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Kilimanjaro: The Last Glacier

Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro is iconic and mythical. Its flat-topped, ice-covered summit rises dramatically from the surrounding lowlands of Tanzania to a height of 19,341 feet above sea-level. Due to their latitude, Kilimanjaro's "tropical" glaciers are particularly susceptible to sunlight and climate fluctuations. The glaciers have thinned by 85 percent over the last century, and nearly half of that loss occurred between 2000 and 2011. Scientists predict that the Northern Icefield will have completely melted within the next 30 years, and Furtwängler Glacier will vanish within the next decade. Encased within Kilimanjaro's ice are the microscopic particles of pollen, bacteria, dust and atmosphere gasses that have recorded millennia of deep time and global history. The loss of these glaciers promises to carry heavy cultural and scientific significance.

As the highest mountain in Africa, over 16,000 tourists attempt to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro every year. Many are drawn by the dramatic glacier landscape of the summit. These tourists employ hundreds of local Tanzanians who carry all the food and equipment needed for each expedition. The (mostly) men who are employed in this trade are, thus, intimately connected to the mountain's landscape. As the glaciers continue to melt and disappear, the men whose livelihoods depend on Kilimanjaro's glaciers will be dramatically impacted.

In August 2016 I travelled to Tanzania with renowned tropical glacier scientist Dr. Douglas R. Hardy (University of Massachusetts), to document the rapidly melting glaciers on the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro, and to make portraits of the Tanzanian porters. This project reflects my recent focus on creating projects that bring art and science together in an effort to make the monumental issue of climate change both tangible and comprehensible on a human scale. By placing the portraits of the Tanzanian porters, cooks and guides alongside dramatic ice landscapes, I intend to blur the boundaries between artistic memorial and scientific record in order to underscore the transience of this iconic landscape.