



WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE ARCTIC



Historically, images of the Arctic represent man's heroic accomplishments of explorers and scientists battling the extreme environment. We were a group of 26 international artists, researchers, musicians, and writers with a crew of ten aboard the tall ship *Barquentine Antigua*, 22 of us women. On an expedition of investigation and discovery, we sailed around the remote Svalbard archipelago, between Norway and the North Pole. North of the Arctic Circle, the land, mostly covered by glaciers, includes fjords, inlets and smaller islands.

Svalbard today is a measure of the impact of environmental climate changes. The Dutch whaling industry of the 17th- and 18th-centuries was replaced with coal mining in the 19th-century, followed by international research stations. With no indigenous populations—its visitors, from Vikings to coal miners—it remains one of the

earth's most intensely beautiful lands. What could be perceived as a land of endless ice and isolation becomes a deeply spiritual experience of the profound relationship between humankind and nature.

The expedition, organized by The Arctic Circle, was one of only two sailings each year. Daily life on board included meals in a tight, but well-organized space that functioned as dining room, meeting room and as work/studio space. Our tiny bedroom cabins and the ship's galley was an extreme contrast with the seemingly unlimited vastness of the environment outside. Inside the ship was filled with an electric human energy: drawing, note taking, discussion, eating, equipment preparation and eating. Outside was surreal silence. We witnessed the Northern Lights descending from above, uncharted islands revealed as receding glaciers melted, the 20-minute daily reduction of sunlight leading



Above:
Tamara Enz

Yva Jung: A performative dialogue documents the daily experiences in the Arctic of the South Korean, London-based artist. "High Angle of Repose" references the scientific term for the steepest angle of a material before its decline. While the image of Jung reclining is in harmony with the mountain slopes around her, the pose—like the environment—is temporal and fragile.

Barbara Crawford

to a winter of polar darkness, abandoned mining outposts, the hope invested in the Global Seed Vault as it leaks, nature's rhythm of migrating animals—all set within the dramatic stage of the Arctic landscape.

While I anticipated a certain awe and wonder about the Arctic, I did not anticipate the large number of women participants and crew members, including the four armed guides and a co-captain. Viewing the artwork of my expedition companions, I was struck by the ways in which women seem to see and understand this environment in a different spirit from the men who had gone before. A spirit perhaps more northing and communal. I began to question: Is there a different way, perhaps a feminine way, of exploring

our moral relationship to nature and to an ecosystem as unique and challenging as the Arctic?

Today there is a shift in the way artists are telling the story of the Arctic. Still there is the sublime purity and beauty of the land, but the artist is no longer cast as the hero. Instead, with the responsibility of being a voice, a messenger, for the land, the artist is now an advocate. 📷

Virginia artist Barbara Crawford was one of the The Arctic Circle's 2018 artists-in-residence. She has been a Visiting Artist at the American Academy in Rome, and a Fellow at the Tyrone Guthrie Center for Creative Art, Ireland, and the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica, Venice.

Opposite Top:

Zelda Zinn

This artist's works also evoke the domestic, as she blends nature with layered flower patterns—designs evoking household fabrics. The overlay serves to make the sublime familiar and embellishing the beauty of the subject.

Opposite Bottom:

Stephanie Imbeau

Richly crafted and embellished, the house-shaped garments evoke ceremonial rituals, yet symbolize the intense privacy of simple domestic habitation. The Berlin-based artist's temporal art works, lit from within and worn by her fellow artists, are her testament to the solitary beauty of the individual as they journey through the Arctic.



Julie Stephenson: This same sea and ice have provided spiritual revelations for the Australian artist and shaman. Her contemplative encounters with landscapes lead her to record her observations, scientific in nature and pedagogical in spirit, as tools for self-reflection. For Stephenson, the "landscape is my teacher."

