

photo access

29 Jan - 28 Feb

Once Was

Rebecca Wickham

How do we mourn for more-than-human deaths, when all that remains of loss is empty space? *Once Was* explores the hollow land left behind when glaciers melt, and the grief and guilt that coalesces in the bare earth revealed by their erasure.

A glacier is declared 'dead ice' when it can no longer move under its own weight. Motionless, it melts where it lays, revealing land that hasn't seen sky for sometimes thousands of years. Photographs showing the remains of such glaciers are paired with a series of death masks, made from earth, rock and meltwater gathered at each site, and cast from a mould of the artist's own face.

Marina Warner refers to the death mask as the 'psychological precursor' to the photograph, in both form and use. A memorial photograph pre-photography, it acts as an object of grief and remembrance; an imprint of presence in the wake of disappearance. Here, these post-glacial landscapes are seen as death mask themselves, cast from the moving form of the glacier that after death, leaves only its impression behind in the earth. By showing the death mask as photograph, an extension of the environment it was cast from, the boundaries between the human and landscape begin to dissolve, as if the empty glacial valley is the negative mould from which the mask emerges; the Earth's skin is our skin too. We must grieve with, rather than for, as we are bound up in this fabric of undoing.

Shown alongside these images is a series of lithographs, but the roller is inked only once at the beginning of the process and the image printed as many times as possible until the ink runs out. The landscape becomes a faint echo of its previous self, actively erased by human hands. The

surface of these images seems to disintegrate the lighter the ink gets; there's a sense of an irrevocable unravelling.

A glacier remembers, from months to millions of years, an entire archive of layered histories that records and tells the stories of the earth, built up over centuries and now melting in decades. With the extinction of our glaciers, the memories of the earth itself are fading with the thawing ice. *Once Was* explores the process of grieving as a purposeful act of sustained remembrance. It speaks to our entanglement with, and responsibility for, these sites of loss, and our willing blindness to the consequences we create for ourselves. It is an elegy and prophecy both.

Bio

An Australian early-career photographer, Rebecca has recently graduated from London College of Communication with an MA (Distinction) in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography. Her research-based practice sits between photography and other mediums, with work concerning the climate crisis and our relationship with the earth. Primarily focused on landscape, she is interested in the materiality of place, often working directly with the environment to bring a trace of its history and physicality into the work.

Website: rwickham.com

Instagram: @bectic

List of works

from left to right

1.
Rebecca Wickham
Calderone Glacier, Death Mask (diptych), 2024
Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Fine Art Print
1630 x 1040mm
\$1700

2.
Rebecca Wickham
Pizol Glacier, Death Mask (triptych), 2024
Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Fine Art Print
3220 x 790mm
\$2500

3.
Rebecca Wickham
Tiefen Glacier 01-06, 2024
Original lithographs
each 230 x 300mm framed
\$1800

4.
Rebecca Wickham
Calderone Glacier 01-06, 2024
Original lithographs, each 230 x 300mm framed
\$1800

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