



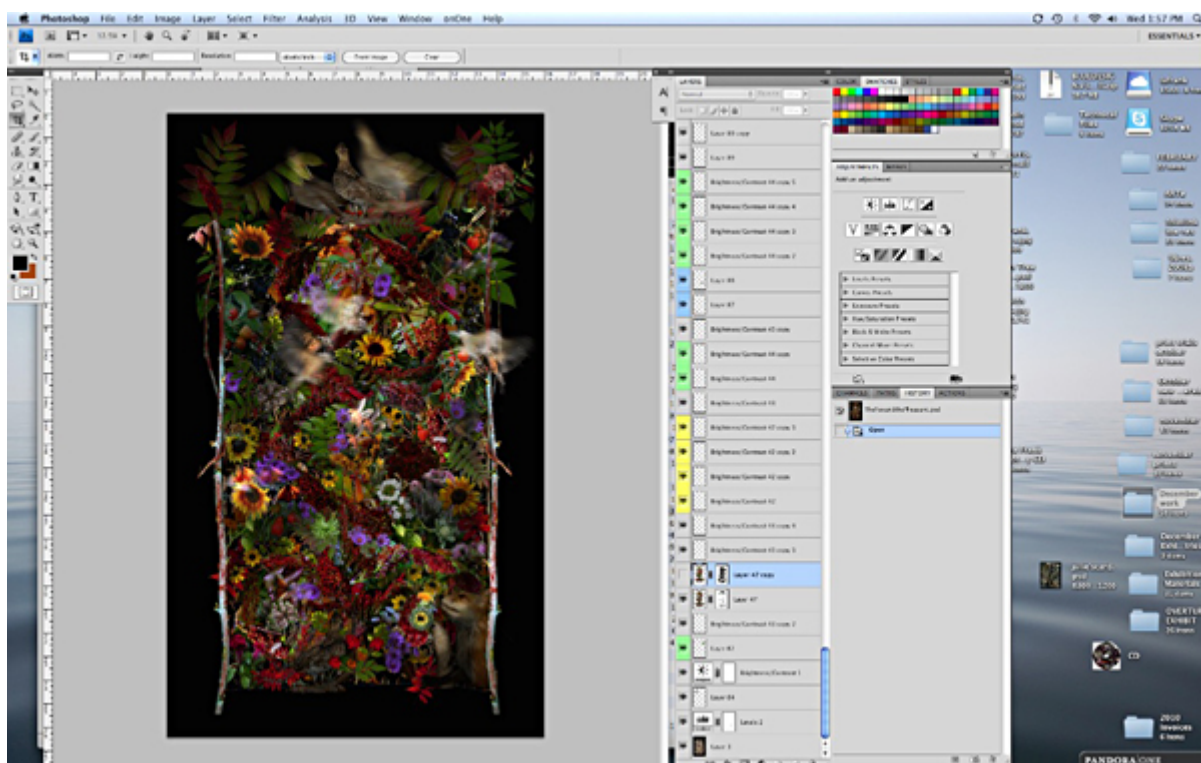
Lisa A. Frank Shares Her Approach to Image Construction

For the last seven years I have been making large scale photographs derived from nature related subject matter. Densely ornamental, my artwork draws upon my textile design background and refers to the interior decoration documents of Britain's Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century —William Morris, in particular.

My work begins with a deep connection to nature and rises up from the “snapshots” I take of the forests and wetlands of New York State, and now Wisconsin where I currently reside. This makes for a visual diary that has documented changing evidence of the ordinary and the astonishing over the course of these years.

I catalogue these photographs into an ever growing digital library organized by subject, season and year. I have over 6000 photos of wild mushrooms alone. My patterns, “tapestries,” and still lifes are constructed from these daily “snapshots” (called that because they are never meant to be stand-alone photographs that get hung on a wall).

I begin by selecting groups of photographs that are compelling to me for one reason or another. I take them apart and begin selectively emphasizing lines, shapes, colors, or textures in ways that start to come together as components, which then get attached to other components, which then become larger and more complex until there’s finally a system I can see breaking through.



These combinations of motifs are “sewn” together through extremely compulsive image layering and masking (the file sizes are huge and so is the time involved). Often working with over 100 color coded layers in Adobe Photoshop, the photographic groupings I’ve made are then given a “repeat” structure—a textile design term referring to the way a pattern is set up to tile seamlessly in any direction. There are a range of established repeat formats that I use including the “half-drop” and the “mirrored image.” The ability of these patterns to endlessly tile

creates the potential for multiple sized works ranging from large individual prints to full room installations.

The designs themselves are presented in several different ways: as solitary repeating patterns, as stand- alone tapestry-like designs that have an implied narrative, and as floor to ceiling “sections” that combine repeating patterns with elaborately constructed “trompe l’oeil” mouldings including wainscoting, friezes, borders, swags and other architectural detailing. Traditionally these would be called “decorator specimen panels” in the 19th century, but my work breaks their rules governing good design with densely elaborate surfaces that feature both the living and the dead.

I call my still life portfolio ‘Stilleven’ (which translates into “inanimate object” or “immobile nature” in Dutch). These are entirely constructed fabrications. In 17th- and 18th- century Dutch still life painting, the elements in each composition originated as life studies done throughout the year: tulips from early spring, hollyhocks in high summer, grapes in the autumn. These were then combined into a miscellany that could never exist in reality. In these paintings flowers in a state of perfection do not conform to time or season. Instead they break that bond between humans and nature, and coexist in a sovereign fantasy world. The “natural” is imposed on “nature” and time is permanently suspended.



My artwork observes the “wildness” in nature even while it is taming it with formal patterning and composition. Creating a context for connection, it is my purpose to draw the viewer into a local world as it hasn’t been seen before—charged with wonder—richly complex while being inclusive and accessible.

-Lisa A. Frank December, 2014

Lisa is a MacDowell Colony Fellow in photography for 2014. She holds an MFA from the Design Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she works as a lecturer. She has an extensive professional background as an artist working in New York City where she designed textiles, wallpaper, and innovative surface treatments for residential and

commercial interior projects. She painted scenery for the Metropolitan Opera, film and Broadway productions as a member of the United Scenic Artists union. Using her artwork to enhance interdisciplinary explorations, Frank was chosen to be a Senior Research Fellow at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2013. She is the first artist/collaborator to be given this distinction.

Website Address: <http://lisafrankphotography.com/>

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