



Meet the New Face of Vacheron Constantin, Zaria Forman

The visual artist is the latest talent and thought leader to join the Swiss watch company's inner circle.

Time is of the essence for Zaria Forman, a New York-based visual artist who travels the world to draw ice such as melting glaciers, moving icebergs, and crashing waves. “The landscapes I draw are so ephemeral, that by the time I have completed a drawing, the ice I’ve rendered no longer exists,” she says of her transient subject, which she draws in pastel. Forman has been



documenting ice for more than a decade with regular trips to the Arctic; first with her mother, a landscape photographer, and most recently with Vacheron Constantin, the Geneva-based watch company for which she recently traveled to Fellsfjara, Iceland as their newest talent. “There are always a few moments that stand out on each trip, where the landscape and light line up in magical ways, and I know immediately that I’ll make a drawing of it,” she says.

As a young child, Forman visited parts of the world few people have the chance to experience. In 2007, her mother, Rena Bass Forman, whose work focuses on remote landscapes, took the family to Greenland. There, Forman, who was 25 years old at the time, not only saw her first glacier but also met environmental scientists and locals who depended on polar ice to survive. While the trip inspired Forman, she wouldn’t hone in on the subject for years. “I was too afraid to even attempt to draw ice,” she says. Five years later, she returned to Greenland, this time leading an Arctic expedition up the northwest coast to document the dramatic geography along the way. “I’ve been drawing ice ever since.”

It’s difficult to comprehend the vastness of polar ice, says Forman, whose large-scale pastel drawings measure, on average, five by seven-and-a-half feet. Each piece takes roughly four months to complete, in addition to one month spent on location, wherein she takes thousands of photographs as well as video and sound recordings. “I also spend that time soaking up the landscape without my camera lens in front of my face,” she says, recalling time spent on an airborne NASA science mission mapping changes in ice at the north and south poles. She traveled with NASA scientists and engineers in specialized aircrafts that hovered a mere 1,500 feet above glaciers, sea ice, and mountain ranges. Still, she says, “my memories of the experience are just as important as the data I collect on-site.



At first glance, one might mistake Forman’s hyperrealism pastel drawings for photographs. “Over the years, I’ve noticed that viewers tend to look very closely at my work when they realize they are not photographs,” says Forman of her zoomed-in portraits. “I enjoy how this creates an intimacy with the subject matter, bringing people closer to the intricacies of our changing landscapes.” While pastels have long been her medium of choice—it’s intimate and simple, and leaves little room for error or reworking, she says—choosing the right color palette wasn’t always as clear.



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“When I began to draw ice in 2012, I would dull the colors because I worried that viewers would think I was exaggerating them,” says Forman. But after her first trip to Antarctica a couple of years later, where she says she witnessed the most saturated blues in the natural world, she decided to recreate the landscapes as precisely as possible in order to “transport viewers to that exact time and place.”

Shades of deep-sea blue and light turquoise and vibrant green fill her work. The brilliant patchwork of colors recalls the ice-blue face of the Vacheron watch Forman wears for the Swiss brand’s Overseas campaign. Like the timepiece, her pigments feel rare and luxurious, and they are: Forman now gets her pastels handmade to match the landscape pictures she takes from each trip. “I’d say 90% of the time, I’m depicting the exact scene that I witnessed, because I want to stay true to the natural landscape that existed at that point in time,” she says, a fact that perhaps makes Forman as much of an historian as an artist.





These days, Forman spends most of her time working out of her living room, where she is finishing the Fellsfjara, Iceland series, one of which now hangs at Vacheron Constantin’s headquarters. In stained clothes, nostril filters, and surgical gloves—her 18-carat pink gold watch not included for fear of pastel dust, she says—she zeroes in on far flung places such as Skaftafellsjokull, a glacier tongue off Iceland’s largest ice cap, Vatnajokull. “Scientists estimate that Skaftafellsjokull has shrunk by about 155 square miles in the last 30 years,” she writes on social media to support drone footage of the ice cap. “My drawings are meant to be portraits of this accelerated loss, and a clarion call for faster action against it.” And while the loss is unmistakable Forman prefers not to focus on the devastation in her work. “By conveying the beauty of these places, I hope to inspire you to want to protect and preserve them.”