

# Petzel

Smith, Roberta, "Art in Review: Experiments in Primitive Living," *The New York Times*, January 8, 2009

*The New York Times*

## Art & Design



Friedrich Petzel

Dana Hoey's photograph "Double Check" (2007), part of her Ash theme, is on view in "Experiments in Primitive Living," at Friedrich Petzel.

### Experiments in Primitive Living

*Friedrich Petzel*

*537 West 22nd Street, Chelsea*

*Through Jan. 24*

Dana Hoey's photographs favor narrative ambiguities concerning women and photography and the social roles they play. Here 40 images, framed in black and mounted, unglazed, on progressively darker walls, fold environmental and political issues into the mix.

Against the slickness of this presentation is the harshness of the images. Taken outdoors and more or less set up, the photographs are arranged according to five themes: ash, freeze, thaw, flood and drought. They cover the waterfront of photographic conventions, but in contaminated form: portrait, landscape, still life, scientific study, advertisement, pornography, photojournalism, forensic.

The ash images are first, giving the show a dour, postapocalyptic mood similar to that of [Cormac McCarthy](#)'s novel "The Road." There are also recurring references to ash, most startlingly in the dirt-caked female nude of "Freeze — Fallen."

But the remaining images tend to divide between normal and not. "Thaw" includes a white-haired older woman in a spring garden, and close-ups of flowers, but also the mud-smear leg of a woman holding an Army helmet.

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"Drought" features children playing in a sloping field, but also an image of someone tending a small fire pit where sticks, grass and legs have all been spray-painted gold. You don't know if you're viewing details of a druggy camp-out or of a survivalist's crazed last stand.

There are moments of quiet bravura: "Freeze — Helmet" shows a snow scene reflected in a shiny helmet resting on an expanse of pale flesh.

Ms. Hoey's art has grown steadily in ambition, but she may be a very late bloomer. So far her themes tend to be more distinct than her images, despite high levels of diligence, seriousness and craftsmanship. There is a difference between mysteriousness and ambiguity bordering on opacity. Ms. Hoey asks a lot of her medium, so much that she might almost fare better in another one, like writing or film.

**ROBERTA SMITH**