

A Painter Memorializes the Planet's Icy Grandeur

By Kat Long

“I’m interested in the most remote places on Earth,” says Zaria Forman, a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based artist. Her late mother, a fine-arts photographer, introduced Ms. Forman to Greenland’s icy grandeur on a family trip in 2006. Though she wasn’t very aware of climate change at the time, Ms. Forman says, her observations of the rapidly altering Arctic gave her a creative spark. The ice and ocean, the ultimate symbols of the warming planet, became the recurring subjects of Forman’s large-scale pastel drawings.



Whale Bay, Antarctica no. 1, 60"x90", soft pastel on paper, 2016. Photo: Zaria Forman

As the planet warms, massive ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica will shrink, according to some computer models of future climate changes; research shows that [ice shelves are receding](#) at an accelerated rate. The influx of fresh water from Antarctica alone could [raise sea levels](#) by more than a meter by 2100, a recent [estimate](#) found.



Deception Island, Antarctica, 72"x128", soft pastel on paper, 2015. Photo: Zaria Forman

In addition to Greenland, Ms. Forman has traveled to Svalbard, Norway; the Sahara Desert, the Maldives and, most recently, to [Antarctica](#), as the resident artist aboard the National Geographic Explorer. On every expedition, she takes thousands of photographs. In her studio, she turns the most striking images into extraordinarily realistic drawings using soft pastels and her fingers to blend the colors on the paper.



From left: Greenland #69, Greenland #72, soft pastel on paper, 2014. ZARIA FORMAN (2)

“I’m really interested in the nuances of ice, the colors and textures. Those are the little details that you don’t get unless you travel there,” she says.

In Antarctica, the oldest ice appears sapphire blue, Ms. Forman says. As it compresses over many years, air bubbles within it are squeezed out, and the dense ice absorbs the colors of the spectrum except blue.



Maldives #14, 60"x90", soft pastel on paper, 2015. Photo: Zaria Forman

Ms. Forman says she left blue footprints as she walked through a layer of snow. But in Greenland, the ice had different hues, she says. There, "the freezing and refreezing of ice created striations of blue, like Crest toothpaste."



Artist Zaria Forman uses soft pastels to draw a scene from Antarctica. Photo: Melissa Walbridge

Ms. Forman has said “her life’s mission [is] to convey the urgency of climate change through my work.” Her next project, a 30-foot-long drawing of Antarctica, is meant to envelope viewers and evoke the power, as well as the fragility, of the landscape. Ms. Forman hopes viewers will be inspired to act against climate change.



Maldives #10, 45”x75”, soft pastel on paper, 2014. Photo: Zaria Forman

“I focus on the beauty, not the devastation. I want viewers to fall in love with the landscape as I have,” Ms. Forman says. “And once we have that connection, I hope it inspires people to protect our environment. That’s my angle—imagery can spark people into action better than a scientific paper.”



Greenland #63, 50"x75", soft pastel on paper, 2013. Photo: Zaria Forman

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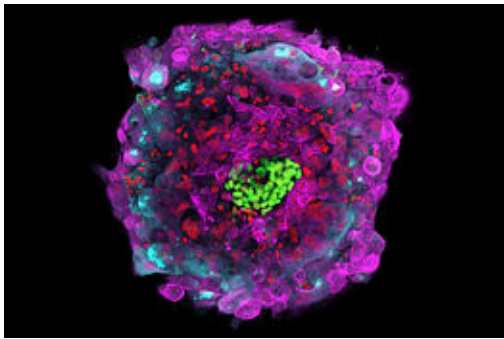
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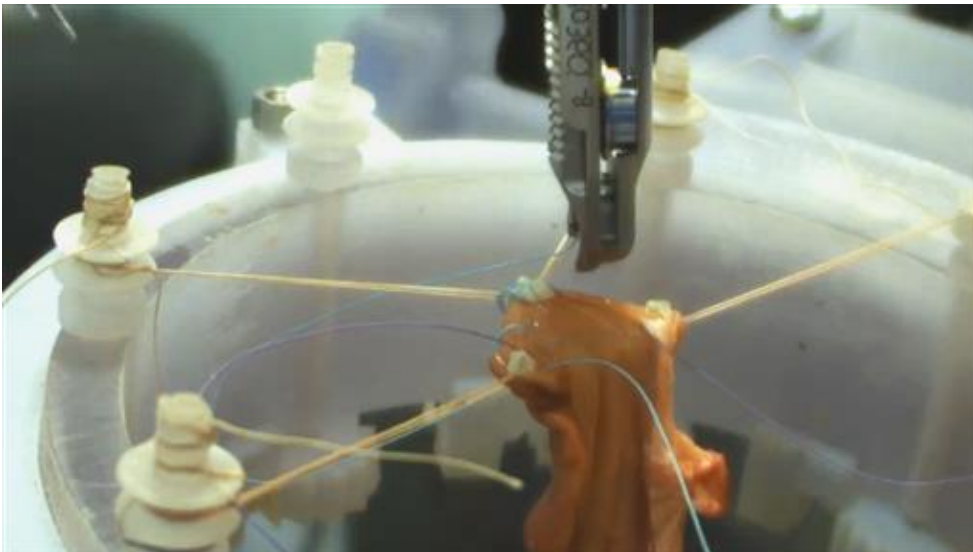
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