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Kilimanjaro: The Last Glacier by Ian van Coller

Exhibition Dates: May 5 - July 1, 2017

Artist's Reception & Page-through:
Friday, May 5 | 5:00 - 7:30 pm



Kilimanjaro: The Last Glacier is a project of scale, resonance, and urgency that merges art and science, past and present, history and legacy. Van Coller has accompanied climate change researchers on their expeditions to study disappearing glaciers. The work in this exhibition is the product of two such trips, one to Tanzania, and the other to Peru, both of which are home to rare tropical glaciers. Latitude is what designates glaciers as “tropical;” they are particularly susceptible to sunlight and climate fluctuations. Scientists predict most will be extinct within the next decade.

The artist is most celebrated for his handmade artist's books, and the centerpiece of this series, and therefore our exhibition, is an oversized limited-edition artist's book. *Kilimanjaro: The Last Glacier* opens to 37 x 50 inches. Its scale aligns the book with its subject, but its dimensions also recall ledgers or atlases, thus conjuring themes of archiving, mapping, and exploration. This book features icescapes and portraits. The artist makes paring and sequencing choices that work to harmonize landscape and figure, but also pushes their connection so as to personify place- the ice, the rocks, and the vegetation start to look like the men who occupy the frames. The glaciers start to come alive, until we consider that we are watching their final days, and witnessing a double death. Without the tourism driven by the unique landscape many of these men will be left without livelihood. The work related to the expedition to Peru is less represented in this exhibition, but none the less spectacular. The two works from *The Transparency of Ice and the Melting of Deep Time* we have included are unique- the landscape prints of van Coller have been annotated by the scientists who studied them.

Van Coller's work collapses time. The glacier is a metaphor for time; man punctuates our moment- through his portrait or through his handwriting. We begin to recognize that like man, the glacier has memory. Like the rings of a tree, the ice can act like a natural supercomputer to hold eons of records on temperature, precipitation, and life. It is this information the scientists van Coller accompanies are after. The record is steadily disappearing, and they must act fast to save what they can. In this context, the presence of man is sadly ironic. Next to a glacier, humans seem miniscule in terms of scale and history, and yet we are likely the greatest contributor to their extinction.

About the Artist: Ian van Coller was born in South Africa during apartheid and now lives, works, and teaches in the United States at Montana State University. His early work focused on the troubled legacy of South Africa, and sought to reconcile his own sense of guilt associated with his Occidental ethnicity in the face of post-colonialism. To achieve this, much of his work sought to depict and elevate “true Africanness” over the colonial view of place. In more recent years, his focus has shifted- or better said, broadened in scope- to consider the ethics of global citizenship, especially as set against the contemporary issues of climate change. He has worked alongside NOAA, National Geodetic Foundation, and other respected scientists in the field of climate change in Tanzania, Peru, Iceland, Antarctica, and the state of Montana to photograph endangered landscapes and the cultural impact of their loss. His work is in major collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC; Fogg Museum, Harvard; The Getty Collection, Los Angeles; Johannesburg Art Gallery in South Africa; Nelson-Akins Museum of Art, Kansas City; New York Public Library, NYC; Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art; and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography Library, Tokyo; among others.