

# HAND PAPERMAKING

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COVER: Joan Hall, large detail of *The New Normal: In with the Tide*, 2018, 70 x 100 x 15 inches, handmade paper of kozo and gampi, mixed media (collagraph printing, glass pins, acrylic, Mylar). Photo by Dan McManus. Courtesy of the artist.



## Saul Melman and Images of the Anthropocene: Ice, Water, Carbon, Trace, and Absence

DONNA GUSTAFSON

*Ice shard melting into a newly formed sheet of abaca. Photo: Tatiana Ginsberg, 2017. FACING PAGE: Saul Melman, Untitled\_12, 2015, 29 x 39 inches, ice, carbon, abaca. Private collection. All photos courtesy of the artist.*

The Anthropocene is a term that describes the moment in geological time that we currently inhabit. Distinct from previous epochs, it is marked indelibly with signs of human presence. The start of the Anthropocene is often linked to the Industrial Revolution and will presumably continue through what may very well be the demise of the planet as we know it. Profound changes are already in motion including an unprecedented extinction of plants and animals on land and sea, the accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, global warming, shifting patterns of rain and drought, and rising seas. Fresh, clean water—the single most important resource on the planet—is increasingly at risk; even more ominous, water is increasingly commodified for private access. As places like Flint, Michigan have already shown, pollution, bad public policy, and government neglect create scarcity where rivers run; what can we expect in places where fresh water is already hard to find?

Because water (and in its frozen state, ice) has always been present on Earth, the study of water in geological time plays an important role in documenting climate change. Ice, carbon, and pressure

are key indicators of past global weather and important tools for understanding the pace of climate change. They are also key elements in a recent series of handmade paper works by New York-based artist Saul Melman.

To document climate change, scientists travel to the glaciers of the North and South Poles and drill down through millennia of compacted ice. These extracted cores reveal patterns of particulate matter, carbon among them, embedded in layers of ice that reveal evidence of human activity even in parts of the planet uninhabited by humankind. In his handmade-paper *Anthropocene Series*, Melman's use of ice and carbon as artmaking tools subtly references the scientific process that measures the increasing human footprint. His use of the term "Anthropocene" suggests his ambition to embody the enormity of the changes wrought by human activity. These global changes are suggested in a human-scaled sheet of abaca paper imprinted with the melting of ice and the trace of carbon.

Melman became interested in papermaking watching Ursula von Rydingsvard's paper pulp experiments at Dieu Donn , the inno-

vative papermaking studio that recently relocated from Manhattan to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Seeing a kinship between the process of papermaking and his own process-driven work in sculpture, installation, and performance, Melman applied for and won a Workspace Program residency at Dieu Donn  in 2013.

Melman is unusual among contemporary artists in that he is both a practicing artist and medical doctor who works as an emergency-room physician. The art, empathy, and discipline required of a doctor are deeply embedded within his studio practice. In both arenas of activity, Melman draws from his knowledge and experience to undertake a carefully considered application of touch, one that allows a process (whether healing or mark making) to move forward in time.

Melman's thoughtful approach to surface and material is clearly evident in his past sculptural installations, for example, *Central Governor* (2010 to present) at the Museum of Modern Art's PS1, and *Best Of All Possible Worlds* (2011) at Socrates Sculpture Park. Both of these installations embody evocative meditations on absence and





Anthropocene Series\_09, 2015, 24 x 19 inches, ice, carbon, abaca.



Anthropocene Series\_02, 2015, 24 x 19 inches, ice, carbon, abaca. Collection of Christine Symchych and Jim McNulty.



Best Of All Possible Worlds, 2011, 20 x 50 x 9.5 feet, thermoplastic, paint, wood, steel.



Manipulating cast sheet of ice and carbon into a freshly formed sheet of abaca.



Saul Melman holding a cast sheet of ice.

presence, time, transformation, space, and light. In *Central Governor*, a performance of limited duration and an ongoing installation, the subject was both the missing human caretaker of a formerly useful machine and the ancient boiler whose partially gold-leafed exterior evidenced a continuous metamorphosis between an abandoned relic and a polished reliquary. In *Best Of All Possible Worlds*, absence was marked by an arrangement of thermoplastic casts of household doors that silently memorialized thousands of domestic moments visible in the layers of paint and the traces of time and use etched into the translucent surfaces touched by the changing light of day and night. The artist's predilection for explorations of the slightest evidence of touch, light, time, and the material trace in the immaterial marked both installations and the *Anthropocene Series*.

At Dieu Donné, Melman immersed himself in the process of papermaking and, because water is central to the process, in water. Water and force (repeated beating) break down the plant fibers that become the pulp; water holds the pulp in a fluid state, and as water is removed from the pulp—in the process of forming the sheet, pressing, and drying—solid sheets of paper emerge from the soupy mix. The process can also be reversed; paper returns to pulp with the addition of water. Circling through the process, Melman begins

with newly formed sheets of paper and cast sheets of ice. Placing the ice on the paper and using sustained pressure, he forces the ice and wet paper to adhere; the process causes the upper layer of pulp and water to freeze and the ice to crack. The artist brushes liquid carbon into the fissures, literally freezing a moment in time and capturing a fleeting effect as the liquid runs into the rapidly freezing topmost layer of pulp. Like the natural process of frost running over a pond's surface, the delicate, fractal pattern expands until the liquid freezes and soaks into the pulp. Continually pressing the ice into the wet mass, the ice becomes a tool for carving the surface of the paper pulp. Drawing with ink and sculpting with ice in the same moment, the artist leaves the metaphorical marks of carbon on ice, in water, and on the surface of the natural world. As the ice melts and is absorbed into the paper pulp, the tools involved in the process of making disappear into the final object.

In a continuation of the series, Melman further explores the possibilities of his tools by freezing water mixed with carbon pigment into blocks of ice, then shattering the blocks with a hammer, and selecting shards of ice to press into sheets of wet paper pulp. He uses the shards to sculpt the thickness of the paper, and allows them to melt into the pulp, drawing rivulets of pigment. He assists the





Untitled\_03, 2015, 28 x 21 inches, ice, carbon, abaca. Photo by and courtesy of Galleria Anna Marra, Rome, Italy.

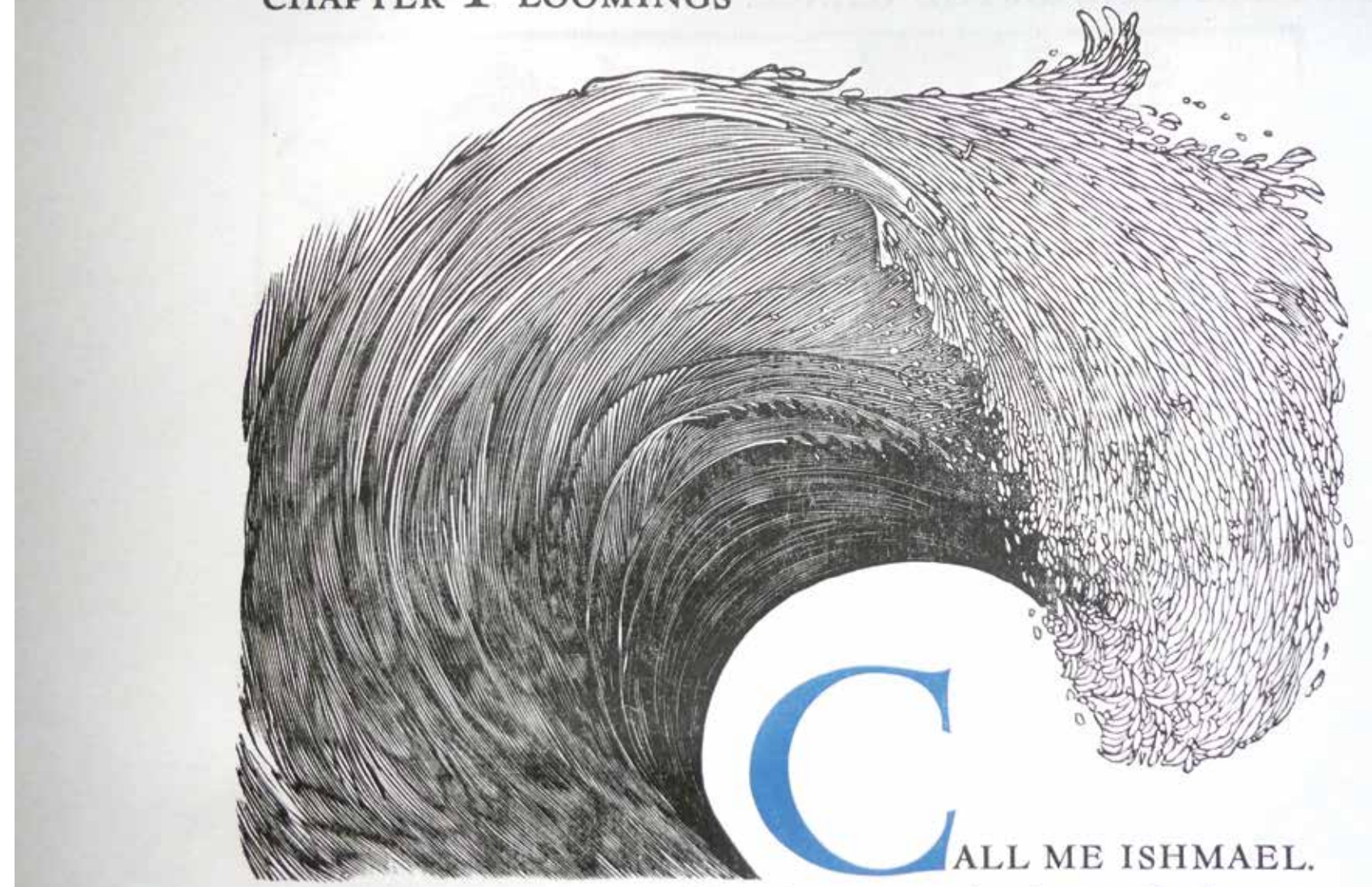


The artist placing shards of carbon-ink-infused ice into the surface of a freshly formed sheet of abaca. Photo: Tatiana Ginsberg, 2017.

process by injecting hot water, causing the carbon to bleed into the wet surface, and with the pull of gravity, leave an elongated stain of black and gray on a nearly white, somewhat translucent surface. These complex images are deliberately composed as the artist chooses where to place the ice and how much hot water to apply. Redolent of organic form and of strange digital maps of interior cellular structure, the black and gray create illusions of cavities and areas of high relief and seem to reference bone and skin as much as ink and paper.

Consistent with earlier projects, the *Anthropocene Series* prioritizes a craftsman's approach to materials and an innate understanding of less as more. In discovering water as the material trace and the immaterial mark—deeply present, but also absent from the final work—the artist merges form and content. Water, like light, is both present and absent; it appears and disappears. Within the artist's

transformation of water, abaca, ice, and carbon to ghostly images of the human imprint on the natural world, lies an alchemical performance. Metaphorically speaking, the ice and carbon track leads us back to humanity's transformation of the natural world and the imprint of cellular structure beneath a surface of skin. Such thoughts return us to the visible and the invisible. In healing and artmaking the acts of the physician/artist (and perhaps it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that artists and physicians are descendants of shamanic beings who travelled between the visible and invisible worlds) are subsumed in a sequence of events that requires an empathetic viewer to re-imagine and re-construct after the completion of the act. In Saul Melman's *Anthropocene Series*, the traces of water, ice, and carbon, absorbed by and documented on handmade paper, offer us a microcosmic means to reconstruct our world of time and change.



### Cold and Unyielding Ocean: Custom Paper for Arion Press's Moby-Dick

SIMON BARCHAM GREEN

*Opening page of Moby-Dick; or, The Whale by Herman Melville, illustrated by Barry Moser, published by Arion Press, 1979. All photos courtesy of the author, and reproduced with permission from Arion Press.*

Andrew Hoyem and I first worked together in 1976 on a custom paper order for Arion Press. Although he had been using our papers before, they were entirely standard stock papers. However, for *Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press, 1957–1966, & Grabhorn–Hoyem, 1966–1973* Andrew wanted something more distinctive, so we added the words “Arion Press” and his AH logo as watermarks in our Tovil paper. The logo was composed of nearly straight lines and not very challenging, although in retrospect we should have at least flared the ends as we did later for the lyre logo the press adopted. The quantity was also not very large. During the same time Andrew was already working on a much larger project—a new edition of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale by Herman Melville*.<sup>2</sup>

Andrew recounted that in 1971 or 1972, he suggested to his partner Robert Grabhorn that they should make a comparable edition of *Moby-Dick*, in folio format, handset, printed on dampened handmade paper, with illustrations, and hand bound in a comparable manner. Without sufficient capital of their own, the project was set aside. In 1977, Fritz Maytag and Barry Traub, friends and members of a monthly dining group Andrew belonged to, asked him what he most wished to print. *Moby-Dick* was his immediate answer. Planning began with trial pages and an estimation of cost. Barry Moser was chosen as the artist and given the charge that the prints, from blocks of end-grain hardwood, should illustrate things the reader might not know of, and that characters or creatures (the