

Helen Frederick



Recommended by George Waterman

While all art is conceptual in that art chooses to express an idea, much conceptual art today does not require, indeed, does not seek the particular skills and knowledge born from traditional honored skilled workers. From the time when painting or sculpture was aligned with materials, learned and honed over lifetimes, we are now often confronted by art that has been reduced to the idea only, the learned “craft” from cultural predecessors has gone away. Conceptual art is often closer to poetry. That is why it is so extraordinary to see the manual dexterity in the works of Helen Frederick. Her interest, as expressed by neurologist Frank Wilson in *THE HAND*, lies in the fact that the hand shapes the brain, language, and human culture. Not only do her works deeply convey ideas about society, but they are expressed with an exquisite skill. Helen Frederick has studied hand papermaking in the far east, particularly India, Japan, and China. There can only be a very few artists in this country with this level of expertise. Her medium is often pulp painting, that is the effect of layering wet pigmented paper with brushes, stencils, and painterly applications, which, in her case, are also produced by her hand. Collaged imagery and text are often a part of the composition. Helen Frederick’s work is about the social issues we hear so much about: pollution, environment, climate, social injustice, but they are also very much about the life of the spirit, all produced by an artist at the top of her game. This is art that speaks to us all forever, conceived and gently delivered by a master. How fortunate we are to have such an artist among us.

George Waterman, Fall 2020

Bio

Helen Frederick is recognized as a distinguished artist, curator, educator, coordinator of international projects, and as founder of Pyramid Atlantic, a center for contemporary printmaking, hand papermaking and the art of the book. As an advocate for and an active participant in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area arts scene, she has served on the directorial boards of

alternative art spaces, various local and national boards including the College Art Association, and national peer-review panels. Her work has been exhibited at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., The Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University, Dieu Donne Gallery, New York, Henie-Onstad Museum, Norway, and the Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, Japan, and is in collections of the Whitney Museum and Brooklyn Museum in New York, the National Gallery of Art, Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., among many others. Frederick, who is a Professor Emeritus in the School of Art at George Mason University, has fulfilled speaking engagements around the world, always emphasizing collaboration across disciplines. Throughout her life, Frederick's passion for diverse cultures and histories has led her to travel to observe the material cultures of many societies, their skills, and ideas and to make connections among disparate cultural traditions. Her private Reading Road Studio in Silver Spring, Maryland, provides collaborative opportunities for artists interested in works in and on paper, constructions, artist books, and critical conversations about social justice, cultural and visual literacy. In 2008, she received the Southern Graphic Council International Printmaker Emeritus Award and was invited into the Feminist Art Base archive, the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Frederick is an alumnus of the Rhode Island School of Design.

Artist Statement

I have always had a real fascination with Asian aesthetics. When I was a child, my mother would take me to Philadelphia to visit my grandparents and we would often go to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I wanted to see the Chinese and Japanese rooms and the Duchamp collection over and over again. To me the objects, the materiality in these rooms, posed so many interesting questions. I was curious about how commonplace handmade things, particularly three-dimensional objects, were intriguing in their making, both beautiful or practical, and had a cultural sensibility so different from mine and yet somehow familiar. I still recall those rooms, vividly engrained in my memory. They are an evocative kind of cross-pollination experience that I keep carrying into my work. My work as a painter, printmaker, and installation artist weave together the personal and the communal, layering elements of visual information onto, and into, substrates of hand formed paper as a material that is capable of advancing hybrid statements. I attempt to explore a fundamental quality and lineage of materiality that guides us in our 21st century lives and binds us in a larger evolutionary process. By linking Asian traditions that I have studied, with Western ones, my printed and 3-dimensional constructions use embedded words, perforations, and photographic appropriations in a personal language of markings. Symbols of decay and regeneration, or shapes for introspection, are prominent. I rely on sources near and far for geographical immersions, drawing on sound, environmental recall, and diminishing aspects in nature that are often determined by our damaging behavioral agency. Walking and listening to the voices of nature often leads me into my work. By using universal symbolic shapes and materials themselves as an essence, my intention is to capture fleeting moments, or eternal moments of recollection, and plant them onto surfaces that are formed by the kinesthesia of my own corporeal abilities. I use the tools and processes that I have come to understand best. Ritual is a grounding

aspect of my process, and basically I consider myself a laborer of art, aligned with all those who acknowledge the many steps required for manual construction, and grounded by the labor of the hand for the making of objects.



Helen Frederick 2020, Paradox, Pulp Painting 18" x18"



Helen Frederick 2019, Two Birds, Pulp Painting 42" x 22"