

Coded Messages: Jane Hartley

Curated by John Cino

July 1 – August 29

One could simply take in the beauty of Jane Hartley's still life paintings. It is easy to get lost in the minute detail of natural objects, patterns and reproductions of works of art. They are a tour de force of the painting craft, capturing intricacies of texture and light available only through oil, a medium mastered by the painters of the Northern Renaissance. Indeed no one would be faulted for appreciating these paintings for their simple beauty, but there is more to them.

The Flemish painters of the Baroque period, in which Ms. Hartley looks to for inspiration, took the objects in still life paintings as subjects unto themselves. Back then both artists and their intended audience were adept at decoding symbols. A flower was not just a beautiful object to be admired; each variety carried its own implied meaning. Jane Hartley has become a student not only of the Baroque painting technique, but also of its deployment of symbols. Each work has a catalogue of symbolic representations, as the allusions of each object accumulates within a painting, the depth of the message grows.

The works in *Coded Messages* come from two related series. **Messages of Happiness** and **Flora, Fauna & Far East**, in each series, the artist extends the symbolic language to China. In the piece, *The Lady and the Warrior*, Ms. Hartley evokes enduring love by recalling a Chinese legend in which Lady Yee accompanies her warrior husband Hsiang Yu into battle. As defeat appeared imminent, the Lady attempts to console his spirits but fails and commits suicide. The loving couple is masterfully described through pieces of sculpture and ceramic, which are strewn with poppies. In the legend, poppies blossom from her gravesite representing her strong and bright spirit.



Jane Hartley, *The Lady and the Warrior*



Jane Hartley, *Lotus with Nine Coins*

The painting *Lotus with Nine Coins* from **Messages of Happiness** is a treatise on prosperity, one of the three blessings, along with luck and longevity. Its color key is yellow, associated with royalty and sovereignty, and conveys a message of status, virtue and fortune. The lotus flower evokes a life of integrity while the carp signifies a peaceful life of abundance. The number nine in China is used to indicate multitude and nine coins strung on a red tassel to symbolize the promise of “uninterrupted wealth forever.” The red coral signifies good luck. Taken all together, the imagery of *Lotus with Nine Coins* is a blessing for a life well lived rewarded with wealth.

Jane Hartley began her studies at the Maryland Institute College of Art. She now lives in a coastal community in Georgia and is represented on Long Island by the William Ris Gallery in Southold.

The curators would like to thank Mary Cantone of the William Ris Gallery for the loan of these works.

- John Cino
Program Director & Curator
Patchogue Arts Council & Museum of Contemporary Art L.I.