Everythng That's Lost

cutting out the snow (detail), 2015, cut paper pinned to wall, dimensions variable

All photos by Karen Asher.

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Everything That’s Lost is a show about snow. One side of the gallery is given over to cutting out the snow (cut paper pinned to wall, dimensions variable, 2015), a collection of images sourced from a pictorial nature book about the Arctic. Each image was cut by hand. No skyline or sun, no trees or people, just the portions of the original photograph that are blanketed in snow. In one image there is the clearly identifiable silhouette of two polar bears crossing a clearing. The largest are the size of almost an entire page, with only a small portion removed; the smallest are gathered into a small pile of tiny paper cuttings collected on a plinth.

The artist transformed the images from cutting out the snow into digital vectors and then laser-cut each one onto a large square of paper eventually
forming an enormous, bound book of 2038 pages. The exhibition literature notes that the centre of each pure white page contains one of those unique, abstract snow shapes but the book is cordoned off for several feet around, making those shapes mostly imperceptible. However, the book’s sheer size is commanding. When I visited the gallery it was opened roughly halfway, its immense curved pages spread out like two grand snow drifts. Or, given its size and isolation within the gallery (a wall separates the book from the rest of the exhibition), they could be the snow-capped peaks of two mountaintops.

2.

What we call “snow” isn’t a fixed thing. Sometimes snow is wet and heavy, sometimes ‘dry’ and light. Snow gets blown around, collects against walls and fences, dusts surfaces. Enough snow in one place can form a wide bank that’s...
difficult to cross, until it melts away. Snow is transient, shifting, in-between. The exhibition suggests that the only way to depict the ephemerality of snow is through a repetition of representations that chart its various states.

3.
Ursula K Le Guin’s novel *The Left Hand Of Darkness* is about the planet Gethen, which is inhabited by a race of mostly genderless humanoids. The Gethenians spend the majority of their lives in a middle zone between or beyond fixed gender, only temporarily acquiring male or female qualities as is required for the proliferation of their race before returning to androgyny. The in-betweenness of Gethenians is also found in their conception of history and chronology: “Years are not numbered consecutively from a base year forward to the present; the base year is the current year. Every New Year’s Day,” Le Guin informs us, “the year just past becomes the year “one ago,” and every past date is increased by one. The future is similarly counted, the next year being the year “one to come,” until it in turn becomes the year one.” Events of the past and future are not fixed points in history but rather temporally shifting markers whose point in time is being forever re-calibrated according to the present moment.
cutting out the snow (detail), 2015, cut paper pinned to wall, dimensions variable
For Gethenians, their entire history is an in-between zone of epic ephemerality. A system of marking time that anchors itself to the present is curious indeed because right now is a constantly shifting state of affairs. Gethenian time keeping is inconvenient, one prone to failure.

4.
“Gethen” translates as snow. The planet is in the midst of a protracted ice age in which snow fall is constant. The perpetual winter manifests in Gethenian chronology and time-keeping as a perpetual present that supersedes the existence of past and future. The arc of time is in a sense halted, frozen in place and blown over by ceaseless snowfall. In Gethenian time, what has passed and what will be are secondary concepts to the solidity of a frozen present. Right now is what’s real; what has come and what will come are only real insofar as they relate to the present. The snow obscures any vision of the future or memory of the past. Gethenians are snow-blind to history. By contrast, rather than getting lost in the snow, Genda’s exhibition gives a macroscopic vision, carving a clear and ordered path.

5.
Genda’s book sits on a plinth looking mountainous, like some final book of eternal time. While the snow outside my window melts and hardens, the representations of snow in Genda’s book remain fixed in place. The book, then, takes on something of the eternality of Gethenian time. It recalls the Gethenian eternal present, a centre-anchor to the constant whir of time’s infinite progression.

6.
*Everything That’s Lost* (book-work, 56 x 56 x 56cm, 2017) offers its own form of keeping time: at 4:30 pm on each of the twenty five days the exhibition was open to the public, exactly eighty-one pages of the big white book are flipped one by one. On the first day of the exhibition the book was laid open at the
Likewise, the hours of the day are plotted to be predictable, yet the feeling of time progressing varies wildly depending on my inner state. There is humour and absurdity to a project that pins images of snow to the wall, as if snow could ever be skewered and made to stay put so easily.

10.
That the exhibition’s title piece takes the form of a book is deeply ironic since language fails to be up to the task of description, of rendering something infinite, fixed; it fails to convey the vastness of different varieties of experience. Snow drifts and melts, words can be forgotten. Inversely, the snow-shapes of Genda’s book remains stolidly in place on the page. In an attempt to override the failure of language, Genda’s book suggests we consider the abstract snow-shapes as a form of language. This is an open-ended language, one founded on both repetition of shapes and the differences of each particular cut. Genda proposes a connection between a snowy landscape as an accumulation of distinct shapes and language as an accumulation of distinct words and voices. The individual parts that constitute the whole are too numerous to consolidate. Even a book of 2038 pages is in the end a reminder of the infinite number of pages—lost, not yet formed, forgotten—left out of the binding.

Note
Critical Distance is a writing program of aceartinc. that encourages critical writing and dialogue about contemporary art. The program is an avenue for exploration by emerging and established artists and writers. Written for each exhibition mounted at aceartinc, these texts form the basis of our annual journal Paper Wait.

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aceartinc. is an Artist Run Centre dedicated to the support, exhibition, and dissemination of contemporary art. We do this via an open call for submissions and special projects through which we work with contemporary artists, curators, and art writers, including emerging artists and those from queer, Indigenous, and underrepresented communities. Contemporary art is at its most powerful when engaged with and thought about, and so we actively welcome the public, with all of its nuanced communities.

Daniel Colussi is a musician from Vancouver/Toronto currently living in Winnipeg. His music investigates the following topics: horses, the colour blue, irrecoverability, desire and depression. His next record, On The Plain, will be released on Musty Dusty in May 2018.