

ICE CUTS

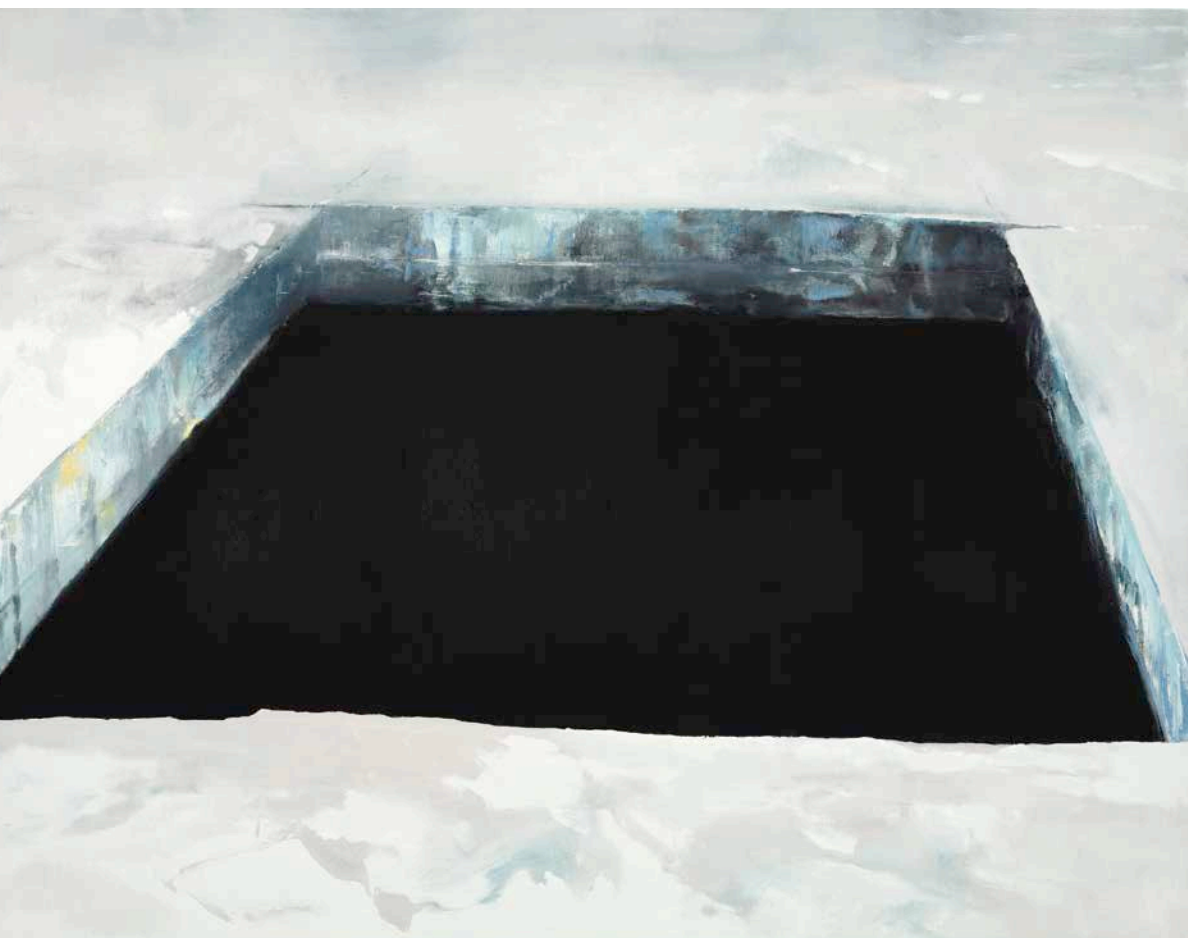
New works by
Eric Aho on view now
at Hood Museum of Art
at Dartmouth College.

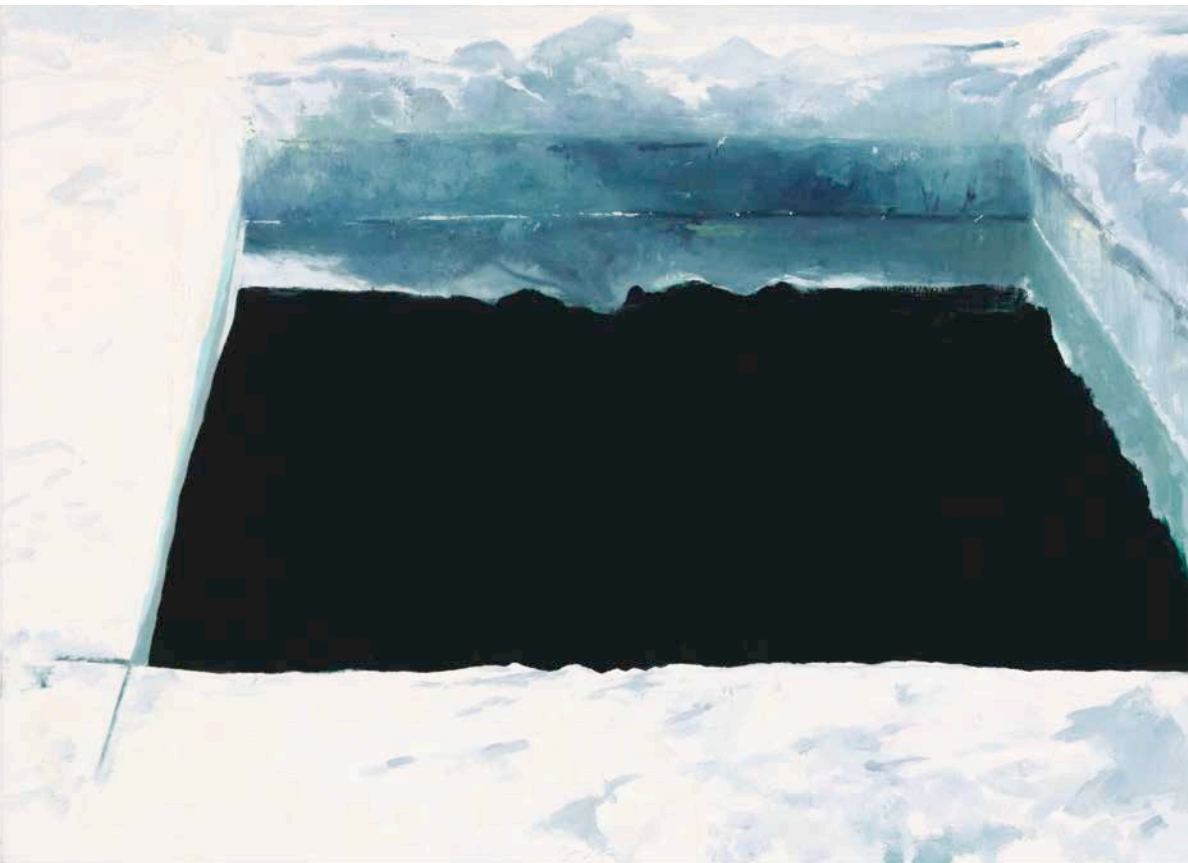
BY JOHN O'HERN

Eric Aho's interest in ice cuts goes back to his father's stories of harvesting ice during the Depression. It extends to the present in which he carries on tradition by cutting a hole in the ice outside his sauna for a shocking dip in the cold water.

He has painted compacted river ice and a series of

paintings of a Vermont marble quarry, "bringing ice into the summer." He also discovered ice accidentally sitting in his driveway while painting the shed behind his house. "It's a white building and when the doors are open there is a big black square," he says. "I've probably done about 10 or 12 paintings—both doors open, both





2

1
Ice Cut (1932), oil on linen, 62 x 80".
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth
College, purchased through the Virginia
and Preston T. Kelsey '58 Fund, 2015.24.1.
©Eric Aho. Photo by Rachel Portesi.

2
Ice Cut (1930), oil on linen, 50 x 70".
Courtesy the artist and DC Moore Gallery.
©Eric Aho. Photo by Rachel Portesi.

3
An avanto, Finnish for hole in the ice or
plunge pool, reflects the artist and his
sauna. Photo by Rachel Portesi.

4
The artist's studio with *Ice Cut* (*Arctic
Sky*), 2015, and other works, winter
2015. Photo by Rachel Portesi.



3



4





5

Ice Cut (Arctic Sky), oil on linen,
74 x 95½". Courtesy the artist
and DC Moore Gallery. ©Eric Aho.
Photo by Rachel Portesi.

closed, left door open, right door open...I was sitting there one August morning when down the sidewalk came a lady who stopped and said 'Oh, my goodness, you're painting the old ice house!' I didn't know it had been an ice house."

His neighbor's casual comment was an affirmation. "I was looking for the same thing. They all became the same thing. The ice cuts, the ice house and the quarry have a fundamental light and dark contrast," Aho says. "In the quarry there's scale. Down in the quarry I looked up and began thinking of the marble as an iceberg. It became a surrogate for painting the Arctic."

The *Ice Cut* paintings are a departure from his more abstract paintings. "They're a big interruption to my regular work," he explains. "They're a different kind of puzzle. There's not the same freedom to make a big sweeping mark that would eventually integrate itself into a tree, a cloud or a ridge. But within that there's room for the casual application of the paint. The subject is rigid but the handling doesn't need to be."

He often talks about the "casual eye." Referring to John Constable's *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, he remarks, "The painting has a relaxed attitude. Constable knew the area so well he didn't have to force it. His marks all have an unforced unison. The will can be strong and want to possess the scene, subject or idea. When you relax, the way you look out at the subject and the way your eye takes it in and the hand that makes the mark are all in harmony."

The black holes of his *Ice Cut* paintings are a chromatic black. They're more than voids and are rich with subtle color changes and texture. Realizing that the ice cuts sometimes reflect the blue sky and clouds he began, again, to think of the Arctic. Recalling the colors of the *Arctic Sky* that he experienced during his graduate studies in Finland, he continues to add to the *Ice Cut* paintings as he reflects on their potential.

The exhibition *Eric Aho: Ice Cuts* continues at Dartmouth College's Hood Museum of Art in Hanover, New Hampshire, through March 13. ●

ERIC AHO: ICE CUTS

When: Through March 13, 2016

Where: Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College,
6 E. Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755

Information: (603) 646-2808, hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu