

James Conaway

Artist Statement

I have been working on my current series of paintings on old pieces of wood after studying Byzantine icons in Greece, Turkey, and Poland. I was fascinated by these icons painted on wood and the marks and scratches left by past generations. Back in my studio in Minneapolis, I began painting on old pieces of wood that had once had another life and now discarded. Many had holes, cracks, and rusty nails.

As I experimented further with my new painting surface, my tools changed. Sandpaper, steel wool, grinders, sanders, knives, and scrapers were as important as paint and brush. I painted, then sanded, scraped, and then repainted only to follow the same cycle the next day. My dialogue with each piece of wood resulted in the scratches, holes, and gain taking an active role in describing my subject matter.

My icons are not about a sense of place, naturalism or the picturesque. My icons are all studio inventions as I work to express my reverence for the landscape, especially the tree, and to define its spirituality. They are about memory and the transformation of these discarded pieces of wood, giving them a new life and an new meaning.

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