



“CONTEMPLATION OF VASTNESS,” 2012

Gala Bent

GOUACHE, WATERCOLOR AND
GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 30" X 22"

PHOTO: COURTESY G. GIBSON GALLERY

SEATTLE

Gala Bent: “Geology of Longing” at G. Gibson Gallery

In “Geology of Longing,” Seattle-based artist Gala Bent, mines complex, diverse, and not necessarily human relationships with sparkling geometric landscapes in gouache, watercolor and graphite. Her faceted constructions suggest parallels between human nature and nature’s nature, as made manifest in desert plains, swirling azure skies, gaping caves, and steep cliffs that bear decidedly human bodily attributes. The swelling mounds in *Contemplation of Vastness* (all works 2012) mutate into nipple-topped crests while the stump-like figure in *Hydrophiliac* reveals a water-filled gash of a mouth. At other times Bent literally confuses ground and figure: *Mossy Figure* depicts an organic coat of many colors whose patches of green and yellow plant matter cloak an underlying man or woman. Bent has not only turned the world upside down, but also inside out, by putting the very ground we normally walk upon, on us.

Her almost scientifically detailed images are seemingly at odds with her surreal worlds, but a peculiar type of tension is fostered between her fantastical subject matter and her pencil and ink precision. She’s

been called an illustrator, and while her work bears some of the narrative qualities associated with that title, Bent doesn’t create images to enhance prefabricated content. On the contrary, her images are rife with stories that hold a logic all their own, from the black mound at the edge of a river edging towards dark mountains in *Contemplation of Sorrow*, to the lynch-like upside-down vegetation of *Hanging Garden*. Something is happening, and it may even be horrible, but there’s a certain level-headedness that surrounds the hysteria of her finely rendered drawings, as if Bent were playing a crime scene reporter in a kid’s school play. It’s simply too silly to be taken seriously. Or is it?

Contemplation in Exile bears a rainbow halo, barely visible behind the form of a simultaneously amorphous and angular floating island. We may be adrift upon the water, suggests Bent, but as long as we’re here, we may as well enjoy the view.

—SUZANNE BEAL