Graduate Certificate in Antarctic Studies
2000-2001

Major Project

Visual Expressions of the
Inner Antarctic Journey

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Introduction

Initially, as Bill Manhire says in his latest book of essays, Antarctica had its origins as an aesthetic concept, a "Terra Incognita", necessary to balance the continents of the Northern Hemisphere. Antarctica had its origins as an idea rather than an actual place. This project attempts to present some of the ideas relating to Antarctic in a visual way. It consists of the presentation, through different mediums, of the interaction between the traveler and the Antarctic environment. It will involve the expression of experiences, thoughts and feelings leading up to departure, the actual experience and reflection upon return. It will present the ideas and thoughts of a traveler before leaving for the ice and then contrast these with the actual experience in a way that can be appreciated by people from all walks of life. The development of the Antarctic experience will be recorded.
Before
Antarctica – Fears and Desires, an oil painting

Feelings of excitement and apprehension are illustrated in this first oil painting. My thoughts and feelings towards the southern continent have been shaped by the never-ending bombardment of images experienced over the years. Television programmes displayed images of cute seals lounging on sea ice and hoards of penguins huddled together in a vast, surreal landscape of ice and snow. My idea of Antarctica has been shaped by these images, from television and Antarctic exhibits. This is the Antarctica I feared I would experience.

In contrast to this rather cynical view, is a pure and romantic idea of Antarctica. This vision remains untouched and unspoiled by what television and Antarctic ‘experiences’ have thrown at me. I could still conjure up images of Antarctica as a vast, wild and unspoilt place. This is the Antarctica I hoped to experience.

This painting therefore consists of my romantic idealism of Antarctica as a wild and untouched wilderness that melds with my cynical vision of Antarctica as a commercialized land consisting of polystyrene icebergs.
Poetry
A Land Locked Safe in Ice

There are words inadequate.
How many could be used?
To describe,
something so vast,
empty,
white.

If I could create more,
perhaps, I could describe
the wide-eyed, passionate people,
who’ve been,
and returned,
from a place of ice,
of snow,
and stretching sky.

No longer wrapped in frenzy,
but calm, serene.
How could they tell us what they have seen?
With inadequate words.
Empty,
Unframed,
Frostbitten.

Their memories now secure.
Safe in photos, in poems.
Reminders of a land,
Locked safe in ice.
Frostbitten,
Pristine,
Cold.
Scott Was a Tourist Too

How would Scott react
to the measures
to restore,
maintain,
and catalogue
his little weather beaten hut?
That he and his men
huddled in and shared a cup of tea,
a laugh..
Before beginning,
their death march.

How would Scott have felt,
at the efforts taken
to restore history?
Artifacts?
Rubbish?
Could he have imagined,
what awaited?

Could he have envisioned,
(as he sipped his choysa tea)
12 tourists stumbling in,
chattering, snapping,
packed snugly into the room
into their bright yellow and blue coats.
Huddled around.
Stark contrast with the mix of browns inside

What would they say to each other?
Their accents thick.
hanging on icy breath.
Would they stare confused,
open mouthed at one another,
words frozen in their throats

Perhaps,
he would have blended in so well,
at the head of his table,
in his little hut,
that he would be simply regarded,
as part of the exhibit.
During
Watercolours

During the trip I was inspired by the subtlety of shades and tints. I have attempted to capture these this with the two watercolours painted during a white out. I have not often painted in watercolours and so this is special for me. I found this an effective way of representing the Antarctica landscape due to the subtly of shading and texture given by watercolours. The landscape leant itself to watercolours well.

Poetry

The poetry represents some of the most vivid sensual impressions. Sight, smell and sound. I was extremely inspired to write while I was on the ice. The poetry is heavily weighted in the actual experience of being in Antarctica due to inspiration.
Poetry
Hagglund Dreams

Traveling past huge cliffs of ice.
100m high.
That drop
Sheer cliffs
Down to the slippery, salty, sea ice below.

Seals lounge
As huge black shapes in the distance.
Dark slugs
In the white of the snow.

Penguins!
Adieles on the ice
Insects.
They scatter like fleas
Across the ice.
Shapes

Antarctica.

The vast expanse.
Flat
To the unseeing eye

A land of contrast.
of texture.
Subtle shapes,
rise out of the landscape.
For those who take the time to look.

The snow twinkles.
Bright stars.
As if to make up for their lack

Ice
Huge tabular blocks
Cylindrical stalactites
Hexagonal ice
So large it forms spiraling ice formations
in its reach for the ground.

Mountains in the distance
are pyramid shapes
As the sun passes over them
Continuing its ever cyclical shape

Pentagonal sea ice,
is broken and battered by currents unseen.

A land of no perspective.
Loves to fool you,
Large scale shapes
Are echoed in the small,
As if the land could not bear
Discontinuity.
Impressions

In the ice caves
frozen nostrils
make each breath crispy
air crunches through noses

Frozen breath,
Hangs like a cloud
For a second,
Wisps, drifts and disappears

Clouds outside drift silently by
Nunatuks poking through
Appear to float
In a colourless liquid

Mountains hang as if on strings
In this colourless pool of ice
A slim brushstroke
Swiped across the horizon
Sounds

Sewoomp
Crunch
Sewoomp
Crunch

Sounds of mukluks in the snow.

Crisp
Crisp
Crisp
Crisp

Crampons on the sea ice.

Crackle
Snap
Crackle
Snap

Walking on honeycomb textured ice.

No birds to wake us up,
No traffic going by.
These sounds echo,
Amplified by the silence
That stretches all around.
Silence

The mountains frown upon us
A great grandfather,
Frowning.
We should be seen and not heard

Silence suits the openness.

This is a place where we do not belong.

Every footprint leaves a mark,
unerased.
Every track a sword slash,
across the breast,
through the heart of the whiteness
The Toilet Tent

Awakening at 3am.
That knowing dread creeps in.
For a while you lie,
Eyes squeezed shut,
Pretending.

Defeated, you pull on
The ten items of clothing
And, stumbling in untied shoes (frozen)
Eyes red and blurred,
You stomp in the blinding sunlight,
To that tent at the end of the row

The cold, like a small dog,
Nips and yips at your ankles.
Drives you on.
Falling to knees,
And fighting the tent door,
You drag yourself through the small opening
Past the puddle on the doormat.

With luck
You can get back to your tent
Before the cold lays its’ teeth in too deeply.
And clamber over tent mate,
To scramble into your sleeping bag like a contortionist.
Ramming your feet down, you find,
It has twisted and tied into knots!

Finally, snug again
Like a larva in its cocoon,
Closed eyes
And drift
Relaxed in the knowledge,
That the fight is over,
And will not need to be fought again,
For at least a few hours.............
Subtle

Subtle shade and tints,
I recognise the beauty,
the terror,
of white, on white, on white.

It extends,
from white out conditions
to the time the sun peaks through the clouds
and casts slight shadows on the landscape,
-enough to gain definition.

I have seen shades shift
from dark sky to light.
across the horizon.
I have held a snowflake in my hand,
caressing the snow with frozen gloves.
Touched ice crystals
hanging
inside the heart of a glacier.

I have watched seal pups perform
for me?
Penguins scatter over the ice
like tiny skittles bowled by the wind.
I have been inspired by the beauty of this place
an oil painting,
untouched.
Cruelty

Leaving.

This morning my heart broke.
I felt,
as I climbed the steps of the herc,
and lost physical touch with the land,
an icy hand reach
and take hold of me.

How can a land,
So subdued,
serene and beautiful,
Be so fierce in its hold on me?

How bitter, unforgiving and cruel
is this land,
that entices you to love it,
And then banishes you forever from its shores.
Going Home

Now, brown, weather beaten, burnt
We huddle in corners,
On ledges,
On boxes,
Again contorting our bodies in the battle for comfort.

Everything inside - green
walls
curtains
toilet.

Even the cargo handler
Who rest his legs,
as he sleeps,
On a green duffel bag.

He looks as if he would disappear into it.
Melting, molding together.

The mad rush to get everything done,
At the expense of sleep,
Over.
No matter how much resisted,
The time of departure came

Now sleeping, dreaming
Of colour,
Of smells,
Look out the window,
For the first time - no ice!
Only ocean.
Time to go home.
Reflection
On return, I was not inspired to write much poetry. Instead I concentrated on developing paintings and charcoals from the sketches and photos I took while on the ice. This part of my project consists of 2 watercolours and three charcoals as well as the main oil painting. The oil painting represents the most vivid visual impression that I experienced on the ice. Antarctica is an extremely complex and vast landscape. It is hard to contain it. My painting is an attempt to frame the unframable and contain something uncontainable. It is a simple piece called “Ice” and shows the subtly, simplicity and beauty of ice. It represents how I could manage the landscape - in small pieces.
**Hagglunds**

I am remembering Hagglunds
Huge beasts of burden
They seemed to growl

They charge across the snow
Traveling in packs,
Not straying.

Chewing the landscape.
Chewing the snow.
Sending it flying through the air.