

# TRANSFORMING THE DESERT

## – Christa Stephens

*Transforming the Desert* is Santa Fe artist Christa Stephens' emotional journey through the hard edges of her formative years on the Llano Estacado, a vast tableland that encompasses part of eastern New Mexico and northwestern Texas. She was born on the palisaded plain, which has often been described as “barren” and “desolate” due to its lack of vegetation, and was profoundly influenced by the stark geometry of this southwestern desert from an early age. Residing in the area through her twenties, she grew to revere her time on the high prairie as a metaphor for personal reflection and transformation.

Building on this experience, Stephens became keenly interested in the way human consciousness correlates to natural and cosmological cycles. Inspired by scientific analogies between galactic and neurological activity, and insights gained from mathematical models of mental and emotional processes, she began to infuse her desert-inspired geometric abstractions with symbolic depictions of the patterns that permeate our inner and outer worlds. She continues to cultivate these ideas through her ongoing series, *Skyscapes of the Llano Estacado: Abstractions from Beyond the Horizon Line*.

In these paintings, Stephens visualizes the southwestern sky as a conceptual substrate on which she condenses ethereal qualities of vapor and particles into geometric fragments. Hard edges draw upon the stark beauty of the immense staked plain, while bold, saturated colors dramatize the emotional density of one's journey through the allegorical desert of the soul. Using precisely rendered contrasting elements, she pieces together models of physical and perceptual phenomena, creating a subtractive and theatrical “mirage in the desert” description of the human experience.

These works amplify the horizon line between a calcified landscape and the infinity that rises from it; symbolizing the human capacity to thrive in, and ultimately transcend, the desert environments we face from without and within. They invite the viewer to consider that our true identities lie far beyond social and cultural constructs. From this perspective, phenomena that once seemed mythical or theoretical lie within the landscape of heart and mind.

### **About the Artist**

Christa Stephens grew up on the high plains of eastern New Mexico. After receiving a bachelor's degree in music, she pursued studies in fine art and graphic design that ultimately led to a unique expression of these three disciplines through her own visual language of geometric form and structure. Her vibrant, hard-edge abstractions draw upon the stark beauty of the southwestern desert and dramatize her musical sensibilities of rhythm, dynamics, and tonality.

Working from her studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Christa engages in a practice that combines playful improvisation with a cerebral approach to concept and method. Her formative process employs traditional media, but breaks with conventional techniques in order to distinguish the ephemeral qualities of observation and experience. Motivated by a life-long interest in the nature of existence, she uses contrasting elements to depict intricate patterns that symbolize physical and perceptual phenomena. Through this rigorous inquiry into the confluence of human intuition and cosmological cycles, she seeks to engage intellect and imagination in a theatrical and subtractive description of the natural world.