

emergency!





emergency!

Sarah Casey



Foreword

Anita Taylor + Gary Sangster

Drawing Projects UK has been proud to present the solo exhibition, *Emergency!* by Sarah Casey, from 12 November 2022 to 4 February 2023.

Emergency! is a poignant exhibition of sixty new drawings made by Sarah Casey in response to glacial archaeology. Sarah began drawing the seemingly random artefacts that have emerged from Swiss alpine glaciers as the ice preserving them melts at unprecedented rates. These ice melts have revealed a cornucopia of objects from across the ages - from the neolithic to the recent past; these drawn, dusty depictions of these objects - neolithic sticks, glasses from the 1950s, 60s, 70s, a range of watches, belts, buckles, shoes, and other items of clothing - all reminding us of journeys past and quietly jostling for attention whilst suspended between waxy, translucent sheets of paper as they would once have been transfixed in ice. Large sheets of suspended drawings, layered images, ghostlike or shaped into luminous and voluminous forms littered across the gallery floor and piled high in corners as though swept up in a snow storm. Boulder-like forms, or specimens in frames, these drawings are delicate yet robust, precious yet discarded, making present these lost objects; and simultaneously rendering a visual, tactile and haptic simile for the tarrying nature of glacial archaeology in the revealing of human histories through the artefacts retrieved. Here, the purposes and processes of drawing are at play - observing, recording, documenting, communicating and commenting on critical issues through mark-making, trace, erasure; through the systematic use of fugitive materials, these delicate drawings present a resonant equivalent to an experience of stopping time, stilling the events of the past in lost objects, statically preserved in the rigid space of frozen water.

This exhibition has provided a unique opportunity to engage with the role of drawing in its negotiation of making, unmaking, presence and loss as these momentary experiences are fixed, fleetingly, for us to absorb, connect, retrieve, identify, or imagine. A forensic enterprise, a scientific accumulation, recast as a lyrical narrative of the past. The dual descriptive/

interpretive role of drawing as a way to visually record these momentary experiences sits at the heart of the exhibition and elegantly negotiates the ambiguous space between science and art, between the documentary and expressive artefact.

Drawing Projects UK is dedicated to research and public engagement with and through drawing, and this exhibition and the research underpinning it are exemplary in demonstrating the capacity of drawing to evoke and provoke a thoughtful dialogue across disciplines and posit new ways of encountering and viewing the world and articulating our understanding of it. We are grateful to Sarah Casey for the opportunity to share her research and investigation of glacial archaeology and climate change in and through drawing via this compelling exhibition. The exhibition was accompanied by a widely attended programme of in-person and online Drawing Sessions and thematic Drawing Discussions that explored the interface of art, archaeology and science with a range of distinguished speakers, launched as part of the Being Human Festival 2022. We are grateful to Arts Council England and Lancaster University for enabling the realisation of this curatorial project within our 2022/23 programmes.

We are delighted to launch this publication which documents, and will disseminate more widely, the exhibition, research, and reflections on this potent dialogue between drawing and glacial archaeology at Drawing Projects UK as the exhibition closes on 4 February 2023.

Drawing Projects UK

January 2023



Emergency! Bows, Spectacle and French boot
Drawings depicting items from the Neolithic period to the twentieth century

About the *Emergency!* Project

Emergency! is an exhibition of 60 new drawings by Sarah Casey developed in response to glacial archaeology. In 2018, at Musées cantonaux du Valais, Switzerland, she began drawing artefacts that have emerged from alpine glaciers as the ice in which they have been preserved for 50, 500 or 5000 years is now melting at unprecedented rates. This glacial archaeology embodies a position of extreme precarity: these rare and valuable finds preserve important knowledge about the human past, yet insight comes at the cost of environmental change and threatened futures. Moreover, the artefacts themselves, once released from their frozen slumber, will rapidly decay and disintegrate when exposed. The *Emergency!* project asks how might processes of drawing – with its use of marking and erasure, presence and absence – negotiate these tensions and find new ways of thinking through loss and change? The drawings in the exhibition are made by trapping dust in wax and so, like the archaeology they depict, are contingent on their environmental conditions to survive – if they get exposed to heat, they will melt away. This research was developed through a Henry Moore Institute Research Fellowship 2021 and undertaken in dialogue with Musées cantonaux du Valais, Switzerland.

Sarah Casey is a visual artist and researcher working at the cusp of drawing and sculpture. She studied History of Art with History and Philosophy of Science before retraining as an artist. Over the past decade she has explored relationships between drawing, (in)visibility and (im)materiality through collaboration with researchers from different fields ranging from archaeology to astrophysics and anthropology. Solo exhibitions of her work have been at Kensington Palace, The Bowes Museum and internationally at Ryerson University, Toronto. She also writes on drawing and is co-author of *Drawing Investigations: graphic relationships with science, culture and environment* (Bloomsbury 2020). She was visiting research fellow at The Henry Moore Institute 2021-22 and is currently Director of the School of Art at Lancaster University UK.

For more images and information about this work visit www.sarahcasey.co.uk



Emergency! Exhibition detail at Drawing Projects UK 2022



Glacial Archaeology in the Swiss Alps

Pierre-Yves Nicod + Philippe Curdy

The Swiss Alps are undoubtedly a favourable place for glacial archaeology: situated at the centre of the alpine massif, they include almost fifty peaks over 4000m high – with a multitude of glaciers today covering close to 1200km², namely around 45 % of the glaciated surfaces in the European Alps.

For forty years, these high mountain areas have been strongly affected by global warming which has provoked the accelerated melt of permafrost and rapid glacial retreat. Spectacular avalanches, landslides and devastating rock falls are often the consequences. Another effect of this melting process is the discovery of remains that have been frozen and therefore conserved over decades, centuries and even millennia. Faced with the increase in finds, a new scientific discipline, glacial archaeology, has the mission to collect, preserve and study these particular remains of the past.

The majority of the finds take place on mountain passes that are covered with ice or were so until a short time ago. Historic sources confirm that these high mountain routes were regularly used at least since the 16th century: in particular, they enabled the transport of salt and wine and the relocation of livestock.

An increase in finds

Glacial archaeology acquired global renown in 1991 with the news from the Tyrolean Alps of “Otzi”, the famous Neolithic mummy. However, other important discoveries had already been made, notably, in the Swiss Alps. The oldest accounts come from the region of the Theodul pass (Zermatt, VS, 3300m). Here, in 1854, one of the founding members of the British Alpine Club saw human remains, footwear and mule bones. In 1885, human and animals remains were found at the south side of the pass, while a medieval iron dagger and roman coins were discovered at the north side. The existence of the latter, probably an offering, reached the ears of the well-known alpinist Edward Whymper, conqueror of Mt Cervin, who acquired them in 1896.

Left: *Surveying at the Col Collon in 2017. In the foreground, wooden fragments, some of which were dated to the Iron Age.*
Copyright: @Philippe Curdy

Other important discoveries were made between 1930-40 at Lötschenpass (Ferden, VS 2680m). The painter Albert Nyfeler – who regularly bivvied there – collected various objects including several wooden bows that he then stored in his basement. Rediscovered in 1989 by the ethnographer Werner Bellwald, and thereafter radiocarbon dated, these bows turned out to be 4000 years old, dating from the Early Bronze Age.

Between 1984 and 1990, Annemarie Julen-Lehner and her brother Peter Lehner, residents of Zermatt, recovered the remains of a man on the Theodul glacier, probably fallen in a crevasse at the beginning of the seventeenth century along with armaments and luggage and one or more mules. The discovery which soon became known as “the mercenary of Theodul” had a certain echo in scientific circles. In 1992, in the first volume dedicated to the discovery of “Ötzi”, Werner H. Meyer, archaeologist and professor of medieval history at Basel listed the finds from Swiss glaciers and encouraged researchers to rapidly undertake initiatives on a large scale, but his call was hardly heard. The only notable intervention in this decade happened in the Canton of Grisons where human bones were found on the Porschabella glacier (Bergun, GR 2680m) leading to the collection of remains linked to a ‘shepherdess’ who disappeared around 1690.

The discoveries at Schnidejoch in 2003 (Lenk BE, 2750m) would lead to putting in place the first scheduled work in the Swiss Alps. Between 2004 and 2009, the Archaeological Service of Canton Bern, during its annual inspection of the pass, gathered an impressive collection of objects including a remarkable panoply of Neolithic hunting goods.

Between 2011 and 2015, a project supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation was carried out in the Valais Alps. Based on the most efficient path principle, this work has made it possible to identify preferential routes through the massifs and to map the most critical locations from a glacial archaeological perspective. The theoretical routes have been compared with data from historical archives and followed up with surveys in the field. More than a hundred prehistoric, ancient and modern tools, stakes and wooden fragments have been collected. Other projects followed in the Grisons Alps between 2015-16 and Bernese Alps from 2012. At the same time, there was also an increase in finds reported to the Cantonal Archaeological Services by hikers and employees who work at high altitude.

Remains allow us to understand the mountain dwellers of the past

Objects released by the melting ice come from inhospitable and very high areas far from the



*Archaeological survey on the Haut-Glacier d’Arolla, Valais, alt. 3070 m
Copyright: @Philippe Curdy*

falling into crevasses:

Therefore those that know the country well drive projecting wooden stakes along the safer spots, in order that their line may guide the traveller in safety. But if these are covered with snow and hidden, or are overturned by the streams running down from the mountains, the paths are difficult to traverse even with natives leading the way (Information about some passes in the Cottian Alps).

An environment full of resources

Very early on, humans knew how to make profit from the mountain resources, be they mineral, animal or vegetable. At Stremlücke (Fuorcla de Strem Sut, Silenen, Uri, 2830m), melting of ice revealed evidence of a rock crystal mining industry by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. These remains, more than 8000 years old, are the oldest finds discovered through glacial archaeology. The outfits of the archers at Schnidejoch and Lötchenpass indicate that for 4000-5000 years humans climbed there to hunt ibex, chamois and marmots. A medieval spear head from the Theodul glacier and crossbow bolts from Lötchenpass also recall this activity, unless they testify to the passage of armed troops. Finally, several rare objects are linked to plant exploitation: a maple wood sickle handle found at the Aventine pass (Zermatt, Valais 3440m) or a pruning blade from the 11-13th century found at Cleuson pass (Nendaz, Valais, 3000m). A small iron bell clapper from the modern or contemporary period discovered on the Theodul glacier could testify to pastoral activities at high altitude.

Under Good Protection

Other remains illustrate the way in which humans placed themselves under the safeguard of superior powers to protect them from the dangers in high mountains. Some pieces could have been offerings, like the large Bronze age pin found at Schnidejoch or the Roman coins at the Theodul pass, recuperated by Edward Whymper. In the Christian period, statues of saints and crosses were erected on passes and summits, some of them still present in the landscape. Furthermore, at all times, travellers used to carry small devotional artefacts, amulets, rosaries or prayer books.

A threatened heritage that involves us all

According to glaciological prognostics, global heating will provoke a loss of 60-80 % of the glacial cover in the Swiss Alps between today and 2060: at this rate, only certain shreds of glaciers will remain at the end of the century! This strong acceleration will unmistakably liberate an increasing number of archaeological remains, which will rapidly alter once exposed to the air. Unfortunately, the large regions concerned and the difficulties of accessing them render recovery operations nearly impossible for the public authorities in charge of this heritage. The participation of non-professionals is indispensable: it is essential that hikers, alpinists, guides, hut guardians and cable car workers are all made aware of the best practice to adopt: avoid touching objects, photograph them in situ, locate them using GPS or on a topographical map, quickly alert the archaeological services. Several strategies are actually in place: information fliers in mountain huts, press reports, scientific or mainstream publications broadcasts on radio and television and staging exhibitions. The Canton of Valais has recently developed a mobile app “IceWatcher” which enables people to record and report a discovery (<https://www.vs.ch/web/archeologie/archeologie-glaciaire>).

Pierre-Yves Nicod

Curator of the Department of Prehistory and Antiquity at the Valais History Museum

Philippe Curdy

Archaeologist, Former Curator at the Valais Cantonal Museums.

Notes

Text adapted from the chapter: ‘L’archéologie glaciaire dans les Alpes suisses’ (P.-Y. Nicod, Ph. Curdy) in : *Vestiges des cimes - archéologie glaciaire*, Milano : Silvana editoriale, 2022. p.82-90.
Translation: Sarah Casey 2023.



Emergency! Shot (Detail)
Detail of sculpted floor drawing depicting the dagger found with the Theodul “mercenary”



Emergency! Exhibition detail at Drawing Projects UK 2022

Drawing as Erratic

Sarah Casey

It's raining. Again. Outside, the air seems lulled by the steady monotony of Scottish winter rain. It's not the first day. The loch has filled. The burn behind the house is running high and fast, the overflow channel nearby a second torrent. I watch nervously as it edges higher.

This outlet was formed over 11000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age as the glacier that filled the valley began to warm. As the pressure of meltwater built up behind the moraine, it found its way out at the lowest point, bursting through the moraine, forging a channel through the band of rock upon which my house now stands. As further melt ensued, more ice turned to water, flooding the hollow scoured by the icesheet, then draining away until inflow and outflow stabilized into the calm expanse of water in which I now love to swim. It's curious to think of this placid beauty spot as a site of the geologic trauma that birthed the Holocene. Other traces are visible: rocks bearing grooves gouged out as if by giant talons; boulders strewn around the fields above the loch have been left high and dry as the icy flow that once carried them receded. Bedrock ground down under the weight of moving ice has become sediment forming a 'beach' at the water's edge and settling as a silky silty blanket in the depths. The finest of this particulate, glacial flour, is occasionally whipped up into the water on turbulent days, carried with the flow and as the water level subsides. Then after days of evaporating sunshine, these sediments trace the water's edge, dusting the banks above the water line with a dull ochre shimmer delineating the water's passage. A veritable drawing is it not? A ghost of a flood, and of the ice that went before.

These traces, these erratics,¹ are a reminder that glaciers are not inert, dead things somewhere else. They have touched and left their mark on the skin of the land we now inhabit and cultivate. Neither are glaciers unified stable geologic features, but porous shifting entities of entanglement, sweeping up and transforming matter— animal, vegetable, mineral — enveloping

it, ingesting it, excreting it. They transport one part of a landscape to another, forming new terrains along the way. It is perhaps not surprising that glaciers have been both feared as monsters and venerated as gods.

This is glacier as force, a geological agent, an entanglement and an archive of the past. It is enchanting to think of those Antarctic ice cores with their pockets of air carrying the atmosphere of the past into the present. Ice that last fell as snow as the first humans drew breath. Records of events past, long before our time. In more populous regions of the planet, ice also carries more visible traces of human history into the present in the form of glacial archaeology. This is the study of artefacts buried not in earth, but ice. Unlike terrestrial archeology, ice bound finds do not follow the same stratigraphic order with newer finds on top— a slow moving churn of a glacier is no place for things to stand still. Artefacts from 50, 500 or 5000 years ago might emerge in the same year. Artefacts can emerge unexpectedly and are often discovered by non-specialists — hikers and climbers.² In the European Alps there are currently public awareness campaigns to alert mountain goers to the potential existence of emerging archaeology in an attempt to identify finds before it is too late.³ Archaeology from ice is particularly valuable. The arid and subzero conditions preserve fugitive materials such hair, textile, leather that would readily decay in the moist conditions of terrestrial burial. Some of the earliest practices of weaving in alpine Europe were revealed by glacial archeology. However, while these rare and valuable artefacts provide important knowledge about the past, this insight comes at the cost of environmental change and threatened futures. What's more, these precious finds are themselves vulnerable and will rapidly deteriorate and disappear, once awakened from their slumber by the thaw of global heating.

This presents a compelling conceptual framework, focusing not on what is lost (the ice), but the things that emerge as a result of this loss, an inversion of negative and positive. It reminds us that loss is not a simple, singular thing. Instead, as the ice melts we are compelled to ask, what is lost? For whom is it lost? What is revealed in its place? And what does 'lost' mean anyway?

The *Emergency* exhibition aims to explore the precarity of this context asking how might the material intelligence of drawing — with its use of marking and erasure, presence and absence



– negotiate these tensions and find new ways of articulating the nuances of loss and change engendered by the global climate emergency?

I first set eyes on an item of glacial archaeology 2018 when artefacts from the European alps had been gathered together in Sion for an exhibition *Vestiges en Péril* curated by Pierre-Yves Nicod at the Musée d'histoire du Valais.⁴ The artefacts in the exhibition dated from the Mesolithic to 20th century, and included shoes, clothes, crockery as well as weapons and tools. In addition to these identifiable objects from the more recent past, are strange misshapen wooden forms. Nicod explained to me that many of these are enigmas. It's not known what they were but it is known that they were made by human hand.

And so began an exchange with Nicod, and a series of research visits 2019-2022 to study collection finds at Sion, Annecy, and Bern. This involved slow careful sketchbook studies of the artefacts attempting to delineate their details and get a sense of their materiality, using drawing as a proxy for touching. Back in the studio, my task was to identify a way to manipulate materials and technique to embody the conundrums of these artefacts, i.e. their material precarity, the fact that they are revealed through loss, a sense of layering with other time periods.

The resultant drawings, exhibited for the first time at Drawing Projects UK, are made by trapping graphite dust between sheets of waxed paper. These sheets are so thin that they are almost transparent, like looking through misted glass. One sheet is laid flat on to a large studio table. Then, using a stick of watersoluble graphite, particles are shaved off onto the surface of the paper, leaving a dusty residue. The slight tackiness of the wax helps it adhere. Occasionally an addition of water, or pressure helps manipulate an image, taking on the form of one of the glacial artefacts. The graphite dusts builds up, creating thicker piles of dust in the areas of the drawing that require most shadow. At this stage, there is extreme precarity. I hold my face as far back as possible, so that my breath doesn't disturb these vulnerable unfixed 'marks' – rather, ante-marks, the arranged pigment that will become marks.

The next stage involves trapping this layered dust between the two paper skins. The second sheet is laid carefully over the first. The movement of down draft disturbs the particles, they puff outwards slightly, a diffused mark, as if the image has been dropped from a height into soft powder, or as if its substance, the particulate of its matter, is visibly, eroding seeping into its surroundings. Finally, heat. The drawings are to be made (and by 'made' I mean become fixed) with heat. The image is suspended in place by melting the two skins of waxed paper to encase them. Running a hot iron over the surface fuses the skins together. The resultant surface takes on a reflective sheen with craquelure reminiscent of ice. The soluble graphite becomes liquid in the molten wax and in places pools, bubbles and becomes dark. Pigment is fused with wax. Under the agency of heat, an entanglement called drawing emerges.

The image floats there. Lifted from the table and hung in space, the object appears trapped in ice. The darkness and tonal values of the drawing suggest an illusory solidity - the objects peer out of the page as if hidden behind it. But there is no behind. Only the wafer-thin surface. When several drawings are layered over one another other, the lower layers become hazy, like shadows of something out of reach. As if buried deeper. The drawings enact a fanciful stratigraphy. Imagining the jumble of objects layered in the ice. Bound together in relationships that shift over time. Unlike terrestrial burials, a glacier is not at rest. It is an icy river, pulled by the forces of gravity and erosion.

The composition of these layered drawings is also contingent. The sheets can be layered up interchangeably. Different objects coming to the fore, as if jostling for attention at the surface. There is perhaps no one single drawing here. The drawing is the relationship between the parts, the arrangement temporarily composed. This openness can be found in the material make-up of the individual sheets. Fixed by heat, suspended in the page. It is only the melting of the wax that holds the pigment in place to make an image, to make the shift from matter to drawing. But this is an unstable support. Wax, like ice, melts. The drawing remains subject to environmental forces – heat from the sun, domestic heating devices, light. Subjected to heat, wax, like ice, will return to its molten state. These drawings are only temporarily held. When heated, the sheets will become unstuck, the graphite become liquid in the molten wax, allowing it to run and pool, or smear away as the support disintegrates.



Emergency! French shoe, Two Times and Shot



This sense of vulnerability to damage is accentuated in the gallery display. While the layered hanging suggests a limbo, of being poised between one state and another, on the floor beneath lies a mass of other drawings crumpled up into a three-dimensional topography. The form at once evokes mountainous terrain and icy crevasses. The crumpled paper clearly recalls discarded waste, the screwed-up paper ball tossed away. The crumpling is a counter intuitive step to take in drawing, after spending hours of time and care in its production. The crumpled ball is a visual signifier of the unwanted and discarded; here it is deliberately engaged in the drawing to gently probe values of finish and care. Does something on the verge of loss become more coveted? Would it matter if the drawing were to be destroyed all together? Or has the drawing not been lost at all but is now in a changed state, as in ice to water?

Drawing as an artform has long held association with the ephemeral, both in its material conditions and its capacity to make visible images and ideas. Traditionally made on paper, drawings are typically vulnerable to atmospheric conditions, sensitive to both light and humidity. In conventional circumstances, damage to drawings is avoided. To protect them, works on paper would be framed behind glass, or stored away from sunlight to enhance their longevity. This materiality is generally coded as positive: the intimacy and care that viewing demands has contributed to constructing a kind protective aura around drawings. A 2009 exhibition devoted itself to this very theme arguing: ‘what is most compelling about works of art on paper: their inherent fragility and their particular brand of quiet intimacy.’⁵ Elsewhere, it has been argued that the ‘insubstantiality of drawing has a particular form of visuality that provokes in us a peculiar response.’⁶ It is this capacity of the materiality of drawing to provoke a response that the *Emergency!* project explores.

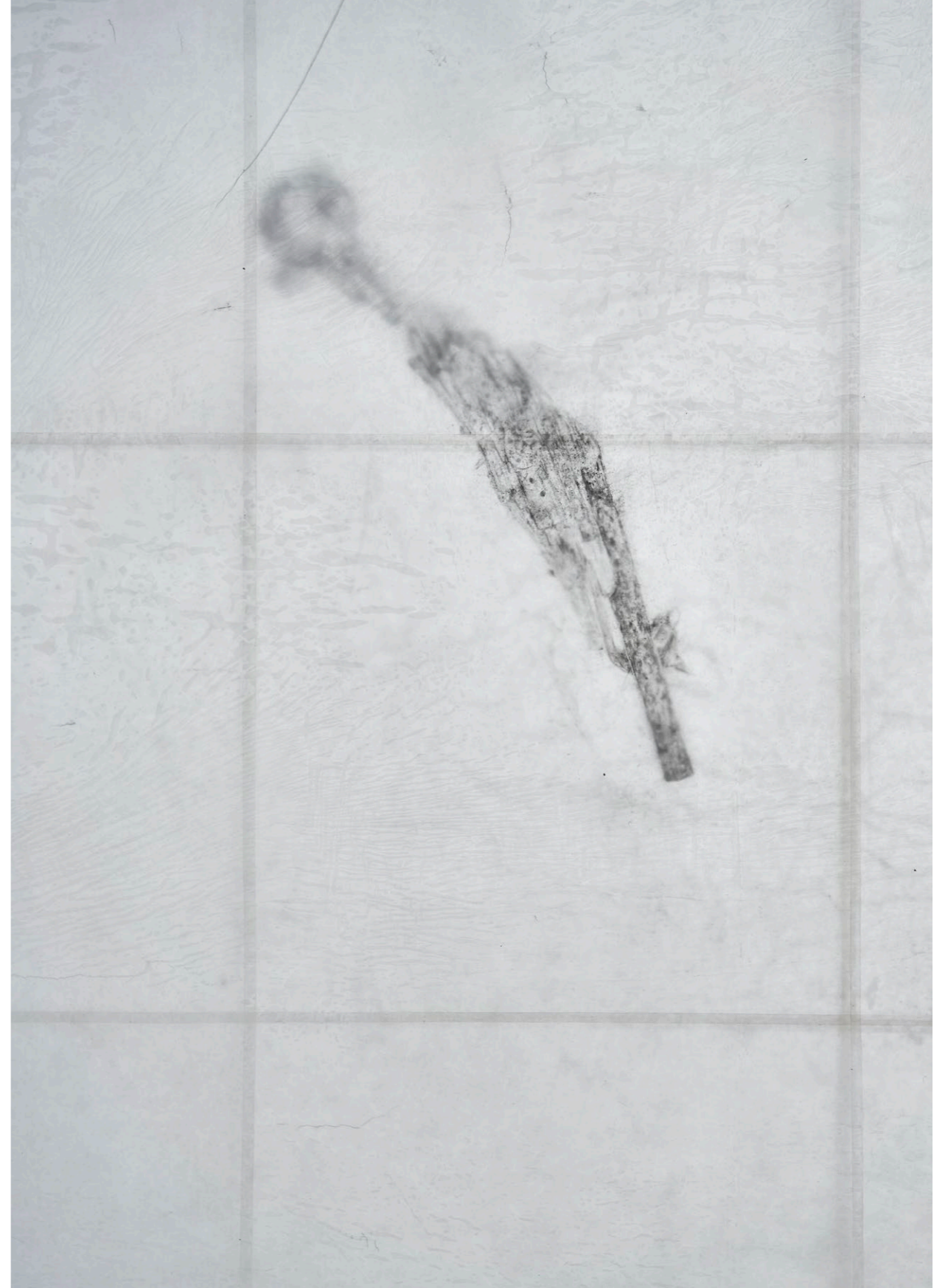
Drawings are often discussed in terms of traces, particularly how they bear the trace of a maker, or more recently, the traces of non-human agency that contribute to their making. In both cases, the message is that a drawing bears its making on its sleeve. It is its own form of archaeology, a record of the making process.⁷ Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy wrote that drawings are in a state of becoming, of opening up, a drawing as a ‘suspension of achieved reality.’⁸ Implicit to this conception of drawing is a sense of movement and futurity. I take from this the idea that a drawing is not a final fixed entity, it gestures towards its own future and the potential of what might happen to it. Specifically, in the context of the *Emergency!*

work, the more materially vulnerable a drawing appears to be, the more aware we are of the threat to its future. And just as its making is recorded in a drawing, so too can its ‘unmaking’, as it accrues the marks of its ongoing existence and decay. Like the changing ecologies of mountain environments, drawings change over time. Ink fades, creases deepen, paper yellows. You see, it’s a fallacy that drawings mark, or fix, in as much as they themselves are not stable. They, like us and the world around us, are in a state of change, subject to the entropy of time to which we will all succumb.

What *Emergency!* does, is acknowledge this uncertainty, to the vulnerability of not knowing what forces are at play, both in glaciers and drawing. This quality is approached not as a weakness to be avoided, but as a potential agent to make meaning in the drawing. The *Emergency!* work seeks to highlight this state of flux and look at how it might be harnessed to reflect upon other states of precarity in the world – in this case the human and environmental challenges found in glacial archaeology.

Sarah Casey

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Emergency! Exhibition detail at Drawing Projects UK 2022



Of Ice and Water: Drawing in Precarious Environments

Anita Taylor + Sarah Casey + Emma Stibbon + Tania Kovats

This is a transcription edited from of a public panel discussion between Anita Taylor, Emma Stibbon, Tania Kovats and Sarah Casey on 17th November 2022 at Drawing Projects UK as part of the event On Ice and Water: Drawing in Precarious Environments following presentations from Casey, Stibbon and Kovats about their use of drawing.

Anita Taylor: Sarah would you like to introduce our discussion as, in a way, you've curated our panel with a particular reason and rationale. The sense of working in precarious environments is absolutely clear and the precarity of our world is absolutely fundamental across all three of these presentations.

Sarah Casey: Thank you Anita, and to Emma and Tania, that was fantastic. One of the things that I thought would be interesting, if we were put together to speak, was around this theme of change or precarity. One thing I found came out quite strongly [in our presentations] was this idea of flux of things being in motion. For instance what Tania said about rock, you think of it being really solid, but actually it's been shaped and changed by the water, and Emma talking about watching how her materials took shape and changed on the page as the water froze, and so on, and there is strong sense of both that which is fixed, the materiality of rock, and the fluidity of water, but then them having this relationship, of coming together. And I just wonder – and this might be an odd question – whether either of you had anything to say about drawing being this act of marking and fixing but also its openness and capacity to talk about change, [for example] in the way you use it to talk about these moving and shifting and precarious environments, I just wondered if there was something about drawing that lends itself peculiarly to this?

Emma Stibbon: Perhaps I could describe the experience I had of making those drawings on deck as I was crossing the Barents Sea, which was really rough and wild. It started off about

seven degrees air temperature. I'd taken my turn on the bridge, writing down the log every hour for the crew and I could see that the temperature was rapidly going down as we travelled further north. I found drawing was a good way of keeping my eye on the horizon and seemed to help with seasickness so I made a series of about twenty drawings. It was only when I got back to the studio, and I had space to spread out all the drawings that I could see that the media had started to freeze as we travelled into colder latitudes. It felt visceral to see how the temperature had controlled my drawing, as the ice crystals in the ink had affected the process. By the end I had to almost drop it onto the page as the brush was a solid ice block. It was very palpable evidence that the elements were controlling what was happening. I had, by the end, little control over it, the media did its own thing. I went back to the ship's logbook and put the latitude against the time on each drawing and I could see that it correlated really accurately with what was happening on the page. So, it was a bit magical.

Tania Kovats: I think there's a couple of things [to say] if I want to respond to that. I think I get images of Ruskin's drawings of rocks and mountains and how incredible within his drawing is his geological understanding of how rock isn't fixed, he kind of draws the thrust upwards of mountains and the churn of rock. We need something to be solid and yet even stone that is our most, well, "solid as a rock"... it's a big conceptual thing that we cling onto, but it is not solid. I suppose I have the same slightly contradictory thing when I work with water, because I try to make water still and for me water is this literal embodiment [of flux]. If you are by a river flowing you're actually watching time pass but what I do when I capture it, I make it still and I think art, and possibly particularly drawing, gives us a capacity of a place to find stillness even if we are drawing flux. Drawing movement, and making drawings with a huge kind of action in them, they do slow us down and they do give us a stillness. One of the reasons I repeatedly make the Sea Mark drawings is because it's a space where I become still, and that's very precious to me and I think when I look at that drawing, it makes me still again, even though I'm trying to draw the movement of water and the energy of water rather than a picture of the sea. The drawing itself gives me a stillness. I think taking something that I bring into my teaching a lot, and thinking about ecology and planetary wellbeing, and trying to incorporate that with an understanding of the individual's wellbeing within it. And I don't know Sarah, there's something about those humble shoes that have somehow been found in a glacier, that's such a needle in a haystack image, and I'm just wondering if the shoe represents a loss of shoe or loss of life? Just thinking about what that shoe has been through and what a still point it comes to in the drawing, possibly stiller than when it was in the glacier...

SC: Yeah, there are lots of shoes! They are amazing objects. That's the point, the idea of thinking about where they have [been], the erratic, the thing moving both in space but also in time, having come down to us and appearing, and thinking about what it has witnessed and seen.

TK: I had a question, which is about gender and ice because the polar spaces are quite gendered spaces. They are associated with heroics and explorers who were almost exclusively male – and of course there are exceptions to that – but I wondered, particularly Emma, if you could speak about your experience as a woman in those spaces and if you have any reflection on how traditionally they are spaces occupied by women?

ES: Yes, that's true although in Svalbard there is a history of remarkable female explorers, who against all the odds survived in extreme icy situations. As a female I would suggest working out in the elements is a different experience to being male. If you're working out in the landscape anywhere it's a vulnerable place to be sometimes. I've had one or two hairy situations and it is something I am conscious of. But then danger isn't always gendered in an icy environment, in Svalbard the bears don't distinguish - that's my only thought when I'm there, that I don't get eaten! But I would say I've been frustrated, for instance on an application for a residency in a national park in America which was glaciated, and I really wanted to go. But I thought it would be sensible to go with another person, like my partner – it was up in the mountains and miles from anywhere but they were categorical that you had to be on your own, and that only one person could go. And I did think, wow, I'd like to know how many women come on this residency because that is really asking a lot – indeed for a male or female. There are probably lots of women out there who would do it, but that wasn't for me!

AT: Yes, it's quite challenging isn't it. You get [from your presentation] a sense of how pioneering you are. I know that you are going out on boats with other people to get to the locations but there is a real sense of pioneering [in order] to understand, and retracing steps that others have taken in order to document. There is a comment in that chat which is about the non-human presence. The presences of the viewer and you the maker and, I think that's true from all three of you, that forming the equivalent of the experience and the equivalent to being the explorer of that experience seems quite fundamental...

ES: Well, tipping it into exploring... I'm not an explorer, you know, I don't take risks but it is interesting to see how response is gendered, for example when Alison Hargreaves died

on K2 – the first and foremost thing was “she’s a mother, what was she thinking of? This is outrageous!” And how many male explorers, of all the many men who die on mountains, that’s never the first response, that “he was a father, what was he thinking of?”... I think it is tougher for women, even now.

AT: That’s absolutely certain. There is a question that’s come up, and I think it is a question that relates to all of you, although it may have come up when Emma was speaking. The question is, “is the act of drawing en plein air a form of gestural rehearsal that stays with you once making the studio scaled pieces?”

ES: Sarah, do you want to answer that?

SC: I can answer that. I would say, yes, although perhaps less in my case in the landscape, but when I was talking about encountering the objects, the drawing is kind of remote sensing in itself. Your eyes attach to the artefact that you’re drawing and your hand mimics the motion of your eyes; you’re almost imaginatively touching the thing and it becomes a way to imaginatively inhabit, sensorially inhabit the artefact, so kind of feeling it within your body, then you have that bodily memory, that you can transport [back to the studio] and then be used to... what’s the word... to try and recreate it. You’re trying to search for a way to make a drawing that is equivalent to that sensation that you feel, if that makes sense. So the way that I’m trying then back in the studio to use materials – the graphite, the wax the papers – to represent, [is] to have an analogy with the way that I felt when I was in that relationship with those artefacts. So while I couldn’t touch them, the drawing becomes a kind of proxy for touching when I’m seeing them, which affects my body and then that bodily memory is then what I’m drawing. So, if you like, the drawings probably aren’t drawings of the glacial archaeology at all, they are more like drawings of the aura of the artefact, or the effect the object on me.

AT: Thank you Sarah. Does anyone else want to answer? I think that’s a great answer.

TK: I’d like to say I can’t remember the last time I drew in the landscape. For me personally, I have great pleasure in being in the landscape, but it is about an unbound experience. There isn’t an edge to it. I only find the edge when I’m back in the studio. So, I’m in absolute awe of people that use drawing within it [the landscape] is part of their practice. I have huge respect for it, but I know it’s not part of what I have done ... so far! Who knows, I might be working up to it.

ES: That’s really interesting Sarah, you described the sensory experience that happens when you’re drawing in front of something so eloquently. I find drawing from observation strange, like almost a portal (without making it into something mystical) it’s like another space that I’m entering into. Incredibly focused, more so than in the studio, it’s very un-self-conscious. There is so much to grapple with – the weather and chaos of information and you feel there is a kind of collapse, like nothing is coming together on the page. It’s remarkable – or often not – back in the studio when I review things – that I have made some sort of sense out of that. Which always seems a bit of a miracle because I definitely enter an unconscious state when I am out drawing, as opposed to in the studio where I’m consciously constructing the image and I’m more self-aware - it’s a very odd, performative experience. Going back to the question about gesture, I think drawing in the studio is a sort of reenactment of that ‘in the field’ experience. Although my photographs have all that information, which is really important in terms of structuring something, it’s actually my drawings from observation that recall the experience.

AT: That’s great, thank you.

SC: I’m just going to follow what Emma said to round it up. Tania mentioned Ruskin and his appreciation of rocks, as well as being an advocate for drawing. There is that famous quote from Ruskin about using drawing not to make a picture but to better see and understand the world. But I think what Emma is saying really emphasizes that. That knowledge isn’t necessarily visual or verbal or intellectual, it can be very much embodied or sensory knowledge as well. That only struck me when you were speaking there.

AT: Thank you, I think that’s a wonderful rounding of that [point]. I think drawing is making equivalence to the experience and we’re drawing on all of those senses and experiences, and knowledge and different kinds of contexts and references in order to distill something into forming an equivalent to that whole experience. I think what’s rather beautiful in all three of your work is that sense of capturing the fugitive because in a way it’s the fugitive landscape but actually the sense of drawing as a sense of that uncapturable essence. There is one more question I want to bring in, which is about translating touch. “The cold materiality of place visually is shared by all of you, where do you see similar approaches in, say, poetry, dance? Is there an equivalent approach to translating these experiences anywhere other than through drawing?”

ES: Of course! All of these things, I feel sound and movement transition boundaries into drawing. It's really interesting Tania to see your film, your moving image that you incorporate drawing into. I feel there are these other sensory dimensions that interpret space.

AT: Fantastic, I think I'd like to say thank you for three really thought-provoking, inspiring, imaginative and fabulous presentations, presenting stunning work that does really provoke our concerns; it references, and it bears witness to, a changing and precarious landscape.

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Emergency! Porchabella shoe (Detail)

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Emergency! Sarah Casey

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