Dance Festival. While editing, Otake attempted to transform performance footage into a more abstract and elemental media work. Otake regards performance as a practice of dying.



DonChristian Jones (he/his)

In addition to being a choreographer, Jones is a visual artist, rapper, singer/songwriter, and producer. His work spans musical and time-based performance, rap mixtapes, video, and public murals, blending genres of painting and hip hop, and referencing classical and contemporary styles.



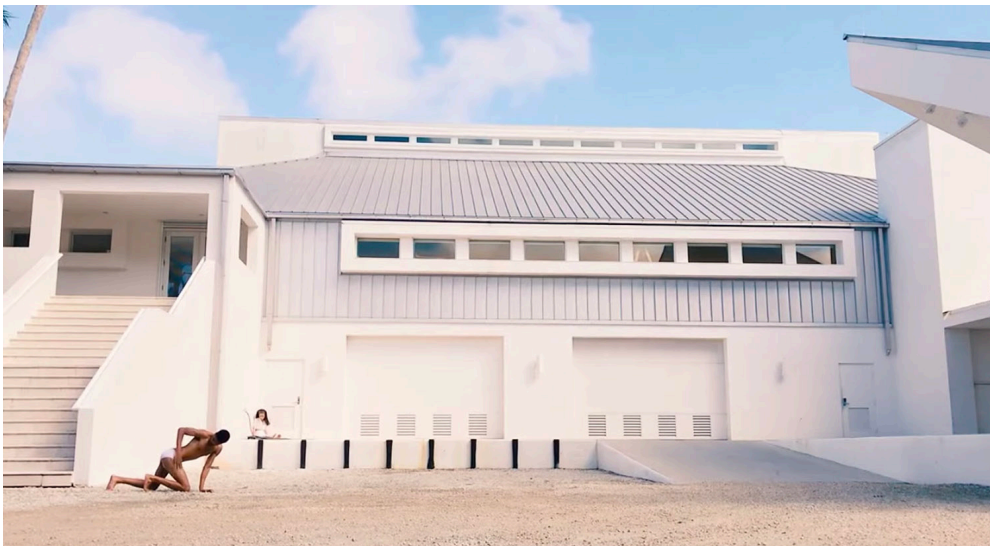
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Congratulations to Christina Leone, a Wesleyan staff member, for placing second on last night's episode of [@Jeopardy](#).

Leone is one of nine members of the Wesleyan community to



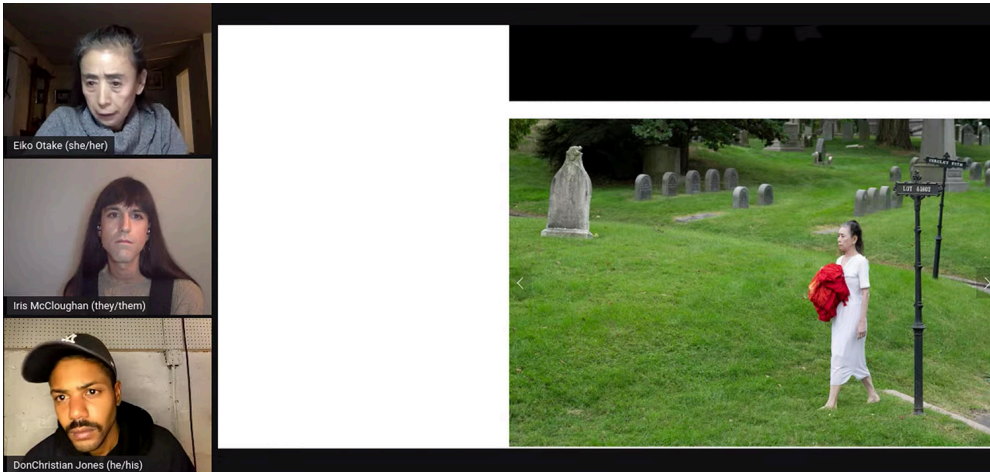
Otake and Jones collaborated in *Visit*, a 6-minute, 20-second work filmed in 2017.



Jones created *Savings* and placed Otake's body in the frame. He also wrote the piece's accompanying music.



Jones performed in *Fish House*, a 3-minute, 49-second piece directed, filmed, and edited by Otake in 2017. Otake recently edited the footage in Japan during quarantine. After editing, Otake realized that this is the first media work she created without her own body.



Otake presented her first, and only, live performance during the pandemic titled "A Body in a Cemetery" Sept. 26–27 at the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, N.Y. Audience members watched while social distancing. Otake, who normally interacts with and physically touches her audience, had to alter her performance techniques for the production. "I'm small. I can't see into people's eyes. I have to be close. This is about sharing space together," she said.

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