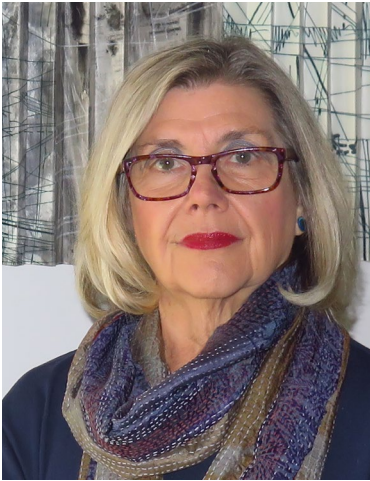


Polar Expressions

Q&A with Sandra Meech



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Specific locations feature prominently in your work. Tell us how travel influences your art.

The first real adventure was a visit to Arctic Canada, to Baker Lake and Rankin Inlet, after research done for a Textile Diploma course here in the UK. During the Diploma I specialized in traditional and modern textiles from these two northern communities as I researched both the making of Caribou skin clothing and the contemporary appliqué and embroidered wall hangings they make today. The first collection of Arctic inspired art and stitched textile pieces began from 1996 as art quilts. This began my passion for ice and the polar regions.

By 2005/2006 I had travelled to Iceland and became fascinated by glaciers and icebergs as they were melting. The compacted marks in the ice melting at my feet on a black lava shoreline in the icebox of Jokulsarlon inspired a series of textile pieces. This aspect of 'the melt' mixed with increasing reports of climate change in these northern regions now became the prominent focus of my future art and stitch projects.

The biggest influence from travel in Polar Expressions came in 2016 with a trip to Antarctica. Although the evidence of melting ice was not as obvious as in the Arctic, there were now many more news reports about enormous shelves of ice showing signs of breaking away from the White Continent. My textile work continued to show photography, but I was also creating more paintings inspired by that trip. I continue to transfer these images onto cotton, layer and machine stitch. Memories of that trip, sketchbooks, diary writings and photography as an aide-memoire, continues to inspire more work based on these Polar regions.

What is the last trip you took?

In 2017 we have travelled to Namibia-- a total contrast of color, climate, landscape, culture, and ecology.

The three regions I am emotionally invested in are Canada (the country of my birth), Britain (where I have lived here most of my life), and the Polar regions. Although the places I have been fortunate to visit have been rich in cultures and landscapes, I am not tempted to do pieces of work based on most of my travel destinations. My journeys inspire sketchbooks, paintings, and hundreds of photos but this will be as far as I take it. This is a personal decision for me. If I became fundamentally attached to a certain place over many visits and experiences, then perhaps I might feel I had earned the right to explore it as a theme in my own art.

You seem to be drawn to ice in a way that many people would be attracted to beaches and tropical islands. What do you find so captivating?

I come from Burlington, Ontario, so I was used to cold, icy winters and I could walk to Hamilton Bay (the western tip of Lake Ontario) which in my childhood would freeze over completely. Cars drove on the ice and we safely skated on it. Then, for many years living in the UK (with moderate winters) I had never been on a frozen lake again until I walked on Baker Lake in Nunavut. It was a memorable walk for me as the ice was around 3-4' thick but I could hear it crack under my feet. The patterns on the ice were captivating and the silence was something I had never experienced. Ice then became quite a fascinating 'living' natural entity for me. Visiting the ice bay of Jokulsarlon in Iceland full of glacier fed, melting ice-

bergs, became an inspiration. I became captivated by the ancient ice melting at my feet and that memory remains with me still.

In Antarctica it was the sheer size and presence of the icebergs in all of their forms-- enormous flat tabular icebergs that were up to a half mile long as well as amazing huge formations with around one-tenth above water. What lies beneath?

I love the colour of compacted ice and the marks and the shapes it forms. This could be a body of work entirely on its own. What is being revealed in all parts of the world as glaciers retreat at such a fast speed because of climate change is another aspect of melting that is of great concern. The melting ice in Antarctica has revealed evidence of fossils-- ammonites and the remnants of subterranean rainforests that once grew in Antarctica.

What is your planning process for a work?

Most of my planning comes together at the sketchbook stage. I have always researched a subject by making notes, collecting articles, jotting down ideas in a little notebook (with me all the time) and capturing images. I like to have a visual idea of what the end result might look like from the start.

Do you use a sketchbook?

YES. Sketchbooks are often pages of collages of black and white or paint washed images mixed with marks, line drawings and writings, - the words are sometimes what I feel or observe and sometimes some scientific facts that I have read. More recently the sketchbooks have been watercolor and acrylic abstracted paintings of the landscapes I see with marks and notations. As a starting point, I enjoy working into either my own handmade books or the accordion format sketchbooks.