

DESIGN OF THE MONTH

By Timothy Holton

Keep the Beast Happy

It's hard to think of another realm today where human beings unleash our imaginations more than we do in science fiction. My shop, Holton Studio Frame-Makers, recently had the great privilege of framing a painting born of the extraordinary imagination of Croatian artist Milivoj Čeran, 2018 winner of the European Science Fiction Society's Best Artist Award. Čeran is also known as an illustrator for the massively popular fantasy card game, "Magic: The Gathering." But it's from another realm of human imagination that Čeran's work came to us: he is also the creator of "The Norse Mythology Art Book," for which he painted "Jormungandr." The story is that the deep sea serpent Jormungandr grew so large that he circled the globe and was able to bite his own tail. It's an extraordinary feat of encompassing, which, to a picture framer pondering how his own work might resonate with and enhance a picture, is naturally intriguing. After all, there's nothing more characteristic of the very nature of a frame than the fact that it encompasses a picture. Based on that, I let my own imagination go.

As a shop that seeks to restore picture framing to its origins in real woodworking—the art of the joiner, or the cabinetmaker—the choice of wood for a frame is a primary consideration. Nothing we make is as beautiful as what nature makes, so a frame can only be as



beautiful as the wood it's made of. For a work of Northern European mythology, the obvious choice of wood is quarter sawn white oak—the primary wood used for buildings and furnishings throughout northern Europe until the seventeenth century. In any case, the coarse, wild grain of quarter sawn white oak suited the coarse, wild creature that is the picture's subject. The vessel depicted, a Viking ship, surely made of oak, also suggested the wood for the vessel that is a picture frame.

With a wood chosen to harmonize with the picture, I turned to the form of the frame. Such a work of imagination pushed my own creativity as a framer. I got a good nudge from the frame actually depicted in the painting: the decorative brass border around a ship's porthole. (A picture is a window; sometimes it's a porthole.) From that I came up with the carved 1" wide liner stained and then rubbed with a compound of bronze powders suspended in wax. (There are many products available ready to use or to mix yourself. I used Liberon's gilt cream.) Attempting Čeran's masterful knot work would have been foolhardy, and too busy in any case. But a simplified pattern, a serpentine band quietly winding all the way around

"Jormungandr" by Croatian artist Milivoj Čeran was framed using quarter sawn white oak with eye-catching decorative details like splined corners and a bronze-stained liner.



Timothy Holton is the owner of Holton Studio Frame-Makers in Berkeley, CA. A native Californian inspired by the art and architecture of his home state, Tim began his career in framing at Storey Framing in 1975. After earning a history degree and a brief career in live theater, Tim returned his attention to framing, honing the joining and carving skills that distinguish his work. After the Oakland Museum's contemporary artisan gallery displayed his work in 1993, he was spurred to open his own business, which now specializes in hand-carved hardwood frames built entirely in-house. Tim lives in Berkeley with his wife, Stephanie McCoy. They have an adult daughter, Ella.

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to resonate with the picture's subject, felt right. The carving is flat rather than in relief, the pattern simply outlined with a v-shaped carving tool (v-tool) and the background stippled.

The main frame is a 2 1/2" plain flat profile, but with corners articulated with decoratively shaped splines in exceptionally wide slots. In keeping with our practice of using proper woodworking techniques to make frames, all of our mitered frames are splined; in recent years we've increasingly taken to giving that inherently pleasing detail of joinery more of an accent by shaping our splines to stand slightly proud of the frame back. Going beyond that, we sometimes give splines their own complementary form, as we did here. In this case, though, I gave the idea another twist: instead of being proud all the way around the corner, the splines are partially recessed in the slot. The curves repeat those of the water line, while the slight flair and double points at the corners are echoed and amplified by the splines, the resulting composition of points playing off the spiny monster.

The painting being acrylic and airbrush on paper, it had to go behind glass. We handled this archivally with a method we often use, which is to cut the frame rabbet wide and install what we call a gasket mat, which is narrower than the



A closeup showing the decorative splined corners that reflected the spiny monster depicted in the artwork.

rabbet and is therefore fully hidden, simply serving to create space between the glass and painting. Then we line the rabbet of the frame with metal frame sealing tape to isolate the acids in the wood from the paper.

I'm happy to say that the customer and artist were both pleased. ("The frame is absolutely stunning!" Mr. Čeran wrote on a Facebook post with a photo of the piece.) But the crucial thing was to give the great serpent a distinguished, honorific setting that will keep the formidable beast happy. Because, as the story has it, if Jormungandr lets go of his tail, that's when Ragnarök happens. We can only imagine. **PFM**

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367 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3/4"x60yd	\$4.99	\$4.59

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