

FORCE of NATURE

DENVER PAINTER MINDY BRAY MANIPULATES ICONIC LANDSCAPES
TO EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE.

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In west-facing views of the Denver skyline, angular skyscrapers cut through a Rocky Mountain tableau, providing a visual reminder of the urban setting's proximity to the untamed wild. That tension provides endless inspiration for Denver painter Mindy Bray, who flattens mountains and rivers into sharp angles and planes of surreal colors to create abstract landscapes that feel at once familiar and fabricated.

Bray's approach strays from traditional portrayals of Colorado. "In the past, landscape painting was used to provoke romantic ideals of the American West," she says, "but I'm more fascinated by how we build our cities to incorporate and manage nature. I think abstraction is a more contemporary expression of how we see the landscape as something we can contain and control."

This dynamic is reflected in Bray's unique creative process: She begins by photographing an outdoor scene, then edits the image using Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator, often zooming in to focus on one detail. She projects the final image onto a blank surface of canvas or paper and uses the photo to guide her pencil drawing, fragmenting the image as she works. Then, when choosing her palette of inks, acrylic, gouache or latex paints, Bray often gravitates toward beachy pastel yellows, pinks, greens and blues—colors not often associated with Colorado landscapes—"to emphasize the abstraction," she says.

Bray's artistic process and mind-set reflect her creative background. A native of Phoenix, she changed majors from photography to painting while studying at Arizona State University. "I was drawn to painting over photography because I liked the work of the painting process and being able to spend more time with a single image," she says.

In 2006, armed with a master of fine arts from the University of Iowa, she and her husband moved to Denver. "I was interested in what felt like an inclusive art community with an opportunity for growth," she says of the decision. The city has responded in kind: Bray has large-scale permanent public artworks on display at the Colorado Convention Center and the Westin Denver International Airport hotel, both portraying the Platte River at Denver's Confluence Park, a favorite spot for the artist. Her upcoming series will focus on "watercolors of simulated environments within architectural structures, such as greenhouses," she says, and will incorporate drawings, paintings and potentially a built structure. "Up to this point, I've been exploring our impact on the environment on an aesthetic level," she says. "But going forward, I want my work to represent that impact more explicitly. I live in Colorado because I love to be outside, but I understand that relationship comes with a challenge." 



Denver artist Mindy Bray (left) works on *Veiled*, a painting based on an image of a willow tree. On display on the walls of her studio are *Breakdown* (below), *Living Wall* (bottom, left), *In the Absence of (Sonoran Desert)* (bottom, right) and *Veiled* (opposite).

