



Peter Frederiksen, *Even a worm will turn.*
April 26, 2025 - June 7, 2025

Massey Klein Gallery is pleased to present *Even a worm will turn.*, a solo exhibition of new embroideries by Peter Frederiksen. The exhibition will be on view from April 26th through June 7th. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, April 26th from 6-8pm. This is the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery. For press inquiries or questions regarding works available, please email info@masseyklein.com.

"To whom do lions cast their gentle looks?
Not to the beast that would usurp their den.
The smallest worm will turn being trodden on,
And doves will peck in safeguard of their brood."

William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 3 (Act 2, Scene 2)*

What constitutes a bad day? What's the cause? It's different for everyone, probably, but I doubt that any day truly starts bad. It grows. It builds to bad. There's a proverbial last straw, a boiling point, but the fallacy of the single cause warns against oversimplification - no one thing can be assumed to be the sole reason for any single outcome. Instead of looking at blaming the last straw, we should hope to look at the untold many straws that came before it. Our understanding of our worlds should be cumulative, but as detail-oriented animals it can be hard to see the forest for the trees.

Of course, when looking at the state of things in our world, when seeing the forest, it's hard not to see the flames. Every day feels like a bad day. And none of this feels new. What's happening has been going on for years, and it won't stop. Collectively, we're waking up every day about one stubbed toe away from having a bad day. It is taking less and less to cause a break.

Even a worm will turn is fifteen new embroideries showing breaking points. These are works showing thrashing, flailing, punching, piling, and spinning. Some - like "Every day there's a new and exciting challenge." - are abstracted, showcasing messiness and emotion; not quite a dance, but a spiral - the kind of spiral you go through out of exhaustion, frustration, burnout, taking up about as much space as is physically possible, limbs overextended and whipping around. The same blurring effect is utilized in other works, as in "It doesn't matter what I do, I just keep seeing nails." These are tight snapshots of action, emphasizing quickness to act, or maybe more specifically lacking the hesitancy and tempering that comes with experience.

Many of the titles of the works harken to self-help style phrases, like "Trusting the process." and "It might shock you how quickly you can change your mind." These titling conventions, sardonic as they may be, call loosely to the specific brand of assistance that is being afforded to people, the kind of pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps ideology that is cementing our collective status as being left to ourselves to figure it out. This sentiment is most-clearly seen visually in both "Fighting for scraps." and "Everyone wants to help build the coffin." These two pieces show two different piles of people: one working against each other, and one working together. Neither seems very productive, both feel pretty violent, and the ultimate goals are kept from the viewer, the pointlessness on full display, screaming out that there is no right answer.

The titular concept is an old one: first recorded in 1546 in a collection of proverbs by English writer John Heywood and made more famous by William Shakespeare, "even a worm will turn" is the simplified version of the expression, conveying that even the most docile of creatures will retaliate or seek revenge if pushed too far.

I saw this phrase a few years ago, on Twitter of all places. I couldn't get it out of my head, the visuals it conjured up and the short Wikipedia article that scratched the surface of the history it held. I spent a lot of time rolling it over and over in my mind, the beautiful simplicity of the flow of the sentence in its dumbed-down state, a quiet profundity. Take from that what you will.

-Peter Frederiksen, 2025

Peter Frederiksen champions the art of embroidery. Throughout his exploration of the medium, the artist has developed a free-motion machine technique, commonly working on a standard sewing machine that has been altered by removing the presser foot and lowering the feed teeth, allowing Frederiksen to engage tension while moving an embroidery hoop around freely. The result is dense embroidery stitched onto linen canvas, which is then stretched onto a wooden panel as a nod to traditional painting. Described by the artist as "drawing with a sewing machine," Frederiksen produces scenes with subtle gradients and uniform textures that closely resemble colored pencil drawings when viewed from a distance.

The nostalgic, soft-edged scenes are born from the artist's love of cartoons (notably post-war Warner Brothers and the Simpsons) and come together through a fervent editing process. Beginning with screenshots taken from old cartoons, often focusing on the smallest of elements while featuring as much action as possible, Frederiksen crops, edits, and adds additional details, be it from other cartoons, eclectic designs or abstract images, before tracing, sketching, and eventually stitching his creations onto linen.

The artist places great importance on the titles of his work, often giving the title as much thought as the image itself. His titles can be ciphers, descriptors, or sometimes just something that he considers humorous, but all serve to provide a jumping-off point for the viewer's interpretation of the work. While trying to match the poetics of the image with the poetics of the words, the artist maintains that much is open to interpretation - he is as interested in what others feel from the work as that which was intended.

Peter Frederiksen attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, with a focus on painting, drawing, and fibers. It was during these years that the artist explored the techniques of other mediums and expanded his painting practice to include soft sculpture and fiber art. Following his time at SAIC, Frederiksen worked at ad agencies as an art producer where he fostered his passion for promoting and representing other working artists. He is currently a partner, representative, and producer at RAD Represents, an artist representation company located in Chicago, IL.

Frederiksen's embroideries have most recently been featured in exhibitions at UNION Gallery in London, Hunt Gallery in Toronto, The Flat in Milan, Galleri Urbane in Dallas, PostMastersROMA in Rome, Haverkamp Leistenschneider in Berlin, Daniel Raphael Gallery in London, and Bulls Fest in Chicago, curated by All Star Press Chicago. The artist's work has been presented at several institutions in Chicago including the Chicago Athletic Association (solo exhibition, 2020), the Hyde Park Art Center (group exhibition, 2019), and the Arts Club of Chicago (group exhibition, 2018). The artist's first solo exhibition with Massey Klein Gallery, [NO NO NO NO NO](#), was on view from 2 September through 8 October 2022.

Frederiksen has appeared in numerous print and online publications, including *Creative Boom*, *Varyer*, *The Guardian*, *Colossal*, *It's Nice That*, *gallerytalk.net*, *Textiel Plus*, *The Fiber Studio*, *Composite Arts Magazine*, and *Chicago Art Review*. The artist lives and works in Chicago, IL.