

Holly Van Hart

Artist Statement



I am absorbed and inspired by the idea of the **limitless opportunities** we have in our lives.

In my 'Possibilities Abound' series of oil paintings, **larger-than-life bird eggs and nests** are used to symbolize the promise of our own capabilities, to be nurtured and explored and stretched to their fullest potential. The **spring time** setting is intended to lead us to deeper thoughts about regeneration and the future.

The eggs are in the nest, but nothing more is assured. Nature's forces (predators, the elements, humans) produce **constant threats**. Heavily textured paint in **shapes of organic swirls** are seen throughout the paintings to remind us of these threats and the **energy** that's required to **fend them off**. The swirls mimic the **curves of the eggs and nests** and emphasize a **rhythm of curves** seen throughout the series.

Strong fields of color offer a key to a work's predominant mood – blue for calm, red for excitement, yellow for optimism. To infuse an extra **feeling of energy and freshness**, these works are typically begun with a strong red underpainting that is meant to show through the upper paint layers.

The themes of 'possibilities' and 'spring' have additional, specific meanings that are tied to my **two decades of high-tech life in Silicon Valley, California**. Silicon Valley has a unique culture of creativity and unrelenting optimism. It is a hotbed of technology innovation, and **a place where anything is possible**. I participated in this type of creativity every day for 20 years, first as an engineer and later in high-tech sales management. This was followed by a move in 2013 to full time professional artist. Since then, my art career has brought a new spring-time to my life.

-- Holly Van Hart

PAINTINGS INTO WORDS

2 Selected Works from 'Possibilities Abound'

What follows is my attempt to put into words what I created with paints and canvas for two paintings in my Possibilities Abound' series. My aim is that these words brings to light some meanings that might have otherwise been missed, and lead to a better viewing experience.

But a painting is not necessarily about what the artist wanted it to be about! So please don't let my words limit your interpretations in any way.

You as the viewer complete each painting.

- Holly Van Hart

1. 'Possibilities Abound' by Holly Van Hart

In 'Possibilities Abound', three eggs, each a slightly different light yellow-orange color, are nestled in a thick woven nest. The earthy but rich-looking nest is constructed from a swirl of dark chocolate- brown colored sticks with hints of a deep royal red. All of it is **larger-than-life**. This is to emphasize the potential of the human spirit, and the message that 'life is as large as you make it'.

Behind the nest is a **calming, dusky-blue** field of color. Is it sky? Water? We don't know. This could be any nest, anywhere, or every nest, everywhere.



Possibilities Abound, 30" x 40" oil painting by Holly Van Hart

Organic swirls of texture are seen throughout the painting. They mimic the curves of the eggs and nest, and are there to remind us of the **unseen forces and threats of nature**. Two big swirls juxtapose each other in the dusky blue and interrupt its calm feeling.

Unique to this painting, it **began as a larger-than-life portrait of myself**. Not fully satisfied with the portrait, and no longer inspired to complete it, it got morphed into 'Possibilities Abound'. Is this a more accurate representation of me?

The **3 eggs** represent the 3 men that I live with (my husband and two sons). But sometimes they symbolize myself and my two siblings, and at other times my 3 careers – engineering, sales, and now art.

Two of the three eggs have heavy **texture** underneath, leading us to expect some turbulence in their lives ahead. The smallest, furthest-most egg is smooth and without texture; this life will be relatively untroubled, perhaps not as exciting either. It points away from the other two eggs, suggesting a different life path.

The nest shape is a **circle**, with the circle representing **unity** of the 3 eggs and the infinite possibilities in their lives.

When I started this piece, I was excited about the idea and had a vision in my mind of the finished work. Mid-way through, my vision wasn't being realized and I wasn't sure whether the painting could succeed. The eggs were too uniform, the nest too tightly painted and boring; it needed to be loosened up to better represent the unpredictability of our lives. In one intense and long painting session, I used big messy brushstrokes that would either result in a breakthrough painting or a failed painting. With a few later refinements, the result was 'Possibilities Abound'. I'm honored to say this painting placed 1st in the 2013 California Statewide Painting Competition hosted by the Triton Museum of Art.

2. 'Celebration' by Holly Van Hart

The nest in 'Celebration' fills most of the large canvas. **Red and orange ribbons** adorn the nest from top to bottom, and from left to right. Of varying sizes and shades, the ribbons are woven into the nest and also twist and turn and spiral out from the nest at their every opportunity. The parents who built this nest were **living larger than life**, and clearly in a **celebratory mood**.

Three white eggs stick out from the top of the nest. They are shimmering with red around their edges, making them look like they are **full of energy and radiating heat**.



Celebration, 30" x 40" oil painting by Holly Van Hart

This image was based **entirely on my imagination**, and was built up with 10 or more layers of paint. One might think that it's easier to paint something imaginary compared to something realistic, but it's the exact opposite for me. The more that's created in my mind, the more time it takes.

This painting holds some personal memories for me. Furthest back, **as a girl, my mother had us do an experiment** one spring. We cut up pieces of red yarn and put them in trees. **Would the red yarn wind up as part of the birds' nests?** Yes! They did.

Shortly before 'Celebration' was made, my girlfriends and I got all wrapped up in an art project involving ribbons. We spent hours creating **pencil drawings of ribbons** folding all over each other, twisting and turning according to our imaginations. It was almost as if we were addicted to the project, we couldn't seem to stop. But eventually we did stop, and immediately afterwards, I began this painting.

Present in my mind while painting the 'Possibilities Abound' series (but not explicitly stated in the work itself) are thoughts of **gender roles**. In many bird species, females and males share the duties of nest building, incubating the eggs, and finding food for the nestlings. I think that's totally cool, and this is how my husband and I try to live our lives. Well, we don't have to incubate any eggs, but we do share the child-rearing, home-making, and earning-a-living responsibilities pretty equally. This has given us huge flexibility and opened up many new possibilities and opportunities for each of us.