

michael tangen • artist statement

Have you ever stopped to evaluate your impressions of things and events, and how you came to such conclusions? In the philosophy of Stoicism, this sort of introspective inquiry and assessment was taken quite seriously and served as the fulcrum between a life well-lived and a life on autopilot. Ancient philosophers had terminology related to these sort of inquiries: ***phantasia*** — that is, the impression or mental representation of an event, and its relationship to ***sunkatathesis***, or the act of assent or judgment we give to those impressions. The Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius confronted this in his ***Meditations*** (Book 6.13) — the discipline of challenging our impressions of truth and whether or not they are actually worthy of our assent. Furthermore, the first century philosopher Epictetus challenged his students with the notion that our suffering and our resulting poor choices stem not from events themselves, but from the *judgments* we attach to those events (Enchiridion, §5).

My research in the philosophy of Stoicism has served as a framework through which to examine our collective human experience, asking of myself the same questions I ask of you: what are my impressions, how did I arrive at such conclusions, and are there other possibilities that exist outside my particular point of view? I've extended this line of questioning representationally into my pieces through the use of ink washes and expressive line work in India ink, along with abstract watercolor underpaintings. I feel ink is a tremendous medium for exploring this sort of inquiry — it represents how polarized we become around matters of opinion or belief, it also represents a certain permanence that mirrors how rigid we become in our points of view. Furthermore the manner in which I gesturally apply the swaths of ink bear the likeness of how we rapidly and sometimes carelessly arrive at our verdicts, and the areas of complex textures and patterns illustrate how complex and nuanced much of life really is, and how we try to distill the intricate into oversimplified stories and iconography.

I invite you to join me in this contemplative self-inquiry: “What do I see — not just in the art, but every day living? What are my impressions, and by what means did I arrive at those conclusions? How might I explore other angles and points of view, challenging myself to arrive at a more rigorously tested impression?”

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