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Recession imagery captured in exhibit

[Karen Goldberg Goff](#)

An empty office. An abandoned building. A sign that says, "I want what we had." These images from the recession have been captured in a new photography exhibit, "Framing the Economic Downturn," presented by the Washington Project for the Arts. It opens Wednesday at Gallery O/H on H Street Northeast and runs through Dec. 12.

The opening is part of FotoWeek DC 2009 (www.fotoweekdc.org), an areawide photo festival for professionals and amateurs taking place in the District this week. The second-annual event celebrating photography features exhibitions, competitions and special events at area galleries and museums.

"Framing the Economic Downturn" is a look at economic strife -- past and present -- through photos, says Kristina Bilonick, Washington Project for the Arts program director.

"The imagery could not be any more current," she says. Many of the photos were shot recently in the District and surrounding areas.

There is social relevance in looking at how hardship and good fortune run in cycles, says exhibit curator Jim Hubbard. Mr. Hubbard, the creative director of Venice Arts in Venice, Calif., was a longtime D.C. photojournalist who founded Shooting Back, a nonprofit organization that empowered underprivileged and homeless youths by teaching them photography.

"I have always been concerned with people who are dispossessed," said Mr. Hubbard, whose work stems from war protests in the 1960s and features many series on the disenfranchised in the District in the 1980s. "I was just reading in the L.A. Times about Dorothea Lange, who captured so many images of the dispossessed during the Depression. I was intrigued when she said she was a photographer of democracy for democracy. The world really needs these images."

"Framing the Economic Downturn" includes works by photographers Kike Arnal, Jaimie E. Beach, Linda Hesh, Michael Kent, Judith Pratt and Michelle Renay Wilson, among others.

Mr. Arnal's photos are from a series he shot called "In the Shadow of Power." The black-and-white photos, shot over a three-year period, are of what goes on in the Washington one does not see on C-SPAN. Many of the images are of the homeless and AIDS patients.

"Elements indicative of failure and hardship and those of apparent success seldom ever intersect in Washington," Mr. Arnal says in his artist's statement. "Many Americans and international visitors alike seem to have an incomplete understanding of Washington, a center of global influence that has failed many of its own communities. No doubt the situations I have documented can be found in nearly any major city, but in the seat of power of the richest nation in the world, such images are all the more troubling."

Ms. Hesh's work comes from a series called "The Desolation Doorhangers." She created a series of eight statements printed on door hangers, placed them across the city and shot pictures. The door hangers feature statements such as "I don't know what to do," "I didn't ask for this," "I feel so lost," and "I don't understand."

"The statements could be about problems in a love affair, feeling dissatisfied at work, longing for your neighborhood as it was or even frustration with the government," Ms. Hesh said. "This artwork is about any type of relationship that results in a broken trust."

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