

Tip of the Iceberg vandalized at Andrew Warburton Memorial Park.

Donna Akrey's comment on the vandalism against her installation on the Pipeline Trail was candid, "... the layers of meaning in a work to 'replenish' icebergs being vandalized is pretty poignant."<sup>1</sup> Akrey's work contains many layers of meaning for anyone willing to contemplate it. The installation provides moulds in which the Hamilton artist invites viewers to cast their own icebergs, and to contribute the objects to her display for the public to enjoy. There are also layers of humour inherent to her choice of art material - the patience required to fill the moulds with water, waiting for the water to freeze only to see them melt over time, as well as to the size of the miniature iceberg multiples. The artist plays on the mystery of the tip of the iceberg: what's hidden underneath the surface level of the mould is the upside-down sculptural piece.

Akrey's installation is part of a multi-arts festival "The Last Days of Ice and Snow," which spans the Crown Point and Homeside neighbourhoods in East Hamilton. The project responds to climate change, and is inspired by the pipe that has supplied the city of Hamilton with fresh water for more than 100 years. Red Tree artists' collective has previously collaborated with Pipeline Trail Hamilton on projects that engage residents in artistic dialogue in an area that is quite remote from the arts district, in the sense of both geographic distance and presence of public art. In order to appreciate Donna's installation, a viewer does not need a degree in art history. However, the fact that it was vandalized after only three days, does speak to something amiss in the neighbourhood.

Ontario has an extensive art curriculum, revised in 2009. The introduction to the plan outlines the importance of the arts in education, and begins with a quote, "To watch a child completely engaged in an arts experience is to recognize that the brain is on, driven by the aesthetic and emotional imperative to make meaning, to say something, to represent what matters."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, having worked in a number of schools as guest artist, I know that very few primary schools implement the art curriculum. This means that most students miss out on learning to express what matters in a creative way. It also means, that they may not understand how someone else's brain works. They may fear the aesthetic imperative that they have not learned to follow. Instead of being driven to explore or make meaning, they may feel compelled to destroy that which they don't recognize.

I would like to speak to the people who tried to destroy Donna Akrey's work. I would like to ask them to take the artist's invitation at face value, to create a sculpture and to turn something negative into a positive experience with art. In visual art speak, an empty space in a painting or empty form in sculpture is called "negative space." This is the space that surrounds an object, as opposed to the "positive space" which the object itself occupies on paper, canvas or in a room. A mould by nature is a hollow shell that is filled with fluid (or soft) matter, which then becomes a three-dimensional object in a process called "casting." Consider the many meanings of "casting" in the English language, and perhaps focus on shaping something instead of throwing it aside. A recent study has concluded that making art is good for you, even if you are not good at it.<sup>3</sup> Try making art meaningful for your own sake.

Ingrid Mayrhofer, February 10, 2020

For more information on the festival, please see <http://www.redtreecollective.ca/last%20days.htm>

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<sup>1</sup> email from the artist, February 4, 2020

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts18b09curr.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lifehack.org/429885/study-says-art-makes-you-mentally-healthier-even-if-youre-not-good-at-it>