

HELEN HAWES

About these Images

MOST OF THE IMAGES YOU SEE HERE are giclee prints, they record the evolutions leading to six original mixed media paintings. There are over 40 past life prints. Like the photographs in a family album, they preserve fleeting moments of history and reveal patterns of birth, growth, and death. There are six presented here, *Out of Darkness*, *Seed Series*, *Indigo Child*, *Earth and Sky*, *Amazing Grace*, and *Endocrine System*. Like most families they continue to grow and are rarely considered finished. They become richer over the years as they gain layers of history.

I have been working for the past ten years on these drawings. This project was started to help me face my fear of death. It has brought much more. The guidelines of the project are very simple.

1. No drawing is ever finished.
2. Slow down and listen.
3. Notice the important pausing places.
4. Stop and dialogue with the drawing.
5. Make a print of each past life.
6. Allow the process to continue.
7. The originals can never be sold as they are never finished.
8. At the right time let go of making the prints.
9. At the right time let go of making the originals.
10. At the right time let go.
11. There is no scheduled end to this project.

This structure forces me to confront, over and over, the death and birth of the drawings. There is no sense of a finish point and there is no artificial freezing forever in time and space, as is characteristic of most of the visual Arts. In this project the work seems to mimic life more closely, constantly changing, one image growing out of the other, allowing a continual flow of “never the sameness” in which death is just another pause, and the new always comes from what was already there. Little by little my fear of death diminishes as my trust in the process grows.

SOME THINGS I’VE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY:

When a form maintains it’s shape long enough to say or do something that demands my attention, I pause and dialogue with it. When the drawing is ready to continue growing I begin again. I learn a lot about who I am along the way.

There are times when I long for a fresh start, a clean slate. I want to escape to the Fiji islands. Other times when I pause at ‘early’ moments in drawings, unformed and eager, I feel a squirmy embarrassment that wriggles inside out to hide from itself. Real innocence makes me itch. Other times, it is fear that makes me move like lightning to get away from adolescent marks with their unbridled power and raw honesty. There are lost places and familiar places. There are drawings that make me feel like a ‘good’ artist. I sense my bigger and better than muscles tighten and I notice the drawing struggling to free itself from my not-so-gentle grip. It is hard to stay with the dying drawings, especially those with personalities of whom I have grown very fond. At those times my ‘please don’t leave me’ shouts often drown out the drawing’s own soft request to allow the marks which will begin the death process. When I can listen and do allow, surprisingly, death appears quite differently than I had assumed. There are more metaphors for death than I had ever dreamed. Another intriguing place to pause is when new life appears from the decaying matter of a long dead image.

Since the process is about dialogue, I try to listen to the image growing on the paper as well as my own voice. Because I am human, where I choose to pause and make a print of the work is often governed mostly by my own habits and judgments. When I can free myself of both of these ‘guard rails’ a whole new path opens up. It is always a challenge to let go of the controls and allow the true nature of the process to unfold itself. As the listener in me grows stronger and the protector-director weaker, I can catch a glimpse of infinity.