



Questions and Answers

What is science if not the asking of questions? In the Anthropocene, science can answer questions about the past, can dial Earth's history back millennia. The individual may see this year's thaw as quick, but it is only in relation to a wider knowledge of patterns in nature that it is evident as tragic.

The works in *A Quick and Tragic Thaw* feel like answers to a momentous question. This question might have been spoken in another room, the viewer may not hear it—but reverberations hang in the air. Thus a conversation ensues between past and future. Yvonne Love and Gabrielle Russomagno have been collaborating for over a decade—that particular call and response of artists driven to challenge each other and the times in which they live. Like science, art can be a group pursuit, a shared look-out. And these works do look outward, invoking other international voices: Inuit terms for ice and human interactions with it; the names of hurricanes; a personal record of birds observed in the artist's back garden ("*Collections*").

Words are not everything. Humans have many other means of communication, one of the most redolent of which is the map—a way of documenting past voyages and finding a way forward. But now landscapes are changing dramatically due to human-made climate crisis, for example as sea levels rise and coastlines shift. Love and Russomagno investigate the many ways of reading maps, and honouring the different research traditions that created them. Arctic landmass elements ("*Elements*") are 'drawn' in the copper mined there, then nestled within a narrow fault of graphite. The outline of Greenland recurs in black sand and in topobathic charts. The former uses 'natural' materials, the latter sophisticated digital technology ("*Repeat Units*").

A diverse use of materials—copper, carbon, graphite and rag paper among them—characterises these

works. In "*Plastic Projections*" data from a range of conservation organisations and companies with less benevolent intentions for the Arctic region is printed onto plastic discs, the surface of which morphs and distorts like shrink-plastic childhood toys, a reminder that humans are playing dangerous games with the world. In "*Transfer and Pierce (SOS)*", some drawings made with a pin through paper record temporal states of being—movements of wind, the loss of glacial ice—in a language of absence. Other drawings are made through oil-black/blue carbon paper (formerly used to duplicate typed documents), but there's just one document—the duplicate is the original. The implication is that there is only one chance. In "*Collections*" the transparent bell jar (a former protector of natural history specimens) has melted away and in its place, the forms it has moulded in plaster take on shapes reminiscent of ice cores or ice shelters. Can this proxy snow be preserved? The messages embedded in it suggest otherwise.

A rich reading of science and literature runs through this work and is transmuted by it. Art is a space for what Love and Russomagno describe as "an emotional meditation on loss" that is necessarily absent from science, but at the same time is essential before humans can transform science into onward action. Humans often seem unable to act on knowledge—their tragic 'flaw' perhaps? To address climate crisis with the urgency that is necessary scientists and policymakers and artists all have a role to play. This is work which not only questions, but inspires the viewer to ask question in turn. Which of our most precious words will be preserved beneath the bell jars' glass? What maps will guide us into the future?

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