

Lisa Bloom, *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022. 288 pages. ISBN 978-1-4780-2324-1. \$27.95 USD paperback.

Lisa Bloom's *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic* moves readers to consider and reconsider a topic Bloom has long critically analyzed and discussed: gender and inequity in the polar regions. Bloom's new text offers a sweeping analysis of a range of artistic media (film, photography, multi-media, literature, drawing, carving, among other forms) across both poles, but works to privilege voices that aren't often at the center. Bloom's book is part contemporary supplement to her 1993 germinal text *Gender on Ice* (U of Minnesota P), and part survey of crucial interventions of new polar media. *Gender on Ice* continues to be influential in its insistence upon critically understanding how machinations of masculinity, as it is entwined with nationalist science, is enacted in particular ways in polar regions especially through the lens of the discovering and conquering male hero. However, unlike her 1993 text, Bloom's 2022 monograph is dedicated to a reality of the Earth's poles: the effects of a changing climate.

From the outset, Bloom takes up key topics of “gender, sexuality, race, and the relations of the human to the nonhuman (p.1)” as entwined with various “nationalisms, empire, and globalizing capitalism (p.1)” in the Arctic and Antarctica. Bloom recounts that she has witnessed academic interests in icy places explode because of anthropogenic climate change, a set of interrelated processes that has caused its own set of destructive explosions to the environment across the globe. For Bloom, mainstream journalism and academia had previously understood the polar regions simply as “uninhabited so-called wastelands” and as not immediately consequential to normative lives and ways of living. Now, however, those same news outlets take regular and surging notice of polar places and the often grave consequences they might release on the world through melt and through planet climate dysregulation. In the same moment, however, Bloom refuses a dominant narrative that “equates climate change with apocalyptic spectacles of melting ice and desperate polar bears, and green capitalism with masculinist imagery of sublime wilderness and imperial heroics (p.2).” Instead, Bloom centers art, photography, and film that takes a more critical approach to polar aesthetics—an approach that finds fault at the “social roots in colonialism and capitalism (p.2).” This monograph does not deny the reality of a changing climate and the changing landscapes of polar places, but it looks to disrupt a dominant narrative of decline and doom to center more nuanced and complicated stories of a changing North and South pole.

Disasters of climate change have not only changed the material world but have also changed the artistic practices produced to make sense of those alterations. Artists, intellectuals, writers, and thinkers more generally are responding to the transformations happening the world over. For the Arctic and Antarctic in particular, a range of new polar representations have bloomed in the heat. *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics* has its finger on the pulse of those new productions and reproductions and devotes attention in large part toward artistic renderings of Black, Indigenous, and feminist creators. In several chapters Bloom devotes time to thinking through contemporary Black and Indigenous productions about polar places. I will focus in this review solely on those chapters.

“Reclaiming the Arctic Through Feminist and Black Aesthetic Perspectives” is the second chapter of the book and takes up work by Katja Aglert and Isaac Julien. This chapter troubles the dominating thematic of the Heroic Age that Bloom attended to in *Gender on Ice*. Bloom writes that this problematizing work is achieved through the centering of subjectivities that were disallowed during those time periods of exploration and knowledge production about the poles—namely, women-identifying folks and African Americans. Algert’s work, Bloom argues, lays bare the acts of failure of men and their tests of masculinity in polar places by focusing centrally on the very acts of failure many of these explorers worked tirelessly to veil and to cover from public view. In addition to exposing and luxuriating in male failure, Algert also inserts people who identify as women into the Arctic landscape in her work to further destabilize the overwhelming historical presence men have had on icy locales. In the second half of the chapter, Bloom discusses the artistic production of Isaac Julien. Specifically, Bloom is interested in his film *True North*. Julien’s work centers Matthew Henson, an African American explorer who was onboard seven trips to discover the North Pole but whose contributions are only just now being celebrated. One is more likely to find Robert Peary named in the historical records than Henson. In Bloom’s analysis, she writes that Julien demonstrates how “The suffering that Henson endured was due less to the privations of the Arctic than to the racial hierarchies that Peary reproduced (p.74).” This is an important pivot away from the “severity” of Arctic climes as brutalizing, but instead the violence of racism is what more drastically shapes the experience of Henson among his white counterparts. Bloom argues that Julien is not working to remake or substitute the Arctic as instead a Heroic Black space. Julien actively and alternatively is aiming to represent a “contaminated sublime,” to “present a kind of trauma within the scenes” of the icy Arctic (p. 75).

Bloom allots two chapters to Indigenous responses to climate change in their homelands titled “At Memory’s Edge,” and “What is Unseen and Missing in the Circumpolar North: Contemporary Art and Indigenous Collaborative Perspectives.” The first discusses Arctic cinema by Zacharias Kunuk and Ian Mauro, and the second chapter gives close and newer attention to the late Indigenous artist, Annie Pootoogook. Pootoogook’s work is less discussed in the world of art criticism, and Bloom’s attention here to her work, and that of Lindsay Nixon’s engagement with Pootoogook is one of the most important offerings of this monograph. In her artwork, Pootoogook defied the traditional archetype of Indigenous Arctic art as she insisted on featuring the daily mundane artifacts and features of her life—not a sensational and expected landscape of the Arctic and Indigenous peoples. Bloom quotes Pootoogook who stated, “I didn’t see any igloos in my life...Only Skidoo, Honda, the house, and things inside the house (p.120).” Much like Julien who works against the dominant framing of the Arctic as one particular white, icy entity, Pootoogook drew images of domestic violence, interior scenes of boredom inside of her home, and images of still life like glasses and undergarments. Julien and Pootoogook then, respectively, insist against the notion that Blackness must be disruptive and that Indigeneity must be an authenticity-making force as they interface with the environment of the Arctic or Antarctic. Bloom quotes Nixon’s discussion of Pootoogook as Nixon reflects, “I never met Pootoogook but I missed her,” aligning the life-loss of Pootoogook and the art world’s inability to understand her brilliance. An all too familiar story of and for Native women, we miss the women who we know and will never have the chance to meet.

Throughout *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic*, Bloom brings her readers into a contemporary landscape of a changing polar

landscape, and the critical artistic reception that change brings. Each of the seven chapters offer a survey-like instruction of cutting-edge polar aesthetic work that thinks the changing environment and power relations together. Bloom's expertise and experience in polar places brings an important, sharp and keen eye to the modern iterations of gender and racial violence as they are enacted and unfold around the poles.

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