



“we have one enemy and that is ice”

In Fall 2018, I sat on a block of ice until an impression was left. It took ten hours. Doing nothing, on the stoop of my apartment in Sunset Park, I noticed the ebb and flow of my neighbors going to school, to work, and then back home. Looking up, I noticed the gradations of gray fall sky shifting throughout the day. The wind would rush down the block and blow leaves off their branches. Whenever it picked up, I'd focus on any leaf still tethered to its branch. I hoped to catch the moment the wind broke it loose, then track it as it fell. The leaves I fixated on all stayed put.

The extended period of time needed to make an indentation in the ice block is at odds with the immediacy we expect from current impression-making devices. The time photography needs to make an impression has gone from hours to fractions of seconds, satisfying an ever increasing desire for speed and ease.

How can you speed up a body's impression on ice without inducing a fever?

In the early twentieth century, Frederic Tudor began carving big ice blocks out of frozen New England lakes and shipping them to white colonial elites in Cuba, India, Australia, China, and South America. Facing a tropical heat they were unaccustomed to, wealthy European colonists put ice in their drinks to cool down. The big, white, American blocks of ice served as soothing aids to the colonists until the advent of electric refrigeration later in the century. The now-standard practice of serving ice cubes in drinks stems from this colonial practice.

Around the time I made this piece, I was volunteering at the The Sanctuary Coalition's pro se clinic as a Spanish-English translator, helping undocumented immigrants work on their asylum applications. The title of the piece, “we have one enemy and that is ice,” is a quote from Sara Gozalo, a leader of The New Sanctuary Coalition, delivered during a meeting. Ice, ICE, or Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the federal agency charged with detaining, prosecuting, and deporting “illegal” immigrants. Many people detained by ICE are put in “la hielera,” or “the ice box,” exposed to extremely cold temperatures for extended, indefinite periods of time. “we have one enemy and that is ice” is a sit-in in solidarity with immigrants persecuted by ICE--like those in la hielera, with nothing to do but sit on a hard bench and shiver--and a protest of the inhumane and racist policies and acts carried out by the American political system and their overzealous enforcement agencies.

Like mooning, there is explicit vulgarity and irreverence in the act of pushing an impression of my ass (even if clothed) onto the smooth white block. Ten hours into the act, I still wasn't able to penetrate or break it--but I could definitely make an impression with my ass.

“we have one enemy and that is ice” takes off from where Francis Alys' Paradox of Praxis 1 left off. Alys performed under the rubric “sometimes making something leads to nothing,” pushing a block of ice until it disappeared. My interest was in finding a way to do the reverse: to make something by doing nothing. I disengaged from the attention economy of social media and digital communications. Praxis is defined as “practice, as distinguished from theory.” Pushing the ice block until it melts into nothing, Francis Alys performs a paradox.

In pursuing nothing, and achieving nothing, he made something (the artwork).

The UN released a landmark report, Global Warming of 1.5 °C, the same month that I sat on the ice. The report details the consequences which the rise of a few degrees in global temperatures will have on our planet, calling for us to curb our consumption. The receding coastlines of the North and South poles are evidence of the stress humans are placing on planet earth. As a collective body, our recalcitrant posture towards the environment--our inability to stop leaning so heavily into it--is disastrously changing the planet.

Wealthy industrialized nations such as the U.S. are responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions, which disproportionately affect communities with less resources and global influence. Central American climate refugees are turning up at the southern border of the U.S. in droves. Unpredictable weather patterns have threatened their lives and livelihoods, dependent on the fruits of their land. By denying them asylum, the U.S. refuses to bear responsibility for the plight of climate refugees--a direct result of its unbounded consumption and ignorant economic policies.

