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Ice-cold Satire: Performers pass out free ice cream, 'propaganda' in eye-catching public display

by Lynsi Burton

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A black and white ice cream truck sat at the Southern Pacific Depot playing music. A man in an olive green blazer and tie adorned with a dollar-bill design handed out fliers to the small crowd that had gathered. The headline of the flier read: "What's more American than Ice Cream on a hot day? Or a hot planet, for that matter?"

"We're trying to embrace global warming and embody global warming by eating ice cream," the enterprising capitalist said.

He encouraged all passers-by to get some free ice cream from the truck and order a "side of propaganda."

"We burned a lot of fossil fuel to bring it to you," he said encouragingly to the public.

The man? UC Davis theater and dance Professor Larry Bogad. The truck? The Tactical Ice Cream Unit. Both were the most recent installation of "Temp Work," a three-month civic arts series coordinated by the Richard L. Nelson Gallery at UC Davis with a \$20,000 grant from the city of Davis Civic Arts Commission.

The day's theme was political satire, and Bogad acted as a pitch man, hawking free "glacial" ice cream harvested with the help of global warming. He presented himself as a spokesman for the joint organizations Global Economic Experiments and Advanced Thawing Enterprises, or GEE-ATE, a play on the recent G8 summit.

For the "Temp Work" series, the city asked for faculty participation, said Renny Pritikin, project curator and director of the Nelson Gallery.

Bogad has had similar political performance experience, such as the Rebel Insurgent Clown Army, in which performers dress-up as clowns and mediate political demonstrations.

Pritikin said Bogad suggested using the Tactical Ice Cream Unit, deployed by the Center for Tactical Magic based in the Bay Area, which travels to give free ice

cream and hand out information (what they call "propaganda") on social and political issues.

"They see one of the roles of art as talking to people about social issues," Pritikin said.

Flavors of the day included the polar pop, tundra bomb, iceberg sandwich and the orange 'splosion. Then, the ice cream connoisseurs could order a spicy side of propaganda on anything ranging from protest tips and global warming to the Patriot Act and the Black Panthers.

Bogad solicited the ice cream as being taken directly from polar ice caps to the public.

"One of our main slogans is, 'climate change is sweet,' and we want you all to understand that," he said, working the crowd. "Globalization has so many wonderful by-products and it brings us together."

Bogad said he was disappointed that he couldn't find any red, white and blue rocket-shaped popsicles.

A constant of 10 to 15 people milled about the truck, listening to Bogad's pitches and indulging in cold popsicles on a hot day.

"I think it's a brilliant satire about modern consumption and depletion of resources, and how industry makes a positive out of negatives like global warming," said Casey Hutchins, chairman of the Davis Civic Arts Commission. Hutchins delightedly sucked on his fruity popsicle.

Unfortunately, not everyone got the joke. A woman stood by with disbelief, expressing her disapproval to Bogad, as he waxed poetic about the wonders of global warming and the American obesity culture. She shook her head.

"It's saturated fat, folks," she shouted to the ice cream eaters.

Bogad remained unfazed, even climbing on top of the ice cream truck occasionally to solicit the cold glacial treats.

"We make a profit and we move on," he said. "We mine it for all it's worth and we get outta there."

Steven Inness stayed for awhile, enjoying his "polar pop."

"You know what, I love to think that this is 50,000 years old and I'm sucking it all down," he said jovially to Bogad.

What did Inness think of the satire?

"Tasty," he said.

For the most part, Bogad and the Tactical Ice Cream Unit successfully combined humor with thoughtful political commentary.

"It forces you to look at the propaganda that people spew," Erin Badillo said, who enjoyed a popsicle.

Her friend, Joe Ferreira, enjoyed the spectacle, as well.

"It's engaging, it's fun, it's entertaining to me," he said.

Even when engaged in discussion, Bogad's character was unbreakable.

"As a spokesman for GEE-! ATE ... we really want to use this ice cream as attitude adjustment for global warming," he said. "We're trying to educate people to be a part of it. With climate chaos, some people have a problem with it. I say it's just an opportunity."

Also part of "Temp Work" is a newly installed sculpture at the substation by Las Vegas artist Stephen Hendee. His geometric structure, "Transfer Station," is made of corrugated plastic, fluorescent lights and tape, and is inspired by science fiction film stage sets. Displayed since April 9 is Sacramento artist Dave Lane's sculpture, "Weapon of Mass Creation." His and Hendee's work will be on display at the depot until June 30.

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