
NICOLE DEXTRAS

ARTIST STATEMENT

FROZEN

My work with ice focuses on the issue of climate change and the fragility of our ecosystem. It began as a reaction to the skepticism regarding the effects of the Antarctic's melting icebergs at the beginning of this new century. I endeavored to create works with ice that connected directly to our humanity by relating the concept of "all is flux" to our most instinctive human modes of communication, our body and our language.

In 2005 an uncommon snowstorm in Vancouver Canada prompted me to experiment with photographing objects frozen in ice. This became a pivotal point in my artistic practice because ice allowed me to delve into the nature of the ephemeral, which shifted my studio practice to outdoor installations and community engagement. Two bodies of work have evolved from this process: *Ice Typography* and *Frozen Textiles*.

My use of text in the landscape relates to concrete poetry but with the added twist of having the word's meaning alter with the melting process. Sometimes the words relate to the urban landscape such as *Consume*, where the ice word was installed on the edge of Stanley Park facing the encroaching real estate development. Others like *Legacy*, created on the Yukon river was meant to signify the heritage of the land but ended up being more of a comment on climate change since the ice letters cracked due to unprecedented temperature changes from -50 Celsius to above 0 within a couple of weeks in mid February. These works have the added dimension of being created in public spaces, sometimes sanctioned and sometimes installed guerilla style, which allows me to initiate a genuine discussion with the community. This has ranged from locals giving me input on the choice of words, discussions with snowmobilers and ice fisherman about changes in weather patterns, to witnessing a couple arguing about the validity of the ephemeral.

By contrast, the *Frozen Textiles* series, consisting of garments suspended in blocks of ice, is often done in more remote locations where the only trace they leave is in the subsequent photograph. They are more subtle and haunting. The clothing encased in ice takes on a skeletal quality comparable to a forensic examination under a microscope; seams and buttons serve as clues to an internalized landscape which appears impenetrable one moment and precariously fragile the next. It is a shape shifter that speaks of our place in nature and the relationship of our bodies to the land. On a deeper level, the mercurial aspect of ice alludes to the transient nature of the environment and of the inherent poetic beauty of the ephemeral.

Our modern notion of nature is based on dominating it to suit our needs. Whether the landscape is viewed as resource to be commodified or as a romantic background to leisure interests, it is regarded as separate from the self. This fundamental split in perception lies at the crux of our environmental crisis. Our survival depends on a paradigm shift from our once undisputed ambition to tame nature to a more attentive and conciliatory outlook. I therefore choose to create within an ephemeral vernacular to accentuate the collective physical and psychological experience of flux and change.