

Aerobatic Artist Lise Lemeland '85

At one point in her life, Lise Lemeland '85 was gripped by a fear of flying. The nervous shakes that accompanied her infrequent commercial flights weighed on her. But to face that fear, on a summer vacation to Martha's Vineyard in 2007, Lemeland decided to venture up in a biplane with a local pilot.

Photos by Laurie Zaleski



The pilot “must have sensed a fellow adventurer in the front seat,” Lemeland wrote in a 2009 article for *Sport Aerobatics*, “because the next thing I knew he was looping and rolling me through the skies off South Beach.”

Lemeland, who is an artist and associate professor of drawing and painting at New York's Alfred University by trade (www.liselemeland.com), admits to a confusing mix of elation and fear, but she was sure of one instinct – she *had* to fly again. By January 2009, Lemeland had earned her pilot's license and, by July,

had married her instructor, fellow pilot Pat Jessup. And she had not only learned to fly, but had taken on a specialty – aerobatics; twisting and turning a small plane, a few thousand feet up in the air, into gravity-defying configurations. She still admits to a touch of fear, but that emotion cannot overcome the passion she has discovered in the sky.

“In aerobatics, you are putting an airplane in all these configurations. I mean, it's not meant to fly upside down,” Lemeland tells *Alumni Horae*. “There is the fear factor and the thrill that's woven together, which is part of what makes it so fun.”

Since June 21, 2010, Lemeland, a 44-year-old mother of three, has had to once again put aside her fear. That's the day that Jessup, her husband of only 11 months, was killed when the Cessna he was piloting suffered engine failure

on a charter flight with two members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service.

“I had so little solo time before my husband was killed,” says Lemeland. “Once he was gone, I had to learn a lot of things on my own. It was a very difficult time in so many ways.”

It took a few months for Lemeland to return to the air. She had at that point already placed fourth in her first aerobatic competition in the summer of 2009, her training costs for that initial step defrayed when she was awarded the Douglas Yost Aerobatic Scholarship.

“I remembered what [Pat] taught me and I was able to transform it into a focus on aerobatics,” she says of returning to the cockpit.

To date, Lemeland has competed in six aerobatics events, moving up from primary (novice) to sportsman (standard)

level in the summer of 2011. Her many flying honors include first place in the primary category at the 2010 U.S./Canada Aerobatic Challenge and second in primary at the 2010 East Coast Aerobatic Contest.

In competition, Lemeland must demonstrate the ability to maneuver her Super Decathlon aerobatic plane through a sequence of six figures over a 3,000-square-foot grid marked an equivalent vertical distance below on the ground. She casually speaks of training to handle advanced spins, of wearing a parachute in the cockpit at all times in case the need to bail out arises, and of performing loops and half-Cubans (half figure-eights), all with the ability to pull the plane out of a spin at the right moment.

Her current challenge is mastering in her tri-weekly practice flights a maneuver known as a "hammerhead," in which the pilot must pull the plane into a vertical up line and, before it loses air-speed, kick the rudder to cause the plane to pivot.

"You're waiting for this ever-so-subtle shudder that happens because of slipstream on the propeller that hits the tail," she says. "It's difficult to master because you have to trust what you feel."

Painting, says Lemeland, had been her greatest passion until she discovered flying. But she soon learned that the two were connected. Her views from the cockpit register in her brain for later translation (*see image at right*). In 2010, three of her paintings were acquired by the permanent collection of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.

"There are lots of things that go into the art that I see when I fly," she explains. "I try to put into the paintings my perspective when I am in the airplane. I find that I get really inspired in my studio after I've been flying. And art gets into the flying in that, when I am up there, I am always cataloging. I notice a cloud coming at me inverted and I think, 'that is the coolest thing; I have to remember that, but right now I have to fly.'"

Grey Out over Runway 23, 2009. 5 color aquatint proof with gouache, 24"x18."

