

GEORGE RAMMELL / Crime Scene on Ice





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On a winter afternoon in 2009, I was walking down Broadway in Vancouver when I passed by a bargain bookstore. I cruised over to the anthropology section and picked up a book about the 5300 year old Otzi Ice Man. This late Stone-Age archer had been found by two German hikers 20 years earlier. The mummy had emerged from the shrinking Similaun Glacier in the Otzlander Mountains on the Austrian-Italian boarder. I was intrigued to read that the Ice Man was 47 years old (an old guy in those days) when he was murdered by an arrow that struck him from behind, just above his backpack, and penetrated through his shoulder. He had a deep defensive wound on his left hand from an earlier altercation and the blood of several people stained his clothing. Otzi's possessions included a bronze axe, sophisticated fur and leather clothing, and a tethered pouch of wood conk mushrooms (*Fomes Fomentarius*) whose antibiotic properties relieve the symptoms of arthritis, which was evident in Otzi's joints. He had 57 tattoos on acupuncture points throughout his body, possibly made to relieve his pain. His hair and lungs contained arsenic from inhaling copper fumes, suggesting he was a coppersmith 500 years before it was believed the Bronze Age began. An analysis of the mineral content in his tooth enamel indicated he was raised in a valley to the south, 60 kilometers from where he was killed. His stomach contained einkorn bread, made from wheat that originated in Asia, deer and ibex meat, and, most notably, traces of pollen that revealed he was attempting to cross the Tisenjoch Pass in early spring, when unpredictable snowstorms are not uncommon.

I was most intrigued by Otzi's Yew-wood bow and his 14 arrows. Harm Paulsen, a technical archeologist involved in the analysis of the find, made an accurate copy of Otzi's bow and stone tipped arrows. Testing this gear he found it to be as accurate as his modern longbow, capable of grouping his arrows within a hand width at a distance of 30 meters. In Otzi's time European habitation consisted of trails connecting villages of about 60 people, and archeologists have found mass graves showing violence between groups was commonplace. Each region had its prototypical mannerisms for the making of implements; even arrowhead designs can now be traced to specific valleys and flint quarries.

The following spring I was nominated by Vancouver artist Kent Anderson to attend the *SilvrettAtelier*, a biennial summer art symposium in the Austrian Alps. Coincidentally, the alpine residency was within 50 kilometers from the Oetzlander Alps. With the support of Capilano University's Faculty Association and Mountain Equipment Co-op, my plan to reconstruct the crime scene with modern equivalents of Otzi's possessions appeared possible. The folks at MEC generously provided me with most of the items I needed: a GPS device, an altitude watch, an avalanche beacon, binoculars, a parka, gloves, boots, sunglasses, gaiters, a head-light, a backpack, camp-stove, and crampons. I then purchased vacuum-sealed packages of dried food, a folding knife, aluminum snowshoes, a compound bow, carbon arrows, and synthetic arthritis drugs. Most of these items were direct equivalents of Otzi's gear. I crated these new artifacts and shipped them to his homeland.

In the summer of 2010 I flew to Milano, where I jumped a train headed north for the Tyrol Museum of Archeology in Bolzano to visit Otzi as he lay in his refrigerated windowed tomb. I was fascinated by the local debate regarding the ethics of publicly exhibiting his body, regardless how prehistoric. I was equally fascinated by the impeccably-crafted helical fletching on his Stone Age arrows that provide the aerodynamic spin that kept them flying in a straight trajectory.

I've made hook knives, adzes and skew chisels for decades, and I identify with the act of making the tools I use. I make each tool for a specific task; their shapes are forged, filed, and tempered to fit the form I'm carving. The bond I have with my tools is essential; they feel like an extension of my nervous system. I imagine Otzi felt the same way about his tools, and likely more so as his survival depended on them. When viewing Otzi's artifacts in their glass boxes I wondered about the actions they harboured, and the ethics their maker lived by. I thought about our persistent empathy with making, and what is lost when products are designed by specialists in so many fields, and what is gained through mass production and space-age materials. Is our attraction to commercial branding and technology a substitute for our evolved identification with the hand-made?

I rode a train and a mountain bus to the symposium studios in the southern Austrian village of Beilerhohe, where cross-country ski lodges and hydro dam

buildings surrounded a turquoise lake high above the tree line. After meeting my fellow artists and adjusting to the altitude, I became oriented to the mountains through day hikes and looked for a location for my installation. After days of searching, I found an ice-patch on a ridge where two winds meet from different directions. I unloaded my pack and composed my crime scene under the gaze of a herd of curious wild ibex that had been re-introduced to the Alps decades earlier. I arranged my modern artifacts the way Otzi's possessions were found. I then documented my installation with my old Roliflex camera.

In April of 2011, I exhibited all of the items I photographed at a Symposium show at the Liechtenstein Palace in Feldkirch, Austria. In a large anthropological-like grid on the floor of the gallery my artifacts were linked with my hand-drawn script in German and English, quoting scientist's speculations of the Otzi mystery:

"It's the oldest who-done-it story in history."

"He may have committed a transgression and was followed and punished in an act of revenge."

"He may have been a trader, an outsider who knew how to work metal."

"It was a clever piece of bush-craft; it shows he planned his route."

"Wunder der linken Hand und des Armszeugen von einer vorangehenden Auseinandersetzung."

"Blutspuren mehrerer Personen befinden sich auf seiner Ausrüstung; sie laßt darauf schließen, dass der Mordfall in einer langen Reihe gewalt-samer Zwischenfälle steht."