

**Nicky McArthur**

**ANTA 604 – Supervised Personal Project**

**A Comparative Review of Selected New Zealand Artists who have  
visited Antarctica**

**28.2.2013**

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## 1.0 Introduction

This project reviews the work of five New Zealand visual artists who have visited Antarctica. Four travelled as part of an Antarctic Arts Fellowship from Antarctica New Zealand and one New Zealander travelled as part of the United States science program.

It includes a short survey of some official artists' programs to Antarctica from around the world, looking in particular at the brief given to their selected artists, the expectations regarding artists' participation in these programs and the desired outcomes of having been accepted and given funding to travel to Antarctica as an Arts Fellow, in order to provide a comparison with the Antarctica New Zealand Arts Fellowship program which is then described.

This review of artists' programs selects a small representative sample of New Zealand artists who have travelled to Antarctica. The selection of this sample takes into consideration comparative media and the different styles of artworks. I am especially interested in the evolution of artists' works and where possible chose artists who appear to have been most impacted by their Antarctic experience, based on the artists' biographies and discussions with the artists themselves.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the chosen artists and this project reviews the outcomes from these discussions, drawing comparisons between the artists. The review looks at what artists gain from their experience of Antarctica, exploring their personal objectives, their methods, their insights and how they translated these into outcomes that led up to the final works exhibited relating directly to their visit to Antarctica.

Finally I will explore how the artists personally view the outcomes following their visit to Antarctica, with a discussion of how these artists consider their visit has impacted on them and their work up until the present day.

### 1.1 The Idea of Antarctica and the Role of the Artist

The idea of Antarctica has fascinated humans for over two thousand years. In the fourth century BC the Greeks named it "Anti Arktos" – "South of the Bear", to balance "Arktos", the icy lands of the arctic and the northern stars (Polar Cruises, 2013). Over the centuries its mystique grew;

Antarctica – or Terra Australis Nondum Cognita – was added to early maps and the world deliberated what wonders, mysteries and riches might be on offer far to the south. The notions and then the realities of Antarctica have drawn explorers, adventurers, speculators, scientists and artists to discover its secrets ever since. Today as science, principally, opens the door to some of the myths and legends that grew up over the centuries about Antarctica and the last great unexplored wilderness continent reveals her secrets to the variety of travellers who visit, it is often the artists' interpretations that have the ability to convey these secrets in a manner accessible and interesting to the wider public around the globe. Artists across history and round the world have always had this role, the arts together with the oral and written word being the only means of documenting human existence, of portraying and interpreting the life and times of an era. The history of the evolving role of visual art in Antarctica is well summarised by William L Fox:

The evolution of our perception of the Antarctic from an unknown space to a comprehensible place can be traced through the evolution of its portrayal in visual art. Early expedition artists relied upon the topographically-based aesthetic traditions of northern European landscape painting as the polar region was first charted, and the continent's outlines were traced in coastal profiles during the late eighteenth through to the mid-nineteenth centuries. This pragmatic approach with its close ties to cartographic needs was later superseded by increasingly symbolic depictions of the environment. The artists accompanying Scott, Shackleton and Mawson, for example, often portrayed the Antarctic as an historic stage for heroic action. With the International Geophysical Year in 1957–1958, modernist aesthetics reached the continent. Visiting artists sponsored by national programs began to abstract the environment in photography and painting. By the turn of the century, sculptors and installation artists had helped bring the Antarctic more fully into the international cultural arena as a subject for contemporary art. This aesthetic shift is both a symptom of, and part of the process for, the transformation of a *terra incognita* into a *terra Antarctica*. (Fox 2005, abstract)

## 1.2 Consilience between the Arts and Science

The concept of consilience between science and the arts is becoming well recognized, with the role of the artist now generally accepted as providing a medium through which Antarctica and Antarctic science can be translated and transmitted to the general public in a form which is understandable to a wide audience. "Consilience" is a word used, in this case by Creative NZ, when talking about the possibilities for Artists to Antarctica and what can arise when science and art meet and intersect:

Consilience: it's not a word you'll find in the average home dictionary. But check in the Shorter Oxford and it's there: "the fact of 'jumping together'." It's a word you're likely to hear more often, as scientists and artists discover that they have more in common than has traditionally been thought. It's also a term favoured by American philosopher Edward O. Wilson in his book *Consilience* to describe what he says is the greatest enterprise of the mind – the attempt to link the sciences and the humanities. James Buwalda, the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology is equally passionate about this connection, especially in terms of what it means for New Zealand. "Creativity is the common ground where art and science meet," he says. "The only difference is how these talents are applied. Innovation and a history of creativity are pillars of New Zealand's culture." Consilience, it seems, is a concept whose time has come.... For composer David Downes, science and art are inextricably intertwined.... "– the journey from the rational to the emotional. I'm particularly intrigued by the interplay between these two perceived polarities." As for Stuart Hoar, the current writer-in-residence at Canterbury University, he believes that the impulses driving scientists and artists are similar.

“The process that scientists go through, the passions and the ideas and the intellectualising is no different from any artist. They have an idea and it’s very beautiful, and they try and develop it. Artists are part of the same process. They are continually researching in terms of what it is to be human in this place.... Scientists are not as disinterested as they think.” Their work, too, has its own beauty. Rutherford likened Einstein’s theory of relativity to a great work of art. To mathematicians, complicated mathematical equations are as aesthetically pleasing as a beautifully composed painting or musical composition. It’s a beauty that may be appreciated by a relatively small audience, but the intersection of the arts and science can have unexpectedly accessible outcomes. Two Australian artists, for example, have used tissue culture and tissue engineering to create living works of art – colourful, live “pictures”, which are beautiful objects in themselves. But, perhaps more importantly, the process of creating these pictures has helped the scientists involved move beyond conventional scientific modes of thinking, thus advancing their understanding of tissue engineering. It’s a process that’s been described as the “clash of cultures”. It’s this cross-fertilisation that’s behind the Artists to Antarctica program, a partnership between Antarctica New Zealand in Christchurch and Creative New Zealand. (Creative NZ 2000)

### **1.3 The Antarctic Treaty**

Early explorers such as Captain Cook always travelled with scientists and artists in order to document what they saw and accurately portray all that they discovered, both scientific and geographical. The recognition, from the time of the earliest expeditions, of the importance of science and of the sharing of information was carried forward over the decades to become incorporated finally in the Antarctic Treaty in 1959.

The main purpose of the Antarctic Treaty is to ensure “that Antarctica shall continue for ever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord.” (Antarctic Treaty, 1959) Every year the Treaty parties meet “for the purpose of exchanging information, consulting together on matters of common interest pertaining to Antarctica, and formulating and considering and recommending to their Governments measures in furtherance of the principles and objectives of the Treaty” (Article IX). The value of artists in and to Antarctica was brought firmly to the forefront at the twentieth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting at Utrecht in 1996, whose report states:

The representatives, noting that Antarctica has been the subject of significant works of art, literature and music; recognizing that the unique character of Antarctica itself represents an inspiration for protecting its values; recommend: Promotion of understanding and appreciation of the values of Antarctica, in particular its scientific, aesthetic and wilderness values, including through: a) Educational opportunities, in particular for young persons, and b) The contribution of writers, artists and musicians. (Resolution II, ATS Report 1997)

In order to meet the Treaty obligations of Article 9 – and the implications for meeting cultural obligations – it has been seen to be beneficial to have artists visiting Antarctica. To that end many countries have introduced artists’ programs, as these not only meet the above obligations but provide a vehicle to bring knowledge of Antarctica to a wider public audience than just through the sciences.

## **2.0 Countries that Maintain Antarctic Arts Programs: A Sample**

For reasons of language accessibility I have selected a range of English-speaking countries for comparison with the New Zealand Arts Fellowships program, which is detailed in section 3.2 below.

## 2.1 The US Program

In the latter half of the twentieth century once the value the humanities could bring to Antarctica began to be better recognized, the first of the Antarctic Artists' Fellowships was established. The United States National Science Foundation instituted, and continues to fund and manage, their Antarctic Artists' and Writers' Program, providing "opportunities for scholars in the humanities (painting, photography, writing, history, and other liberal arts) to work in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean". (NSF, 2012) The artists, like the scientists, have to convince the Foundation that their work will amongst other things reach a significant audience. The selection criteria have been stringent and artists must have a substantial record in their field, have written proof of a contract to exhibit or publish after their visit and the works must be representative of Antarctica.

By the early 1980s the program had taken shape. The Fellowship recipients travel to Antarctica for two to three months, allowing a significant amount of time for the artist to be immersed in their Antarctic surroundings, and are able to access a range of areas in the Antarctic region. Nearly a hundred participants have now had the opportunity to travel to Antarctica; fifteen artists have been multiple times, with two selected artists having travelled to the ice five times.

Guy Guthridge helped create the program which supports the arts in Antarctica. He points out that "If you look backwards (to the past)... it would have been abnormal not to have artists and writers in an expedition to the Antarctic..." (Rejcek, 2007 ). He views the role of the artist as a means towards alerting a much wider audience to the issues: "something is going terribly wrong with the way humans are interfacing with their planet" (Guthridge, 2007 ). He himself learned these lessons in Antarctica through science, but "it's a message that the arts can deliver with power and conviction" (Rejcek, 2007 ). The success of the US Antarctic Artists program inspired Australia, then New Zealand and finally Britain to follow suit.

## 2.2 The Australian Program

Australians are inspired by Mawson and his explorations, the photos Frank Hurley took at the beginning of the twentieth century and the art of Charles Turnbull Harrison (1911 – 1914). Like many national polar institutes and agencies, in the 1980s the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) launched the AAD Art Fellowship to enable artists to go to Antarctica. The intention was to assist the understanding of Antarctica and to make information accessible for a non-scientific audience. "The vision of the Australian program is 'Antarctica: Valued, Protected and Understood' ....the AAD aims to ensure an increased international awareness and appreciation of Antarctica focusing on... the extraordinary and beautiful natural environment... the small human communities forged on the vast continent and the treaty values and cooperation that shape Antarctica's geopolitical significance." (AAD,2011 )

The AAD art program assists communication between artists and scientists and enables an exchange of ideas and perceptions of Antarctica. The program's assessment criteria include the importance of gaining the attention of a broad audience so that people should get a sense of the continent and be able to seize Antarctica's role as the driver of our climate. Each year the AAD selects one to five artists who are prominent in their field or promising newcomers. "The program aims to nurture the production of excellent and significant works of art and interpretation by leading professionals and talented emerging artists and writers." (AAD, 2011)

Antarctica's waste ice landscape with its freezing temperatures and howling storms is certainly not a place we would expect an artist to work. The continent, however, attracts writers as well as painters, musicians and filmmakers. They come to experience a place far from their everyday reality, to find inspiration and in the end their own Antarctic. Importantly, Australian artists travel by ship and have a much longer time in Antarctica (up to two months). This has made for some really meaningful art and is an important aspect of their program. Over one

hundred artists and journalists have now been to Antarctica with the Fellowship. The AAD will accept people from outside the Treaty nations.

## **2.3 The British Program**

This program commenced in 2001/02 and was run by the British Antarctic Survey and the Arts Council of England. Owing to funding cuts it is sadly no longer running. The Fellowship allowed two candidates to visit Antarctica for up to eight weeks during the summer season (October – March), and was part of a continuing program by BAS to raise awareness and understanding of the extensive science it undertakes in Antarctica. Individual practitioners from the visual arts (including photography, new media and the moving image) and writers (including fiction, non-fiction and poetry) had the opportunity to travel to the Antarctic and visit the scientific research carried out there. BAS undertook logistics and Antarctic support, whilst the Arts Council provided travel costs and a Fellowship grant to assist the artists.

The two candidates were chosen by an independent review panel of advisors from the BAS and Arts Council of England. Key selection criteria included the innovation of the project, its linkage to science, the feasibility of the proposed outcomes, the capabilities, professional reputation and track record of the applicant and the potential for a significant audience and the efforts made to reach it. The British Antarctic Survey is the primary organisation responsible for undertaking the UK's scientific research in Antarctica. Professor David Walton who coordinated the program stated, "This is an unprecedented partnership between the Arts Council of England and British Antarctic Survey. The successful artists will be able to work in association with Antarctic scientists and will make new work in response to this remarkable, frozen continent" (Walton, 2003). The final Fellows travelled to Antarctica in 2008/09 and fourteen artists in total benefited.

## **3.0 New Zealand Artists to Antarctica**

### **3.1 History**

The history of New Zealand artists in Antarctica is younger than some other nations', but with this country's close links with Antarctica and the introduction of an Arts Fellowship an impressive amount of quality work has come forth over the years. As in so many countries the military documentary recording of the history of a country has been considered important and in Antarctica too New Zealand military artists have had a great role to play. War artists might throw some light onto why art, and in particular painting, is so important as a medium; whilst this is clearly for historical reasons it is also considered important for educational reasons – important because their artwork becomes a part of the record of a country. (Archives NZ)

### **3.2 First Arts Fellows to Travel to Antarctica**

Interestingly, the first three artists to be invited to travel to Antarctica had all served with and been official artists to the military. They were respectively Peter McIntyre in 1957 and 1958/59, Maurice Conly in 1970 and 1974 and Austin Deans in 1981/82, who was "delighted to have managed to wangle a trip to Antarctica, which was a lifelong ambition". (Deans Art, 2012).

The next artists invited to travel south were Jonathan White, painter, in 1989/90, Kim Westerkov, photographer, also in 1990 and John Hamilton, painter, in 1991/92. 1996 saw the advent of Antarctica New Zealand as an entity and the twentieth Antarctic Treaty meeting in Utrecht, and in 1997 the Antarctic Arts Fellows sent their first writer, Bill Manhire, to the ice. The program has since run annually.

### 3.3 Antarctica New Zealand Arts Fellowships

Antarctica New Zealand was established on July 1 1996, coincidentally with the new Treaty objectives formulated in Utrecht that year. It embraced art from the start, and the Artists' Program came into permanent being in 1997. In May 1998 Creative New Zealand announced that they were pairing with Antarctica New Zealand in a pilot scheme to enable artists to visit Antarctica and on their return to work on a body of work responding to their Antarctic experience for exhibition. (Creative NZ, 1998). Claudia Scott, Arts Board Chair at the time said "It will be interesting to see the impact of this experience on the artists and how it will influence the direction of their work. It's a wonderful opportunity for artists to experience this remote wilderness and create challenging new work." Hence started a journey for Antarctica New Zealand, as Creative New Zealand selected artists to travel to Antarctica to evolve their passions for both the place and their personal art form whatever that might be. Entitled "Arts and Science Join Forces", this was greeted enthusiastically by the arts world and Nigel Brown, Bill Manhire and Chris Orsman visited Antarctica in 1998. Whilst at Scott Base they produced (in 8 days) *Homelight*, a mix of poetry and drawings that was a limited edition very much in the spirit of *Aurora Australis* or the *South Polar Times*. These three were to be the first of the now more than fifty artists to benefit from an Arts Fellowship to travel to Antarctica.

Gillian Wratt (Antarctica NZ) said at the opening of the Nigel Brown exhibition at Canterbury Museum in 1999 that Antarctica holds a fascination for millions of New Zealanders, most of whom will never get a chance to experience it. Traditionally it was for journalists, youth groups and schools to communicate the Antarctic experience. She believed that it was the ability of artists to communicate this experience that led to an Artists to Antarctica program. (*The Press*, 23 April 1999).

"Antarctica is one of the most inspiring places on the planet," says Antarctica New Zealand CEO Lou Sanson. "It feeds the mind and soul. The chance to capture the majesty of this vast frozen continent and convey that through art is a wonderful way to communicate directly and inspire others." The Artists to Antarctica program is an integral part of each season's on-ice activities, he says. "Art is a way to shine a light on the rich science, history and early endeavours which characterise Antarctica. The ability to look at things through different eyes then turn that into a painting, performance, poem, sculpture or composition for the public is one of the real strengths of this program." (Creative NZ 2006)

The Fellowship program was and is open to successful New Zealand artists and writers from all disciplines who are well-established in their careers; among those to visit the Ice have been poet Bernadette Hall, furniture maker/sculptor David Trubridge, children's author Margaret Mahy and composer Gareth Farr. The artists' program covers costs of travel to and from Antarctica, accommodation, food, field equipment, clothing hire and transport in Antarctica. Creative New Zealand provided selected artists with grants of up to \$10,000 to work on a project inspired by their time in Antarctica, and to cover materials and travel and accommodation in Christchurch prior to departure (Creative NZ 2006). Fellowships could be awarded to candidates either by application or by invitation. The artists usually spent a period of eight to fourteen days in Antarctica. "The energy and vitality the artists inject into our own environment at Scott Base each season is a highlight for many of the scientists and staff in Antarctica," says Sanson. "Since the program began, we have seen many varied art forms and a wide body of New Zealand Antarctic art has been created." (Creative NZ 2006)

2007 saw the withdrawal of Creative New Zealand from the collaboration with Antarctica New Zealand and an invitation-only system is currently in place, with Antarctica New Zealand funding the artists into Antarctica. The expectation is that an art work will be donated to Antarctica New Zealand. New Zealand Arts Fellowships have therefore been granted by invitation from 1957 to 1996; by application between 1997 and 2007, with intermittent artists invited; and from 2008 until the present, by invitation only.

## 4.0 The Studied Artists

Art elicits a different feeling about Antarctica from science, as mentioned earlier in relation to consilience. Art allows Antarctica's wonders, its fragility and its remoteness to be conveyed to a wide audience and thus ensures that not only are the principles of the Antarctic Treaty met but that Antarctica New Zealand achieves the objectives of their program and that their investment in these artists bears fruition according to this criteria. Much has been written about consilience and my research into the following artists also demonstrates that there is a strong link between the arts and science. It has been inspiring to talk with all the artists and to learn how closely the two appear to lie together.

New Zealanders have a deep connection with the Antarctic continent, with long history of explorers, tourists, scientists and travellers departing our shores. Artists now carry the mantle of bringing back some of these stories and making the wider public aware of environmental issues.

I have chosen to explore five New Zealand artists in total; four are Antarctica New Zealand Arts Fellows and one travelled independently to Antarctica through another program. Two were invited artists (male) and two applied for the Fellowship (female), and all are over fifty years of age. All travelled south in the first decade of the twenty-first century except for Elliot who first visited in the 1998/99 season. As one would expect they are well-renowned in their field and are passionate about the frozen continent and the journeys they experienced. As landscape artists they already had a deep connection to the land and without a doubt their visits have impacted on them all in different ways and at varying levels. What is noticeable in all cases is the interest in the evolution of the human interactions with Antarctica. With no indigenous population this has only occurred relatively recently. Over the last century people have quietly but insistently made their mark on this last untouched wilderness continent; the extraordinary remoteness which has kept humans at bay for millennia is only now being diminished, allowing scientists to uncover and reveal its secrets as technologies allow us to reside in these deep latitudes. The environmental limitations in themselves had direct impacts on the artists and the manner in which they approached their work. I have set out to demonstrate how these many elements manifested themselves for each of the artists: Margaret Elliot, Clare Plug, Peter James Smith, Grahame Sydney and Claire Beynon.

One of the comparisons I would have liked to make was the application process and how this related to the outcomes, but given that only two of the five studied artists applied to Antarctica New Zealand a better comparison may be drawn between the artists who applied and those who were invited. The small number of artists studied has allowed a look in greater depth at how each artist prepared for their trip to Antarctica, what evolved for them down there, the exhibition work that followed on from their visit and how the experience continues to influence them today. I have personally been to exhibitions of all the artists and am familiar with their work and style, except for Clare Plug. A note in regard to Claire Beynon: I included her because she was referred to me by several people and I was intrigued to understand why, and I was also already familiar with her work. Her inclusion has provided an opportunity to study an artist who was able to spend over two months on each separate visit, and the extent to which this has impacted on her life and art in comparison with the relatively short visits offered to artists by Antarctica New Zealand.

Please note that unless otherwise referenced, all quotations in this section are from my interviews with the artists.

## 5.0 Margaret Elliot 1998/99



### 5.1 Background and Preparation

Margaret Elliot is a Wellington-based artist who travelled to Antarctica for the first time in 1998. Margaret has had a lifelong fascination with the dramatic forms of land and sky. She creates her images in relation to the rhythms of the landscapes, aware of the forms nature provides and how then as humans we interact in these spaces. Arriving in Antarctica to its extremes, minimal forms and its vast scale had a profound effect on her work and continues to do so today. She was able to visit Antarctica twice more as a staff member of the Post-graduate Certificate in Antarctic Studies study group at Gateway Antarctica and says that it was not until the second and third visit that she was able to find her true relationship for her art in this landscape. Her Antarctic work has been described thus: “her twilight worlds are snow-coated, and windswept; powerful landscapes caught between the heroic past and contemporary existence” (Scott Elliot had long been interested in travelling to Antarctica, so when the opportunity arose to apply to Antarctica New Zealand the application form itself became a process whereby much thought and consideration was given to how it might affect her. She particularly requested to visit certain areas including the historic huts, Lake Vanda and one of the Dry Valleys and noted that she would be grateful to “at least get a view of Mt Erebus.” She believes the application process is a good one as it encourages real consideration for what one might produce as a result of travelling down there. Her application form explains, “I use spatial illusion as an expressive device and not primarily for copying appearances. I am much more interested in understanding the processes and forces that shape the environment, reproducing movement and patterns to produce a parallel entity rather than imitating surface effects. A vast space with few reference points would have ambiguities of scale that could be used with expressive and disquieting effect.” (Elliot, 1998 application form)

### 5.2 Experiences in Antarctica

On arriving in Antarctica Elliot found, as others do, that she was in information overload from the mere fact of arriving in Antarctica: not only out in the field but the logistics of arriving, settling into Scott Base, completing Antarctic Field Training, and being told what was required in that environment. She discovered early on that you cannot really freelance when you are there. For safety reasons everything is quite rightly very structured, so the opportunity as an artist to get away from it all to have time on one’s own is almost impossible. Additionally the visiting artists mostly travel to places together, which is fine and ideas were shared – but for an artist this makes it hard. Having to stick together with the other artists was also different. “We were all so

grateful to be there but it was hard to make art in that environment.”

Elliot says that her first visit was overwhelming in all aspects, getting to grips with everything at Scott Base, and with no darkness she found that on returning to New Zealand she was much more tired than she realized. It was not until her second visit that she was able to begin to formulate a response as an artist to the environment. “I did much my best work following the second trip. The second and the third trip were critical to my art and were a turning point for me. The patterns in the landscape became incredibly important and have led on to significant bodies of works.” She found the third trip really consolidating as it tied up all the loose ends and she was able to come to terms with the landscape and the environment.

Working in Antarctica as an artist presents its own set of problems. Elliot was prepared for this and had taken coloured pencils as part of her drawing kit for making sketches in the field. She collected visual information by taking photographs and making drawings on site, as she usually works fairly quickly and economically recording line drawings in a diary with additional notes. She had known it would be too cold to paint and “I found the combination of sketches and coloured pencils worked well for field work.”

From an artistic perspective she notes Antarctica has no markers and few reference points; the scale is so huge and there are multiple layers of white and ambiguous spaces with wonderful nuances of light and weather. Initially she focused on the fractal nature of ice formations in these ambiguous spaces and the confusing experience of a landscape that has no reference point. During her second visit when she camped out on the ice she continued to explore the ambiguities of scale in relation to the encampment. She is interested in the human impacts and the relationships between these and the environment. She looked at tracks in the ice and the tents within these relationships to the expanse.

Elliot relates to the quote from *Moby Dick*, “Or is it that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour, and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning in such a wide landscape of snows?”

As a personal experience Elliot feels Antarctica has so many levels. The impact on the senses is so broad and extreme: the constant cold, the glare from the snow that affects the eyes, the smell of the ice that affects the nose, the air that is cold in the nose and tastes slightly salty – having said that, she loved every minute and was always just so grateful to be there.

At Scott Base she particularly enjoyed the interactions with the scientists; most were really interested in what the visiting artists were doing, as they were in what the scientists were doing. “I really enjoyed the dialogue between the scientists and artists. Both had so much to offer each other.” I have found this to be a common theme.

### **5.3 Outcomes and Ongoing Influence**

*Tented Spaces* was the 2003-2004 exhibition at the Christchurch Art Gallery that Elliot feels featured some of her most successful work from Antarctica. In an article written about this exhibition, “Echoes 3”, tented forms morph into snowy peaks, denying the distinction between man-made structures and those attributed to nature. Perspective dissolves, deceiving the eye into believing that through the absence of landmarks this land stretches for miles. The inhabitants of flimsy tents, exposed and vulnerable face an uncertain death.” (Irish, 2006). Margaret Elliot regards the tented spaces as “markers of place, history, devastation and ambition. They stand to represent past endeavours while negotiating the artist’s position in this layered landscape. The Antarctic experience is defined by the environment but also by the people who have traversed the land, both in the past and the present. Tracks, tents and flag posts feature as markers, yet Antarctica cannot be truly conquered or claimed. The snow continues to fall in a land that refuses to remain static.”

This quote well represents Elliot’s thoughts on the works that were part of this exhibition. I was

lucky enough to visit the exhibition and also the artist in her own home in 2004. The use of oils on board undoubtedly achieves all that Elliot sets out to convey in relation to what is stated above. One of her works hangs at Scott Base by the window and it certainly reminds one of man's fragility in this landscape.

As a mid-career artist Elliot reflects back and certainly a high point of her life as an artist was being selected to travel to Antarctica. That and the following trips continue to influence her work; some of these influences have been mentioned above, and can be seen particularly in her comment that "the patterns in the landscape became incredibly important and have led on to significant bodies of works" (4.1.2).

## **5.4 Reflections on the Fellowship**

Elliot sees the Fellowship as a wonderful opportunity and was continually grateful for being able to travel there. Having artists in Antarctica humanises the art and takes it into the public arena, which is very important.

She absolutely thinks that one visit is not enough, or that it needs to be longer. "I was overwhelmed by everything on my first visit. Ten days is not really enough to collect experiences and information to produce the significant body of work that was expected from the residency."

The funding that was available at that time was fantastic as it allowed her to paint full time, which made a significant difference to the quality of the output. "The tent series evolved from my second trip and that is some of my favourite work. The work became all-absorbing and almost otherworldly; it was a privilege to be able to immerse myself in my work like that and it was better because of it."

## **6 Grahame Sydney 2003/04 and 2006/07**



### **6.1 Background**

Grahame Sydney is a long-time well respected artist from Otago whose landscape paintings are well known throughout New Zealand due in part to the fact that he has produced several books of his works. Sydney, initially Dunedin-based, became a full time artist in 1974 before later moving to Central Otago. He has quietly evolved his own style, reflecting his character, and his deep love of landscapes is very apparent in his paintings. His work is bold, powerful and yet at

the same time calm, inviting the viewer to pause and consider the ancient forms and history of the region. His work “hovers between realism and abstraction” (Kedgeley 2011) and has without doubt become iconic of Central Otago and he rarely paints elsewhere.

The opportunity to travel at the invitation of Antarctica New Zealand came in 2003 and Sydney, aware of the huge privilege of this offer, gladly accepted. He travelled south at the end of November 2003 for a brief eight days. In October 2006 he was again able to travel south, having requested this time of year in order to experience the extraordinary subtleties of light available early in the season.

Sydney is best known for his paintings but photography, a hobby from teenage years, became a necessity during his first trip to Antarctica, and this became a turning point for him to revisit the medium and resulted in the book *White Silence* (Sydney, 2008).

## 6.2 Preparation

As an invited artist Sydney did not have to submit an application form. Viewing the other artists' applications shows how much thought, effort and prior preparation has to go into that process. On my asking what sort of preparation Sydney undertook for his Fellowship trip it became apparent that he had a long and deep interest in Antarctica. “I had read about it for decades and had always been interested and intrigued by the inaccessibility, remoteness and history of Antarctica.” He was very aware of what had gone before, from the early explorers' perspectives, be they the photographers struggling to develop negatives in freezing temperatures or Edward Wilson's wonderful pencil drawings out in the field and his subtle paintings, through to his friend Nigel Brown who battled winds and battened down his work with rocks. Sydney took pencils and gouaches, watercolours and brushes in the hope of being able to draw and paint outside, but the reality of the cold turned not only the trip into a different journey; once the watercolours had shattered (Sydney 2008) Sydney picked up the camera.

Having visited this fascinating continent in 2003 Sydney was inspired and wanted desperately to return. He made that request to Antarctica New Zealand who in 2006 granted not only that wish but allowed Sydney to travel in October, which though much colder made accessible the subtlety of light he was seeking for his work.

## 6.3 Experiences in Antarctica

Sydney says he was completely in awe of the barren landscape from the moment he stepped off the plane, finding it alien and otherworldly. He was so inspired by what he encountered that he barely slept at all during the eight-day visit, not wanting to waste a moment. “I found it all wonderfully electrifying; I could not bear to waste a moment.” He spent much of his time “just gazing at the landscape trying to make some sort of sense and understanding”. For all that he had read in the past it still not did prepare him for the absences of what was or rather was not there in the environment and the landscape. “The minimal elements were what intrigued me in the landscape, the absences and reduction of form, the concealment of this landscape under the ice.” The sense of where ice, rock and sky began and ended was often ambiguous and he found everything incredibly minimal. “I had not realized how little an artist needs for something to be so breathtakingly beautiful.” This presented its own set of challenges as it is not a colourful place, but Sydney considers that if one knows how to paint it provides wonderful opportunities.

Sydney found being at Scott Base was a bit like being on a school camp and being told what to do. Scott Base is by necessity run like a military operation and everything is planned. All the artists travelled together; “freedom is not a word that applies because of the dangers, and this is what you expect” (Radio interview). He went to McMurdo for a visit as he was curious about the size of the township with its bars and bowling alleys and in particular was interested in Crary Laboratory. Whilst there a blizzard came in, and there they stayed for three days in what they stood up in. Sydney was delighted to have experienced the storm and sneaked out with his

camera to capture some of the drama a storm like that presents. "It was exhilarating." (radio interview). Sydney grabbed every opportunity that came his way whilst there and he will be forever grateful for the opportunity he was given.

Frustrations included the trip being just too short. "I never like the idea of being a tourist in a place, looking at the view and then painting it. It is imperative to be able to understand it through experiencing it." On the first trip there was just so much to take in, absorb and process.

Sydney's first visit took place at the end of November 2003. For his 2006 visit he requested WINFLY, the first flight of the season at the beginning of October. "I asked to go early because the sun is very low in the sky and it is so very different, not light not dark, I loved that." He found it a relief to be back again and able to respond to the landscape and the environment. "I have an inbuilt distaste for tourist art; the first exposure is a tourist exposure, on my first trip it took over a week to start thinking about what I was doing, stop feeling like a kid" (radio interview). After that first visit he had a long time to think about Antarctica and he desperately wanted to go down with "the familiarity on board so as to be a better artist and a better responder".

Sydney has always been intrigued by man's gestures on the landscape, something he has much documented in Central Otago. In Antarctica he found these gestures somewhat feeble in the vastness of the plac, such as the flags which seemed so insignificant, yet so symbolic flags and the white ice road, now going even to the South Pole. Flags were everywhere, red ones, black ones; on the one hand there is a desolate white continent and on the other all the manmade interventions, many of which allow people to identify with home. He was somewhat amused by features such as the small orange fishing huts the scientists have out on the ice and the letter box out at Cape Royds saying "no circulars".

For Sydney too one of the great pleasures at Scott Base was talking with the scientists and the new thinking that may happen when world class artists and world class scientists interact. He found it exciting to be in the science environment, enjoying technical dinnertime conversation at Scott Base as well as being able to attend the weekly lectures available on base. Somewhat bemused, he says "the only bad experiences were a result of the bar!"

## 6.4 Methodology

Having taken pencils, etc, from the moment he arrived he realized that it was going to be too cold to draw. Sydney is meticulous in his drawing of landscapes and takes time when recording out in the field. It was clear this was never going to work for him in that harsh environment.

Because it was too cold to actually paint he took photographs, having not handled a camera much other than as an interested amateur throughout his life. The camera became incredibly important for recording. The "one-eyed" camera as he calls it became his constant companion but even that presented its challenges in the cold, requiring body warmth to keep it functioning, protection during times of lens changing and if fingers needed to be bared the reminder of Antarctica's harsh realities was ever present. This was also a constant reminder of all that the men of the heroic era had endured and the difficulties they constantly faced, without the warmth of Scott Base to return to.

## 6.5 Outcomes and Ongoing Influence

The outcomes for Sydney following his journeys to Antarctica in terms of both exhibitions and continuing influence have been ongoing. Once one has been to Antarctica it appears to touch most people profoundly and Sydney is no exception. "I am one of the haunted visitors." (Sydney, 2008).

Outcomes include the book *White Silence*, which has been instrumental in bringing Antarctica to a wide public audience. This book of photographs has been described by some as being very true to the conditions of light that are actually experienced most often.

Sydney has always worked slowly and methodically in his studio, using photographs and sketches for reference and usually only producing six to eight works a year. “For me the best work came from the second trip. I understood the environment better – I asked to go down on WINFLY at the end of August (*sic*) for a very different light. It was cold – very cold, so not possible to paint – but the environment was so very different.” Sydney has produced a series of paintings on Antarctica which again has brought the continent to a wider public audience, and one of these has been gifted to Antarctica New Zealand.

Talking to Sydney seven years on from his last visit, he says the Antarctic experience has taught him to look at Central Otago with new eyes and he developed a new theme painting winter scenes. The landscape is so minimal at that stage of the year and having worked with the reduced colour, texture and narrow tones of Antarctica he has become much more conscious of absences and subtleties that perhaps were not noticed as much before. He has gone on to produce a series of works depicting these winter landscapes, and also a series of works with fog. Sydney says Central Otago is full of extremes, and the seasons are important to him. Both are extreme landscapes and the hardness of the landscape fascinates him.

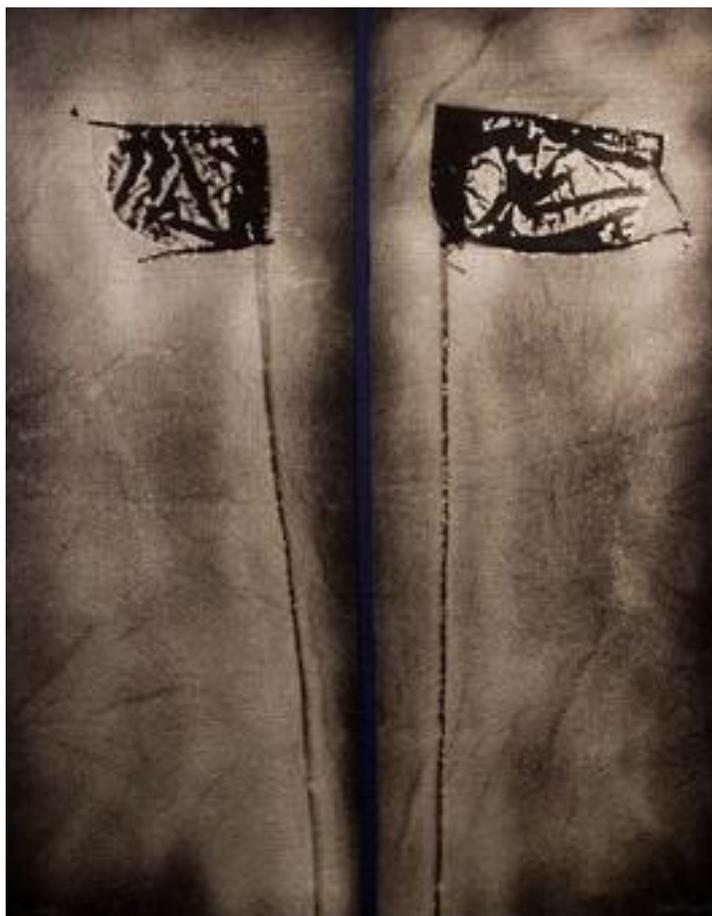
## **6.6 Reflections on the Fellowship**

Sydney believes that the current system of inviting artists to the Antarctica is a good one. The selected artists need to be of a high calibre if Antarctica New Zealand wants to maintain a high standard. He considers it essential to have, as one of its outputs, valued works reaching a wide public audience. He questions some of the previous artists who travelled as Arts Fellows, saying that in some instances the work that was produced was just too transient to leave a long term legacy for Antarctica New Zealand. Of the various artistic media of those who have participated in the Arts Fellowship program, he suggests that “painters are able to give a really decent response to the environment that the public can relate to”. (He did not think much of the dance one!)

Sydney also thinks that the visits are simply too short for any artist to really even start to come to terms with the vastness of Antarctica. “The environment from the moment one arrives is so overwhelming, and there is so much to take in and come to terms with: there is clothing, field training, Scott Base, McMurdo etc and on one’s first visit one feels like a tourist, grappling with all that just existing down there involves. One’s responses are very superficial because of this time frame.” It was not until his second visit, when it was no longer such a novelty, that he was able view the environment with some sort of clarity and so to produce quality paintings on his return to New Zealand that reflected how deeply moved and inspired he was by these surrounds.

He is incredibly grateful for the opportunities and was constantly aware of the costs of anyone being at Scott Base at all, and suggests that perhaps sending fewer artists each year but allowing them to stay for longer might produce work of an even greater standard. Sydney would go back in a heartbeat given the opportunity. Because he did not have to go through the application process he did not have that opportunity for “processing” in which to think about it, and the time frame was also somewhat shorter, being invited in mid-winter and then on the plane in November for the first visit. For the second visit he had had three years to think about it! The trips re-opened a relationship with his camera but if he were ever given the opportunity to go a third time Sydney would like to make a film, the great digital media of our time.

## 7 Clare Plug 2006/07



### 7.1 Background

Clare Plug is a landscape artist residing in Hawke's Bay who uses the quilt medium to communicate her connection with and deep affection for this North Island coastal region. Her abstracted imagery of landscape uses a wide variety of fabrics, often hand-dyed, enabling her to convey illusions of forms that capture the imagination of the viewer.

Clare has a long-time fascination with the Antarctic and applied to Antarctica New Zealand in 2005. "I have now developed the necessary breadth and depth of technical & creative design skills, and the exhibition experience, to tackle the challenge of creating an original and distinctive series of works inspired by this new environment. I will be able to clearly convey the additional subtext of associated ecological themes. Particularly as Antarctica is a place for which I already hold a longstanding fascination. My background in science (B Sc Hons in Zoology) will also help me to achieve this. I now have a sufficient national and international reputation in my field to assist Antarctica NZ in achieving some of its goals for the Artists to Antarctica program." (Plug 2005 application form)

Clare travelled to Antarctica in October 2006 as an Arts Fellow in the company of Joyce Campbell and Neil Dawson, who was the invited artist that year. The trip took place earlier than usual due to the forthcoming visit of dignitary visitors later that year.

### 7.2 Preparation

Plugs' journey to Antarctica began four to five years earlier when at a quilt exhibition where she won an award, Antarctica New Zealand staff spoke to her of how evocative it was for them and

the seeds of going to Antarctica were sown. Plug says she read and read and “the family were seriously over the “A” word”, although her zoology degree had previously taught her quite a lot about Antarctica.

Once accepted, she continued to read everything she could as she wanted to do it justice. As the time approached she got fitter as she wanted to be able to cope with the field training; her biggest fear was how she might deal with the cold. “I watched the temperatures daily on the webcam.” She later related that the clothing was so good that it was not a problem at all in spite of the time of year.

Plug took quite a lot of backup-plan material in case they could not get out at all, including material ) and different materials [fabrics] that I could have played with if we were unable to leave base for prolonged periods”. At home she experimented with new fabrics and new dyes, introducing blue. She was inspired by the sledging flags that the early explorers carried with them and she carried out a lot of research in this area.

As part of the application process Plug had already named her project “Layers of Protection” and therefore had a definite focal point, but knew also that this could evolve in any direction as a response to the landscape during her visit. Her application form states

I fervently believe that as New Zealanders we all need to be regularly reminded how Antarctica, both the continental landmass and atmosphere above it, and the Southern Ocean that surrounds it, is a unique place;  
for the treasures and mysteries it holds,  
the information it yields about the past, and also  
in helping us understand the future of our world.

Antarctica seems to me to be a “time capsule”, an “ark” and an “early warning station” all in one, and I hope to convey various aspects of this, the history and the science, in my artworks.

My object in choosing this particular theme for my project is to show how vitally important protection and continued study of this unique place is. (Plug 2005 application form)

### 7.3 Experiences in Antarctica

Plug says continually how much of a privilege it was to travel to the Antarctica. One of the highlights for her was the sharing of times and ideas with other Arts Fellows Joyce Campbell and Neil Dawson, the latter being an invited artist. “The plus of having Joyce Campbell there was that she took ages taking photographs so we had much longer in various locations than we might otherwise have done.” The artists had arranged by email to support Campbell by carrying all her equipment, and the sharing of ideas obviously became a huge positive too.

She found Antarctica to be a very “textiley” place, with the flags marking the way, the tents, the sledging flags, the national flags of the countries. She found the people aspect of flags intriguing too.

Plug loved Scott Base; “the people were so welcoming and supportive of anything we asked and/or needed.” She enjoyed being with the scientists and she found that her own science did come through in her art. Plug says with profound conviction, “I found my own voice in Antarctica.”

She found it hard not to be overwhelmed by Antarctica and she did not really begin to process deeply until she was back at home. She recorded information in a notebook for working with and also made sound recordings in readiness for her future exhibition. Otherwise she did just try to absorb.

She felt Antarctica has an astonishing feeling: “it is such an amazing place, glistening and glistening, the melted ice, dripping and oozing, it was all completely spectacular.” She loved the

light, the beautiful shadows. “The light in the pressure ridges was extraordinary.” The sun was golden and in the second week it did not set at night so they experienced a time of transition of the seasons. Black and white for them was strongly contrasted at that time of year.

“We had an opportunity to camp out with the scientists at Razor Back Island – that was extraordinary, and a real highlight of the trip. It was fantastic to be able to share information. I have a science degree background too and so the exchange of ideas was interesting – the scientists were fascinated by the different way in which artists view things.”

Plug was delighted to have the opportunity to visit all three historic huts, the Andrill site to see what the scientists were investigating, and the Dry Valleys by helicopter and out to the edge of the Central Plateau. On the return journey they called in at Misty Sound where there was a fantastic ice sculpture. She says she felt constantly grateful for the opportunities. “I would love a second visit!”

## 7.4 Exhibition Outcomes and Ongoing Influence

Having done so much preparation work, Plug carefully planned how she wanted her exhibition as a result of the trip to evolve. It was important for her that the whole experience came through to her viewers and to that end she created a whole installation at the Hawke’s Bay Art Gallery and Museum, including sound. She also wanted to provide an environment where learning could take place and so a series of lectures funded by the Royal Society accompanied the exhibition. She started by planning the scope of the exhibition as a whole before refining the details. A large space was required for what she had in mind and a digital soundscape was put together by her husband Arie from recordings made whilst in Antarctica. Attention to detail was important right down to signage and text panels being correct. The total overall experience was what was important.

The exhibition was called “Layers of Protection”. Plug wished to convey to the audience that Antarctica already had its own layers of protection, the cold, the altitude, darkness, the thick layer of ice and rock and the extreme dryness of the desert that it is. Plug also wished to convey the fragility and vulnerability of the continent, and many of the materials she used were organza like and hung beautifully from the roof.

Plug says that the funding received from Antarctica New Zealand was crucial in helping to make the exhibition happen, as all the materials for creating her works alone cost more than the funding. She worked on her exhibition for twenty months, part time and then full time towards the end.

Red wind-whipped flags in the front window of the Hawke's Bay Museum and Art Gallery in Napier, New Zealand, drills the power of Antarctic weather into the mind before the viewer even enters Clare Plug's show *Look South* (on display through November 1). Plug's mostly abstract textiles evoke the grandeur, natural forces, desolation, strength and vulnerability of Antarctica. These are not quilts for keeping warm under. Stitch, discharge, devoré, appliqué and painting cohere to summon place and past and to remind us of climate-change effects now and in the future. Cracks in the ice may occur every summer, but more of them and larger chunks of the ice shelves breaking off are signs that all is not well with our planet. The still, dark, calm and eerie soundscape (produced by Arie Plug from recordings Clare made in Antarctica) inside the gallery create a sombre mood, acknowledging lives lost in the pursuits of adventure and science and warning us of calamities to come. (Malthus 2009) This exhibition was followed by another joint one, *Ice Crack* at the Dowse Museum in 2008. Plug said, “I would love to take my ideas from it still further. Without question I have stepped up my ideas and output to meet the exhibition. I went further than I realized it was possible for me to go, from the beautiful materials I used eg the organza for the flags and the different techniques that I developed to create falling walls of ice. I loved people’s reactions to it and I had a lovely journey

with old Antarcticans who felt I had got the feel of it – and from a perspective often that they would not have considered.”

## 7.5 Reflections on the Fellowship

Commenting on Antarctica New Zealand’s current policy of the Arts Fellowships being by invitation only, Plug sees this as being a pity, as their cohort of one invited artist and one who applied made for a great mix. She sees a danger that only having invited artists will give a skewed angle to the collection of Antarctica New Zealand art in the longer term. “It seems to be that the artists being taken now are more commercial and perhaps they are missing out on some great artists and art because of this approach” She also commented that it is a shame there is no longer an artists’ program to the Auckland Islands the Department of Conservation used to have one available at one stage.

## 8 Peter James Smith 2009/10



My telephone interview with this artist was somewhat unsatisfactory because cut short by the artist’s need to catch a plane flight. He stipulated the date and time I was to phone him so the lack of sufficient time was unfortunately out of my control.

### 8.1 Background

Peter James Smith is a Melbourne-based New Zealander who was until recently Professor of Mathematics and Art at RMIT University with a science PhD and a Master’s degree in Fine Art. Smith’s career has spanned thirty years over both mathematics and science and painting and he has recently retired to pursue full-time his love of painting. His combining of both science and maths is iconic of all Smith’s work; statistics, mathematical equations, mythology, references to human endeavour and religion come together to portray how our world is made up and the interrelationships between these very different ways humans make sense of it. In an artist’s statement reported on the Milford Galleries website Smith explains, “My work gathers together phases of scientific endeavour by placing data, text, references and graffiti across an illusionistic visual field. The gathering of data, codes, signifiers and histories into a current woven text is a particularly post-modern stance. It provides the artist with a curator’s brief. It sits well with the scientist who creates new work by formally referencing the pioneering work of others in the field. In this sense scientists don’t ‘appropriate’, they build on the past.” (Smith,

2000)

Smith travelled to Antarctica in 2009/10 at the invitation of Antarctica New Zealand. This trip resulted in the exhibitions *L I G H T... at the crossing* (Flinders Lane Gallery Melbourne, 2011) and *Windless Bight* (Milford Galleries Dunedin, 2012), and the experience has gone on to influence both the man and his art since.

## 8.2 Preparation

As an invited artist one does not have to go through the application process. Similarly to Sydney, Smith felt incredibly privileged to have been asked and coming with that was a sense of responsibility to provide New Zealand with a legacy of his journey. Smith focused on ideas of the science taking place in Antarctica, the history that has evolved over the past century and the interplay between the two, and the spiritual aspect as well.

Smith took drawing materials, having learned of the difficulties of the cold experienced by other artists whilst down on the ice. An aspect that he found overwhelming was all the preparation around the clothing and what to wear when and all the dressing up, and that was even before one had boarded the flight!

## 8.3 Experiences in Antarctica

Smith's visit to Antarctica was for ten days' duration. "I found it quite tough going down there, there was just so much to take in." He found the whole overwhelming both to the senses and as a person; just being in that environment was all-consuming. Smith was in Antarctica with writer Owen Marshall. He recounted that they moved around a lot and had fantastic opportunities provided for them by Antarctica New Zealand. They visited the areas around Hut Point Peninsula including all the huts. Smith was intrigued by the Erebus Ice Tongue and the way it flows out onto the Ice Shelf, the complexity of it from a scientist's perspective, and he would have liked to have much longer to visit this area. For him though the highlight was visiting the hut at Winter Quarters Bay. It was here that he felt he had stepped back in time as it was authentic; nothing had been restored, "there was nothing fettered about it and the smell invaded the nostrils. It was unused and very finite." For Smith there was a notion of completeness about this hut and its atmosphere. He feels that Shackleton's hut which has been totally restored has lost something because of it. Smith would have loved also to have the opportunity to go to the Dry Valleys.

When asked about the personal difficulties encountered in that environment Smith says, "The challenges for me were that my paintings are very dark and for me to incorporate the whiteness of Antarctica and allow that to come through was not easy." He recorded what he saw by drawing; he has previously stated, "It is by gathering data that we come to know the world." For Smith the information from all the different perspectives of being in that vast open space translated into very spiritual works, combining all the aspects of his experiences.

## 8.4 Exhibition Outcomes

Following his visit to Antarctica Smith produced a large body of work which followed with exhibitions both in Australia and New Zealand. In particular his 2012 exhibition *Windless Bight* at the Milford Galleries, Dunedin, with the paintings in "notebook" style, exemplify what arose for Smith on his Antarctic visit. Wanting to portray a sense of time passing and address the aspect of the human narrative on the continent, he chose to paint his canvases using a notebook format. The mathematical aspect of the forces in Antarctica being continually at play come across strongly, combined with the sombre aspects of the history of the prior century and all that has come to pass. Maps, postcards and religious symbols give depth to this portrayal. The numbers and mathematics relate to the actuality of now. "His works celebrate a sublime sense

of possibility and the excitement of discovery, charting the desire for progress born of scientific invention and enquiry, and creating a space for the imagination. Still life and landscape images are balanced by strong mark making and text. A revelatory light illuminates the painted scenes referencing the heightened colours and texts of early 20th century postcards.” (Flinders Lane Gallery, 2011 ) The inscription and overwriting in his works “takes up the personalising process of an endearment written in a book given as a gift.” (Armstrong, 2011)

The paintings are still dark; as Smith has already pointed out, he found it difficult to “deal with all that white”. He combines the abstract of the painted landscapes with overlays of science, mathematics, religion and history. These layers of information give his paintings much to be pondered, and he builds up a narrative of thoughts evoked through his visit often related to one single event or moment in history. “Peter James Smith's combination of high Romanticism with science remains an outstanding personal style and achievement”. (McNamara, 2012)

The painting gifted to Antarctica New Zealand is entitled “B15” and relates to the iceberg which travelled north to New Zealand. Smith was fascinated by the drift of the currents and how by just travelling a bit further east the berg caught a different current and went further north. The painting depicts the spawning of the iceberg as well the information which “was able to be sourced from satellite images. I love graphs and I am fascinated by the polar currents.”

## 8.5 Ongoing Influence

The experience of visiting Antarctica was “life-changing”. It marked a point in Smith’s work where he began to look at light very differently, having experienced the subtleties and nuances of light there. “I am now painting different paintings – my dark paintings turned white-coloured!” Smith continues to be strongly influenced by the visit and has since planned his trip to the Sub-Antarctic Islands. He points out though that the mega-flora and -fauna of the southern islands are very different from the minimal landscapes of Antarctica. The exhibition *Under South, A History of Fugitive Marks* will show at the Bett Gallery in Hobart in May 2013. “As I said, it was life-changing, I am still making images of it and will continue to do so.”

Peter James Smith has achieved the Antarctica New Zealand objective of reaching a wide audience and continuing to do so. His works combining art and science are outstanding and the technique of using an artist’s notebook as part of the canvas conveys a wonderful sense of history and of time passing. The work owned by Antarctica New Zealand relating to the journey of the iceberg B15 hangs in the reception area and is very representative of Smith’s work. If staying in the conversation with Antarctic contacts is still part of Antarctica New Zealand’s measures of the success of the program, then Smith, who has recently travelled to the Sub-Antarctic Islands and is about to have a further exhibition of works relating to his Antarctic visit, has certainly achieved it.

## 9.0 Claire Beynon 2005 and 2008 (not an Antarctica New Zealand Arts Fellowship alumni)



### 9.1 Background

Claire Beynon was born and educated in South Africa and lives in Dunedin; she is a multi-media artist and poet who is extraordinarily passionate about Antarctica. A chance meeting with New York scientist Dr. Samuel Bowser led to Claire travelling to Antarctica as part of his team in 2005. They had met while Claire was in Christchurch for the opening of an exhibition of her work, and Bowser subsequently remembered and decided to include her as he could envisage linking science and art in a collaborative way.

The United States National Science Foundation funded her trip as a scientist and part of Bowser's research team. Beynon's experiences are interesting to study because she was with Bowser for ten weeks from October to December 2005 and was again able to visit for eight weeks in 2008. This is quite a different length of stay from that offered by the New Zealand program and without a doubt from Beynon's perspective this was critical in her being able to "benefit from a full-immersion experience in the Antarctic environment" (Beynon 2005).

I have chosen to include Beynon, as well as for the reasons given in 4.0 above, in part because her work is often in pastel as well as oils and this provides a different medium with which to portray Antarctica. Her work is very ethereal and has almost a floating quality. She is also a poet and has written widely since her visits to the ice.

### 9.2 Preparation

For Beynon's first visit to Antarctica she decided she did not want to do much preparation, in particular thinking or planning, as she did not want to have any preconceived ideas. This phenomenological approach allowed a different freedom for her and she relates, "I therefore had an experience that was raw and visceral" and she was very pleased to have had that initial visit where everything was so stark and new. She did however undertake some training to be able to help effectively as a field assistant to Bowser and the research team.

For her second visit she already had knowledge of the practical aspects from her previous visit so could plan extensively for what she was hoping to achieve. Underwater filming became a focus, in particular under the ice, and she relates that she produced “very different work after that second trip”.

### 9.3 Experiences in Antarctica

Beynon was funded as a field assistant to the scientists and so that was where her priorities lay. “My first commitment was to the sample sorting.” She holds a degree herself in Fine Arts and thoroughly enjoyed being in the field and working alongside the scientists. She had taken a camera and a few artists’ materials, and was grateful to have the camera especially at the beginning when the science team was busy on their various projects. It enabled her to capture moments as they arose when there was not time for drawing. During her two-month tenure Beynon immersed herself in the beautiful ice continent, exploring its wide spaces and also its tiny organisms. Phenomena that captured her creative imagination included the “negative spaces between landforms, the uninhabited spaces and the dynamics of space”. She became entranced in the minutiae that they encountered and this beauty continues to capture her imagination to this day.

Beynon’s first Antarctic field training was a baptism of fire, or rather ice, as the weather was “the worst Sam had seen in twenty-five years”. They experienced a wind chill factor of minus 89°C that night. She found the specialist clothing fantastic but October is cold and keeping hands warm for photographing was a constant battle early in the season. As scientists they went “where the science took us” and this included Explorers’ Cove, New Harbor and the Bay of Sails. One of the reasons Bowser included her in his team was because he had been travelling and studying in Antarctica for twenty-five years and he felt an artist could bring a new perspective; he told her, “I want someone like you to see with new eyes, to reopen the doors to the wonder of this place.” Bowser and Beynon were later to exhibit collaboratively, science and art combining to produce a wonderful exhibition inspired by their Antarctic discoveries.

Beynon found the twenty-four hour daylight wonderful and she loved being able to wander around in the middle of the night when the light was often so different. “People think Antarctica is white, but it’s not. The colour emerges slowly. You get these rich and vibrant violets and then the palest pinks.” (Beynon 2007) For her it was also the sounds, the sound of the ice cracking; the ice had its a voice and she loved that. “The wind also had its own voice and this later gave rise to drawings entitled “Katabatic”. She found one was constantly aware of the vastness of the continent: “I think I learned that Antarctica is powerful. You submit to it. If you listen to the silence, you can hear her groaning and whispering.”

Above all though, what really captured her imagination was the beauty of the microorganisms. She found, viewing them under the microscope, that they had an extraordinary beauty. Together with Bowser they came up with the idea of reducing down microscope slides to one centimetre, separating the tones on the glass slides and finally etching them onto the glass slide, the whole being recorded under a microscope. This was a part of a three-year project.

### 9.3 Outcomes

Exhibitions of Antarctic work include *not EMPTY not SILENT not WHITE* in 2006 at the Art House, Christchurch, and the following year *Where There Is Ice, There is Music* at the Diversion Gallery in Picton. The works were a result of her first trip to Antarctica and utilise a wide range of media as well as her poetry. Beynon’s work embraces all aspects of her Antarctic experiences, from the wider landscape to the microscopic, as mentioned above. For this exhibition, as well as her better-known pastel work she included several other media including ink and gesso on paper and acrylic and wax on canvas. One work in particular “This Fragile Earth” takes an intimate view of the myriad colours of the ice at various stages of solidity,

printed in archival inks and worked with pastel to create a meditative mandala implying the lens of the microscope. “After the scientists had finished with the tiny forms the artist took some of the material outside and using tweezers laid them onto the ice like fine drawings, photographed these and incorporated them into the work.” (Diversion Gallery, 2007). Beynon used cotton threads in this work and several others, suggesting paths or ways the ice.

As part of this exhibition Beynon also produced a limited edition book titled *Open Book* in which are contained her poems. These works evolved from the notebook she kept during her trip to Antarctica in 2005. The exhibition comprised a substantial body of work.

Following her second trip she exhibited jointly with Sam Bowser in New York, creating an installation called *InterfaCE*. This work was extraordinary in its scope and showed the images produced from scientific collaborative endeavours. Another exhibition, *Boat Meditation*, followed time spent with Kaiser and Harper, “I was fortunate to share the 2008 season with two divers who are also professional underwater film-makers, Henry Kaiser and Shawn Harper. We talked at length about what it was I wanted to communicate via these boats and their curious underwater voyage – namely, something common to all of us, a kind of visual poem considering the things that connect rather than divide us, highlighting the magnificent earth we inhabit, our independent and shared life journeys.” This became a journey in itself exemplifying the collaboration that Beynon deems so important in life. (Beynon, 2012)

## 9.4 Ongoing Influence

Beynon says that for her the return to New Zealand at the end of her trips required a major readjustment. From the moment of stepping off the plane she was struck by “the textures of everything, the texture of the air, the texture of the temperature, and the smell of the soil and the green. This was quite a shock for me.”

For her, without a doubt, the full immersion opportunities provided on both her trips have carried through and “permeated my life in so many ways, it has altered it on many levels and the resonances of Antarctica continue to inform my work. It has been life-changing, it touched my whole being.” Beynon says she will draw on these experiences of the rest of her life. In particular she found the rhythm of working with the scientists was unique. “To survive we depended on each other, to work we depended on each other, it was all collaborative, we were operating as one organism, the strength was truly in the group collaboration.”

Beynon continues to produce art and poetry inspired by Antarctica and is often invited to speak publicly about her experiences, the collaboration and how this has impacted on her life. Beynon and Bowers’ work together epitomises what is possible in real consilience between the arts and the sciences.

## 10.0 Conclusion

The Antarctic artists’ programmes have been subject to comprehensive evaluations from time to time, in order to ensure that the program is achieving what is outlined by Antarctica New Zealand. The following are criteria used for measuring success:

1. The degree to which the artists have continued to produce Antarctic-influenced work
2. The level to which they maintain contact with each other
3. The way in which they have supported the program by encouraging other artists to submit applications
4. The way in which scientists working in Antarctica are recognizing the work the artists are doing (refer Artists to Antarctica report to Creative NZ (Antarctica New Zealand 2003).

Against all the above measures the programme has been deemed to be a great success. The artists interviewed generally continued to “think about Antarctica” often, drawing on their experiences for their art works. Many have remained in touch, and some were even collaborating for future exhibitions and installations.

From the interviews that took place between myself and the artists, I would agree completely that the artists all met the measures outlined above. I was inspired by their commitment to and enthusiasm for all “things Antarctic”. Without exception my interviewees were all very keen and happy to talk with me, help out and answer any questions and I was almost humbled by how much they chose to share of their experiences with someone they (apart from Margaret Elliot) have never met.

The idea of sending artists to Antarctica in order to document and bring back visual information from the continent for others is as old as Antarctic exploration itself. As soon as New Zealand became a permanent political presence in Antarctica in 1957 following International Geophysical Year artists began to travel south with scientists, although it was initially mainly the military that provided the artists. The advent of the United States program led the way for other countries to create Arts Fellow programs and New Zealand adopted the idea of having an application process when Antarctica New Zealand was formed. The circumstances in which artists have visit Antarctica has now gone back to an invitation-only program, with mixed reception from the artists.

Artists value the program and there are those who feel that in order to keep the standard high it necessitates invitation-only, whilst others feel that Antarctica New Zealand might well be missing out on outstanding talent from young enthusiastic up-and-coming artists. Whatever is deemed to be the best process is almost irrelevant, as the most important aspect of the artists’ program must be provide Antarctica New Zealand above all else with a high profile for all its activities to as wide an audience as possible. The New Zealand Government maintains Scott Base and its national presence in Antarctica for international political and strategic reasons as well as for science and culture. That presence in Antarctica is important and the wider public who essentially fund the program expect the art to be of a good standard.

On reaching a decision about whom I should study I had already decided to stay principally with painters, but on further researching I was impressed by the diversity of the artists who have travelled to the ice as part of this program over the years. In particular, having chosen painters, it was noticeable that in recent times there have been fewer overall who have been invited; this is also true of the Australian program where again the diversity of the artists has been wide. What has impressed me particularly though is the number of collaborative exhibitions, installations and performances that have taken place throughout New Zealand. Some of the artists interviewed feel though that in some instances there is not enough permanence attached to the output.

Of the artists reviewed the outstanding revelation for me has been discovering the level of consilience taking place in Antarctica. The interest of the artists in the science and scientists in the artists has been inspiring, and is most exemplified in the works of Peter James Smith and the international collaboration between Claire Beynon and Sam Bowser. All the artists even if not actually working with the scientists enjoyed their interactions with them, found their projects fascinating and could envisage ways of incorporating that into their art works.

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