Xavier Cortada, "Shackleton in the South Pole," mixed-media on canvas, 24" x 18", 2007.

SHACKLETON IN THE SOUTH POLE
BY XAVIER CORTADA

ABOUT SHACKLETON

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton was an Irish Antarctic explorer who led three British expeditions to the Antarctic. He was one of the principal figures of the period known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration.

Shackleton's first experience of the polar regions was as third officer on Captain Robert Falcon Scott's Discovery expedition of 1901–1904, from which he was sent home early on health grounds, after he and his companions Scott and Edward Adrian Wilson set a new southern record by marching to latitude 82°S. During the Nimrod expedition of 1907–1909, he and three companions established a new record Farthest South latitude at 88°S, only 97 geographical miles from the South Pole, the largest advance to the pole in exploration history. After the race to the South Pole ended in December 1911 with Roald Amundsen's conquest, Shackleton turned his attention to the crossing of Antarctica from sea to sea via the pole. To this end, he made preparations for what became the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition from 1914–1917.

Disaster struck this expedition when its ship, Endurance, became trapped in pack ice and was slowly crushed before the shore parties could be landed. The crew escaped by camping on the sea ice until it disintegrated, then by launching the lifeboats to reach Elephant Island and ultimately South Georgia Island, a stormy ocean voyage of 720 nautical miles (830 miles) and Shackleton's most famous exploit.

In 1921, he returned to the Antarctic with a 125-ton Norwegian sealer named Quest in the Shackleton–Rowett Expedition, financed by former schoolfriend John Quiller Rowett.

The goals of this final venture were imprecise, but a circumnavigation of the Antarctic continent and investigation of some "lost sub-Antarctic islands were mentioned as objectives. The expedition left England on September 24, 1921. When the party arrived in Rio de Janeiro, Shackleton suffered a suspected heart attack. He refused proper medical examination, so Quest continued south and on January 4, 1922, arrived at South Georgia.

In the early hours of the next morning, Shackleton summoned the expedition's physician, Alexander Macklin, complaining of discomfort. Macklin told him he had been overdoing things and should try to "lead a more regular life," to which Schakleton answered: "You are always wanting me to give up things, what is it I ought to give up?" A few moments later, at 2:50 a.m. on January 5, 1922, Schakleton suffered a fatal heart attack.

Away from his expeditions, Shackleton's life was generally restless and unfulfilled. In his search for rapid pathways to wealth and security, he launched business ventures which failed to prosper, and he died heavily in debt. Upon his death, he was lauded in the press but was thereafter largely forgotten, while the heroic reputation of his rival Scott was sustained for many decades. Later in the 20th century, Shackleton was "rediscovered." He rapidly became a role model for leadership as one who, in extreme circumstances, always kept his team together and never gave up.

"Scott for scientific method, Amundsen for speed and efficiency, but when disaster strikes and all hope is gone, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton."

- Sir Raymond Priestley, one of Shackleton's contemporaries, in his 1956 address to the British Science Association

(paraphrased from Apsley Cherry-Garrard's preface in "The Worst Journey in the World")

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HOMAGE TO SHACKLETON

During his artist's residency with the National Science Foundation (NSF) Antarctic Artists and Writers Program, Xavier Cortada created art honoring Antarctic explorers and scientists. Researchers in Antarctica develop knowledge that is of great importance to our scientific and human advancement. Their work proves how relevant the continent is to our daily lives. The pieces were created for and remain on permanent exhibit in Antarctica.

While in Antarctica, Cortada created a portrait of Sir Ernest Shackleton, who came within 97 miles of being the first to reach the South Pole. In a follow-up expedition, the Antarctic explorer attempted to traverse the continent but wound marooned with his 27 men on a polar ice floe. Enduring the harshest conditions for almost two years, they all survived.

Cortada thought to honor Shackleton by "placing him" permanently in the South Pole, the place that so eluded him in life. The artist hopes that Shackleton's portrait (which is on permanent exhibit inside the United States' Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station) serves to inspire those now working in the most inhospitable of continents, especially those who winter during cold, dark months in the South Pole.

On January 4, 2007, Cortada presented his "Shackleton in the South Pole" painting to the South Pole Station's NSF Representative Jerry Marty and Station Manager B. K. Grant at the Geographic South Pole, conceptually bringing the Shackleton to the place he so longed to reach. The artist created the portrait using canvas, acrylic paint, crushed Mt. Erebus crystals, soil samples from the Dry Valleys, soil samples from Ross Island, McMurdo Sound seawater, GIS maps of the Antarctic continent, copies of historic photographs and maps of Sir Ernest Shackleton's expeditions. In essence, through his painting, Shackleton brought to the South Pole pieces of the continent he "opened" for the rest of us to experience.

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SHACKLETON IMBUED WITH LIFE

EXERPT FROM "CORTADA REINVENTS STYLE DURING ANTARCTIC VISIT"
BY PETER REJCEK FOR THE UNITED STATES ANTARCTIC PROGRAM'S *THE ANTARCTIC SUN*

(January 21, 2007) "...The prolific artist didn't stop with these one-hit wonders designed to shock the mind off its normal line of thinking. He also painted a portrait of Antarctic hero and explorer Ernest Shackleton while he was in McMurdo and presented the painting to the South Pole station management during his brief visit.

"Shackleton to me is the epitome of the Antarctic hero," Cortada said. "He opened up this continent to us."

Shackleton failed to reach the Pole in life. Cortada imbued his painting of the famed British explorer with some unusual elements for his long overdue arrival.

He used GIS maps of the continent that traced Shackleton's various expeditions. He also overlaid historical photos for the portrait before painting it. The materials used in the paint included glacial ice, dirt from the Dry Valleys and even crushed crystals from Mount Erebus.

"I think the painting is very significant," said Jerry Marty, the National Science Foundation representative at South Pole. "Shackleton's Antarctica expeditions and his leadership pioneered — almost 100 years later — a continent being used for scientific research, without ownership, and for peaceful purposes.

"The temporary installations of climate change and notions of geologic timeline were very powerful," he added."

Xavier Cortada is an artist and Professor of Practice at the University of Miami Department of Art and Art History. Cortada's work is intended to generate awareness and action towards issues of global climate change. Using the power and elasticity of participatory art to engage, Cortada educates and inspires community members to work together and learn together to solve our community's problems.

Cortada has created art installations at the North and South Poles to help address environmental issues at every point in between. His work is also in the collections of Peréz Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the Patricia and Philip Frost Art Museum, the MDC Museum of Art + Design, the NSU Museum of Art in Ft. Lauderdale, the Whatcom Museum in Washington, and the World Bank and is the Artist-in-Residence at Pinecrest Gardens.

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