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LACE OUT OF PLACE

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As a child, Cal Lane watched her grandma put lace doilies on top of cupcakes, then sift icing-sugar over the top to create a pretty pattern.

That child grew up to be an industrial welder, and then an artist who never forgot her grandmother's technique. Now Lane places lace over metal objects and wields her torch or plasma cutter to create sculptures and wall hangings that are startlingly delicate and domestic, yet as tough as the metals that are her medium.

Much of her new work is made of unfurled oil drums, oilcans and old car parts -- anything to do with oil -- which she has welded into wispy prayer rugs, tapestries and ancient-looking maps.

"Oil is in our conversation these days," she says. "We've had a love affair with it, and now it's ruining our planet."

Not all her work is lace-based. Some of Lane's most delightful designs are from her imagination, such as the discreetly erotic, entangled human figures on some sculptures.

Lane also has welded wheelbarrows, shovels and other heavy metal objects into sheer wispieness -- all mysteriously intimate and somehow thrilling. Some oilcans, when unfurled, have the shape of crosses. Up close, the intricacy and artistry become apparent.

Perhaps the most surprising work in her current exhibit is one you cannot buy. It's a kind of magic carpet, made of dirt, that Lane created on the white floor of an otherwise empty room. She bought the soil at a local hardware store, she says, and repeatedly sifted it over a large square of lace to create the huge "rug" that is both exquisitely earthy and ephemeral. When the show is over, the rug will be swept away -- but maybe not in the minds of those who've seen it.

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