



ZELDA ZINN | Artist Statement

Bringing the Arctic Home

It is hard to consider the Arctic today without thinking about its history, and what The North has represented in the collective imagination. For centuries, it was the site of expeditions and often heartbreak, where so many men lost their lives in the quest of conquering the unknown and bringing glory to their homelands. What was the impulse that drove them to risk so much? I wondered about all they gave up for adventure: abundant heat and food, books, companionship, families, a sense of security, and so much more. They willingly traded all of this for a chance at being the first to see terra incognita, and to perhaps become part of history.

Seeing this barren, majestic land in person, I thought of those who kept the home fires burning, not knowing whether their loved ones were alive or dead. How did the families left behind cope with the uncertainty? How did they carry on?

I came back from the Arctic with small photos of a vast, unknowable place, full of frozen secrets, buried in the permafrost, glaciers, and water. Scant signs of life were visible. The immensity and strange stillness of the landscape were constant reminders of how small and impermanent we humans are. My tiny files were a result of mediating my experience with a camera to try to wrap my mind around what I was witnessing. My photos were an attempt to hold and hold on to this mind-bending place.

As a way to make sense of my experience and my pictures, I had a compulsion to combine reassuring traces of culture, of home, with these wild landscapes. This was a way for me to rationalize my relationship with the Arctic, to view it in human terms. I considered the comforting signs of domesticity: wall coverings and bedspreads, lace and art, and chose decorative patterns based on nature: birds, flowers, and vines, all signs of life in more hospitable climes. The hybrid landscapes combine interior and exterior, exotic and familiar as a framework for considering the Arctic anew.