

# TRUTH BE TOLD

by LigoranoReese



## Speaking Environmentally About Truth – James Sherry

Our societies are not melting away, but collapsing in that slow-motion fashion we see in the great ice shelves of Greenland and Antarctica. Slippery conditions have developed under the apparently solid surface of our societies especially in America.

The Trump administration deals harsh blows distorting the idea of truth on three levels: the individual organism, social truth, and truth about our surroundings. The linkages between these three and their connections to biological and inorganic components of the environment influence how our human image forms an ecology of truth.

Their goal is not to slowly melt truth as it has developed over centuries and as LigoranoReese have implied in their ice sculpture of the word TRUTH, but to explode it, create a nuclear melt-down, by claiming that god and personal preference have as much truth value as the sciences that dominate global decision.

First, our surface understanding of our surroundings is cratered with overt lies floated in the press and social media about research into ecosystems and pollution's effects on individuals, groups, and environs, making people question their own perceptions in an unhelpful manner. This weakens individual resolve at exactly the time when concerted efforts are needed to change how we collect and adapt resources for use overturning our own assumptions and categories, sometimes referred to as 'ground truth.'

Second, the Trump administration undermines the institutions that manage our resources visibly in the EPA by cutting 20% of its workforce and in the Interior Department by rolling back boundaries of public lands and opening them to private exploitation, a battle between the provisional truths of science and the fixed truths faith.

The administration's efforts to insert fixed truth into an untidy system like the sciences seeks to shatter the power structures built around science and engineering. Not coincidentally and really quite purposefully, this attack on the conditional truth of science allows oligarchs greater access to resources that most countries' laws have held in common.

Third, the administration seeks to reduce funding for basic research into ecology and other sciences in an attempt to return society to a view of environment based on faith, fixed truth, and unexamined, *a priori* assumptions. This strategy builds using a few libertarian billionaires and evangelical revivalists to explode our relationship to our surroundings making them accessible to personal preference and subject to the polemics of religious freedom; applying and elevating ancient wisdom from Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu texts to our legal systems.

The administration has censored a series of words that may not be used in Center for Disease Control documents. Specific words and phrases are prohibited: "vulnerable," "diversity," "entitlement," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based," and "science-based." This censorship is not only reckless and dangerous, but an offense to the scientific community, men and women, who whatever their personal weaknesses have devoted their lives to seeking truth about their surroundings. This goes far beyond an attack on lexicon or word-choice.

A ban on words creates barriers for scientists who need to communicate. It also breaks public trust in investigation and research. Ironically, the restrictions on seven words in CDC communications resembles an Oulipian constraint and should be viewed as avant-garde literature, not science. The truths of science benefit from transparent language while constraints on literary language enhance political truths and reveal the importance of form. Different truths operate in different parts of the environmental model.

## How does an environmental model of truth address these problems?

How does an environmental model of truth address these problems? We treat ourselves carefully if we understand our own value. But the truth about ourselves depends on our surroundings. I am more useful at my desk than on the battlefield. Understanding the truth about myself cannot be determined by looking only at my mind, because its processes reach out to other people and my surroundings. These sources determine how I think as much as my inherent characteristics. I would not want to reach too far beyond my usefulness, but sometimes I fulfill an obligation to myself such as writing this piece for the meltedaway.com website.

First, we treat other people in ways that reflect how we treat ourselves. Second, the matrix of self-truth connects to the ways we treat others. Third, these views about self and others extend to how we treat our surroundings, the ecosystems we inhabit, and the environment of the planet taken as a whole. Fourth, if we think of ourselves as inherently flawed, our ecosystems suffer. Thus, our surroundings reflect how we treat ourselves and others and help us to see how we might treat ourselves and others. These channels between people and their surroundings are complex and variable.

If our statements and actions are only self-serving and fail to consider our surroundings, then they may be said to be false, untrue, mendacious.



Instagram @meltedaway, Tweeting @melted\_away, #ligoranoreese, #publicart, #TruthBeTold, #Truth, #ArtActionDay

We must look toward intersectionality which is nothing more than the social component of environmentalism. To be true in the sense of the society and the world rather than just our perceived self-interest, we must consider external matters—those outside our immediate frame of reference—along with our own interests.

Truth is fragmented when we express only our own perceptions. The world collapses around us, and we think we can therefore ignore it because it does not confirm our bias. This pollution of mendacity, as Marshall Reese has phrased it, comes from perceived self-interest, ignoring the factors of other people and our surroundings. The views of truth where evidence

## Our surroundings reflect how we treat ourselves

can be most useful are those external truths that have been the province of science for several centuries. Re-constituting those truths in terms of religious practice ignores the mendacity of assumptions built only on faith.

Would we, for example, want the hunches of the detective to convict us of crimes, or would we like to see proof of the accused's guilt or innocence? Would we like the dictates of priests to determine where and how to build a bridge across a river? Such obvious examples should block libertarian political donors such as McMahon, DeVos, Ricketts, and Ross, but the administration has given them key cabinet posts, a similar tactic to asking a priest to build a bridge. Is knowing how to operate a system or an institution as important as repaying oligarchic leadership and its networks for funding the election?

The ecology of truth, as an alternative to faith, focuses on the connections between ourselves, other people, and our surroundings. How are those channels between things used? We know the world is constantly telling us things, but how do we hear them? Are our associations exploited only for our self-interest? Do our ecosystems exist only to serve us, or is it necessary to cultivate them to serve us more effectively and for the long term?

Some systems need to be efficient and singular. Some, about 30% (Waide, R.B., et al. 1999. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 30: 257-300), operate more effectively through diversity. A single value or fixed answer to these questions is not supported by the facts. Diversity exists in many answers to questions about environment, and those answers most often come in ranges, not as single values.

European and American culture has focused on the characteristics of our minds and internal connections for nearly 200 years. It is time for us to focus outward, to see our connections to the world, to include the complexity of planetary interaction in our inspiration, in the food that nourishes us, the water, the air, the information that we carefully write. Our task in interpreting is to avoid allowing what we already have in hand, what we already assume about the future, and what we have previously learned to alone determine what we perceive as truth.

The TRUTH Ice Sculpture, like any model, simplifies these conditional truths by showing how the sculpture depends on temperature. While the details of climate change are complex, the TRUTH Ice Sculpture model melts slowly allowing us time to realize that our world is collapsing like the ice, collapsing for individuals, for groups, and for our environs. Melt-water drowns the lowlands, pushing populations inland. People become more desperate and only think of themselves. Society collapses like the TRUTH Ice Sculpture.

James Sherry is the author of 13 books of prose and poetry, most recently *The Oligarch*, that builds an environmental model of politics through Machiavelli's *The Prince*. He is the editor of Roof Books and looks after the Segue Foundation in NYC.



## Truth Be Told

*The ice sculpture's straight forward display conceals a rare capacity to elicit complex reactions and intense emotions demonstrating sculpture's power to engage our bodily awareness. . .*

— Robert Atkins

Launching January 20, 2018, the first anniversary of the Trump administration, *Truth be Told*, symbolizes the emergence of an alternate fact world – where belief supplants truth.

*Truth Be Told* is the sixth sculpture of Melted Away the temporary monuments series begun in 2006. Melting ice sculptures are the perfect media to depict the transformation of social values and semantic meaning.

Last year, we entered uncharted territory with no way of measuring just how far ground truth lies. This artwork will last for days, one week, possibly longer, an almost imperceptible disintegration that belies the force and speed at which the current administration is undermining the basic concepts of our nation's history and governance.

The monuments of Melted Away are ideal markers for the opening decades in the 21st century – first, DEMOCRACY is broken, then the ECONOMY ruined; the MIDDLE CLASS disappears, THE FUTURE is tenuous, THE AMERICAN DREAM vanishes, and TRUTH remains an open question.

Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese have collaborated together as the artistic duo LigoranoReese since the mid-1980s. Their work is an ongoing investigation into the impact of technology on society and the rhetoric of politics and visual culture in the media. LigoranoReese's body of work is multidisciplinary and includes limited edition multiples, videos, sculptures and installations which involve a range of unusual materials and industrial processes.

### Letter Sponsors

Lydia Cheney and Jim Sokol, Jim Kempner, Wanda Kownacki, Peter and Beverly Lipman, Michael Mann, Mike and Yvonne Nevins, Steve and Sarah Sorkin, Deborah Wexler

### Streaming Partners

ArtsEverywhere; Catharine Clark Gallery; Contemporary Art Museum, University of South Florida; Eyebeam; Harbourfront Centre; Nevada Museum of Art; Institute of the Arts and Sciences and the Digital Art/New Media MFA Program of UC Santa Cruz Arts Division; San Jose ICA; Streaming Museum; School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California

### Special Thanks

Dru Arstark, Diane Bertolo, Catharine Clark, Nina Colosi, Lisa Guido, Perry Hoberman, Jim Kempner, Cathy Kimball, Sondra Kitchen, Wanda Kownacki, Todd Lester, JoAnne Northrup, Shintaro Okamoto, Roddy Schrock, Kristin Soderqvist, Isabel Sullivan, Sally Szwed, Shawn Van Sluys, Maria Venuto, John Weber

For more information: [info@meltedaway.com](mailto:info@meltedaway.com)



artseverywhere  
Media Partner



[meltedaway.com](http://meltedaway.com)