

## ARTIST STATEMENT

### *Linear Metaphysics: Contemporary Mark-Making and Time-Based Art Works*

The stratification or layering of time is of particular interest to me as an artist working in 21<sup>st</sup> century global and visual culture because the contemporary paintings, prints and embossed images I create inherently reflect their origins as both, part of the time-honored ancient tradition or continuum of mark-making by human beings, and the original form of time-based media. My creative agenda incorporates the exploration of and research into the history and prehistory of the unique culture of the peoples of ancient Scotland and Britain to contextualize what I have seen and experienced abroad first hand for use in my artwork. I work in a cross-disciplinary manner to explore the creative process as it relates to this larger artistic dialogue so an integral element of my work is the examination of historical or recurring themes that help contextualize our present relationship to the landscape and our place in it as human beings.

I discovered profound connections and parallels between how I view, respond to and interact with the landscape of my present and how the people of ancient Scotland and Britain were intertwined with their natural surroundings. I felt a visceral connection to the land itself and the stone structures, carved objects, dwellings and surfaced stones that were handled and physically manipulated by creative beings in history and prehistory. Because of their connection to and reverence for the natural world, the alteration and devastation of their landscape during occupation and subsequent invasion was a form of annihilation. I considered the successive waves of persecution suffered by these ancient tribal peoples whose spirituality, identity and shared humanity were so immersed in the land, sea and cosmos. The titles for the art in this exhibition are some of the known recorded names used to identify just some of these Celtic and Iron Age tribes in early Scotland and Britain by Greek and Roman historians in antiquity. These early people either aligned themselves with neighboring tribes who shared similar languages or belief systems, were occupied and oppressed by others, or were subsumed by conquering peoples. We do not even know what they called themselves, nor do we know what specific elements of humanity have made their way in the continuum from these ancient people as they evolved into our present but we have evidence of their existing culture in fragments and the landscape. I examined the relationships these ancient objects, structures and earthworks have with their immediate surroundings to better understand the people who revered and worked with them as a sophisticated testament to their shared cultural humanity and interrelationship with the landscape just as I now work with the materials I have at hand as a practicing artist whose experience, reverence, treatment of and relationship to the landscape has shaped and influenced the way in which I perceive my own surroundings and my ongoing contributions to contemporary global visual culture.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach in my recent research to investigate the relationship of art and archaeology throughout the history and prehistory of ancient Scotland and Britain was an extension of my exploration of the larger scholarly and creative themes regarding a sense of identity, place, time and purpose. Formal study of our collective history allows me to distinguish the peoples and ideas of the present from those of the past as we exist and create in this continuum. In *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland*, Neal Ascherson, describes the notion of 'cultural landscape' being rediscovered among present day historians, archaeologists and anthropologists as they depart from a Western anthropocentric perspective to consider the vision of Neolithic peoples who may have understood themselves and their imaginations as integrated components of the larger natural world. This is intriguing because the Western scientific notion of dividing people, places and objects into separate segments first in order to study them runs counter to my professional training which prepares me to approach things in their entirety and as a whole before breaking them down into parts since, as an artist, I also view and understand my perceptions, imagination and sense of identity as components of the natural world. My experience of most things begins with a general comprehension and develops into a much more specific understanding as my focus intensifies. The formal processes I develop and employ in the creation of my art involve the exploration of ideas over time as they move from the general to the specific in much the same manner. The application of overlapping linear elements, marks, paint and ink create a stratification and layering of time as an integral feature in this comprehensive body of work. Parallels exist between the surface and spatial relationships created on these painted canvases and intaglio prints and the surface treatment, marks, patterns and structural assembly seen on the stones of ancient Scotland and Britain that have been worked by wind, weather, water and human hands as well as the effects of time. The remnants and fragments of our shared humanity inform the layering and stratification of our current and comprehensive cultural landscape that will one day remain for future generations to ponder.

**James B. Thompson**