

# Karen Trask's *Warm Snow* drifts between information ages

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As our understanding of the physical sciences deepened in the mid-20th century and we discovered more about forces governing our supremely strange and beautiful universe, language used to describe cosmic events shifted. Physicists engaged in the biggest of the Big Questions—the nature, origins and eventual death of our expanding universe—often framing discussions in terms of the ultimate fate of information. Does information escape black holes? In the dusk of the universe, galaxies pulled so far apart they're invisible to each other, would any remaining inhabitants be able to gather information to decipher what had been? How do we interpret information the universe offers us in the form of light and force and matter?

Near the tail of the Victorian era, eminent British astrophysicist Arthur Eddington defined an elegant theory as describing a given phenomenon while being simple enough for a barmaid to grasp. Those days are gone—the upheaval of the classical worldview throughout the last century took the universe further from the layperson, into arcane specialties, beautiful too, but nevertheless not the eternal velvet heavens we once thought we knew.

And yet the language of physics inspires and moves. We're creatures imbued with a thirst for metaphor, and while that can lead to gross misreadings of the natural world and

misappropriations of scientific ideas—like when the author of *The Secret* claims we can wish money into our pockets because of the quantum principle of entanglement, or when post-modern constructionists believe they can pick and choose physical reality—

fragments can snag in our minds, and by playing with meaning and exploring our associations we deepen our understanding of ourselves.

**MONTREAL-BASED ARTIST** Karen Trask bridges these disparate areas of



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**WARM SNOW**  
BY KAREN TRASK  
SNAP MAIN GALLERY (10309 - 97 ST)

human understanding deftly and powerfully in her multi-component installation *Warm Snow*, poetically linking an evocative idea from science with the natural world of experience and an intimate personal landscape of loss and hope.

Entering *Warm Snow*, you hear her starting point: familiar pops and sputters, the audio blizzard of static. As she points out in her artist statement, television static—the stuff between the information we broadcast to each other—is an echo of the beginnings of the universe. It's primal information, part of the afterglow of cosmic background radiation from the Big Bang, a signature of origin that'll eventually dissipate and become undetectable. (Billions of years away, but TV static will mostly vanish next year as North American analog broadcasting technology is abandoned for digital.)

Within the cubic cocoon of the gallery, the source of the fuzzy audio is visible—a small television screen on a corner plinth generates a fog of static, mesmerizing black and white patterns dancing across the screen. A grid of 32 paper rectangles dominates a wall, each fossilizing a different dense static pattern on a sheet of homemade paper

in surprisingly delicate snowy hues of cream and dirty white. The eye is drawn to search for meaning, and the nature of Trask's homemade paper rewards, albeit incompletely: snatches of text can sometimes be picked out, part of the paper background rather than overlaying pattern.

Hugging the opposite corner, a series of smaller prints introduces a female figure and elaborates Trask's theme as the body interacts with text and language that has a static-like swarming of indistinct meaning. In one, the body is made of scrawled words (some literally "WORDS"), outstretched hands invisible beneath a halo of disjointed print. Another silhouette is empty, but collaged text bits envelop the head so densely it's raised off the paper. In the image series, words and cut-up text haunt the body or aura, shifting between the personal (handwritten) and received (text fragments).

On another plinth, a block of plaster entombs a child's face in relief, while another holds a looped video of the artist searching a bleak late winter landscape near a fog-shrouded airport.

There is an enigmatic ballet in *Warm Snow* between information and language, the infinite and the incomplete, meaning and gesture. The shiftings of memory and stutter of beginnings and endings that span ages hangs in the environment, disquieting but still—an idea of the eternal returned to us, somehow. ♥