

*Introduction to*

WENDY ARTIN - HERE TODAY

Athens, Paris, Rome, London, New York

by Joshua David, 2017

We travel through place and time, in cities not our own. An ancient form – a column, arch or heroic head – holds its place on the line of history, while we hover in the here and now, movie gods and rock stars watching from the walls.

Wendy Artin's paintings tell the story of a nomadic life, with periods of movement and periods of settling in. From her irregular migrations through New York come the walls of SoHo and torsos modeled at the Academy. From her time putting down the roots of family life in Rome come sprawling ruins, stone-pine landscapes, market still-lives, and the balletic poses of beautiful friends, captured in moments of grace.

The eye that frames these subjects, and the hand that coaxes them into the light, awaken the hunger we feel as travelers. What are the secrets of a street? What lies behind that faded, regal door? What are the markings on the stucco trying to tell us? They are talismans, stirring the lust that compels us into neighborhoods and alleyways that we are warned against.

The wall paintings started in Paris years ago. Wendy was preparing to leave that city and doing watercolors of objects from the street as a way of remembering – a bicycle, a Deux Chevaux – when the background walls began to interest her more than the objects in the foreground. She spent five years focused on walls almost exclusively, as she moved through Mexico, Guatemala, Rome, New York, and Boston – “the view of the person who arrives.”

I saw Wendy's wall paintings for the first time when she lived in New York – though she never lived here for long, it was more like stop-offs between Europe and South America, always in a different sublet. One sweltering night in the early '90s, camped in a borrowed basement apartment on Waverly Street, she grilled shrimps in the weedy back yard and stirred tomatoes in a pan inside, heating the garlic gently, to keep its bitterness at bay. She'd been sitting on sidewalks downtown, and she showed us watercolors of cast-iron facades with spray-painted tags, rusty standpipes, and wheat-pasted flyers for an off-Broadway production of *Dracula*, a Joey Arias party, the rapturous face of Anita Ekberg in *La Dolce Vita*, slowly peeling away. They were fleeting and eternal, as dark and moody as New York City was in those years.

And so it continued, city to city, walls and more walls, until, in Rome, when her traveling slowed, she began to feel that the essence of that city transcended its walls, and she turned to the Forum, Roman cityscapes, and Romans themselves – subjects that occupied her fully as she made her home in Trastevere, married to Bruno, mother to Lily and Leo.

During all the years she was living in Rome and painting its beauties, she never left walls behind. They were always there, at the edge of her gaze, and one day, in Athens, while looking up at the Parthenon frieze, she felt the familiar tug and rushed out of the Acropolis Museum back to a wall she'd seen earlier in the day, with a stenciled image of Madonna and a scrawl of graffiti that transformed the American icon into a goddess of the Greek street.

And so the season for Wendy's walls has returned, blooming amid the budding branches and models that she painted at the same time. Each glimpse of a celebrity triggers a sense of partial recognition, a drunken flicker from a dream you can't fully remember but also can't forget. The walls have grown denser with images and symbols – and luminescent; the years Wendy spent studying the light in Rome make everything glow from within. The hues are brighter, the colors of a restoration, the gloom to which we've grown accustomed now cleaned away. They are a rebirth, a celebration of life in a world you will never really understand, where the people who walked the road before you are trying to tell you something, marking the trail to a place that you didn't know you were looking for.

Joshua David

New York 2017