



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON NEWS

Design Gallery director creates the extraordinary from the ordinary

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Though she depends on modern technology, Lisa Frank's work has a decidedly Victorian flair. Like famed Victorian textile designer William Morris, she uses patterns to create order out of the wild natural world, turning elegant snapshots of nature into intricate tapestries.

As both teacher and interim director of the School of Human Ecology's Design Gallery, (<http://www.designgallery.wisc.edu/index.html>) she brings New York industry expertise back to her alma mater – even as she shares Wisconsin's natural wonders with the rest of the world.

Frank's current photography show, "The Pattern That Connects," is sponsored by the Center for Photography at Madison. It runs through Friday, July 1 at the Steenbock Gallery of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1922 University Ave.

For more information, visit here (<http://www.wisconsinacademy.org/galleries/>) or see Frank's website (<http://www.lisafrankphotography.com>).

How does your work reflect Victorian attitudes about life and death?

I love natural things observed up close in a changing, seasonal way. This work comes out of a sense that it's important for me to be watchful of what happens in nature — to trace its comforting repetition.



Eucalyptus with Turtles and Honeycomb (detail 2), digital photograph

Growing up in a family of small-town funeral directors, too, death was an organic part of how we lived. What's dead is as interesting as other forms that something can take.

You originally graduated with an art degree. How has your career trajectory brought you back to Madison?

At that time, I didn't want to teach, so I did a certificate in scene painting at the Yale School of Drama and continued as their resident scenic artist. As my interests changed, I did more work in surface design and pattern development, with design clients including Ralph Lauren Home and Scalamandré in New York City.

When I moved back to Madison, I taught Design Studies classes on manual and computer generated imagery and patternmaking during a sabbatical, and I stayed on. I've been Design Gallery director for a year now. Many faculty members haven't necessarily worked in industry, so I can share that practical experience with students.

How do you find individual subjects to combine in such complex ways?

I walk and try to stay alert! When I find something that interests me, I look at it in terms of how I could use it later – a shape I could repeat, or the curve of a stem I could turn into an arabesque form. I'm creating a library of images to draw upon; I have probably 20,000 photographs at this point.

It's my raw material, but it's also my way of creating a visual journal. When I look at them, they bring back memories: "That was in May, on Lake Superior."

Can technology help preserve fleeting moments in nature?

Yes, and that really makes me happy. I like the idea that I'm bringing something to viewers that they wouldn't normally have seen, or paid attention to.

I go into the woods two or three times a week. Last Saturday, I came across this patch of golden yellow lady slippers. I felt so fortunate to see them, but now I'm thinking, "Can I get back to take more photos before they're gone?"

A lot of people aren't outdoor people; maybe they don't have the opportunity to be in the woods the way that I do. I hope that my overuse of Photoshop is forgiven because of what I'm able to put together for others to see.

What's next for the Design Gallery, and your own work?

We're planning an exciting adinkra show for November [featuring West African symbols used in textiles, pottery, advertising and many other forms]. It's been a bit challenging to not have a real Design Gallery, but we continue to have shows. The new gallery will be 2000 square feet, a really nice sized space. I'm looking forward to it.

My MFA show, this December, will be in the CAVE (Cave Automatic Virtual Environment) thanks to the Living Environments Laboratory, led by Patricia Flatley Brennan. I'm in the process of putting my patterns into 3D and... seeing what happens.
