

On Ice

Art Poetry Science

Pat Badt & Scott Sherk, Douglas Beube,
Bill Bonner, Paula Chamlee,
Mark Cohen, Patricia Delluva,
Abigail Doan, Patricia J. Goodrich,
Mineko Grimmer, Michael Grothusen, Jesse Hamilton,
Joan Jeanrenaud with Greg Kuhn,
Mary Alessio Leck, Ellen K. Levy,
Stacy Levy, Nora Ligorano & Marshall Reese,
Nava Lubelski, Gerald Nichols,
E. Nuevo, Tara O'Brien,
Scott Peterman, Daisuke Shintani,
Herbert B. Simon, Michael A. Smith
Buzz Spector, Atsuko Tajima,
Robert Walch, Krzysztof Zarebski

Curator, Kathy Bruce

I originally conceived of this project as one component of a NSF grant proposal I wrote with the wildly romantic expectation of traveling to Antarctica.¹ The exhibition *On Ice* was to be the cumulative result of that journey whose objective would be to assemble the work of artists whose work like my own, was inspired by ice experimentally, scientifically, or conceptually.

Hence, the idea for this show originated out of a personal desire to perceive ICE by touch, smell, sound, and experience. As an artist, the questions are immense: How does the emptiness and whiteness of Antarctica affect the artistic imagination? How does the experience of nothingness/the void affect an artist's understanding of poetry, space, and scale? And finally, how can abstract concepts of ice be transformed by metaphor into various forms of artistic expression?

From the viewpoint of the artistic imagination, these ideas ARE both significant and essential in order to penetrate the mysteries of the axis mundi. However, my proposal to interpret experiential sensation as both subject and medium proved to be as fluid as melting ice itself. What I considered to be compelling questions driving my own interest in Antarctica were considered "insubstantial" from a scientific point of view.

Therefore, this exhibition has become a substitute for that journey: a compilation of ruminations on ice that I envisioned would encompass the topics of my own interests in science, poetry and art. The collection includes works acquired by both invitation and a regional call to artists, scientists, and poets.

For the reasons that my own questions address and for those stated by Robert Frost, "Some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice," I anticipated the works from the regional call would be more conceptual and larger in scope and scale. ICE, after all, is material and immaterial, visible and invisible, audible and inaudible, and most of all, *mysterious*.²

Ice exhibitions elsewhere, such as Lance Fung's *Snow Show*, 2004, in Finland have focused on high-tech, freestanding installations by artists, architects, and designers utilizing ice as the primary medium for constructing archi-

tectural structures, snow gardens, and mammoth sculptures. *The Ship: The Art of Climate Change*, a major exhibition at the Natural History Museum, London, January 3–September 3, 2006, displayed philosophical responses by British artists to their travels to the Arctic with the Cape Farewell Project to measure climate change. The tremendous range of works included artists Antony Gormley, Gary Hume, and Rachel Whiteread among others. They addressed issues of global warming in fanciful ways via site-specific sculpture, schematic paintings, and Whiteread's installation, *The Unilever Series: Embankment* (2005), of stacked, cast, white translucent polyethylene cubes simulating ice.

This exhibition, *On Ice*, finds its foothold somewhere in between those two extremes. The work explores a multifaceted response to ice by giving form to intimate visions. It presents images that inform and demonstrate the multiple uses and meanings of ice. The common motivation shared by all of these exhibitions is an obsession with finding beauty in the depiction of ice in nature or in its manmade form. From every viewpoint, ice is seductive.

Who would not be seduced by Lafayette mathematician Cliff Reiter's snowflake growth animation and Edward Lozowski's documentation of ice spike formation, which contribute to our cerebral understanding of the constitution of ice but are also extraordinarily beautiful and curious? And further, how could one not be entranced by the dancing specks and sparkling bubbles of ice flow below the surface of Grinnell Glacier filmed by geomorphologist Robert S. Anderson. Scrutinizing scientific data on complex systems similar to the method used by scientists, fiber artist Abigail Doan documents her observation of ice crystal formations in *Crocheted Snow I & III* (2006) with crochet and photography.

On a larger scale, sculptor Michael Grothusen's suspended steel map of Antarctica, *Explanation of Mysterious Forces* (2001), spins around ominously in circles propelled by its own weight and a motorized fan, perhaps suggesting the impending impact of global warming on Antarctica; the disappearance of ice from our continent and world. Like Grothusen, Ellen K. Levy approaches serious scientific topics from an artist's perspective in her

multimedia digital print, *Production in Frigid Environments* (2005). Luscious diagrams are a visionary spreadsheet for her concept of an apparatus and method for recovering oil from icy arctic waters.

Tara O'Brien's *Natural Elements* (2005) and Doug Beube's *Melt* (2007) use melting ice as the key component of their creative processes. They arrive at a sense of immaterial nothingness by allowing ice to dissolve back to its watery origins. O'Brien uses various mediums to explore what constitutes the essence and life span of books; in this case, she has molded ice into a book shape. Her ice book begins its life as a mysterious solid entity only to end as an invisible puddle. Beube uses melting ice as a metaphor for the meaning of the book it encases; a book on global warming becomes visible as the melting process exposes the title.

In another approach, Stacy Levy and Mineko Grimmer use melting ice as the mechanism rather than as the object to provoke complex results. In Levy's *Ice Clock* (2002), ice placed in the upper funnel of the "clock" slowly melts, causing the water level in the glass jar below to rise. For the first few days, gallery attendants mark the water level each hour on the jar. At the start of each day, a new bag of ice is used. The passage of time can be noted by comparing the water level with the marks. In Grimmer's lobby installation, *Symposium* (1987/2007), melting ice and falling pebbles provide a meditative sound as they drop into the basin below. Another sound piece is the 2001 performances of *Ice Cello* by cellist Joan Jeanrenaud and composer Gregory Kuhn.

By contrast, the sound of shattering ice/glass is derived from ice in its solid form in *Ice* (1996–2006) by Scott Sherk and Pat Badt. Conceptual artist Krzysztof Zarebski's mysterious *Untitled* (2002) assemblage ponders the philosophical associations of ice to sound by the application of artificial ice cubes on audio equipment. His use of acrylic cubes brings to mind Joseph Cornell's ice cube box assemblage, *Taglioni's Jewel Casket* (1940, New York: The Museum of Modern Art) in which a jewel case pulled from the ice contains ice cubes within it, suggesting the surreal possibility of ice as dream.³

The physical sensation of ice is simulated in the photographic process of E. Nuevo who, in *Shadows after the Storm* (2006) and *Ice Storm* (2006) replicates the texture and reflective shadows of ice on surfaces of glass and steel, moving beyond the expected image of the camera lens. It is possible in these two works to both visualize and experience the *feel* of ice, much in the same way one experiences Frank Hurley's 1915 icy images of the *Endurance*. Hurley staged his photographs by setting up artificial lighting and reverse negatives, thus creating the sensation that the viewer is physically present within the frigid atmosphere of Ernest Shackleton's ship wedged within polar ice. Likewise, Scott Peterman's frozen image of *Shaw Mills* (2002), an icehouse in Maine, freezes the image in sublime timeless oblivion.

The solidity and whiteness of Patricia Goodrich's salt blocks in *Ice Field* (2007) are seductive stand-ins for real ice blocks. They float randomly across the gallery floor like arctic icebergs adrift at sea.

In a humorous approach, Nava Lubelski presents an elegantly embroidered painting, *A Snowflake in Hell* (2003) detailing her apocalyptic vision of what a snowflake might look like arriving in Hell. In Gerald Nichols' *The Skater* (2002), a reproduction of Stuart Gilbert's painting *The Skater (William Grant)*, (1782, Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, Andrew W. Mellon Collection) the figure of has been altered with a pierced outline of sewing pins. Patricia Delluva literally portrays "melting hopes" in her graphic narrative, *Storyboard: "Dissolution"* (2006), in which ice cubes tell a story that is both touching and funny.

While not all of the questions I initially posed were addressed by these works, *Freeze Freud* by conceptual artist Buzz Spector does respond to my query about how the metaphorical meaning of objects embedded in ice is transformed. This 2001 Polaroid diptych is from a studio reconstruction of the original 1992 installation in which Spector obsessively encased the entire oeuvre of Freud's 24 volumes of text into slots carved in blocks of ice that were exhibited in an industrial freezer with blue neon lights. The brilliance here lies in the multitude of interpretive meanings presented in a style that retains the beauty of ice as a highly visual metaphorical element.

Ice blocks are used by artists Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese as individual sculptures rather than encasement. In their video *The State of Things*, crystal clear ice blocks carved into letters spelling D-E-M-O-C-R-A-C-Y create an emotionally charged statement on U.S. politics; a vision that represents one, rather than multiple, points of view. The melting and calving “letters” poetically explode and dissolve to the catchy soundtrack of George W. Bush’s pedantic public speeches on the themes of “freedom and liberty.”

Visual artist Maryann Riker and poet Marilyn Hazelton together provided curatorial expertise for the poetic and visual elements incorporated in the two-volume, collaborative artists’ book created for this exhibition. *Ice Flow*, included in this show, would have been incomplete without their own personal visions of ice, *vis a vis* the written word.

In conclusion, I now wonder if the actual familiarity gained by travel would challenge my preconceptions about ice by experiencing the void and nothingness that might exist in Antarctica or if maybe these ideas are just products of my own creative imagination. It may not be necessary after all to travel to the icy poles of the Earth in order to comprehend the axis mundi. As Eric G. Wilson sees it, the crux of discovery occurs at the junction where the observer’s (or artist’s in this case) experience of repressed energy is transformed through an evaluation of habitual distinctions between the familiar and unfamiliar, enabling him to achieve a sublime moment of disturbance and exhilaration – thus subverting the ego and allowing the “unconscious depths, before barely recognized, [to] turn into the font of conscience existence.”⁴

I will always be haunted by romantic notions of arctic explorers and lost ships in the icy abyss – Caspar David Friedrich’s painting of the crushed ship in *The Sea of Ice*, (1823-25, Hamburg, Germany: Kunsthalle); the image of a frozen woolly mammoth in the glacial ice of Patagonia; Anderson’s tale of the *Ice Queen*; Thoreau’s winter at Walden Pond; Mallarmé’s swan entrapped within its icy grave; and finally, the magical power of ICE.

Kathy Bruce
January 2007 NYC

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Endnotes

1. Antarctic Artists and Writers Program, National Science Foundation, Office of Polar Programs, 2005-06
2. Frost, "Fire and Ice," 80.
3. Hartigan, Vine, Lehrman, and Cornell, Joseph Cornell: Shadowplay... Eterniday, 100.
4. Wilson, *Spiritual History*, 85.

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- Herbert, Martin. "Pole Positions: Art's Arctic Adventures." *Modern Painters. The International Art Magazine* (April 2006): 62-67.
- Wilson, Eric G. *The Spiritual History of Ice, Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

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CHECKLIST

- Pat Badt, Orefield Log, 1994-95, artist's book, acrylic on paper, 20 x 16 x 4
- Pat Badt & Scott Sherk, Ice, 1996–2006, installation, painting and sound, 86 x 24 x 11
- Bill Bonner, Honeyed Ice, 2006, digital photograph, 10 x 8
- Douglas Beube, Melt, 2007, Ice, book, 24x24x10
- Douglas Beube, Melt, 2007, video
- Paula Chamlee, Jökulsárlán, Iceland, 2004, gelatin silver chloride, contact print, 8x10
- Mark Cohen, Flashed Snow Falling Over a Wire, 1998, gelatin silver print, 17-3/4x11-3/4
- Patricia Delluva, Storyboard: "Dissolution," 2006, pencil on paper, triptych, each 12x9
- Abigail Doan, Crocheted Snow 01 & 03, 2006, archival digital print of environmental fiber installation of crocheted tencel, ice, snow, and tree branches, 7-3/4x5-7/8, 5-7/8x7-3/4
- Patricia Goodrich, Ice Field, 2007, salt, mixed media, 8x57x65
- Patricia Goodrich, Ice, 2007, powerpoint presentation
- Mineko Grimmer, Symposium, 1987/2006, bamboo, pine, stones, pebbles, water, 7x12x12 ft
- Michael Grothusen, Explanation of Mysterious Forces, 2001, steel, fan, 14x60x49; 14 ft
- Jesse Hamilton, Puhdunk-Kerank, 2007, wood, metal, plastic, bone, ice, ice machine, and yarn, 27-1/2x31-3/4x13-3/4, ice machine courtesy the Follett Corporation.
- Mary Allesio Leck, Icy Orbit, 2006, Chromira print, 15-1/2x23
- Ellen K. Levy, Production in Frigid Environments, 2005, enamel, acrylic, digital print, 80x20, courtesy Michael Steinberg Fine Art
- Stacy Levy, Ice Clock, 2002/2007, glass, ice, metal, 31-1/2x10-1/2 diam
- Nora Ligorano & Marshall Reese, The State of Things, 2006, video
- Nava Lubelski, A Snowflake in Hell, 2003, thread and ink stains, stretched canvas, 18x16x1-3/4
- Gerald Nichols, The Skater, 2002, silk pins, altered reproduction of The Skater (William Grant), 1782, by Gilbert Suart, 12x7
- E. Nuevo, Ice Storm, 2006, digital prints on stainless steel, 14x50x1
- E. Nuevo, Shadows after the Storm, 2006, digital prints on glass, 12x50x1
- Tara O'Brien, Natural Elements, 2005, ice, plexiglas base, 9-1/4x13-5/8x1
- Scott Peterman, Shaw Mills, 2002, c print, plexiglas, 30x40
- Daisuke Shintani, Scene in Moment, 2005, glass & bronze, 28x9x12
- Daisuke Shintani, Scene in Moment, 2005, glass & bronze, 28x9x12
- Herbert B. Simon, Global Warming, 2005, etching and aquatint, 8x10
- Michael A. Smith, Jökulsárlán, Iceland, 2004, gelatin silver chloride contact print, 8x20
- Buzz Spector, Freeze Freud, 2001, Polaroid diptych, 55 x 47 overall
- Atsuko Tajima, Ice Age, 2005, reverse painting on slumped, sandblasted glass, 21x20x2
- Robert Walch, Untitled #3, 2005, silver gelatin, 16x20
- Krzysztof Zarebski, untitled, 2003, mixed media, 19x25x2
- Collaborative book, Ice Flow, 2 volumes, 9x6 each