



NEW YORK SEATTLE

ELLE

Artist Zaria Forman Confronts Global Warming One Melting Icescape at a Time

BY BRIANNA KOVAN JUN 26, 2019



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Zaria Forman saw her first glacier in 2007. She was 23, a recent grad of Skidmore's studio art program who'd grown up just north of Manhattan in a home well stocked with paints, crayons, and charcoal sticks. That summer's trip to western Greenland was one of many her family embarked on to the globe's least-developed corners, courtesy of her mother, landscape photographer Rena Bass Forman. Seeing the towering glaciers of Ilulissat, some of which rivaled New York skyscrapers in stature, set Forman's own artistic journey in motion. "It really opened my eyes to the climate crisis," she says from her Brooklyn studio. "It's arguably the largest crisis we face as a global society."

Forman's Weddell Sea (Southeast off the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula) 66° 8' 32.831"S, 49° 50' 32.118"W, October 27th, 2016.

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Forman, now 36, has spent the last 12 years visiting the polar regions, speaking with Inuit communities, and documenting her findings through her medium of choice: soft pastels, which she blends and smudges onto paper to create large-scale, hyperrealistic portraits of the melting beauties. “They have such personality,” she says, noting glaciers’ constant rumblings, pops, and crackles. “You feel their presence.” During that inaugural Arctic trip, the family traveled by motorboat around the nearly 40-mile-long Jakobshavn Glacier (which birthed the iceberg that ultimately sank the Titanic). Five years later, in 2012, Forman led her first expedition back up Greenland’s northwestern coast. She’d intended to guide a group of artists and scholars alongside her mother, but was returning instead to scatter her ashes. (Bass Forman was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor in 2011 and passed away just six months later.) “It was a way for me to process my grief,” Forman says of the trip.



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Since then, she's flown over Antarctica and Chile with NASA, tracked ice melt in the equatorial Maldives, snuggled with massive elephant seal pups in South Georgia Island, and spent a month aboard a National Geographic ship bound for Antarctica. "Some air bubbles captured inside ice sheets there are two and a half million years old," she says. "Surrounding that ice is ancient atmosphere." She returns from each trip with gigabytes of photographs, then sorts through thousands of images in her vaulted studio in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. "I'm not a scientist," Forman says. "People are driven to act based on their emotions. The point of this work is to translate the data that scientists are collecting into an emotional experience."



Detail of sea ice chunks in the Arctic near Ellesmere Island.

For her next endeavor, Forman is teaming up with Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic to curate a permanent exhibit aboard their new cruise ship, the National Geographic Endurance. The exhibition, *Change*, will feature artists whose work is inspired by polar regions. "Passengers are seeing these landscapes in a vulnerable way," she says. "They change you. The show will help passengers want to protect and preserve these places."

Forman's drawings are available at Winston Wächter Fine Art; prints are available at Artstar.com.

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