

Huw Davies Gallery
15th October - 7th November

photo
access

State of Change

Emilio Cresciani

2020 Dark Matter Resident

Drawing together works using both darkroom and digital techniques, *State of Change* captures the surprisingly complex and beguiling transformation of ice into water. Photograms document frozen fragments refracting and reflecting light, producing patterns suggestive of shifting landscapes. Close-up captures trace the disintegration of massive blocks into drips and spots. The resulting works reference the profound impacts of human-induced climate change on polar regions, and the wider ways in which people have marked the Earth.

Cresciani produced *State of Change* as PhotoAccess' 2020 Dark Matter artist-in-residence. This program supports the production of experimental work incorporating darkroom or alternative processes.



Emilio Cresciani, *On Ice #3*, 2020, gelatin silver photogram, 50.8cm x 40.6cm

On *State of Change*

For some ten years Cresciani has been exploring our society's industrial underbelly – its abandoned factories, waste dumps, road works – the metaphorical 'dark matter' of contemporary life. In each overlooked or unlovely subject he has sought to find a form of beauty. Revealing this beauty has become his preferred way of asking us to pay attention, to think again. The photographs in this exhibition, though they look like nothing Cresciani has produced until now, are in this vein. *State of Change* is a development on what has gone before, but it is also a significant departure. The elemental nature of the subject matter and the intimate affinity of the work's ideas with its processes and materials are both new.

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This PhotoAccess Dark Matter residency, awarded before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, could easily have come off the rails. When travel restrictions were imposed, as a Sydney based artist, Cresciani's darkroom access was cut – for a time at least. Happily, it turned out that the interruption was productive. It gave rise to a second body of photographs, and also my favourite mental image of Cresciani at work, standing over a huge, immaculate block of ice, hammer in hand.

It's companion image would have to be the artist in the PhotoAccess darkroom (he has driven there from Sydney with an Esky full of ice), at work on this project. I imagine him alone – it is the weekend, everyone else is off somewhere – in the semi-darkness. There's a ventilator humming, water running, the smell of fixer; he probably has music playing. These are familiar, almost homely surroundings to anyone who's ever worked in any darkroom, anywhere.

He is making photograms. The earliest form of photography, a photogram is the medium distilled into its purest form. The requirements are simple – an object, a photosensitive surface, light for making the exposure, some chemistry, water. Each image is unique, essentially unrepeatable. The *Oxford Companion to the Photograph* helpfully explains that their uniqueness lends photograms something of the cachet of painting, and this is the reason why artists like to make them. But that is to miss the point: they are photography in its closest possible relationship with its subject matter. We are talking real physical intimacy here, object and paper touching one another. However that's not all: as light penetrates each translucent object, it may – as happens here – capture and record qualities that the eye does not see. Photograms are true to their subject in ways that conventional photos can only dream of.

Cresciani's photograms record in minute detail what happens on photographic paper as ice melts. The eye, though, is not satisfied with this pedestrian interpretation: his images seem to suggest so much more. They invite the mind to roam. These shapes could be maps, clusters of rocky outcrops fringed by beaches, islets in a dark sea. In some the chunks of ice appear to intersect, overlap. In those there is a sense of something powerfully in flux, as when sea ice breaks up or ice sheets topple into the sea.

A second series of images, presented here on light boxes, explores melting ice from the perspective of a camera's close-up lens. (How strange that the moment of photographic capture, routinely called 'freezing', here becomes its opposite – melting.) Peering into the depths of ice as it melts reveals an alternate view of the same phenomenon, not competing but complementary. With no stable point to anchor the eye, these images are, as much as anything else, about uncertainty and flux.

As ice sheets melt and permafrost thaws, things we never thought to see are appearing: the bodies of long-dead mountaineers; a 'lost' mountain pass littered with Viking artefacts; five islands in the Arctic Ocean; a 'new' island in Antarctica. I am reminded here that COVID-19 has cast us into a new world that was unthinkable less than a year ago. In this light, it would be no surprise to find the mind taking another turn and these photograms starting to read as vastly enlarged microorganisms, harmful pathogens released by a warming Earth.

There may be no more dramatic or awe-inspiring vision of global warming than a massive ice sheet collapsing (unless it's a towering wall of flames against an orange sky), and those photographs are deservedly cemented in our visual memory. Viewing Cresciani's images is a quieter, more intimate, less familiar experience. They visually evoke the process of ice melting in new ways: as wafer thin moments in time; in extreme close up; as areas of diffused and refracted light. Abstractly beautiful, they do not tell us what to think, but the invitation to reflect is there – proffered not through spectacle, but by way of attachment to the mysterious, irreplaceable world they spring from.

Anne Ferran, October 2020

Anne Ferran is a practicing photo-media artist, and has been exhibiting since the 1980s as one of Australia's leading photographic artists.

Emilio Cresciani | About

Emilio Cresciani graduated from Sydney College of the Arts in 2012. His artwork explores redundancy and transition and altered landscapes. His interest is in objects, structures, and in particular the increasing number of 'non-places' that fill our environment. Garbage tips, derelict service stations, road works, car parks, abandoned factories, deforested wastelands. Beauty is found in these places of repulsion, neglect or obsolescence.

Artwork series have included: inverted images of rubbish emphasise the negative side of consumerism, like an x-ray points out disease. Portraits of people with their weekly waste explored Italo Calvino's suggestion that 'we are defined by what we dump'. Cracked car windows and night road works are a metaphor for the central place roads play in capitalism. Recent works explore how human greed is changing our landscape through climate change.

Public Program: Frozen Photos

When: Saturday the 7th November

Price: \$185, enrol online at photoaccess.org.au/learn

Join 2020 Dark Matter Resident Emilio Cresciani on a journey though making photograms with ice.

This cameraless photography technique involves creating images by setting objects directly onto the surface of light-sensitive paper and exposing it to light using an enlarger. In this workshop you will experiment with light and shadow, learning all about this photographic process and create rather than capture images with your own set of prints to take home.

List of Works

22.	Emilio Cresciani, On Ice #1, 2020, gelatin silver photogram, 50.8cm x 40.6, Edition of 1	\$490
23.	Emilio Cresciani, On Ice #2, 2020, gelatin silver photogram, 50.8cm x 40.6, Edition of 1	\$490
24.	Emilio Cresciani, On Ice #3, 2020, gelatin silver photogram, 50.8cm x 40.6, Edition of 1	\$490
25.	Emilio Cresciani, On Ice #4, 2020, gelatin silver photogram, 50.8cm x 40.6, Edition of 1	\$490
26.	Emilio Cresciani, On Ice #5, 2020, gelatin silver photogram, 50.8cm x 40.6, Edition of 1	\$490
27.	Emilio Cresciani, On Ice #6, 2020, gelatin silver photogram, 50.8cm x 40.6, Edition of 1	\$490
28.	Changing of Ice #1, 2020, duraclear, 76 x 56cm Edition of 3 + AP	\$550
29.	Changing of Ice #2, 2020, duraclear, 76 x 56cm Edition of 3 + AP	\$550
30.	Changing of Ice #3, 2020, duraclear, 76 x 56cm Edition of 3 + AP	\$550
31.	Changing of Ice #4, 2020, duraclear, 76 x 56cm Edition of 3 + AP	\$550
32.	Changing of Ice #5, 2020, duraclear, 76 x 56cm Edition of 3 + AP	\$550
33.	Emilio Cresciani, Breaking of Ice #6, 2020, duratran, 42 x 30cm, Edition of 3 + AP	\$590
34.	Emilio Cresciani, Breaking of Ice #3, 2020, duratran, 42 x 30cm, Edition of 3 + AP	\$590
35.	Emilio Cresciani, Breaking of Ice #9, 2020, duratran, 42 x 30cm, Edition of 3 + AP	\$590
36.	Emilio Cresciani, Breaking of Ice #4, 2020, duratran, 42 x 30cm, Edition of 3 + AP	\$590
37.	Emilio Cresciani, Breaking of Ice #1, 2020, duratran, 42 x 30cm, Edition of 3 + AP	\$590

More Online

Visit www.gallery.photoaccess.org.au to learn more about *State of Change*, and see additional complementary digital works to the exhibiton.