

Artist's Statement

When I applied for a travel grant and artist's residencies in 2007, my idea was to explore American landscapes very different from any I had ever painted before, and also different from each other. Flying across the country from East to West, you see the lush country and the enormous rivers of the Midwest. As you approach the Rocky Mountains, there is seemingly endless, lonely brown dryness, with miles-long roads terminating at one house. I thought that these very different landscapes would allow me to connect to emotional and elemental themes that I could use as metaphor in future paintings. An example of this can be seen in my mural *Sandy's Dream*, at Main and Levering Streets in Manayunk, in which I used the rugged California coast to represent the difficult challenge of Ovarian cancer, and the beautiful, but sometimes inimical or uncaring quality of nature. My newest mural, at Juniper and Spruce, depicts a celebratory meal with friends and family, and the landscape shows the earth as a lush and beautiful garden. My thought was it to make it feel like a space you could fall in love with.

I started out in Saint Louis in the fall of 2007, painting the confluences of some of the biggest rivers of the continent: the Mississippi, the Missouri, and the Illinois. Someone slipped me a copy of Undaunted Courage, the story of Meriwether Lewis and the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which tracks a courageous band of Americans who searched for an all-water route from St Louis to the Pacific Ocean. In light of the outstanding dryness in our western states, I had always been mystified by that goal, and was curious how they could have possibly succeeded.

I thought Lewis and Clark didn't have much to do with me until I began painting at the Ucross Foundation, in Wyoming. The creeks that run through the property turn out to be the tiny tributaries of the mighty Missouri River that flows into the Mississippi at Saint Louis. That's the same route that Lewis and Clark took. So my trip was really all about water, and where I thought there was only contrast, there was confluence, of waters, of trade, and of cultural connection. Our modern world tends to take on the blandness of convenience and familiarity, protecting us from the natural dangers that Lewis & Clark confronted on their journey: drought, flood, cold, etc. Even while we make things more convenient for ourselves, it is important to appreciate and preserve the sacred spaces that challenge our hearts and renew our lives.

I want to thank Cerulean Arts, whose energy, perspicacity, and support has meant so much to me as an artist, and the Center for Emerging Visual Artists, whose generous grant enabled this excellent adventure. The trip has provided knowledge and inspiration, as well as precious imagery and metaphor for future paintings, large and small. These opportunities also opened other doors for me:

Artist's Residencies at the Ucross Foundation - Ucross, Wyoming
November and December, 2007, Hartford IL's Confluence Tower and Margaret Wright's Tara Point,
October and November, 2007

Exhibition at the Lewis and Clark State Historic Site
September 6-28, 2008 - Hartford, IL, supported by exhibition grants from The Illinois Great Rivers
Bike Ride and the Lewis & Clarke Society of America

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