

Portraits of the Precarious Earth: Environmental Melancholia

Donna Bassin

A visual meditation on the environmental crisis and the labor of repair.

The landscapes we depend on are vanishing faster than we can learn to mourn them. My work responds to this accelerated loss by stitching, rupturing, and layering photographic terrains to reveal the psychic and ecological fractures beneath the surface. Each image holds two truths at once: what remains and what is already gone. Tears, sutures, and tonal seams serve as emotional diagnostics, reflecting the tension between collapse and the human instinct to repair. I approach the environment as a witness to slow violence, carrying wounds that often go unnoticed. The photographs function as field notes, memorials, and acts of care. They invite viewers to pause within the rupture and recognize what we may still have time to mend.

Portraits of a Precarious Earth examines how we live with rupture and environmental pressure without turning away. My background as a clinical psychologist shapes how I see the landscape as a place where internal experience meets external change. Each composition combines photographs from distant regions, including glaciers, deserts, forests, and coastlines. These pairings create terrains that could not meet in the physical world. I title the works by latitude and longitude to shift attention away from borders and toward our shared ecological vulnerability. Where two sites join, the seam becomes a fault line. A hillside may meet a plain that does not belong to it. A fragile ecosystem may rise into another terrain. These crossings create landscapes that feel familiar yet unsettled, as if holding several histories at once.

Material intervention is central to the work. I tear into the photographic surface, then mend it with washi tape, hand stitching, layered paper, and visible seams. These gestures make rupture and repair tangible. They slow the act of looking and encourage viewers to stay with the tension between beauty and injury. The photographs present the Earth as a surface marked by harm and ongoing care. If they carry devastation, they also hold a quieter resilience. Not triumph or restoration, but the fragile continuance that follows loss.