



HOLLY LANE

INDWELLING NATURE



HOLLY LANE

Encountering Holly Lane's artwork will stop you in your tracks because you won't have ever seen anything quite like it. It will also stop you because it's exquisitely vivid, dream-like paintings will find their way to your subconscious and grab you. And, it will stop you because the intricately carved and polished architectural housings, which convey no distinct historical style but are an amalgam of many, will delight your imagination and hold it in awe. Lane, the San Jose artist who envisions and creates these paintings and hand carves their housings, is a bit of a mystic. She has installed a quote from author Henry James' story *Turn of the Screw* on her studio wall:

"Rooms used by daylight as though they were dark woods ..."

For her the line sums up "a mystical transference from interior to exterior, nature to human made environment." This kind of intuitive exchange lies at the heart of Lane's art. Her imaginative interior life enfolds the natural world, unleashing a vibrant flow of ideas, story, and imagery, which blossom forth in the form of drawings and luminous paintings and expands into three-dimensional sculptural form with equal richness and grace.

Lane has made art continuously since childhood. A detour into philosophy during college didn't last, and she returned to art full time, receiving a Master of Fine Arts degree from San Jose State University. In an unusual move, the Art History department also approved her Fine Arts candidacy, with the caveat: "don't try to change her!" They obviously recognized Lane's rare talent and rarer perspective—appreciation for meaningful ornament, pleasure in detail, a refined eye, and myth-driven narrative subject matter—very different from the general focus of contemporary artists of the later 1980s. Early fifteenth century artists like Jan Van Eyck or Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch might be more comparable, because like them, Lane is a storyteller who employs both symbolic and metaphorical language in service of her work.

The concept of extending her artwork outwards into the frame by way of embellishment first came to Lane while she was an undergraduate at college. She began by tracing a repeating pattern onto a thin wood frame and carving it. She had no formal training in this process (and still does not), but with books and inspirational museum visits she taught herself how to do it.



INDWELL—
TO BE PERMANENTLY PRESENT IN
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From that simple beginning she has gone on to fashion the elaborately ornamented architectural mansions that support and amplify her paintings. With conscious intent, she has reimagined the relationship of a painting to its frame. No longer a simple dividing line between the art and wall, or a hanging apparatus, the structure becomes "a conceptual or formal elaboration" of its accompanying images, or "like a body that houses and expresses the mind."

Lane's purposeful approach directs each step of her process. When beginning a piece, she may start with either painting or wood, but each will inform the other along the way. Before carving, she works out plans on graph paper in beautifully elaborated drawings. These detailed and to-scale renderings allow her to take measurements from the drawing, transfer the finished design to wood, and also make a record of each work. Her eclectic vocabulary of ornament references a range of architectural styles and each of her miniature turrets, columns, cornices and friezes, accentuated with beading, spirals or foliage motifs, is meticulously worked by hand to a velvety finish. Numerous sketchbooks supply her with countless drawing ideas to choose from. She makes a pastel color study of each image she selects before painting with acrylic, and tests wood stain and varnish color in additional painted studies to gauge the effects of various combinations.

Although Lane ultimately gave up the study of philosophy in favor art, its concerns and questions are still very much alive for her. The elemental issues—the nature of being,

what has meaning, the sacred, mythology and its place in our relationship to the world are all reflected in her work. For example, *Indwelling* (2014), speaks to the unequivocal human bond to nature. As she says "we indwell nature and nature indwells us." Three ethereal landscapes illuminate this idea: the setting sun streams through the forest (the place of quest for wisdom seekers), a misty arc shelters a quiet herd of deer (symbol for the soul) at dusk, and a hushed, watery landscape projects a sense of the sacred that only nature can give. The palpable earth spirits she envisions stand honored and secure within a rich and protective housing of columns, drawn curtains and balustrades.

More an illuminated sculpture than painting, her work *Four Consolations* (2015), recalls elaborate medieval altarpieces that open to reveal holy beings within. Instead of portraits of saints, four sparkling vignettes are revealed. Each one depicts an experience that provides consolation—those apparently insignificant events that give us respite from our troubles. Lane has chosen trees and music, touching animals and distant vistas, all of which resonate with intuited truth. The elaborately carved structure into which she has set the vignettes plays like a visual symphony. Each passage—from the detailed, golden entablature complete with clouds, to the dark, sturdy rectangular body with its gem-like illuminations secreted behind doors encrusted with quilling (ornamental patterns comprised of tightly spiraled strips of paper), and finally, to its range of supporting moldings and burgundy-toned ornamentation—come together as a beautifully orchestrated



whole. Although *Four Consolations* stands as a prime example of Lane's astonishing avenue of expression, each work is, in its own way, an equal. Every variation (like the fine graphite drawings of *Gentle Muse*, 2010, or *Unfoldment*, 2015, for example) is impeccably conceived and crafted. Another work, *After the Storm* (2012), dances with exuberant and fanciful detail, enhanced by small silver clasps attached to its intricately carved doors, and a forest of turrets crowning its roof, in a multi-layered, cathedral-like structure. Whimsical and mysterious animal paintings flank an arch-crowned miniature vista that draws us in. Remarkably, such ambitious edifices never overtake the paintings, which are suffused with light and hold our gaze in a fine balance.

Inevitably, Lane's attraction to woodworking led to an exploration of sculpture for its own sake. The same revelatory carving of *After the Storm* also imbues her imposing eight-foot gilded sculpture, *Forest Lustration by the River Lethe* (2011). Its height and golden finish recall an ancient temple, or with its different stages, a Buddhist stupa. Lane has constructed it as a monument in the form of a water purification ceremony (lustration), to the River Lethe, ruled by the goddess of forgetfulness. According to Greek mythology, one must drink from the river of forgetfulness at death in order to come back to another life. At its highest platform she places a single deer standing among a grove of trees. Looking up in anticipation, it waits for a dove to pour out the water of Lethe. In an allegory that joins the ancient world to the present, Lane reveals

nature as provider of a place to forget daily concerns, where resentments and painful events from the past can drop away. In contrast, her diminutive gilded sculpture *Cubiculum* (2014), references a sacred room found in early Christian catacombs. Inverting the expected space, she carves perfect fan vaults into its small square interior. Instead of big and high, one looks downwards into it. Lane describes it as "hand-held loftiness, a little piece of loftiness that you can take with you."

Although essentially a combined product of painting and woodcarving, Holly Lane's incomparable work is not precisely either one, but a dynamic synergy all its own. In the way of a Renaissance woman, her work draws from the history of art and architecture, the natural world, philosophy, mythology, and psychology. Out of the flow of her intuitive, conceptual, and highly skilled processes, lasting many weeks or months, a singular expression of her own invention arises. Like every creative endeavor, once manifest in the world it begins to take on a life of its own, often different from what the artist imagined or intended. Lane recognizes this as a revelatory gift of her own completed works, and is moved when she discovers something entirely new and unsuspected coming back to her from a finished piece. We are also moved, and more than fortunate that she freely shares her brilliance and artistry with us.

Helaine Glick, Independent Curator



Cover:

Indwelling, 2014, Acrylic and carved wood, 22 1/2 x 29 x 8 3/8 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Inside Flap:

Unfoldment, 2015, Acrylic, Graphite on matte Mylar, carved wood, 28 x 33 1/8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery

Inside Panels:

Four Consolations, 2015, Acrylic, carved wood, paper quilling, 27 1/4 x 22 1/2 x 6 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Winfield Gallery

Gentle Muse, 2010, Graphite on matte Mylar, carved wood, 22 x 31 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist

After the Storm, 2012, Acrylic and carved wood, 33 3/4 x 39 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Back Cover:

Cubiculum, 2014, Gilded carved wood, 5 x 5 x 4 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Forest Lustration by the River Lethe, 2011, Gilded carved wood, 97 1/2 x 20 x 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition: January 27 – June 10, 2018

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