



/Above/ *Evolution*, 2008, Solarplate, digital print on Japanese paper, flax paper, screenprint, 50" x 16".
/Back Cover/ *Danger Repeats*, 2008, Solarplate, digital print on Japanese paper, collagraph, 50" x 16".

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/Above/ *Hunger/Labor*, 2008, Solarplate, digital print on Japanese paper, screenprint, 50" x 22".
/Front Cover/ *Where have our Fallen Walked?*, 2008, Solarplate, digital print on Japanese paper, screenprint, 50" x 16".
Appreciation to Will Atkins.

INDEFINITE STATES OF EMERGENCY develops personal and iconic identity with a modern-day “mudra” or movement.



If we carefully consider the object of all those who are in search of what is useful, we shall find that it is nothing else but safety. – Dante

Helen Frederick has spent over 30 years of her life exploring the power of images and their relationship to the molding of her individual identity and our greater social identity. An internationally recognized artist, her approach to this subject is thoughtful yet complex. Central to her process is her incorporation of a matrix of imagery. The matrix is key to her oeuvre because it becomes a pictorial situation or set of circumstances that encourages the origin, embedding, development, and growth of something new and different. Matrices are common in printmaking because they are both repeatable and recombinant in that they permit her to re-use the powerful images that she draws from personal reflection or significant global events and then fixates on. Through combining and layering imagery, new meanings and possibilities arise. Frederick has described her self as an “engineer of layered meanings rather than a maker of prints.”

In conversation, the artist admits to being currently involved with the writings on visual culture by W.J.T. Mitchell, in particular his seminal and elastic text, “What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images.” Mitchell poses an interesting fundamental question as to whether the experience of viewing images has evolved within our minds to the point where we actually wonder if they have a life or consciousness of their own. He expands the field of visual thinking beyond the status of images as merely signs that require interpretation or analysis.

Images present not just a surface but also a face that faces the beholder. Rather than anthropomorphizing pictures, Mitchell explains that he means this as a metaphorical, conceptual, and theoretical perspective — not literal as in animism or symbolic as with icons. He embraces the provisional and contextual quality of postmodern culture. For Mitchell, this approach is a thought experiment and a technique for coming to grips as much as possible with the elusive, ethereal nature of postmodernism. It is impossible, really, to define postmodernism, whose primary attributes are contingency, continually changing imagery, and provisional events and personas that play to the media. But central to postmodernism is the power of visual culture. And this is precisely the environment in which Frederick has immersed herself.

In this body of work on view, the artist depicts herself literally in her photograph of herself bending over in a form of yogic mudra (gesture or motion) and metaphorically in the depiction of a young girl, multiplied several times, bending over and trying to touch the earth. She admits that the method of self-referral in this series may have grown from a recollection of Josef Beuys’s drawings of 1952. Frederick’s mudra of bending over, is indebted to one Beuys drawing in particular, “Akt (nude)” from

1952. Rendered in graphite and chlorinated iron on paper, the image depicts a woman bending over molding a pile. According to Frederick, she creates “by labor and vulnerability and bowing.” We see Frederick’s reinterpretation of this poetic image as a central image matrix in this show.

Coming of age during the advent of the nuclear age and the loss of her brother in the military at a young age were extremely formative events in the artist’s past. As a result Frederick holds the preciousness of life and the earth close to her heart. There is a cautionary quality in this body of work that acknowledges the sacredness of what we are given. Frederick states this in her artist statement included in this brochure.

Thus the imagery she presents includes atomic explosions, natural disasters, acid rain, a pair of empty military boots of a deceased soldier, thumbprints of the thousands we have lost to war and have yet to lose, particle storms, a man seeking his dead wife in the wreckage of the recent Chinese earthquake in the Sichuan province, networks of perilously connected telephone wires in a Japanese backstreet, a danger banner on a construction site, canisters of nuclear waste stored on a Pacific island, monitors that filter in the world and control us as by providing a means of social self-surveillance. And yet there are also images of hope such as a frog’s evolution, a serene Buddha, and candles situated peacefully on welded steel rods. So the narrative is not one of total despair but rather a musing on the possibilities of regeneration after disasters, be they man-made or natural.

It is important to note that Frederick merges digital media with the very physical process of printmaking and its tactile selection of papers and surfaces to print on. Admitting that she enjoys “living on the cusp of haptic-perceptual and virtual realities,” she offers: “Believing that the new media alternatives have their ancestry in the white of paper and the essence of celluloid, I use the essential information carriers of paper and electronic media as my expressive materials. Through the transformative qualities of these materials, I am interested in investigating where the visible and invisible lay side by side.”

Her layering of imagery and media found its roots in her admiration for the eclectic combinations and recombinations of Marcel Duchamp and the encouragement of her repeatable matrices approach at an early stage in her life by Dieter Roth, an important German mixed-media artist she met and worked with. Through this process Frederick hopes “to connect universal collective memories into visual and verbal contexts. “In the end art, for me, is a door to cognitive freedom. In the age of virtual reality there seems to be no more stable point of reference than our imaginations and ourselves.”

— Andrea Pollan, Curator’s Office, Washington DC

All quotes are from conversations and e-mails with the author in November and December of 2008 as well as the artist’s website: www.helenfrederick.com

HELEN FREDERICK ARTIST STATEMENT

INDEFINITE STATES OF EMERGENCY DEVELOPS PERSONAL AND ICONIC IDENTITY WITH A MODERN-DAY “MUDRA” OR MOVEMENT. IT ATTEMPTS TO SHOW THAT WE ARE THE PRODUCT OF OUR ENVIRONMENT AND NOT ABLE TO SEE BEYOND HABITS AND THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL/POLITICAL CONVENTIONS SO DEEPLY ROOTED INSIDE US. IF WE CAN SEE BEYOND THEM WE NEED FIRST TO FREE OURSELVES FROM THE NORMAL WAY WE INTERPRET FACTS. THE HAND-PRINTED IMAGES IN THE EXHIBITION SHOWS AN INNOCENT YOUNG GIRL MULTIPLIED 3 TIMES IN MOVEMENT - BENDING OVER AND STRETCHING OUT WITH SIX TINY HANDS REACHING OVER THE EARTH. EVERY TIME SHE TOUCHES THE GROUND ANOTHER A MEANINGFUL OR HORRIFIC REALIZATION IS JUST UNDER THE SURFACE OF HER HANDS. I HAVE USED MY OWN DIGITAL IMAGE, FULL-SCALE TO PORTRAY THE “REPS” I/WE DO DAILY AND IN A LIFETIME — WHETHER BY CHOICE OR LABOR. WHILE IN MOVEMENT WE DRAW OUT OUR INABILITY TO CLEAR THE DEBRIS LEFT BY US (HUMANITY), AND TO MAKE CHANGE. I AM STILL CONSIDERING WHY THIS MOVEMENT HAS BECOME SO IMPORTANT TO ME, BUT CERTAINLY BECAUSE OUR BACKS ARE “VIRTUALLY” LADEN AS A POPULATION AT THIS TIME. THE TITLES OF THE DIGITAL MOVEMENTS REFER TO ENDANGERMENT, GENOCIDE, TERRORISM, AND SURVEILLANCE. THE IMAGES THEMSELVES REFERENCE MRI’S, THE BIRTHING CANAL, EXPLOSIONS AND BOMBS. ULTIMATELY THEY ALSO EXPLAIN A RITUAL OF BOWING DOWN TO THAT BEFORE AND INSIDE US.

/Left/ *Many More*, 2008, Solarplate, monoprint and hand painting on custom-made paper, 30” x 22”.
/Below/ *Mudra and Particle Systems*, 2008, Solarplate, litho transfer and chine collé, 16” x 21.25”.

