



Ice queen

When Rachel Hazell first saw the sweeping whiteness of Antarctica she could not believe how paper-like it was; ancient icebergs nibbled by waves causing vertical striations that gave the impression of books on a library shelf; 30 metre high ice shelves resembled ripped edges of paper. And the whole vast sweep of pristine landscape looked like a wide, white page just waiting for meaning to be imprinted on it. Even in her wildest dreams, Rachel could never have imagined what a perfect fit Antarctica would be with her work.

A book binder, illustrator and printer, Rachel loves the beauty of books and the power of the word. She went to the Antarctic as artist-in-residence on a passenger ship, where she taught book binding and helped the passengers record their impressions of the primitive land. Lasting memories were 35 Orca Whales swimming in the freshly broken ice and the surprising affection of penguins. Unforgettable and incredibly moving was visiting Scott and Shackleton's huts – everything eerily preserved by the icy temperatures for a return that was never to be.

The trip has left a great impression on her work: producing more sculptural pieces using reinforced traditional French book-binding, stitching for structure and 'drawing' with blue thread shadows and blueness of the ice; and, intriguingly, oversize thinking. She had already collaborated with Helen Storey making a hand stitched, 2 metre high book sculpture – now she is researching materials to make 3 metre high, interactive, 'papery' ice cliffs.

Bitten by the ice bug Rachel couldn't wait to get back there. She's off again as artist-in-residence with the navy on HMS Endurance. Concerned she would be laughed at, she was told she might be surprised how creative they actually are. Always eager for a challenge she is looking forward to that as well as International Polar Year in 2007. ●●● **LM-G**

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