

ON THE COVER

Lyrical Branches II by Letitia Lee

This article is based on a video interview with the artist on December 4, 2024, and a review of her website, <https://www.leemeeart.com/>.

With an open and friendly smile, Letitia Lee drew me into her exhibit area at an art show in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. We began talking and I felt strongly that Letitia's art would be interesting and meaningful for readers of *American Psychologist* and compelling for them to enjoy.

Lyrical Branches II is our cover art for this issue of *American Psychologist*. As the artist indicates, it represents relationship, connection, and togetherness. In fact, it is a mirror image of a companion piece, *Lyrical Branches I* (not shown). Side by side, the companion pieces show the whole sun. Letitia asks us to think about common roots among individuals and urges us to reach out to people because that makes us more whole, whether spouses/partners, friends, family members, or even strangers. Letitia practices and seeks out ways to engage with people and convey dignity and respect in all her interactions. Our interview began with a conversation about the love and respect Letitia feels for her two grandmothers, one almost 100 years old and the other nearly 90 years old. Both of her grandmothers are still fully engaged with life. The two are distinct and different in their backgrounds and personalities. These sometimes vast differences were the foundation for Letitia's openness, compassion, and empathy. For her, if the other side of an opinion or fact was not shown, there was no space for the truth to be seen. Our interview also delved into the impact of race and socioeconomic factors and how those lived experiences affected/effected Letitia's life and her works as a Black woman. Letitia gave examples of painful and at times threatening moments to her well-being. When things felt at their worst, she often remembered her family's advice to "treat people as you want to be treated" and to understand that "close proximity changes minds."

Letitia's works of art highlight color, often incorporating opposites from the color wheel into her paintings. She finds color to be both an emotional experience and a physiological

one. She spoke fondly of her two art teachers (Ms. Rash and Coach Mann) in her public high school in Hampton Roads, Virginia, who actively showed/taught her the fundamental elements of design. It was the color theory that impacted Letitia's thinking, feeling, and being the most. She aims for lively art that "gets your blood flowing." Two of her favorite artists that inspire Letitia's works are Frida Kahlo, for how she "stood up for what she believed, period." The other was Vincent Van Gogh, who was able to capture luminescence, especially in dark scenes. Even more so Letitia loves how Van Gogh cared about his fellow man in his, for example, potato farmers paintings, "You can just feel his empathy and appreciation for the workers." In *Lyrical Branches II*, Letitia paints multiple layers of acrylics. She uses palette knives to build delicate details and texture and ends with chips of gold leaf to bring forth the sparkle and intensity of the work.

When she started her postsecondary education, Letitia expected she might land in the corporate world. Raised by a single-parent mother with very little money, Letitia felt the pressure and the support from her family for her to succeed. An all-star high school athlete (basketball, softball, tennis), she was offered athletic scholarships, first to Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, and then to Elon University in Elon, North Carolina, where she graduated with a double major in fine arts and broadcast communications. Despite her strong people skills and perseverance, Letitia experienced difficulties finding a job in either field. Feeling completely dispirited and hopeless, Letitia kept going. After another discouraging moment, her mother suggested that she take some of her paintings to a local art show. To her surprise, Letitia sold her works and made more money in 1 day than she had during a month in any of her other jobs! She was delighted to see that this was possible, and she remains an artist to this day.

 Anne E. Kazak
Art Editor