

Exhibition: Climate Change: The Ticking Time Bomb
Ruth's Table Gallery
Artist Statement

In 2006, I was honored to receive a National Science Foundation, Antarctic Artists and Writers Program grant for travel to Palmer Station, Antarctica. My project was to take texture molds off the glacier ice and stone for later use in compositing textures into cast glass sculpture. This did not mark my awakening to using environmental cues for my glass. It was a turning point in an evolution from the internalized spaces of captured worlds in my previous work to follow a vein that I had played with for nearly twenty years before. I started by being fascinated with how glass could record and light up textures from the environment. I started with roots, driftwood and rocks making small objects. When I returned from Antarctica, I began to make more complex textured shapes. It turned out to be easier to make panels that were essentially two-dimensional with raised relief, although several fully three-dimensional sculptures were produced then too. The panels led to the five year-project of making a huge cast glass wall for a ski villa in Vail Colorado, the Colorado Cascade. It is composed of thirty panels about 2 x 6-feet each, with a 4-inch relief, for a composition that is about 21 x 21-feet overall. The theme combines Antarctic rock and ice with local chert and shale from the Monterey Formation that runs through north central California.

Embedded in the work is an allusion to layers of time. When you gaze at the glass with natural light, changes happen every minute with the time of day and year. A hundred years ago, this road cut was excavated to reveal this surface. In the rock samples we molded, there is geologic time of formation, a million years per inch. Diatom exoskeletons fell and were compacted in the ocean, then uplifted in the great upheavals of plate tectonics here at the western edge of the continent. This is perhaps the seventh completely different face of the earth over its billions of years. And before that these materials congealed to form our planet. We stand here like we are observing this, but we are a microscopic speck in time.

I love the natural world, of course. Antarctica was as pristine and pure an environment as I have ever experienced. My work is not didactic about climate change. There is a price to pay for using banked energy in the form of fossil fuels. The earth does not care if we warm or cool. But humanity and all our living fellow travelers, the plants and animals will be affected. Fouling the nest with carbon will probably lead to the end of Anthropocene extinction and humanity with it. Years ago, I chose glass as a medium because I was intrigued with its longevity. These works could pass a message into the long term future. Now I wonder if anybody will be around to read it? I'm a little pessimistic: Could we possibly cope with the effect climate extremes will have on our fragile human support systems, water, agriculture, cities, civilization? How could we ever go back to a population and technologies that are really sustainable over millennia?

In my work, I like to focus on the beauty and sublimity of our jewel planet. Never in our history has it been more precious. It's not hard to point that out. It's also not easy to realize that glass has been one of the great culprits, with historical deforestation in Europe and the middle east. Great quantities of wood and minerals have been used for its creation. At least these pieces have a permanent aspect and will be artifacts into the future, whatever it holds. This world could not be more beautiful and perfect. Can we live as though it will always be so?

DAVID RUTH
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