

CHARLES BENEKE ARTIST

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Artist's Statement

Warmer: An Evolving Installation

My work has involved the environment and climate change for several years, but I began to feel that in order to really address this pressing issue, I needed to see and experience climate change first hand. Thanks to a University of Akron Summer Research Fellowship I traveled to Ilulissat, Greenland in June 2009 to see the Jakobshavn Icefjord, a 55 kilometer outlet of Sermeq Kujalleq, the glacier that produces the most icebergs in the northern hemisphere. From there I traveled north to Eqip Sermia where I camped and hiked onto the Greenland ice sheet, the largest ice sheet in the northern hemisphere. I was stunned by the beauty of this extreme environment and overwhelmed by the clear evidence of climate change and global warming in a place that plays such a key role in the regulation of our world's ecosystem.

Global warming is the melting of the polar ice caps at a rate that is much accelerated. It is estimated that the Greenland ice sheet is melting at a rate of 239 cubic kilometers (57.3 cubic miles) per year. At this rate it is possible that this ice sheet, in addition to half of the West Antarctic ice sheet, could be gone within 500 years. We are living at the end of one ice age and witnessing a change that will alter the physical world as humans have known it.

Warmer, an evolving installation is a direct response to my experiences in Greenland and an exploration of our role in Northeast Ohio, both as a society and as individuals, in climate change. Included in this exhibition are photographs of the Jakobshavn icefjord, the Disko Bay, Eqip Sermia, and the inland ice; woodcut prints of industrial smoke plumes, paintings of our industrial blooms, and a knitted smoke cloud. Over the course of the next three months these elements will interact, new elements will be introduced, and this installation will evolve to address the man made changes we have created and that we continue to create for our own comfort at the expense of our environment.

We exist as a part of a world in flux. Change is our most reliable companion. We affect change and we are affected by it. At what point do we take responsibility for how we are changing the world by changing our behaviors and habits?

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