

September 4, 2014

A pick for tonight's ArtHop: Christel Dillbohner



In my [ArtHop roundup in Thursday's Life section](#) I highlight Christel Dillbohner's new exhibition at [1821 Gallery & Studios](#). It's titled "Ice Floe Journals," and in 25 paintings and mono prints she entices the viewer into a glacial world. Part of her technique is to scrape and manipulate the thick, milky emulsion she concocted for this body of work, much like glaciers themselves scratch and shape the land. [I write:](#)

It's easy to fall into the mood of her pieces, as if you've just opened a door and walked out into the harsh beauty of a brisk and encompassing Arctic landscape. You feel the foot-stamping cold.

And while there's nothing explicitly political about her works, the implication is clear: The ice is melting, far faster than it should.

I've connected strongly with Dillbohner's work in the past. I [raved about her 2007 show](#) at the Fresno Art Museum, which she called "An den Ufern der Zeit — at the Shores of Time." (It made my list of one of the top cultural events of the year.) It included a multimedia installation titled "The Undertow," made up of 600 glazed and waxed paper cones, colored deep red and black, suspended from the ceiling by individual strands of filament.

From [my review](#):

In “The Undertow,” the black cones coalesce into a poollike haze suggesting deep and murky waters. It isn’t the crisp and inviting blue of fresh, clear water; this isn’t a place of bright sun and wild-print Madras shorts. Still, amidst what feels like red lily pads tangled enticingly with the surface, there’s a cool and mysterious quality to the work, as if you could just slip in, clothes and all, and disappear into another time and place. Just as enticingly, the hundreds of strands of fine filament create a sheen of their own above the work. It’s like seeing late-afternoon light filtering through to the dark forest floor below. Or perhaps a heavy mist settling in.



For my ArtHop roundup, I talked with Dillbohner about how the seed for her fascination with ice, glaciers and global warming was actually planted at discussions about her Fresno Art Museum show. (It was handsomely curated, by the way, by Jacquelin Pilar.) One thing that intrigues me about Dillbohner’s approach is that she purposely did very little visual research about ice and glaciers. Instead, she immersed herself in books on the subject, tackling a wide reading list in which various authors described the sensation of cold and ice.

Several years ago I read [“The Last Place on Earth: Scott and Amundsen’s Race to the South Pole.”](#) by Roland Huntford. What I recall from that book is the way I was plunged into the cold and desolation of Antarctica. It’s an entirely different sensation than I get from looking at photos and video of that environment. The image formed in my mind purely from words in this non-fiction book was somehow far more bone-chilling and dramatic than me looking at photographs or documentaries on the subject, no matter how good those images are. From the book’s descriptions, I can close my eyes to this day and feel what it was like for Amundsen to be wrapped in a sleeping bag like a cocoon on a vast, wind-ravished plain. That’s a feeling I get from the mental images created by words.



All this went through my mind as I was talking with Dillbohner about her show. She creates sensations, not landscapes. And it creates a nice contrast for her to arrive in the heat of September. As she wrote me when she got into Fresno for her new show: “Show is up and radiates a cool in the heat of the day.”

For more ArtHop picks, be sure to check out [my roundup](#).

Pictured: Christel Dillbohner’s “Echoes and Whispers X,” 2007’s “The Undertow” at the Fresno Art Museum, and “Lost Coast IX – Escarpments.”