

Arts and Culture

World of Wonder

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I'm often reminded of how brutal nature is, from the harsh elements living beings need to endure to survive to the extremes they go to just to see another day. And yet there's such incredible beauty in nature, in its plants, animals, patterns and ecosystems.

Madison artist **Lisa Frank** exquisitely captures these dual sides of the natural world in ***A Cabinet of Curiosities***, an exhibition running through December 29 at the UW Arboretum's **Steinhauer Trust Gallery**.

Frank employs an alternative photography technique called scanography to manipulate her natural subject matter. She draws out the shapes, patterns and textures of bird nests, flowers, grasses, branches, mushrooms, milkweed seeds and more. And the way she arranges them allows her compositions to be quiet and still while also dark and completely mesmerizing.

The artist recently answered a few questions about her technique, inspirations and subject matter.

How did you become interested in photography?

I'm interested in image making. I have formally studied digital imaging but I don't have any background in photography. The camera and scanner are tools for me on a somewhat equal footing with pencils and brushes.

What exactly is scanography?

By placing objects directly on the scanner glass, you allow the scanner to do the work of a camera. It takes a "photo" of what it captures on the glass surface. To get a greater sense of depth I hang a grid over the scanner bed and suspend objects at different levels above the glass.

Why do you choose nature as your subject matter?

Since I was a little girl in a Brownie Scout uniform, I have loved the out-of-doors. It's a subject matter that never grows old or tedious for me.

What inspires you?

Color, texture, light, finding something I've never seen before. Watching my German Shorthaired Pointer run. I particularly enjoy finding things that are unusual or unknown to me ... things that require that I get out all of my nature guides or write a few emails for ID help.

You have an amazing ability to draw out the texture of a bird's nest or the pattern in a mushroom or the gracefulness of a flower petal. How do you approach these different natural elements?

I ask myself questions about how to draw out the essence of something: what makes something special or dramatic or unusual or surprising.

What do you hope people get from seeing your work?

A friend of mine said something to me recently after looking at some of my new work: "Looking at these makes me wonder about everything I'm missing." What I want is to share with others my discoveries and the wonder that I experience, making both accessible.

A Cabinet of Curiosities runs through December 29 at the Steinhauer Trust Gallery in the Arboretum Visitor Center at 1207 Seminole Hwy. Hours are 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. For more information, visit uwarboretum.org.

Images courtesy of the Steinhauer Trust Gallery.

