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Pam Rosenblatt

Photographer Camille Seaman and her Icebergs

On one cloudy, drizzling April 4, 2014, *Wilderness House Literary Review's* arts editor Pam Rosenblatt drove to the Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, Massachusetts to see "Seeing Glacial Time: Climate Change in the Arctic" inside the Tisch Family Gallery. The exhibition took place from January 30 – May 18, 2014 and featured eight artists: Subhanker Banerjee, Olaf Otto Becker, Resa Blattman, Diane Burko, Caleb Cain Marcus, Gilles Mingasson, Joan Perlman, and Camille Seaman. The artworks were contemporary, innovative, impactful photographs and paintings, with one being a video installation. The major theme of the show was climate change/global warming and how it is effecting the Arctic and Antarctica environments. One group of photographs by artist Camille Seaman from Palo Alto, California caught Rosenblatt's critical eye, so she got permission and photographed the five pictures of icebergs originally photographed by Seaman and decided to create a short critique. Here it is:

*We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship,
although it meant the end of travel.
Although it stood stock-still like cloudy rock
and all the sea were moving marble.
We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship;
we'd rather own this breathing plain of snow
though the ship's sails were laid upon the sea
as the snow lies undissolved upon the water.
O solemn, floating field,
are you aware an iceberg takes repose
with you, and when it wakes may pasture on your snows?...¹*

"The Imaginary Iceberg"
Elizabeth Bishop (1911 – 1979)

When you think of the word "iceberg", you probably imagine a large, foreboding ice block floating in one of the Earth's coldest regions' freshwater oceans. And you may think of the Titanic and its sinking due to hitting one of these monstrous icebergs. But, in reality, an iceberg does not have to be that threatening, as suggested by Elizabeth Bishop in her poem "The Imaginary Iceberg" when she wrote, "We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship,/although it meant the end of travel./Although it stood stock-still like cloudy rock/and all the sea were moving marble." Bishop seems to imply that the iceberg is strong and sturdy, like home. But today, with global warming and climate change, such is not the case. The iceberg is not that strong and sturdy, or "stock-still like cloudy rock".

An iceberg results when part of a glacier breaks off and falls into the freshwater ocean. A glacier is different from an iceberg as it is found on top of land and is continually created from severe cold and snow fall. So the iceberg floats in the freshwater ocean, but only 10 percent of its structure is exposed above ocean level; 90 percent of the icy block is found

1 Elizabeth Bishop, "The Imaginary Iceberg", *Bishop I Poems, Prose, and Letters*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, LLC, 2008), p.3.

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underneath the water.² Before global warming and the changing of temperatures due to the greenhouse gas levels rising very fast causing such unfortunate occurrences as the dissolving of glaciers – and more frequently icebergs – and a rise in the water levels, the icebergs lasted longer.³ Unlike during Bishop's day, the iceberg isn't as stable in the new millennium. So documenting them is extremely important. One day, due to climate change, the Arctic and the Antarctica oceans may be free of all glaciers and icebergs and the climate warm, while other areas on the globe may experience extremely cold temperatures. But, with concerned people, politicians like former Vice-President Al Gore and the eight artists who participated in the "Seeing Glacial Time: Climate Change in the Arctic" curated by Dr. Amy Ingrid Schlegel of Tufts University Arts Gallery, perhaps the icebergs, glaciers, and climates can be saved. Or perhaps not. Perhaps it's just the natural progression of nature, as is suggested in photographer Camille Seaman's Artist's statement displayed on the wall of her installation at the "Seeing Glacial Time: Climate Change in the Arctic" show.

Through Seaman's educated, experienced opinion, the iceberg's future and duration is no longer clear, and is similar to "a species undergoing extinction." And she provides evidence with her five artistic panoramic photographs of icebergs in the Arctic and the Antarctica that were in this show as they captured the majestic beauty of Nature's iceberg(s) along with the sad plight of the iceberg(s) as well.

Like a painter who creates on canvas, Seaman photographs each iceberg with special "tools", as she calls them, or highly specialized cameras and lens.⁴



In "The Last Iceberg/Grand Pinnacle Iceberg, East Greenland, 2006, 2006", Seaman has photographed a brilliant, quite spectacular iceberg in an overcast setting. Two portions of the iceberg stand up like Roman columns with the middle section dissolved. This portion of the iceberg is entirely white; the open middle section invites the viewer to look into

² "Difference Between Glacier and Iceberg." DifferenceBetween.com, September 15, 2012. www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-glaciers-and-vs-iceberg/

³ "Global Warming vs. Climate Change – A Knock Out in Round 1?" www.grinningplanet.com/2007/01-02/global-warming-vs-climate-change.htm

⁴ Camille Seaman, "Frequently Asked Questions", camilleseaman.com, April 30, 2014.

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an abyss. There's another snow/ice block of the iceberg to the right of these columns. This part of the iceberg looks blue-gray and is melting, too. The photograph is printed by an Epson Ultrachrome archival pigmented inkjet, as written on the information tag next to the photograph on the wall of the Tisch Family Gallery, Tufts University Art Gallery.



The second photograph, "Iceberg with Seal Blood – Qusiarsuq, Greenland, September 2009, 2009" is an image of a massive iceberg with a speck of seal's blood at its lower left corner. The freshwater ocean and the climate seem to have worn the iceberg down to look like a white-blue-gray sculpture. The minute bit of seal's blood stands out in the starkness of the photograph. The iceberg's reflection gives the photograph the appearance of a portraiture, a realistic painting. This photograph was printed by an Epson Ultrachrome archival pigment inkjet, as written on the information tag next to the photograph on the wall of the Tisch Family Gallery, Tufts University Art Gallery.



Questions arise when the viewer eyes this artwork: Did the seal escape the attack on the iceberg? If not, what killed the seal? How much longer does this huge iceberg have to exist? How long has this iceberg been in existence? And, as for the seal and his tribe, how much longer does its species have to live? All unanswered.

"Blue Underside Revealed II Svalbard, July 5, 2010, 2010" is an artwork of a gorgeous iceberg that looks like quartz. The photograph is a close-up view of this melting, floating block of ice. It appears that this iceberg may break up into little pieces. It's airy and icy looking with crystal blue and white hues. If only it were possible for someone to pick it up, take it home, and place it on a shelf for display. But, realistically – and perhaps unfortunately – a person cannot take this iceberg home. It would melt and disappear, maybe quicker than it would in the freshwater ocean! This photograph was printed by an Epson Ultrachrome archival pigment inkjet, as written on the information tag next to the photograph on the wall of the Tisch Family Gallery, Tufts University Art Gallery.



The next photograph is called "Breaching Iceberg – Greenland, August 8, 2008, 2008". This iceberg has

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the eerie appearance of a ghost ship that is sailing into the unknown with an ominous sky. It's a picture that perhaps should be displayed on the wall of a library. The wear-and-tear of the environment's elements can be seen here, too. Such an artistic piece makes you wonder how long it took for Seaman to achieve the photographic effects, to make this iceberg look so picture perfect. What a majestic scene! This photograph was printed by an Epson Ultrachrome archival pigment inkjet, as written on the information tag next to the photograph on the wall of the Tisch Family Gallery, Tufts University Art Gallery.

"Stuck Under the Moon – Disko Bay, Greenland, September 2009, 2009" is the panoramic view of a long iceberg, or perhaps a glacier, that seems to be falling



apart. It's white against a dark royal blue, cloudy sky and a dark fresh-water ocean. The iceberg's formation looks almost like a city scape of New York City or Boston. The clouds in the sky are powerful, puffy, and seem to draw the iceberg – and the viewer – into the unknown. There's a tiny moon in the upper right hand corner that puts the iceberg, the fresh-water ocean, and the cloud-filled sky into perspective. This photograph was printed by an Epson Ultrachrome archival pigment inkjet, as written on the information tag next to the photograph on the wall of the Tisch Family Gallery, Tufts University Art Gallery.

In fact, the entire Camille Seaman collection in the "Seeing Glacial Time: Climate Change in the Arctic" exhibition places things in and out of perspective. It made the viewer think about a lot of things: global warming and climate change, the beauty of Nature's icebergs, the unfortunate plight of the iceberg and glaciers in the Arctic and the Antarctica, the seriousness of species extinction, the amazing importance to document Nature before, during and after it evolves.

The "Seeing Glacial Time: Climate Change in the Arctic" show at the Tisch Family Gallery at Tufts University's Art Gallery, Medford, Massachusetts was an eye-opening experience. All eight artists revealed sides of the iceberg that are as artistic and beautiful as can be, yet it is a bit disillusioning and disappointing since the icebergs keep melting away and the freshwater ocean keeps rising.

Elizabeth Bishop once insightfully inscribed, "We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship..."⁵ for the "ship" means man-made progress and now we are beginning to see the results of this advancement: we may eventually lose the wonderful "iceberg" ...

Photographer Camille Seaman is a TED Senior Fellow 2013 and a Stanford Knight Fellow 2014.

5 Elizabeth Bishop, "The Imaginary Iceberg", Bishop I Poems, Prose, and Letters, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, LLC, 2008), p.3.