



Lise Lemeland of Montgomery soars by combining love of art, flying

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EASTHAMPTON –When artist Lise Lemeland turned 40, she decided it was time to get over her long-standing fear of flying. She enjoyed rollercoasters and skateboarding, but flying was another story.

Once she got into the air in a World War II-vintage biplane on **Martha's Vineyard**, she liked the slow, throaty sound it made, and she found the sunset particularly beautiful from the open cockpit.



Lise Lemeland of Montgomery, an artist and pilot, poses near some of her work in her studio in Easthampton.

Photo by Cori Urban



Artist/pilot Lise Lemeland stands in her studio at One Cottage Street in Easthampton. There she paints--mostly oil on canvas, oil on panel and gouache on paper.

Photo by Cori Urban

The pilot banked and tilted the plane and did loops and barrel rolls that “totally thrilled me,” Lemeland recalled recently in her studio here one of the city’s refurbished mill buildings.

The experience so impressed Lemeland, she earned a pilot’s license and has been participating in aerobatics competitions throughout the Northeast.

Now, the 46-year-old widow and mother of three focuses her art on her aerobatic flying. And, it’s landed her work in an exhibit at the **Smithsonian Institution’s**

National Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

"My work reflects a personal translation of the physiological experience of aerobatic flying," she said. "As an artist and a pilot, what draws me to aerobatics is the hyper-stimulation of both the visual and vestibular senses."

This extreme type of flying requires intense focus and sensory interpretation. "My goal is to create artwork that communicates this multi-sensory, multi-dimensional experience," she said.

Her work is mostly oil paintings, prints and works on paper; some include text. She has done several commissioned works for pilots who are also art lovers.

Currently three of Lemeland's paintings are on display in an exhibition entitled "High Art: A Decade of Collecting," which opened in July at the Smithsonian.

"It's the ideal museum for my work because they value two things I value: art and aviation," said Lemeland, who was born in Ithaca, N.Y.

"High Art: A Decade of Collecting" showcases 50 pieces of art acquired by the museum during the past 10 years. These pieces bring the static collection of airplanes and spacecraft in the museum to vibrant new life. The exhibition includes three sections: "Visions of Flight" (conceptual works), "Faces of Flight" (portraits) and "Looking Back" (works related to historical events).

Works by Fran Forman and Berndnaut Smilde create surreal visions of imagined worlds through photography while real pilots and astronauts, such as Lemeland and Alan Bean, share their own



Artist/pilot Lise Lemeland painted her own American Champion Super Decathlon plane in this painting. The Montgomery resident has work on display in an exhibition entitled "High Art: A Decade of Collecting" that

recollections of flight. World-famous photographer **Annie Leibovitz** offers an iconic portrait of Eileen Collins as a confident and determined space shuttle commander, and Albert Watson captures the beauty of the museum's own space suit collection.

opened in July at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

Photo by Cori Urban

The exhibit is open to the public through Dec. 1.

Currently on leave from her position as an associate professor of painting at **Alfred University** in Alfred, N.Y., Lemeland moved to Montgomery in June and hangars her **American Champion Super Decathlon** at Barnes Regional Airport in Westfield.

There's an element of danger to flying, Lemeland acknowledges, but she says she is careful and focused, always aware of her surroundings.

"I'm a very careful pilot. I'm not a hotshot," said the trim, petite woman who likes to wear aviation-themed jewelry. (On a recent afternoon she wore matching clear-stone airplane earrings and necklace.)

Lemeland took flying lessons from Pat Jessup, whom she married. "I totally fell in love with Pat and with flying," she said.

He was killed in a 2010 chartered plane crash in Lock Haven, Pa., the year after she earned her pilot's license. Part of the reason she flies is to keep alive that connection to him.

There's also the thrill of it.

"The visual pictures are so crazy, different than anything I had seen," she said. "It's so cool."

As she works in her sunny, wood-floored **One Cottage Street** studio, her artwork now focuses on flying: Most is oil on canvas, oil on panel or gouache on paper. She does some printmaking.



Lise Lemeland, an artist/pilot who lives in Montgomery, sits in her Easthampton studio and uses a model plane to show how some aerobatic maneuvers work.

Photo by Cori Urban

Before learning to fly, her work used patterns significantly. "My longstanding fascination with pattern and the decorative arts from other cultures, combined with my interest in pattern have been at the core of my work for many years," she said. "I have looked to many sources – in particular carpets, embroidery, textiles and lace. Pattern is beautiful, decadent and visually complex, and yet despite the visual activity, it inspires a meditative state."

Many of her aviation-inspired paintings have lace-like sections along with nods to aviation like symbols on aeronautical maps or lights at airports.

"At its heart, my work celebrates extreme flying with visual splendor, reflecting the multiplex sensory and spatial experience of aerobatics," Lemeland explained.

She flies year round, but more in summer when competitions take place; she has been placing in the top four at competitions.

She logs about 100 hours of flight in a year and usually flies one to three times a week, sometimes more.

"When I don't fly, I don't feel inspired in my studio as much," she said.

If she had to use one word to describe her work, it would be "symbiosis" because flying and painting collaborate in a complicated interwoven art form that embodies the essence of beauty to her. "When I am in the plane 3,000 feet above the ground and upside down, everything I see is catalogued in my brain for future painting reference," she explained. "When I am in the studio, I am devoted to finding ways to translate into a two-dimensional art the disorienting and physically taxing experience of flying aerobatics."

Lemeland received a bachelor of fine arts degree from the **San Francisco Art Institute** and her master of fine arts from Hunter College.

When she is not painting or flying, she enjoys running, hiking and visiting art museums and galleries.

She is scheduled to have a show of her work at **Greenfield Community College** in Greenfield in October and one next year at the **Williston Northampton School**.

Lemeland is considering ways to continue to link her passion for art and for aviation and has been lecturing at schools and airshows about art and aerobatics. "My perspective is different. It's art from a pilot's perspective," she said.

For more information about her, visit her website at liselemeland.com.

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