

# Printmaking

A passion for printmaking unites these four accomplished artists, who each work with a different process.

BY AUSTIN R. WILLIAMS

Printmaking is drawing's first cousin. In both disciplines artists work directly with their hands to create lines and tones, ultimately resulting in a finished work on paper. But printmaking involves an additional array of tools and techniques that have fascinated artists for centuries. Every printmaking process offers its own sort of beauty while also imposing certain constraints on the artist. Here we explore the work of four printmakers, who share their thoughts on their chosen printmaking processes.

# TODAY



## ELLEN HECK: DRYPOINT-WOODCUT

A certain amount of unpredictability is endemic to many printmaking processes, and for Ellen Heck this is part of the appeal. "There's a lot of chance that happens between putting an image on a matrix, inking it and pulling it off the press," she says. "These things are not entirely predictable, in a great way. Seeing the finished print is always a surprise. It's exciting. I like that feeling. The first time I took a printmaking class, I felt it was something I could do for a long time."

In recent years Heck's work has focused on portraits that play with symbolism and metaphor. Her series "Forty Fridas" dresses up women and girls as Frida Kahlo, each portrait evoking different aspects of the painter's physical appearance and artistic output. The series "Lonely Hearts" is described by the artist as "metaphorical portraits"

### Abigail as Frida

by Ellen Heck, 2012, woodcut and drypoint, 8 x 6. From the series "Forty Fridas."

that use the symbol of the heart to explore ideas of love and emotion. A somewhat similar approach is taken in the recent series "Fascinators," in which Heck adorns her young subjects with headpieces shaped like Möbius strips.

Heck's work combines two traditional printmaking processes: drypoint, an intaglio process, and woodcut, a relief process. In *intaglio* processes—such as engraving, etching and drypoint—marks are carved into a metal plate using one of several methods. Those indentations are filled with ink, and when the plate is pressed to paper, the ink is transferred to the paper. In *relief* processes, such as woodcut and linocut, the opposite occurs. In these methods the artist carves away the negative parts of the image and ink is applied to the remaining, raised portions of the plate, which is then pressed to paper.

Heck was inspired to combine intaglio and relief processes by Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), who in the late 1800s produced color etchings inspired by Japanese woodcuts that had recently been exhibited in Paris. "I've always loved those images, and I wanted to learn from Cassatt's process," Heck says. "She used aquatint to achieve much of the Japanese woodcut feel and combined it with drypoint. I decided to use woodcut itself in combination with drypoint."



### ABOVE Laura Wearing a Möbius Strip as a Hat

by Ellen Heck, 2016, woodcut, drypoint and hand painting, 9 x 6½. From the series "Fascinators."



### LEFT Allegiance

by Ellen Heck, 2014, woodcut and drypoint, 14 x 14. From the series "Lonely Hearts."