

Art professor shares love of flying through her paintings

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Lise Lemeland and Super D
biplane

Lise Lemeland, an assistant professor of painting in the School of Art & Design at Alfred University, had never flown a plane before she took her first flight in an old biplane off Martha's Vineyard island in the summer of 2007. She was "given a taste for aerobatic flight," that led her to earn her private pilot's license. That in turn led to a new body of work based on her experiences flying aerobatics; three of the paintings now in the collection of a national museum. Not content to be just a private pilot, Lemeland was awarded the highly competitive Doug Yost Memorial Scholarship for Aerobatics in 2009. And now, a little more than two years after her first flight, she is flying in aerobatic competitions - not just for the thrill, or to demonstrate her mastery of the skills, but for artistic research. To her, the two art forms - flying and painting - "are inextricably intertwined." "Visually, aerobatics provides stunning new perspectives that literally upset everything that one might take for granted; the horizon can turn around the wingtip or the airplane's nose with mesmerizing grace," explains Lemeland, who has taught painting in the School of Art & Design, part of the NYS College of Ceramics at Alfred University, since 2005. "Physically, the pilot's body experiences high G-forces, dizzying vestibular inputs, and visual consequences such as grey-out, or seeing stars. I strive to express these physiological experiences through paintings," she says. Ironically, she took that first flight - the one that hooked her - to overcome "a substantial fear of flying, one I had since I was a little girl. For years, she adds, she had watched the biplanes at Martha's Vineyard, and finally decided it was time to face her fears and go up in one of the planes. Even before that, biplanes figured in her work; eight years ago she used an image of a biplane in a series of paintings. An accomplished painter, Lemeland was awarded a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant (2006) and a Strategic Opportunity Stipend (NYFA) for flight filming (2009). She has exhibited her work nationally, most recently in New York City, Connecticut and New Hampshire. Lemeland has written and published several articles for Sport Aerobatics magazine and has a forthcoming article in Aviation for Women magazine on her art and flying. Lemeland lives in Alfred with her three children.