

Clusters

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The Clock, Plymouth State University

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New Exhibit Combines Climate Change with Art

By Sarah Liebowitz; A&E Editor

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A mini fountain and rock garden in the Museum of the White Mountains's interactive Mountain Studio.

Climate change, when it's laid out in complex graphs, can be baffling. The Museum of the White Mountains unravels some of the mysteries of science by portraying this universal issue through the lens of art.

The Museum's new exhibit is called Forecasting: Climate Change and Water Impact. It is the museum's first exhibit with a focus on contemporary art, and the first exhibit to combine art and science.

PSU art professor Kimberly Ritchie is one of the featured artists. Her art stems from two experiences that took her to the extremes of the earth. In January 2016, she had a residency in Joshua Tree National Park, California, which was experiencing a major drought.

Ritchie talked with park rangers there, and learned that the Joshua trees were dying. "They're a cactus," said Ritchie. "They're supposed to absorb, and take on water, and live during really dry times, but that wasn't the case because it has been so dry for so many years."

On the other end of the spectrum, Ritchie went to Iceland on a Research Advisory Grant through PSU. In August 2016, she took

a raft into a lagoon. She watched a chunk of glacier calve off and float into the ocean.

"Just the sound of it popping and cracking when it's breaking away from the rest of the glacier, it sounds like a bomb going off. It's such a massive sound," said Ritchie.

"It was so in-your-face, that you couldn't help but see how quickly climate change was happening."

While in residency, Ritchie created her "Shoreline Prints." These cyanotypes were exposed by waves on the shores of Iceland, and on the shores of California's Salton Sea.



"Ice Shelf" installation by Kimberly Ritchie.

Her piece "Drought Data 2000-2015" consists of mounted cyanotypes exposed by cacti. Lower to the ground, her installation "Ice Shelf" seems to float above the floor.

"I think for a lot of us who are not science-minded, art can help us see science in a different way or through a different lens," said Ritchie. "That's what I try to do as an artist: take research that scientists have done, and bring that to the general public with a slightly different way of looking at it."

Research by Eric Kelsey, PSU professor and director of research at the Mount Washington Observatory, is integrated into the exhibit. Kelsey and a group of six students worked on the Boundary Layer Exposure Project, a project that hoped to discover why the summit of Mount Washington is warming more slowly than the surrounding elevations.

The team worked in shifts from sunrise until sunset, launching weather balloons and driving a water vapor isotope analyzer in a pickup truck up and down the auto road.

Their findings are on display in the exhibit, as well as a collaborative art piece by Kelsey, Ritchie, and Sandra McLane. The piece is an interpretation of one of Kelsey's diagrams. A short documentary on the making of the piece plays on an opposite screen.

Other art in the exhibit includes curved-crease sculptures by Erik and Marin Demaine, made with a form of self-folding origami. Their work is a memorial to frog species going extinct around the world, including Rabbs' fringe-limbed treefrog. The last member of the species died late September, 20016 in the Atlanta Botanical Garden.

Fawn Atencio's colorful work is an interpretation of affected and altered bodies of water, specifically in Colorado. It focuses on the way water evaporation affects climate change.

Artist Shandra McLane works with glass: blown, carved, engraved, and more. "I was attracted to glass to begin with, because it had a scientific aspect to it. There was a very large learning curve, which I enjoyed," said McLane. "I also like the reflection and transparency."

Her glass casting "Svalbard Seed" was inspired by a June 2015 expedition to the North Pole, which included a stop in Longyearbyen, Norway. In Norway, McLane saw the outside of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, a protected seed storage facility that represents the largest collection of crop diversity in the world. The vault also inspired a curriculum, "Engineering the Glass Seed," which teaches teens through STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math).

University President Donald Birx spoke about the exhibit, pointing out that three of the new clusters are present. "Sometimes people ask me, and say, what is a cluster? And this is it. This is what a cluster is," he said.

The Museum of the White Mountains is located at 34 Highland St., across from Lamson Library. The exhibit Forecasting: Climate Change and Water Impact will be on display until April 21, 2017.

CLOCK PHOTOS / ALICE REED