

PROSPECTUS

The Arion Press announces an artist book collaboration
in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the publication of

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY'S

Frankenstein;

or,

The Modern Prometheus

with an introduction by
TODD HOSFELT

and with nine hypodermic ink drip drawings by
TIM HAWKINSON

issued in both Standard and Deluxe editions
at San Francisco
May 2019

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus emerged from a now-famous ghost story challenge between the author, her husband-to-be Percy Shelley, her stepsister Claire Clairmont, Claire's lover Lord Byron, and his personal physician John Polidori in Switzerland, during the dark and rainy summer of 1816. Although the party brought several stories to life, including Dr. Polidori's "The Vampyre" (published 1819), it is Mary Shelley's that became the iconic tale that resonates across continents and cultures two hundred years later, an anniversary celebrated by an Arion Press artist book with images by artist Tim Hawkinson.

Mary Shelley was born in 1797, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft (a feminist author and theorist who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*) and William Godwin, another author and scholar of radical British political theory. Her mother died from complications of childbirth, the first of many losses that marked if not defined Shelley's life: of mother, husband, children, health, and financial security. In her introduction to the 1831 third and final version of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley describes herself as a "devout but nearly silent listener" to the stories of her husband and his friends during the summer she wrote the novel. Percy Shelley's introduction to the first edition reflects his own belief that he had an important role in the writing of his wife's tale. Despite working in the shadow of Percy's literary reputation, Shelley became well-known as an author in her lifetime, and the text makes it clear that while she may have been listening silently, she was more than capable of telling her own story and imagining her own world.

The novel is structured as a nested narrative that captures stories within stories told by and to different characters. At the very physical center of *Frankenstein* is the story of Safie, a young girl whose family Victor Frankenstein's creature observes from afar, watching in his attempt to learn how to be human, but fearful (rightfully so, it turns out) of their judgment. The creature tells his story to Dr. Frankenstein, who himself tells his story to an Arctic explorer named Robert Walton, who faithfully records it via letters sent home to his sister Margaret in England.

Walton's letters to Margaret—whose full name shares its initials not coincidentally with Mary Shelley's—begin and end the text.

These multiple points of view are echoed in the three-volume division Shelley chose for the first edition, which was published anonymously in 1818 when she was only nineteen years old. In this version she dedicates one volume to each of the main narrators. For the third version she restructured the book and revised her story, adding an introduction in which she notes "... the alterations I have made ... are principally those of style. I have changed no portion of the story nor introduced any new ideas or circumstances. I have mended the language where it was so bald as to interfere with the interest of the narrative ... leaving the core and substance of it untouched." She also adds this poignant reflection on the changes in her life in the years since she first wrote the tale: "And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny to go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart." The Arion edition replicates in whole Shelley's 1831 text while reinstating the original tripartite structure that so effectively situates the multiple narratives.

The imagery of *Frankenstein* is distinctive, dramatic, Romantic: the crashing of thunder; the icy Alps and frozen Arctic seas; and of course, the flashing of lightning. As in Gustave Doré's magnificent illustrations for *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Samuel Coleridge's 1798 poem that is considered by some accounts to be the touchstone for *Frankenstein*, the depiction of super nature underlies artist Tim Hawkinson's approach to Shelley's masterpiece. Gravity itself is made present through Hawkinson's invention of a bespoke drawing contraption, derived from a hypodermic-needle stylus, that forces him to embrace nature as a co-creator of his images.

As gallerist Todd Hosfelt notes in his introduction, each mark Hawkinson makes with his idiosyncratic gadget dribbles ink like blood spilling from a surgeon's scalpel. One might see this process as a physi-

cal manifestation of the artist's struggle to convey his vision. "It's so out of control," says Hawkinson, "continual disasters. The ink insists on its own path." The resulting black and white drawings appear both surprisingly modern and timeless, departing from the gothic visuals traditionally associated with Dr. Frankenstein's tale, yet growing directly from the heart of Shelley's story.

Among these is the drawing "Lightning", a nod to the popular misconception that electricity is responsible for the creation of Dr. Frankenstein's monster. This impression is likely a result of the pervasive, lasting effect of the numerous film versions of the early twentieth century, such as the 1931 version starring Boris Karloff, wherein a corpse is lifted through the roof of the laboratory during a lightning storm and then returns, descending to the doctor's proclamation, "It's *alive!*" But in the novel, the awakening of the monster receives little fanfare, and the moment Dr. Frankenstein unlocks the mystery of life spans just a few sentences: "I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised, that among so many men of genius who had directed their enquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret."

It isn't lightning that awakens the beast; it is Dr. Frankenstein's intoxication with his own power. The escalation of the conflict between the creator and his loathed creation causes the drama to explode with the energy not of electricity but of rage, culminating in its shocking acts of violence. "Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful," says the monster, threatening the father who rejected him. Power and fear are the currency of their relationship.

Indeed, the book's most intensely dramatic moments are captured in the interactions between characters who fundamentally misunderstand

each other, who disregard each other as subhuman, who fail to see beyond their own interests to recognize the ethical and emotional truths that might redeem them.

This Arion artist book edition seeks to situate Shelley's work in a contemporary setting that refocuses the spotlight from the monstrous to the human struggle that drives the core of the story. The themes of the text—the responsibility of a creator for their creation, the ways in which new scientific and technological discoveries can fundamentally change our relationships to each other and the world, the dangers of pursuing knowledge over all other human concerns—ring true even, and especially, today.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tim Hawkinson was born in San Francisco in 1960 and currently lives in Los Angeles. He earned a BFA from San Jose State University and an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1989. Solo museum exhibitions include the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams; and an exhibition organized by the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati which traveled to five venues including the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. He was included in the Whitney Biennial in 2003, was a featured artist in the PBS Art21 series in 2003, and was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 2015.

Hawkinson is a masterful conjurer, transforming found materials into extraordinary organisms that can be playful, grotesque, or bizarre. Kitchen scraps, wizened Christmas trees, and detritus blown by storms into his backyard are just some of the ingredients he manipulates to concoct disorienting sculptures and photo-works. Many of Hawkinson's pieces use his body as source material, such as a feather and egg created from his own hair, an octopus constructed from photographs of his

hands and puckered lips, and tiny birds constructed from his fingernail clippings. Other drawings fuse organic elements in ways that suggest new and disturbing forms of life.

Though his work is often humorous, his investigations are provocative, raising questions about the intersections of technology, consciousness, and the environment, and our embodied relationships to these. Like Dr. Frankenstein, the artist asks, “What do I need to bring into existence?” The surprising monsters and mechanisms that result invoke the mixed emotions and contradictions inherent in being human. Hawkinson is a modern-day alchemist and provocateur, but unlike Shelley’s doomed doctor, who rejects the horrifying results of his investigations, Hawkinson sees the artist’s role in society as an interrogator—someone who asks questions even when the answers resist obvious beauty. The Arion edition of *Frankenstein* is Hawkinson’s first artist book.

THE PRINTS

The illustrations for this project were constructed using a custom-built hypodermic needle fountain pen tool incorporating a plastic soda bottle containing India ink suspended from a pulley hanging from the artist’s studio ceiling. On another apparatus, sheets of 6x4-foot butcher paper were pinned to a board fixed to the wall by means of a turntable. These mechanisms in place, a series of horizontal lines was made on the paper. With each horizontal mark, ink dribbled downwards. The paper was spun and the process repeated from different angles to construct a picture. When the drawings are sized-down to fit the pages of the book, the accumulation of lines creates an effect similar to the cross-hatching incised into an etching plate. Prints for the book were made from polymer plates of the reduced drawings.

There are eight full-page illustrations and a double-page centerfold spread: a landscape of the Alps mountain range, the backdrop of the Frankenstein family’s Swiss home. Although the illustrations all share similar page margins, their constituent drip marks are made to bleed off

the edges of their sheets. In addition, Hawkinson has drawn a vignette for the title page depicting the titular Prometheus’s liver, and he has adapted a ship motif from his 1998 work on paper “Crow’s Nest” for the slipcase covers.

THE BOOK

The book is large octavo, 9-5/8 x 6-3/4 inches, 264 pages set in Monotype Bulmer with Eve handset for display. Type and artwork have been printed by letterpress in two colors—black and an icy blue reserved for the title and half-titles—with a Miller TW cylinder press on Magnani papers: 90 GSM laid for the text and 180 GSM wove for the prints. The title page vignette is printed in an additional two colors: deep red over a toned background touchplate. All copies of the book are signed by the artist.

THE STANDARD EDITION

The standard edition is limited to 220 copies for sale and 26 lettered copies *hors de commerce*. It is Smyth-sewn and bound into boards covered with white leatherette whose background has been foil stamped in matte gray, leaving in relief a graphic depiction of a frayed, burst balloon—an object likely fallen from the sky, found by the artist. The image is reminiscent of a lightning strike, or other blast; even a mutant cell. The book is encased in a dark blue cardstock chemise with the title laser-cut so that the white cover shines through the letterforms, illuminating them from underneath. And in keeping with the nesting structure of Mary Shelley’s story, the book and chemise are in turn housed in a slipcase with dark blue cloth top and bottom and a paper wrap-around imprinted with a detail of a ship, perhaps Captain Walton’s.

THE DELUXE EDITION

The deluxe edition is limited to 30 copies for sale and 5 printer’s proofs. These books are handsewn with linen thread and 3-tone silk headbands.

They are bound in white textured Japanese Momi washi over boards and stamped in a manner identical to the standard edition, although with a satin-finish aluminum in lieu of matte gray foil. The chemise, a lighter blue card stock than in the standard edition, is lined with silver Japanese tea chest paper and stamped with aluminum titling. Book and chemise slide into a birch wood slipcase engraved with the wrap-around ship motif. The deluxe edition is accompanied by an extra signed stand-alone print of the Frankenstein family crest, on the same paper as the illustrations in the book.

ORDERING

Current subscribers will be offered the first opportunity to purchase the deluxe edition, and three copies have been reserved for new subscribers—please contact us for details. Other customers may add their names to a reservation list. The retail price for the standard edition is \$1,200, or \$840 for subscribers at the standard 30% discount. The retail price for the deluxe edition is \$2,500. For subscribers the deluxe edition is an optional purchase available at a 20% discount, for a total of \$2,000. To reserve a copy or request further information about the subscription program discounts, please contact:

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