

LISA ESPENMILLER

Artist Statement

The art I make is influenced by those practices in my life that encourage stillness and a focus on the moment at hand: twice-daily zazen (a form of Zen meditation), the ritual of tea, and the tending of our garden. Through my paintings and works on paper I want to create a space where the mind of the viewer finds refuge from the noise and ceaseless activity, not only of our culture, but of the mind itself.

The lines and washes of color in *The Way* and *Where you come from* series describe the subtle energy around and in us that can be sensed when one meditates or becomes acutely aware of the present moment. They express this “something that flows through all things, inside and outside,” what Lao Tzu, the Taoist philosopher, describes as chi. In both of these series I work with a square format to emphasize that the paintings and drawings function both as mirror and window. Viewers are invited to stand before each one allowing the piece to reflect what’s inside, or to see into another layer of reality. The title of both series comes from Tzu’s *Tao te Ching* (“The Way and the Power of the Way”). Each piece is a representation of and is named for one of the chapters of the Tao.

The groundless ground, the title of another series of works on paper, is a Zen term that describes the ever-shifting inner and outer landscape. The making of these drawings complements my zazen practice. As in meditation, I must remain seated and immersed in the realization of the piece for a focused, uninterrupted period of time until the drawing is complete. Working with ink, water, dip pen and brush, each line drawn emulates the groundless ground, no sooner does it appear, than it disappears, renewing its shape then immediately breaking up and forming again. There is little time or space for the logical mind to intervene in an attempt to control the outcome. The pace of each line and the movement of the dip pen are guided by intuition and “no-mind”, accepting and trusting what presents itself in each fluid, changing moment.

I suspect that also being a writer and poet - for years writing words on paper with pen, led to this compulsion to draw line after line after line. I see these lines as an extension of my poetry, another form of written language beckoning us to the necessity of stillness, to awareness of what is happening right now.