



MELANA BONTRAGER | Artist Statement

Fragmented Landscape

My work most often starts with line. Beginning my landscapes with graphite and India Ink, I allow emotion, intention, thoughts, and often the influences of music or written word to inform my layers of line. These “fragmented landscapes” reflect elements I’ve transcribed from nature and are created from multiple layers drawn over the top of each other in graphite. From these initial graphite marks, I then choose a combination of lines to create one combined landscape which I draw in India Ink and often another layer of graphite as well. The result becomes a fragmented representation of the whole.

I find landscape a beautiful metaphor for the human experience. While we are broken, uneven beings—battered by life, shaped by our individual experiences—together we make up a complicated but amazing network. Individual experiences can sometimes feel useless or random at best. And yet, these experiences can miraculously be the path to connection with others who have suffered similarly. And there is often a captivating beauty that grows from these fragmented places: what once felt pointless, can begin to hold meaning.

My work is not intended to negate hardship, nor to glamorize suffering, but rather to point to the redemptive beauty of transformation in the face of that hardship and struggle. I believe we have been created with an innate need for each other: to respond to each other, to flourish beside one another. As we listen to each other’s stories, we discover connections, hope, and a reminder that we don’t traverse this life alone. It is my goal to represent these beautiful discoveries through my painting.