

# ERIC AHO: ICE BOX

November 22, 2009–February 21, 2010



*Ice Cut (1929) 2009*

The viewer can almost hear the crunch of snow underfoot, the chattering of ice on the branches, and the groans of ice on the river when standing before Eric Aho's ice paintings. Luminous evocations of deep winter, they impart a visceral sense of ice and snow.

These paintings are alive with sensation. A plethora of shimmering whites—tinted with frosty blues, greens, pinks, and violets rendered in agitated brushwork and drips of paint—summon both terrain and atmosphere into being. The overall effect is dazzling. These are virtuosic compositions, symphonic in scale and complexity.

Aho's work is a perfect synthesis of abstraction and representation, the general and the particular, process and memory. It is both original and a précis of contemporary and art historical influences.

*Ice Cut* is a particularly daring painting. A large inky-black void is the central feature of the canvas, its flat, barely inflected surface markedly different from the glistening, encrusted area surrounding it. Representing in the geography of the painting the cut exposing the frigid river water, this black void is at the same time a reference to contemporary abstract masters such as Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, and Ad Reinhardt.

Capturing the winter landscape may have been the artist's

immediate aim, but what is striking is how psychologically fraught and foreboding these paintings can be. The ability of a painting, which is in no way illustrative, to convey meaning beyond the intention of the artist is the alchemy of the aesthetic experience.

Mara Williams, Chief Curator

## Artist Statement

THE FROZEN SURFACE OF WATER, like human skin, is a delicate and complex reality. For me, painting a frozen lake or river represents a unique opportunity to examine the actuality of winter, and at the same time to ponder its fragile veneer. What resides beneath surfaces has always challenged my mind.

In this exhibition, bringing together a selection of my recent paintings and a short film by my wife, Rachel Portesi, I wanted to confront the brute force of nature as well as the human hand that has played a role in shaping it. After all, I believe that we see and experience nature chiefly as a construct of our imagination. Conversely, doesn't our physical perception of reality—our actual presence in nature—alter our understanding of its forms, structures, and relationships? How can we feel that nature is both fixed and mutable?

*continued on reverse*

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**Brattleboro Museum & Art Center**

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*Trace* 2009

I discovered that this pursuit of examining, pondering, and painting requires me to manipulate what I have seen—intervening, if you will, between reality and imagination—to the point where the seen and the imagined become one and the same—the point at which the painted image *feels* right.

Eric Aho

## About the Works

*Broken River* (2009) follows the chaotic and apparently random break-up of river ice. The painting's three flat panels create an unexpected dialectic with the irregular sculptural planes of broken ice. The drama here is of "breaking" that extends beyond the river, which remains continuous and fluent under the ice.

*Ice Cut, 1929* (2009) is the third work in a series that originated in a memory of my father, who spoke about ice harvesting in a rural New England community of Finnish immigrants during the Great Depression. Making this series, which reflects paintings by artists as diverse as Gustave Courbet and Ellsworth Kelly, I began to wonder how a single painted image can mediate an equivalent level of tension and sensation present in an individual's relationship to the physical world.

The film *Ice* (2008–09), shot in Super 8 by photographer and filmmaker Rachel Portesi, chronicles the cutting of pond ice for the "avanto," or plunge pool, in front of a Finnish sauna. Two-plus minutes of grainy, jumpy footage plays in stark contrast to the clarity and sharpness of the ice. The resulting handmade record underscores the abstraction of the cut hole. Super 8's nostalgic tone serves to place a current practice in the realm of historical memory.

All works are on loan courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York City. Dimensions are height by width, in inches.

***Broken River* 2009**  
oil on linen and panel  
80 x 100

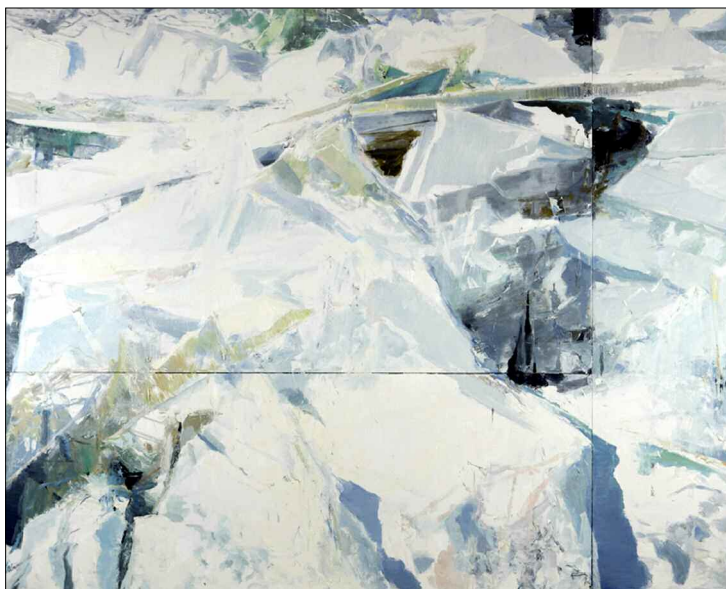
***Trace* 2009**  
oil on linen  
25 x 50

***Small Landfast 3* 2009**  
oil on linen  
10 x 12

***Ice Cut (1929)* 2009**  
oil on linen  
62 x 80

***Landfast 2* 2009**  
oil on linen  
22 x 24

*Broken River* 2009



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## Hours and Accessibility

Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Closed Tuesday and Wednesday except by appointment.

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

The Museum is wheelchair accessible.

An ASL interpreter for the hearing impaired will be provided if requested two weeks in advance of tours or programs.

## Admission and Parking

BMAC members free  
Adults \$6  
Seniors \$4  
Students \$3  
Children 5 and under free

Parking is available in front of the Museum.

## Museum Shop

The Museum Gift Shop, free to the public during regular Museum hours, features an assortment of cards, games, books, prints, and educational and gift items, including work of many local artists.

## Group Tours

Docent-led tours of the Museum for groups are available by appointment. Call the Museum for information.