



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Potters' Penguin Project (PPP) was a community art project based in Durham, North Carolina. Its purpose was (1) to create and exhibit $\geq 1,500$ clay penguins in order to make the impacts of global warming on distant places more immediately tangible to both makers and viewers; and (2) after exhibiting, to disperse the colony as a fundraiser for environmental advocacy non-profits.

PPP penguins cumulatively raised \$5,000+ for

- Earthjustice (earthjustice.org);
- The Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (sanccob.co.za); and
- The Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association (www.ellerbecreek.org).

MAGNITUDE OF COLONY COLLAPSE

The Potters' Penguin Project began in March 2016, after news media picked up on a scientific article about a colony of Adélie penguins in Commonwealth Bay, Antarctica. Over the previous century, the colony's population ranged between 160,000 and 200,000 birds. This changed dramatically after 2010, when a 100-km² iceberg became grounded in the bay, trapping sea ice along the shore and imposing year-round ice cover. Adult penguins in the colony now had to travel an extra 65 km one-way to reach open sea to feed, leading to hundreds of abandoned eggs and thousands of chick deaths. Within a few years, the colony population plummeted to about 10,000 birds as environmental stresses forced the penguins to relocate. This story drew attention to many of the threats penguins face due to climate change.

The PPP began as an effort to understand the magnitude of the Adélie colony's population collapse.

If an artist were to make 25 clay penguins per day, every day, it would take...

- 🐧 16.5 years to make 150,000 penguins;
- 🐧 20 months to make 15,000 penguins;
- 🐧 2 months to make 1,500 penguins.

We chose a goal of 1,500 penguins and invited community participation.

With nearly 600 makers, the PPP colony grew to over 2,000 penguins within one year. The PPP exhibited penguins at Claymakers Gallery (Durham NC), the North Carolina State University Crafts Center (Raleigh NC), and the Greensboro Science Center (Greensboro NC).

ABOUT OUR COLONY

To join the PPP colony, penguins were required to be made mostly of clay (earthen, not polymer), fired, self-standing, and under 10 cm tall.

All species of penguin, real or imagined, were welcome. Our “Standard of Penguinness” was that if the artist believed it looked like a penguin, it was a penguin.

Makers included professional and amateur clay artists; students and teachers at elementary / middle / high schools and arts camps; and volunteers and passers-by at multiple Make-a-Penguin events.

While most PPP penguins originated in North Carolina, penguin donations also came from Arizona, Missouri, New York, Mexico, Spain, and Germany.

Many makers took the PPP as an opportunity to consider the carbon footprint of their art. Several explored lower temperature firing and minimalist decorative techniques. The 10-cm height limit allowed penguins to tuck into kiln spaces that might otherwise have gone unused.

— **ELIZABETH PALEY, FOUNDER & CURATOR**
IMAGES AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/POTTERS PENGUINPROJECT

