

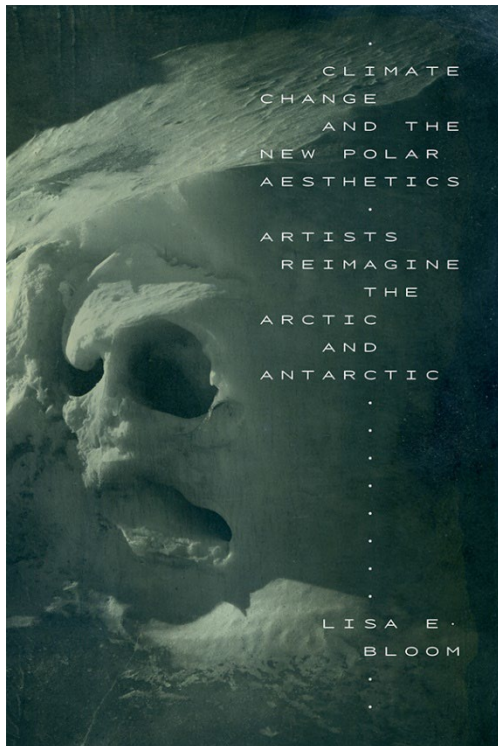
Review: Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics

by Lisa E. Bloom. Duke University Press, November 2022. 288 p. ill. ISBN 978-1-4780-2324-1 (pbk.), \$27.95. <https://dukeupress.edu/climate-change-and-the-new-polar-aesthetics>.

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Climate change has brought two seemingly disparate topics together. Interest in the Arctic can be traced back to Pytheas in the fourth century BCE. Ptolemy hypothesized about Antarctica in the first century CE. Writings on the climate date to the early nineteenth century. Yet, it is only now that the topics are being studied together, forecasting apocalyptic events in the foreseeable future.

But that is not how Lisa Bloom has chosen to write about climate change in the Arctic. In her 1993 book, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*, she discussed the popular press view. Here, Bloom takes a different approach, a political one which traces climate change back to “white masculinity, settler colonialism and capitalism, from the explorer culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the present,” contending that information about environmental destruction has been suppressed and kept from the public. *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics; Artists Reimagine the Arctic and the Antarctic*

Reimagine the Arctic and the Antarctic aims to redress this concern by showing that “feminist, queer, postcolonial and Indigenous artists articulate ways of responding to the climate crisis that differ markedly from those of their Western masculinist counterparts.”

To do so, Bloom organizes the book in three parts, first unveiling feminist, Inuit and Black points of view. Anne Noble’s photography critiques tourist photography, which often uses Antarctica’s extreme nature as a prop, ultimately erasing its reality.

In part two, she and section co-author Elena Glasberg relate how environmental art can create alternative data and visualization about the climate crisis. Isaac Julien, whose photographs present Blackness, argues against an old theory which contends that it is racially impossible for Black people to function in polar regions.

Part three of the book introduces art which focuses on worrisome topics like disappearing ice. Expounding on what she calls “countervisualizations,” Bloom talks about environmentalist art photography and artists like Subhankar Banerjee. Banerjee uses color photography to portray the four seasons, challenging the presumption of the Arctic as a barren wasteland. Edward Burtynsky’s photographs of the Ontario oil sands are shown as both beautiful and grotesque. Activist artists, like the group Not an Alternative, depict visual disturbances, address concerns of a sociopolitical context, and then refocus the conversation on a different set of issues.

The author concludes that “One of the most important challenges facing artists, activists and scholars is to offer creative alternatives and suggest ways to remake and repair the world.” Bloom’s new book is, without a doubt, highly specialized. Yet, through well-chosen examples, understandable text, an extensive bibliography, and detailed footnotes, Bloom’s scholarship makes an important contribution to the literature for institutions with graduate programs and/or libraries which aim to include diverse views of the global environmental crisis.