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PHOTOGRAPHY Lisa Frank talks career, inspirations, Springboard Arts Chicago installation by Carrie Maxwell, Windy City Times 2020-09-03



Lisa Frank's Still Life With Monarchs. Photo by Lisa Frank



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Fifteen years ago, Lisa A. Frank's professional world changed forever when she was fired from a job designing textiles for Ralph Lauren. The very next day, Frank went out and bought a digital camera and "never looked back professionally."

"I was not sure what I was going to do with the camera," said Frank. "I had no training as a photographer. I just knew I wanted to start documenting the extraordinary things I was seeing on my daily hikes with my German shorthaired pointer dog. Using the camera created the beginnings of a visual journal for me."

"I think of myself as mostly as an artist who happens to use photography as a tool. My artwork is composited from many images and involves complex layering and digital painting to create the final result. The camera creates the raw materials that I make my artwork with, almost as a painter would use oils. My photo library has over 70,000 images at this point that I draw upon, and it grows by the day. Taking pictures and the pursuit of always getting better at it [are parts] of my daily life."

When asked how to describe her work, Frank said, "It begins with a deeply felt connection to nature and a wish to convey a sense of wonderment. I present work in several different ways but there often includes references to tapestry style compositions, repeating patterns and borders, ornamental detail, etc."

In terms of her inspirations, Frank said she looks to William Morris and other designers who were active during Britain's Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century, as well as natural history and still life paintings.

Frank's photography will be featured at the new Springboard Arts Chicago gallery, 1910 W. North Ave., this fall for a one-year showing. Several other galleries and online websites also exhibit her work.

"We were drawn to Lisa's interpretation of the natural world and the sense of pattern and place in her work," said Springboard Arts Chicago Vice President of Operations Ann Foley. "We are excited to represent artists like her in our gallery."

"I am thrilled to be represented by this new gallery," said Frank. "I feel a sense of community that I did not realize I lacked."

Frank's journey to photography was a natural outgrowth of her childhood in the small northwestern Illinois town of Mount Carroll where she was an integral part in her father's summer stock theater, Timber Lake Playhouse. The theater, which has been in operation for decades, is still going strong according to Frank.

"My siblings and I grew up running follow spots, ushering, making popcorn, playing in the pit orchestra, painting scenery, singing in the chorus and building costumes," said Frank. "We loved every aspect of being around the theatre in the summers."

This love of theater spurred Frank to get her graduate certificate in scene painting and design at the Yale School of Drama. She worked for many years at the Metropolitan Opera as a union scenic artist and at scene shops that created sets for Broadway productions and films. Frank also designed textiles, wall-coverings and decorative surfaces for high-end interior projects while in New York City.

Frank moved back to the Midwest 12 years ago to be closer to family and subsequently went back to school for her MFA in design studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

While pursuing her career, Frank fell in love with Jane Peckham after many years of failed romances and online dating endeavors. Frank remarked that they have no plans to marry because " we are a couple of old hippies who decided long ago that this was not for us."

"Jane was my niece and nephew's piano teacher," said Frank. "I realized that there was a great benefit to my dedicated attendance at piano recitals. We currently live 20 miles Southwest of Madison, Wisconsin on 10 acres of beautiful drift less landscape.

"We garden extensively. We are building pollinator habitats and are working to restore native plants to the landscape which means endless weed pulling as much as anything, something we have had plenty of time to do this summer. We live happily with a dock-jumping German Shorthaired Pointer, a gorgeous tripawd mixed breed and two odd cats. My trail camera shows the presence of bobcats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons and opossums right outside the door. We are both delighted with our country life."

When asked how their lives have been during this COVID-19 pandemic lock-down, Frank said she bought a super-telephoto lens and now takes photos of many birds in flight. Frank said at first there were a lot of bad photos but she is getting better at it.

"My work life is quite solitary anyway," said Frank. "I spend a lot of time most days taking pictures and sitting in front of my computer screen editing them, so life has not changed that much for me because of COVID-19. Jane, on the other hand, teaches all of her piano lessons online now which has required plentiful amounts of adjustment."

Of Frank's work, Peckham told this publication that "Lisa's delight is palpable in her photographic process and in her resulting artwork. I am so lucky to be alongside to witness this."

For more information, visit lisafrankphotography.com/ and springboardarts.com/artists/lisa-frank/ .



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Wonderful work. A joy have the complexities of Frank's work unfold before your eyes.

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