THE CULTURE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

"Woke this morning to a jagged brown coast, a long, dark profile against a white sky. In the foreground icebergs queued like buses heading south, one behind another in the coastal current."

— Martin Rose, Director, British Council Canada, and Writing Advisor, Cape Farewell Youth Expedition 2008

CAPE FAREWELL YOUTH EXPEDITION 2008

By Larissa Kostoff and Colette Laliberté

ACCORDING TO THE U.S. NATIONAL SNOW AND ICE DATA CENTER (NSIDC), THE SIZE OF THE ARCTIC ICE CAP HIT A 2008 LOW OF 4.52 MILLION SQUARE KILOMETRES ON SEPTEMBER 12. THAT'S CLOSE TO THE RECORD LOW OF 4.13 MILLION SQUARE KILOMETRES REGISTERED LAST YEAR, AND FAR FROM THE CLOSE TO 8 MILLION OBSERVED EACH YEAR FROM 1979, WHEN THE NSIDC BEGAN TAKING SATELLITE IMAGES OF THE ICE, TO 2000.

ABOVE ICEBERGS
CAPE FAREWELL YOUTH EXPEDITION 2008
PHOTO BY ROBERT VANWAARDEN
COURTESY OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL CANADA

PGII

If, as Inuit activist Sheila Watt-Cloutier has argued, the Arctic is the "barometer of the world's health," then the world is very sick indeed. And the melting Arctic is our warning.

Cape Farewell's annual voyages into the Arctic are about heeding that warning — witnessing the effects of climate change and then communicating "through the emotional responses of the arts, as well as through hard science, the urgency of action."

The project, which has been sending artists, scientists and students into the Arctic since 2003, is the brainchild of British artist and filmmaker David Buckland, who has adopted as his mandate the notion that the world can only change the way it acts on climate change by changing the way it feels.

Cape Farewell's voyageurs have recorded the way the Arctic has changed in film, photography, music and words, as well as through scientific observation. It is Buckland's wish that all of them, including the students — perhaps especially the students — return home to assume the role of ambassadors, as powerful agents of change.

Colette Laliberté, an artist and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Art at OCAD, discusses her Cape Farewell experience in these pages. It's a story that began when OCAD President Sara Diamond recommended her to David Buckland as an artist, mentor and potential voyageur. And it's a story that took off on September 5, 2008, when 28 high-school students, including 16 from Canada, 3 from Great Britain and 2 each from Brazil, Mexico and India, as well as 18 specialists in climate change, science, art and education boarded the *Akademik Shokalskiy* after a two-day stay in Iceland.

Cape Farewell's sixth voyage, a collaboration with the British Council Canada, was the first to travel to the Canadian Arctic. The young people who participated — Laliberté calls them "extraordinary" — went through a lengthy selection process and were chosen in part for their communication skills and their commitment to the environment. The international scope of the group was intentional, a way of creating a global network of students who would become communicators and leaders in their own communities and beyond.

Leading the oceanography and climatology student group was Bruno Tremblay, an oceanographer and professor in McGill's Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences. Working with him were Christopher Giesler, science teacher at Ontario's Southwood Secondary School; Jessica Houston, artist and instructor at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; and Geneviève Côté, children's book illustrator and 2007 General Governor's Award winner for illustration. The biogeography group was led by Doug Fraser, Head of Science at Ontario's Timiskaming District Secondary School, and artist/teacher Karen Channing from Newfoundland. Christopher Burns, a specialist in permafrost and a professor of geography at Carleton University in Ottawa, and Laliberté led the geomorphology group.

Colette Laliberté: After preliminary training/orientation at Lake St. George in Richmond Hill (just north of Toronto), and air transport to Reykjavik, Iceland, our Arctic expedition departed on September 7, 2008, for 40 hours of navigation across the Denmark Strait to Ammassalik, Greenland. Following an official bonjour with Danish customs, the *Shokalskiy* continued along the western coast of Greenland to its southern tip, stopping along the way at a beach at the foot of a glacier. Our itinerary allowed for a second venture onto land at Skjoldungen, then up the eastern coast to stop in Tasermiut Fjord, in Tasisuak Lake, and in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland.

From Nuuk we journeyed another 38 hours across the Davis Strait, crossing the Arctic Circle to Qikiqtarjuaq in Baffin Island, where we reported to Canadian customs, visited a school and made two additional stops in Padlopen and Butterfly Bay. We enjoyed a Zodiac tour of Monumental Island in order to see polar bears before our final stop on September 19 in Iqaluit, where we boarded the plane that would take us back to Ottawa.

SCIENCE AND ART: A DIALOGUE

sci•ence: *n. **1** a branch of knowledge conducted on objective principles; esp. concerned with the material and functions of the physical universe*

art: *n. **1** human skill or workmanship as opposed to the work of nature **2** a making or doing of things that display form, beauty and unusual perception*

Science fills seats, says Adam Bly, founder and Editor-in-Chief of Seed Media Group, a science media company. The first of three keynote speakers in the 2008–2009 President's Speaker Series at OCAD, Bly delivered the talk "The 21st-Century Scientific Revolution: Shattering Disciplinary Boundaries Between Science, Art, Design and Culture" on November 13, 2008.

According to Bly, we need to talk about what science knows. Bly is advocating for "a scientific renaissance as a way of galvanizing a population," of saving a "planet in peril," and what's interesting about his argument is where it positions art. The relationship of science to art, he claims, is not discretionary. Art has the capacity to take issues that are fundamentally scientific and activate them in society.

This is also the premise of Cape Farewell, and it's echoed elsewhere, in far less remote places than the Arctic. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) just employed a philosopher-in-residence, and Princeton University opened the Center for Theoretical Science. In a trans-disciplinary world, knowledge gathering also happens between disciplines.

But is there a difference, in that liminal space, between looking and seeing? It's a question that came up again and again during the trip for geomorphologist Chris Burns, who found partnering with Laliberté so "intellectually provocative" he has asked her to accompany him and his students on field trips in 2010.

Colette Laliberté: The dialogue between scientists and artists quickly revealed that our working processes had similarities. Both groups relied on their powers of observation. They collected information, transcribed collected data, translated that data and asked a lot of questions. We observe by looking, touching, tasting, hearing, smelling; this observation is what gives us data. The tools we use to register this data vary according to the work done.

Like the scientists, the artists are guided by what they find. And like the scientists, we engage in a process of reflection. We reflect on the present world to produce works that speak of temporality, change and the fleeting moment. We also share similar questions: How does one look? What is scientific practice? How might science and art complement one another? How to record a trace? How to record a vanishing moment?

In an attempt to answer these questions, the biogeography group photographed and, where possible, collected samples of alpine growth; the geomorphology group calculated and entered in their field books the depth of the permafrost, the temperature of soil and air, and our Global Positioning System (GPS) location; and the oceanography group registered air and water temperatures twice daily.

The work quickly became collaborative. Burns showed the geomorphology group how to probe the ground to calculate the permafrost and take soil temperatures. To measure the depth of the permafrost, we used a stainless steel rod called a "gooser." This was followed by a drawing session. We each drew the tundra growth that we observed in the area into which we had inserted the gooser. [Interestingly, Burns notes that explorers of the Canadian North used to take a sketch artist on each and every journey. Sketching is still a component of field trips today.]