

A dark, atmospheric landscape with a bright, hazy horizon line. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the ground below is a deep, dark grey. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

Out of Place / Non lieu

Lise Beaudry

Isabelle Hayeur

Marie-Josée Laframboise

*Out of Place / Non lieu* brings together the work of three Canadian Francophone artists: Isabelle Hayeur, Lise Beaudry and Marie-Josée Laframboise. The works in the show have conceptual underpinnings that arise from ideas about place. “No place,” or “non lieu,” and places that do not exist are represented simultaneously, raising questions about the real and the imagined and the effects of ephemerality. As Hayeur has written, “we continually remake the world in our own minds . . . In all places the real and the imaginary come together.”<sup>1</sup>

Place does not have a simple definition—it is used in many ways and to different ends. “Place is not just a thing in the world, but a way of understanding the world . . .,”<sup>2</sup> according to Tim Creswell, Professor of Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Wales. Likewise, “space is a more abstract concept than place . . . Places have space between them.”<sup>3</sup> Imagining a non-existent place may be a challenging or disconcerting prospect for some viewers—generally speaking, people are more comfortable in familiar surroundings. As philosopher Edward S. Casey once wrote, “some people find the prospect of an unknown place . . . quite unsettling . . . [T]he prospect of a strict void, of

an utter no-place, is felt to be intolerable. So intolerable, so undermining of personal or collective identity is this prospect, that practices of place-fixing and place-filling are set in motion right away . . . The aim . . . [is to] achieve the assurance offered by plenitude of place. The void of no-place is avoided at almost any cost.”<sup>4</sup>

Hayeur, Beaudry and Laframboise make works that offer perspectives on known and unknown, or real and unreal places. The artists are at ease with the indirect representations of places they create, and through their artworks they invite us to consider our own perceptions: to what extent do existing structures affect our understanding of a place? How can subjectivity be utilized to extend, explode and conceptualize new versions of a place, or non-place?

*Lise Beaudry: Whitescape / Underscape, or, Pictures of Nothing*  
Similar to Hayeur's photographs, impalpable places are the central subject in Lise Beaudry's *Whitescape* photographs, yet Beaudry's sites also have a uniquely ephemeral character. Pictured here are the snowy surfaces of frozen lakes, which are subject to the natural elements—wind and precipitation, thawing and refreezing. Beaudry stood upon these sites to make the photographs in this series, as she contemplated the changeability of such places.

Having grown up in Earlton, a small northern Ontario town near the Québec border, Beaudry spent her early years engaged in activities such as fishing, ice fishing, camping, family gatherings and travel. Much of her work centres around these practices of leisure, and her research interests also lie with theorists such as Michel de Certeau, who wrote on leisure and the everyday.<sup>10</sup>

In 2005, while living in Toronto where she currently resides, Beaudry began photographing ice fishing huts while travelling in northern Ontario. This grew into a body of work that looks at ice fishing communities similar to those she grew up with. She documented “la pêche blanche,” or ice fishing, as a study of an important aspect of northern Ontario, and Francophone, culture.

After Beaudry had worked on that project for five years, her *Whitescape* photographs emerged on one of her trips to photograph the north. As she stood on the surface of a frozen lake, she turned her camera downward to photograph the ice beneath her, capturing the experience of standing in (or on) that place. She wrote that “I began to contemplate the act of standing on the vast, remote, temporary and mysterious landscape of a frozen lake. *Whitescape* is a series of photographs of these white surfaces that are in constant flux.”<sup>11</sup> This decision leveraged a new conceptual approach for the artist toward non-representational art, and significantly, abstract photography.

The *Whitescape* photographs illustrate the ice in a highly minimal and decidedly abstract manner. Ambiguous white

fields have only subtle grey impressions which give slight clue to what they are. Added to that, the shallow depth of field creates a confusing sense of scale—it is hard to tell if these are macroscopic or microscopic views.

Certainly, photography's historic responsibility as a tool for creating realistic views has been liberated in recent decades, as artists have moved beyond using digital manipulation as a mere tool. As discussed earlier, Hayeur's work is a striking example of this. Typically, however, even if the subject matter is non-realistic, photography is still employed to *show* us *something*. In the case of the *Whitescape* photographs, that is hardly the case. Something is of course being shown, but there is very little detail, and the subject is not immediately apparent.

In the publication *Pictures of Nothing*, Kirk Varnedoe relayed a series of lectures he delivered in the early 2000s at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, in the context of discussion about abstract art since Jackson Pollock. He reflects on the phrase "pictures of nothing," which he cites from William Hazlitt writing on his contemporary, the early-nineteenth-century English painter J. M. W. Turner. "Turner was celebrated (or

notorious) for painting vaporous and indistinct conjurings of atmospheric effects . . . Hazlitt reports the remark of a dyspeptic viewer about one such work: 'Pictures of nothing,' the viewer harrumphed, 'and very like.'"<sup>12</sup> Varnedoe goes on to discuss issues of "nothingness and likeness" in abstract art, and he argues that the appreciation and understanding of abstraction often requires more than just looking—it is vital to have contextual information. With Beaudry's photographs, the abstraction she creates is well entrenched in the discourses of representation and photography. Beaudry's artistic statement communicates her interest in "the apparent concreteness of the photographic referent," which she replaces with a "slippery, introspective reflexivity."<sup>13</sup>

Beaudry's process is also key to understanding her works. Her journey out onto the ice of frozen lakes is a meditative experience, and the works can be read as evidence of her evasive experience of the places at which she stood to make the photographs. She considers the site of a frozen lake to be somewhat extraordinary, in that it will never be the same from winter to winter, or even day to day. The surface of that site, the ice, will

always disappear and then renew again the next year. She takes pleasure in the journey itself. Rebecca Solnit's writings about walking are a captivating embellishment of this topic: "When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back... Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains."<sup>14</sup>

There are five *Whitescape* photographs included in the exhibition, which are all frameless and mounted so that they float slightly off the wall. When the photographs are viewed in the gallery, they appear at first to be blank white prints, which poses questions about photographic abstraction in relation to the medium's usual tenet of direct representation. If the viewer walks along the wall up close to the photographs, he or she will encounter them one by one as similar pieces with subtle variations. This process of walking along the wall to view the prints, stopping at each one, is reminiscent of the meditative process the artist undertook to create the works.

An accompanying video, *Underscape*, is projected at a large scale in the gallery. Shot in the icy water beneath a lake's frozen surface with an underwater viewing system normally used to

locate fish, it depicts an enigmatic underwater world. The top of the moving image is light, almost heavenly, as sunlight permeates the ice and illuminates some of the underworld, leaving the lower part of the image a dark, cloudy and ambiguous area. It moves slowly, and has been edited in a manner that suggests choreography. This helps to reinforce the sense of temporality in the *Whitescape* photographs.<sup>15</sup>

An audio piece transmitted through headphones in the gallery enhances the feeling of being immersed in an underwater world. For the creation of this work Beaudry collaborated with Michelle Irving, a Toronto-based media artist and composer. Irving built different types of waterproof microphones in order to experiment with underwater recording, and together the artists dropped the microphones into water through ice fishing holes. The resulting piece includes minimal, echoey noises. A listener might expect to hear something concrete—a sound piece usually contains discrete audible information—this work, however, consists of silent sections and unrecognizable noises. It has been edited and manipulated so that some parts are slowed down or altered from the original recording. The artists intend to

psychologically transport listeners while they hear the piece. Like the *Whitescape* photographs, the audio describes a place that is in constant flux.