

Ways to melt snow that you never thought of trying - Leisure Projects

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Living in Montreal, it sometimes feels like winter will never end. Monuments to snow, such as ice-castles, ice-sculptures, and imprints of snow angels, which seemed so awe-inspiring or beautiful in the early months of winter, turn into tired reminders that spring is far from sight. The snow looms oppressively around our houses, covering our windows, hiding us from the world. Melt! Melt! Melt! And even when it begins to roll away, trickling into gutters and dripping off the eaves, it can't be gone quickly enough. Hardened dirty piles of it sit in corners around the city landscape - refusing stubbornly to go away, even as the grass turns green and buds appear on the trees.

But there is a darkly glorious moment when citizens of the North can take pleasure in the grotesque beauty of the snow's disintegration - when the ice palace caves in and the sculptured snow figures turn to shapeless cones. When monument becomes anti-matter and realism collapses into abstraction then fades, decadently, away.

This brief moment in time would perhaps act as a relief to the Southern Belle protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story *The Ice Palace*. Visiting the North, Sally Carrol becomes trapped in the darkened maze of an ice-palace built by a "Canuck" after witnessing the traditional practice of "storming the ice palace". During the sparkling "attaque du Palais de glace", a procession of snow-shoed chanting men with flaming torches, invades the frozen fortifications, signalling the demise of seasonal snow festivities and the palace itself. Fitzgerald describes the experience as a "phantasmagoria of torches waving in great banks of fire, of colors and the rhythm of soft-leather steps.... It was magnificent, it was tremendous! To Sally Carrol it was the North offering sacrifice on some mighty altar to the grey pagan God of Snow." But after the storming was over, "She was alone with this presence that came out of the North, the dreary loneliness that rose from ice-bound whalers in the Arctic seas, from smokeless, trackless wastes where were strewn the whitened bones of adventure. It was an icy breath of death; it was rolling down low across the land to clutch at her." She is left crying madly "Oh, I want to get out of here!..." 1.

By early spring, when the snow is still on the ground, many Northerners can empathise with Sally Carrol's desperate plea, as we look ahead with anticipation for the outside world to habitable again. Had Fitzgerald's main character stayed a little longer in the North, she would have witnessed with glee the revenge of the thaw and perhaps doubly appreciated the presence of spring. Instead she left without this satisfaction, having only experienced a condensed, but unfinished,

version of winter during her stay - the joy and magnificence of winter as well as the bleakness and oppression, without the release of its denouement.

The on-line exhibition *Ways to melt snow that you never thought of trying*, explores the changing concept of snow in popular imagination throughout the winter season - from the potent imagery of constructed winter monuments to the unappealing detritus of winter's end. Archival images from the Leisure Projects Collection display the beauty and magic of Victorian ice palaces, while Diane Borsato's *Eclipse, Wednesday February 21, 2007* and Zoe Stonyk's *Les flaneurs de neige* celebrate a post-modern version of seasonal environmental art and monument. Leisure Projects' *Emerald Ice Palace* embodies the transformation from icy matter to abstract anti-matter, and lastly, Walking the Turcot Yards' *Snowpile* series and Borsato's *How Easy it would be to be Garbage*, investigate the ugly, spent, final days of winter.

Ways to melt snow that you never thought of trying puts a lid on the winter season. It provides closure for us Northerners as we rush into the warm sunshine and enjoy the first days of spring.

Leisure Projects (Meredith Carruthers & Susannah Wesley)

1. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Ice Palace," Saturday Evening Post, 22 May (1920). The Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina, December 4, 1996
<www.sc.edu/fitzgerald/icepalace/index.html>.