Janet Read | High Arctic: Paintings
Heliconian Exhibition: May 27 – July 7, 2021

Wilding and cultivation:
artist’s statement 2021

My current body of work presents “landscapes of consciousness” from a month’s immersion in high Arctic geography in 2018. I visited Pond Inlet, Grise Fjord, areas of Devon, Philpott, and Ellesmere Islands, and sites on the northwest coast of Greenland.

Paintings reference the artist’s “being” in the natural world and encounters with those for whom the high north is both wild and home. My paintings are reflective of my personal experience, always aware that indigenous voices must be heard to tell their own stories and history. My work tells the story of a visitor, a sojourner, to a sublime region of Canada.

My purpose is to highlight this region and the themes of “wilding and cultivation.” These themes invite the viewer to unpack moral, aesthetic and legal relationships to the land and the people for whom it is sustenance and spirit: landscape and home. The wild is evident in the land and sea. Cultivation is the sea as resource and garden.

My paintings stem from a deep connection to place and immersion in the natural world. Christian Bernard Singer, curator, says, "Janet Read’s abstract works are like landscapes of consciousness that metaphorically interpret various states of being of the natural world." Paint is applied spontaneously in a process of improvisation, refined over the period of the painting process until the work is itself a metaphor. Oil, cold wax, multiple layers, scraping out, and flinging paint
mimic natural processes of wind, rain, cloud, and light. Spatulas are the primary tools. This work, via painting, engages with the land and the community. Carla Garnet, curator, sees the sublime in past work, “…informed by the 21st century notion of the metaphor. As viewers of her [Read’s] exquisite works, we are invited to become aware that this metaphor of embodiment extends beyond the picture, to a view that perceives the beauty in the oscillation between when to cultivate and when to let be wild.”

Works on duralar play with translucency and transparency with the media of graphite and thinned oil paint. The luminous ground evokes the clear arctic air and its nebulous evanescent distances.

Cultivation and wildness have contesting claims in the arctic where cultivation can mean exploitation of pristine landscapes for the riches beneath the surface by southern interests. Cultivation for Indigenous people means the sea. “Our garden is the sea,” says Susie Evyagotalak from the community of Kugluktut.

The natural world of the arctic is remote and unknown to most of us, even as Canadians. The high arctic landscape compelled my imagination with its austerity, light, space, fragility, and beauty.

Wilding and cultivation go hand in hand in this delicately balanced environment. My work explores these dualities to raise awareness of this fragile and beautiful part of our country through explorations of light, earth, and sea.
high arctic: the vernacular of light #4, 72x60, oil on linen
embers of the sky, 40x72, oil on canvas
“a music more than breath but less than the wind”, 60x48, oil on linen
and the wind speaks #2, 60x42, oil on linen
high arctic: ice melt, 60x48, oil on linen
and the wind speaks, 72x40, oil on canvas
South Cape Fjord
high arctic: landfall, 40x30, oil on linen
the sky remembers the day, 40x40, oil on birch panel
breaching whales, 8x8, oil on panel

arctic shoreline #2, 8x8, oil on panel
arctic shoreline, 12x12, oil on canvas

arctic wind, 12x12, oil on canvas
low cloud over water, 18x18, oil and cold wax on birch panel

South Cape Fjord
from Quilakitsoq towards Uummannaq, Greenland, 30x60, oil on linen
Uummannaq, view from Quilakitsoq

Quilakitsoq ground
Adventure Canada, Ocean Endeavour, route map, high arctic 2018
studio installation, May 2021
studio installation, May 2021
Devon Island

light opens over water #4, oil and graphite on duralar
iceberg with horn

iceberg with zodiac after roll over
Adventure Canada, Ocean Endeavour

Photo credits: John A. Read
Art photos: Gary Beechey and Janet Read
All text and images © the artist 2021
Janet Read | High Arctic Paintings
Heliconian Club: virtual exhibition May 27 – July 7, 2021

List of Works

1. arctic seas, 26x26, oil on linen 1,800.00
2. ice #1, 5x5, oil on duralar (framed) 200.00
3. ice #4, 5x5, oil on duralar (framed) 200.00
4. high arctic: the vernacular of light #4, 72x60, oil on linen 10,800.00
5. embers of the sky, 40x72, oil on canvas 6,500.00
6. “a music more than breath but less than the wind”, 60x48, oil on linen 6,800.00
7. and the wind speaks #2, 60x42, oil on linen 6,000.00
8. ice melt, 60x48, oil on linen 6,800.00
9. and the wind speaks, 72x40, oil on canvas 6,500.00
10. high arctic: landfall, 40x30, oil on linen 2,500.00
11. the sky remembers the day, 40x40, oil on birch panel 3,800.00
12. low cloud over water, 18x18, oil and cold wax on birch panel 600.00
13. breaching whales, 8x8, oil on panel 125.00
14. arctic shoreline #2, 8x8, oil on panel 125.00
15. arctic shoreline, 12x12, oil on canvas, framed 500.00
16. arctic wind, 12x12, oil on canvas, framed 500.00
17. from Quilakitsoq towards Uummannaq, Greenland, 30x60, oil on linen 4,500.00
18. light opens over water #4, oil and graphite on duralar 3,200.00