

## Lydia Gravis

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Nearly two years ago, I had the privilege of spending a week at Montello and starting a new body of work that emerged from my desire to give form to what's felt, but formless. The resilience of the human spirit is remarkable, and as I contemplated what felt like fragile embers of my own resilience at that time, I noticed the resilience mirrored back to me by the remote surrounding terrain and its persistent urge to survive despite harsh conditions.

Awestruck by the dark night sky while at Montello, and the sense that human destruction was far away, I was mesmerized by the deafening quiet and the quantum entanglements that emanated around and above. While in residence at Montello, I observed the most vibrant star-filled night sky I have ever witnessed, and it filled me with wonder and reminded me of my smallness. That week in the desert amplified my desire as an artist to create work that deepens the mystery we feel when we immerse ourselves in remote places and tune out the static of our daily routines.

Utilizing simple materials, my work explores the landscape of the human spirit, and the liminal space that exists between sensing and understanding. I use repetitive marks, intersecting concentric lines, and transparent layers to illuminate the life-source energy which envelops, connects, and heals. Intuitively responsive and empathic, my art practice is a visual meditation on our shared human experience.

As I drove to Montello and meandered over miles of unmarked dirt road, I smiled with gratitude for the gift of time and space that I was about to receive. The surrounding landscape seemed undeniably sacred, and it felt like I was coming home to myself in an inexplicable way. I knew the work I was about to make would visually translate what I felt, even though I didn't understand it. As I kept driving, I passed a charred hillside and it reminded me that the burnt remnants of wildfires eventually release potent nutrients that are necessary for verdant new growth. Nature is the best teacher; if only I slow down long enough to learn its valuable lessons.

My time at Montello gave me that stillness. The fire lessons continued during my time at the retreat, and on cold nights I kindled fires that brought me comfort and warmth. Unfortunately, it took me another seven months and the tough love and help of a damn good therapist before I learned the rest of that lesson: that the infernos of my own burnout were raging out of control, and my misallocated



*Rising from the Ashes*, ink, acrylic, chalk and oil pastel on paper, 38 x 50 in, 2024

devotion of time and attention were keeping them ablaze. I recently surrendered to this wisdom, and the longest burning wildfires in my life have begun to lose their momentum. It's going to take some time for their smoldering embers to fully extinguish and cool off, but when they do I know I will rise from the ashes.