

Projects 26 : Stuart Klipper : The Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 1-March 19, 1991

Author

Klipper, Stuart

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26

stuart klipper

projects



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One of photography's earliest and most popular roles was to bring home pictures of faraway places. It was of course to Europe and the United States that the pictures were brought, and so the history of photography is tied to the history of Western exploration and conquest of other lands and cultures. As this legacy came into question—and as the pictures piled up, sating and then numbing curiosity—photography receded from its expeditionary role.

As the West reached for the globe, Antarctica above all resisted its grasp. In his book *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (The University of Iowa Press, 1986), Stephen J. Pyne observes that even the North Pole was more accessible, culturally and physically, than the South: "... the circumpolar Arctic was occupied by native peoples, the technology existed by which to travel over the [ice] pack at least seasonally. . . ." But on Antarctica, "humans confronted an entirely physical universe one-to-one—without intervening biological communities or indigenous cultures. . . . The Ice was sui generis; it was solipsistic, self-reflexive. . . . The exploration of Antarctica would not be encumbered by the spectacle of clashing cultures, but neither would it be enriched by their interchange. . . . The ethnocentricity of Western exploration was gone, but so was its anthropocentricity."

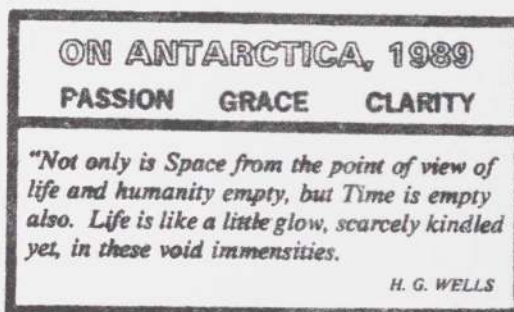
Antarctica is a perfect subject for Stuart Klipper. For more than two decades he has traveled and photographed with indefatigable zeal, as if to recreate single-handedly the fascination of expeditionary work. Over the past decade Klipper's principal partner in this adventure has been a Linhof Technorama camera, with which he made the Antarctic panoramas shown here. Fixed with a Schneider 90-millimeter Super Angulon lens, it encompasses a 105-degree angle of view and produces negatives measuring 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches. Given the precision of today's color materials, the camera allows Klipper to make three-foot-wide prints that are stunning at once for their breadth and for their subtlety of description.

Since acquiring the Technorama in 1978, the peripatetic Klipper has made a prodigious body of work on the back roads of more than half of the fifty United States. He has also ventured far afield, on a series of expeditions to remote or remarkable landscapes. A short list of these projects includes the cemeteries and memorials of World War I on the Western Front in France and Belgium; the deserts of the Holy Land; the terrain of Swedish and Norwegian Lapland most heavily irradiated by fallout from the Chernobyl catastrophe; and the tropical rain-forest preserves of Costa Rica. Klipper traveled to Antarctica in 1987 and 1989, photographing with the Technorama and other cameras; a third trip is scheduled for later this year. The present exhibition includes some fifteen pictures chosen from *On Antarctica*, a series of well over one thousand photographs made in 1989 under the aegis of the National Science Foundation.

It is reasonable to think of the panorama as a natural answer to the horizon. But anyone who has studied a few of these strange pictures knows that the format is highly artificial, difficult to reconcile with our experience of walking in and looking at the landscape. Touchstones of scale and space and time are displaced, and the eye's hunger to see ever yet more is not

diminished but enlarged. Klipper's Antarctic panoramas exploit these qualities richly, giving us a landscape that is ravishing in its barren beauty, in its inhospitable grandeur, and in the delicacy of its ever-changing hues. The photographs seem to fuse the epic swoon of romanticism with the impersonal rigor of science, bypassing both the prettiness of travel pictures and the pedestrian clutter of everyday reportage.

Klipper is convinced that the landscapes he photographs are meaningful, and that the meanings are deep, metaphysical, enigmatic. He lets us know this by marking the backs of the prints in each series with a rubber stamp. For *On Antarctica* there are two stamps—the emblem reproduced on the cover of this brochure, and this one, which Klipper considers more important:



The stamps invite us to ponder what meets the eye, but their flat-footed, *Boy's Life* humor saves them from pretentiousness. Klipper encourages us to think about the pictures but declines to tell us just what to think.

If Klipper's photographs impress us with the inhuman vastness of Antarctica, the mere fact that they exist testifies that the continent at long last is submitting to the embrace of human endeavor. Commercial and military operations are banned, and we may still hope that the ban will continue for a very long time. But science—an enormous variety of it—is flourishing. Every day we know the place better. Although the mark of man is still puny, it is there. Klipper's photographs show us this, too.

When Zora Neale Hurston wrote, "you gotta go there to know there," she meant the phrase metaphorically, but it is true literally also. Klipper, who spent six sea-sick weeks last summer on a sailboat almost ceaselessly storm-beset off the forbidding coasts of Greenland, doubtless would agree. Few of us are qualified to judge his Antarctic panoramas against the landscape itself. Not all of us will decipher the meaning of what he refers to as the "notoriously long, and occasionally cryptic, subtitles" that appear on his rubber stamps. But there is no denying that the panoramas of *On Antarctica* possess passion, grace, and clarity.

Peter Galassi
Curator
Department of Photography



414/ "Dirty Ice," MacMurdo Ice Shelf, near Dailey Islands (shot from helicopter). From *On Antarctica*, 1989. Original in color

biography

Born Bronx, New York, August 27, 1941
Lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota

selected exhibitions

- 1989** *Stuart Klipper and Rhondal McKinney.*
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
(Klipper's Arctic and Antarctic photographs)
- 1988** *Portents in the North: Radiation in Lapland.*
Minnesota Museum of Art, St. Paul
- From Emptiness: Sinai, HaNegev, Midbar Yehuda.*
The Jewish Museum, New York City

selected foreign travels

- 1990** Newfoundland to Greenland to Ireland by sailboat
- 1989** Antarctica, New Zealand Costa Rica,
Dominican Republic, Haiti, Ireland
- 1987** Antarctic sailing expedition, Chile
- 1986** Pakistan, Sri Lanka
- 1985** France, Belgium
- 1984** Egypt, Israel
- 1981** High Arctic voyage
- 1980** Chile, Argentina (Patagonia)
- 1976** Greenland, Iceland
- 1973** Newfoundland
- 1965-67** Sweden

selected honors

- 1989, 1991** National Science Foundation, Artists in
Antarctica Program, selectee
- 1989** The Antarctic Service Medal, United States Navy
- 1980, 1989** Guggenheim Foundation fellowships
- 1980** National Endowment for the Arts fellowship
Bush Foundation (St. Paul) fellowship
- 1977** National Endowment for the Arts grant

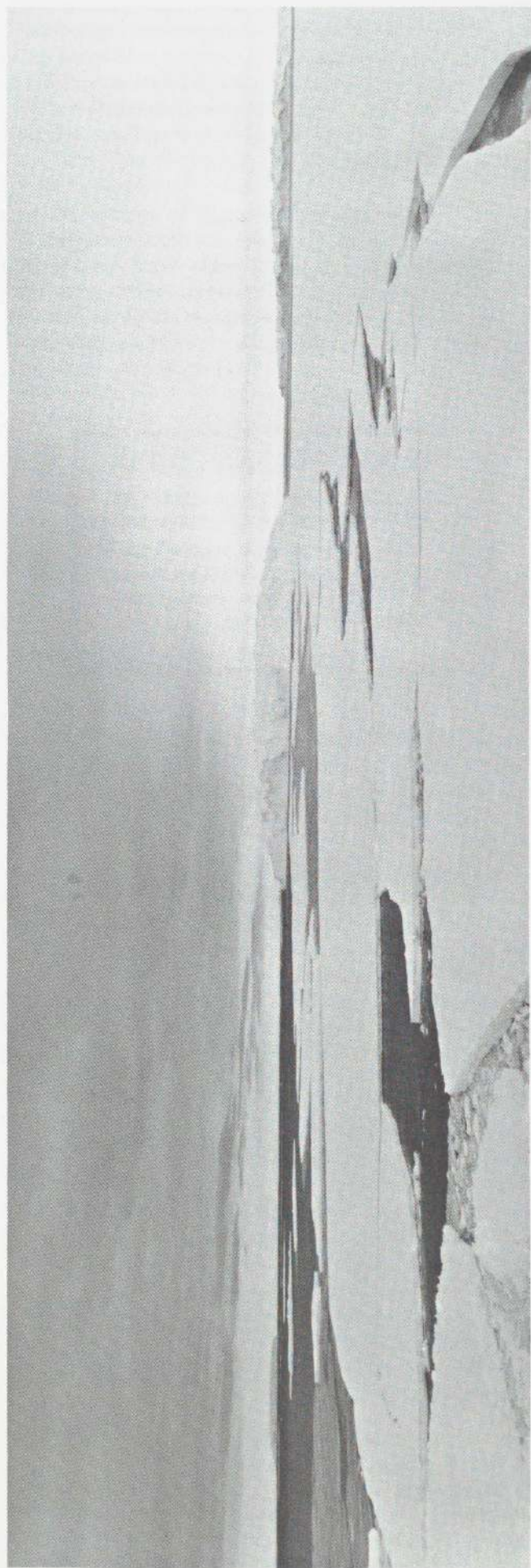
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Ingrid Sischy, "Ice Was, Ice Will Be," *Artforum*,
vol. 26, no. 2 (October 1987), pp. 108-112.

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The artist wishes to thank the National Science Foundation, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Eastman Kodak Corporation, the United States Coast Guard, and the United States Navy.

The prints are chromogenic color prints (Ektacolor), made by Chroma Labs, St. Paul, Minnesota. Each measures approximately 12 x 35 inches.



1190/ Floes at edge of fast ice, about seven miles from Leningradskaya Station (U.S.S.R.), off the Oates Coast (shot from USCG "Polar Sea"). From *On Antarctica*, 1989. Original in color