

Jo Bertini- Artist Statement 2024

Love for desert lands runs deep, seeming to connect with some kind of fundamental longing. The powerful attraction of deserts is most often linked to a sense of its 'spiritually charged' nature. Our instinctive response, from the early indigenous and tribal, to the colonial and contemporary, has been to create artworks that act as enduring testimonials to this effect. We share a compulsion to make art which describes the possibility of an intimate, mystical connection with these special places. The solitary, inviolable nature of deserts has been persistent in the human psyche for millennia. Historically, the western view of deserts has consistently been as places of wildness to be conquered or empty inhospitable wastelands. However, there is also the indigenous view of deserts as benevolent homelands, places of pilgrimage, housing something inherently sacred.

My focus is the female experience of wild desert places as opposed to the predominantly patriarchal archive. Rather than a nostalgic approach, I am interested in personalizing this landscape, introducing a contemporary, feminine perspective into the historical archive and offering alternative versions and ways of seeing which can contribute to a deeper, more holistic and extensive understanding of desert environments. I am interested in turning the contemporary complexities of environmental, scientific and wilderness concerns into poetry. My paintings celebrate and treasure the beauty and resilience of the isolation and wildness of desert landscapes which still allure us with their mystery, ambiguities and secrets. Desert light has an elusive, fleeting quality which can transform the landscape in an instant. Initially, the spectacular beauty of these places enchant us. My challenge is to see beyond representation, beyond re-recording the historical and acknowledged, but rather to create a unique, personal aesthetic.

After many decades of living and working in different remote desert places of the world with indigenous custodians, tribal nomads, scientists and environmentalists, my perspective and observations have been significantly informed and enhanced. Desert landscapes have become filtered through a vivid kaleidoscope of memory, knowledge, research and experience. My paintings are composites of times and places, unifying the transitory ephemera of different seasons with a deep appreciation for the timelessness of desert landforms and archeology. Landscapes are collections of stories, only fragments of which are visible at any one time. In linking these fragments, diverse desert landscapes can be recreated as my own personal landscapes, metaphors, allegories and myths.

My paintings serve as a kinship to the natural world and its creatures, known and unknown, a personal female tribute to the seen and unseen, becoming a form of devotion. It is a devotion that transports both the artist and the viewer away somewhere, where there are only the sounds of wildness, the variegated colors of desert sands and the songs of dry hills.

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