

Artist Creates Shrines Celebrating Nature by Cleverly Uniting Paintings and Hand- Carved Frames [Interview]

By Eva Baron on January 10, 2025



"Light in the Forest," 2020 (courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery).

For California-based artist [Holly Lane](#), the picture frame is far from superfluous. Instead, the frame assumes an essential role, serving not just as a border around her paintings but also as an inseparable part of them.

Though evolving throughout her multi-decade career, Lane's fascination with the frame began as an art undergraduate at San Jose State University in the mid-1980s. She often found herself questioning the relationship between an artwork and its frame, and why the latter was consistently designed to be inconspicuous. Lane's solution was at once simple and radical: create a frame as grand as the painting it surrounds.

Since then, Lane's practice has been defined by a symbiosis between picture and frame. Her intricate frames teem with rich ornamentation and organic forms, perfectly complementing her paintings chronicling the natural world and animal kingdom.

Twenty-five of Lane's carved frame paintings are currently on view in an exhibition at New Museum Los Gatos (NUMU). Open until January 12, 2025, the exhibition titled *Not Enough Time to Love the World* explores the artist's core interests, including mythology, climate change, and environmental sanctity, all while showcasing how she has reconceptualized the frame.

My Modern Met had the chance to speak with Holly Lane about her creative process, thematic underpinnings, and NUMU exhibition. Read on for our exclusive interview with the artist.



Holly Lane creating "Gentle Muse" (2010)

What originally sparked your fascination with the frame?

While an undergraduate in painting I began thinking about frames. I was reading philosopher Jacques Derrida's analysis of how conceptual frames often subconsciously

precondition our perception of what is at the center.

A factor I was considering at that time was if a painting had a frame at all, it was a thin line, serving as protection for the art, and as a conceptual dividing line. The frame was a demarcation line that indicated that all that was within was art—the frame itself, and all that was outside the frame was not art. A good frame was to be inconspicuous.

While pondering the nature of frames, I found some illuminated manuscripts in the San Jose State University library and saw how the scrolling borders visually commented on the text. Sometimes the borders had naughty creatures spoofing the text, even mooning the text—that was my moment of epiphany. I realized that a frame could be many things: it could be a commentary, an informing context, and a conceptual or formal elaboration. It could also embody ancillary ideas, it could be a shelter, it could be an environment, it could be like a body that houses and expresses the mind, and many other rich permutations.

From that point I began to create pieces that fused frame and painting, with some pieces having doors that open and close over paintings to suggest contingency, potentiality, future, past, or cause and effect.



"Cottonwood Moon," 2023 (Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery)

Why does it feel significant to achieve a symbiosis between frame and painting?

By making a frame that is one with the work I hope to eliminate a sense of border, of outside and inside. In doing so, I seek to address two spatial modes of aesthetic perception.

To experience the space of a painting we project our minds into it and, because of this, I see the pictorial space as a mind space. On the other hand, the spatial qualities of sculpture exist in our own physical space—we walk around it, proportion our bodies to it—so in part, sculpture is apprehended or “seen” by the body. By fusing sculptural frames with pictorial images, I hope to address both these modes of human aesthetic perception.

Furthermore, I use architectural forms in the frame because architecture is a human construct that encodes our needs, intentions, and predilections. These architectural frames are a stand-in for the human mind, culture, and consciousness. By placing nature inside an architectural frame, I show nature as held within our minds. Climate change calls us to re-envision nature from one of utility to intimacy and even sanctity, so placing nature within sacred architecture reframes nature as a sacred place.



"Not Enough Time to Love the World," 2022 (Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery)

What is your process in creating your intricate frames?

I have two simultaneous threads of visual ideas going on in my sketchbook, both for paintings and their frame body/extrapolation. This stage is fluid with interchanges, additions, and subtractions going on in my sketchbook.

When I decide on a frame body and the painting, I make full-size drawings on graph paper for the frame, keeping in mind the dialogue and inter-relations with the painting. I also take measurements off the precise full-scale drawings to get the proper amount of wood (primarily basswood) and to plan the carving.

After the carving, I create line drawings, value drawings, and color studies for the painting, modifying the painting if needed to be in conversation with the frame body.



"Wading Through Amber," 2020 (Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery)

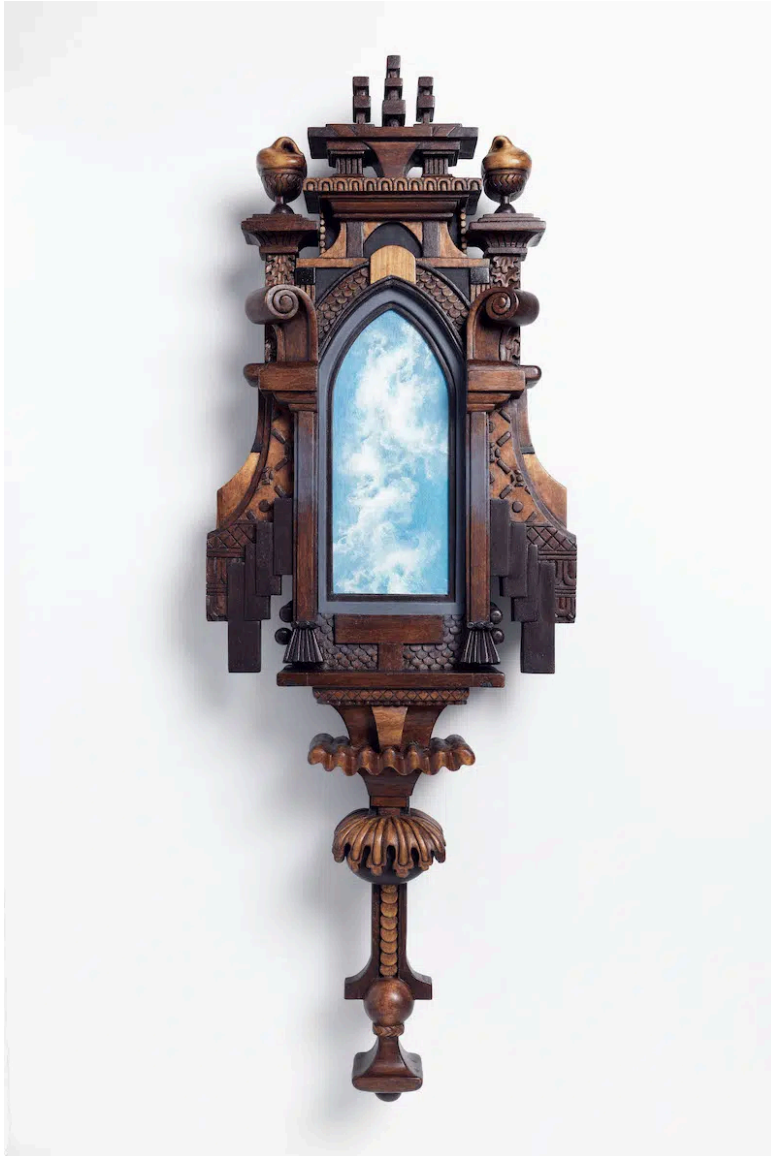


"Companions, The Three Graces," 2021 (Photo: Patrick Tregenza, courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery)

How do you decide which details to incorporate in your frames?

I think about gravity, weight, proportion, balance, extension, expansion, implied movement, coherence, pattern rhythms, counter point, texture, smoothness, and shape rhyming,

among other features, for the frame shapes and carving details. I usually incorporate natural forms with architectural forms, alluding to how the human-built world is entwined with the natural world.



"We Shall Rise," 2024 (Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery)

What was the experience in mounting the exhibition *Not Enough Time to Love the World* at NUMU?

It took two years of steadily working with guest curator Helaine Glick, from proposal to opening reception. Helaine applied her many years of museum experience to shaping the proposal and working with my gallery, Winfield Gallery, of Carmel, CA, and New Museum of Los Gatos.

Once the proposal was accepted by NUMU, Helaine guided every detail. For instance, she took my artist's statements and streamlined them for the wall text. She also coordinated with NUMU's director of exhibitions and collections, Cristiano Colantoni, on the gorgeous installation and lighting he designed.

After the opening guest curator, Helaine, NUMU, and Winfield Gallery have supported every special event and ensuing press opportunity. It has been a wonderful experience.



Image from Holly Lane's "Not Enough Time to Love the World" exhibition (Photo: Rutvik Katkoriya)



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How is the exhibition representative of your practice and multi-decade career?

The NUMU exhibition comprises 25 works selected from my last 14 years of creation, representing my latest frame of mind.

Earlier in my creative life, I sometimes included human figures in the landscape, rethinking myths that involve women—like Eve and Fortuna—from a women's perspective, in an effort to show backstories. Unfortunately, we could not gather enough of these works from around the country for this exhibition.

I'm looking forward to revisiting Fortuna, the capricious ancient Roman goddess of fortune and luck. She enables me to indulge my sense of humor.



"Eudaimonia and the Four Pillars of the Sky," 2010 (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

What are some of your favorite artworks featured within the exhibition and why?

The classification of favorites is tricky. Picking a favorite artwork would be like asking a jill (a mother possum) which of her 10 joeys (baby possums) clinging to her back is her favorite.

That said, there are some works in this exhibition that currently cling especially tightly to my mind. That magnetism, however, is not due to a valuation or ranking on my part—it's because they have aspects that I would like to develop in different ways in the future.

I feel that the bulbous vine-wrapped “vase” that supports *Cottonwood Moon* and the painting's mesh of branches and leaves—which are organically logical, but at first appear to be a jumbled tangle—have more potential, both sculpturally and pictorially. In addition, I would like to achieve the height, delicacy, and use of space in *Eudaimonia and the Four Pillars of the Sky* in another pure sculpture.

These are just a few qualities I'd like to explore more in future works. When each work is completed, I sit with it, learn from it, allow it to guide me toward new potentials. Being an artist is the most connected and expansive work I have ever been a part of. It is limitless.

Holly Lane: [Website](#) | [Facebook](#)

New Museum Los Gatos: [Website](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#)

My Modern Met received permission to feature images from New Museum Los Gatos and Holly Lane. Interview has been edited for length and clarity.



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Eva Baron is a Contributing Writer at My Modern Met. Eva graduated with a degree in Art History and English from Swarthmore College, and has previously worked in book publishing and at galleries. She has since transitioned to a career as a full-time writer. Beyond writing, Eva enjoys doing the daily crossword, going on marathon walks across New York, and sculpting.

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