

*Artists in Antarctica*: Patrick Shepherd (2023), Auckland, New Zealand: Massey University Press. 240p, hard cover. NZ\$80. ISBN: 978-1-99-101627-0

Patrick Shepherd has edited a sumptuous collection of creativity by New Zealand artists from many disciplines, all of whom have participated in the various iterations of the artists and writers' programs run by Antarctica New Zealand since 1997. Collectively, they stimulate responses about Antarctica that cannot arise in the biophysical sciences and provide an important lens on the continent. The spectrum of art, presented alphabetically by artist, ranges through painting, writing, and photography to various mixed media and sculptural forms, including ceramics, and to music and sound. The book is mostly a retrospective account, with the exception of work by Lloyd Jones written exclusively for the book. Each artist describes, sometimes rather like a diary entry, their motivations in seeking to visit Antarctica (frequently returning to childhood inspirations) and the extent to which creative work flowed easily (or, more often, rather slowly) on their return. This slow gestation appears common for those artists who do not produce their work directly when visiting.

In book form, the most immediately engaging artworks are the photographs, notably Laurence Aberhardt's large format images in the style of Herbert Ponting and Frank Hurley; Anne Noble's unsettling *Piss Poles* and *Bitch in Slippers* series that challenge the traditional Antarctic metaphors of masculinity; and Jae Hoon Lee's digitally collaged landscapes. Conversely, the music is obviously less accessible, though internet resources take you to Shepherd's own work (*Katabatic* and *Cryosphere*), to Gareth Farr's *Terra Incognita*, and to Chris Cree-Brown's *Icescape*. I was intrigued to know what Don McGlashan made of it in 2012, though he is not featured in the book, though his song "Shackleton" features on his 2022 album, "Bright November Morning." And while the pages with musical notation intrigue, they do require a side journey to YouTube and Spotify for those lacking musical knowledge (which is, of course, no different than the challenge of mathematical equations or mass spectrometry figures in other literatures to those lacking science training).

In between the photographs and the music lie gems such as Corey Baker's short film *Antarctica: The First Dance*, featuring Madeleine Graham, a Royal New Zealand Ballet soloist; Virginia King's sculptures; and notable New Zealand poets and writers including Bill Manhire and Owen Marshall. Work by Martin Hill and Philippa Jones seems rather reminiscent of earlier environmental sculpture by Andy Goldsworthy. However, their 2014 work *Anthropocene* is almost the only mention of the new age, which, in a sense, unifies almost all the work presented. Painters are well represented, including the work of Nigel Brown, Denise Copland, Margaret Elliot, Dick Frizell, Kathryn Madill, and Grahame Sydney. While the 36 artists provide a rich and intriguing assemblage of work, one wonders what other New Zealand artists, such as Austin Deans, Dave Dobbyn, Margaret Mahy, Craig Potton, and Rebecca Priestley, created in response to their Antarctic experience, not to mention other artists from New Zealand who worked in Antarctica outside of the arts and community engagement program.

All the artists benefit greatly from the high production standards that make the book so enjoyable—and peeling back the dust cover, there is the added delight of discovering poems by Bernadette Hall and Owen Marshall. Massey University Press has, as with their other recent Antarctic offering, Colin Monteath's *Erebus: The Ice Dragon* (2023), produced a beautiful book. Perhaps the publishers have found a niche for these more-than-just-a-coffee-table Antarctic titles.

In addition to a foreword by Sarah Williamson, the chief executive of Antarctica New Zealand, and Shepherd's introduction, Adele Jackson's introductory chapter on contextualising Aotearoa New Zealand's relationship with Antarctica provides an important historic summary and a broader perspective on the role of the New Zealand arts in Antarctica. This sketches on a broader canvas about why the arts are intrinsically part of the Antarctic story and why this needs greater profile.

While the artworks obviously speak directly to the reader, a reflection or synthesis of the impact of New Zealand artists would have helped generate (at least for those immersed in the sciences, in the Antarctic, or elsewhere) a greater appreciation of the multiple layers of meaning to which the arts so importantly contribute. This is compounded in that the book's scope is restricted solely to work by New Zealand artists, though this is not clear from the book's title.

Given that New Zealand is one of several countries that have supported artists and writers to work in Antarctica, as Jackson alludes to briefly in her essay, the book might have benefited from greater acknowledgment of the wider international context. Indeed, it would be fascinating to understand more about the broader global scan of these global programs, including those by artists who have visited Antarctica through tourism or other means. It could provide not just a rich perspective on the contribution of the arts to Antarctica but also stimulate a broader understanding of human experiences in the early Anthropocene. Perhaps this is too reductionist an expectation. Perhaps the art speaks for itself and should only be considered on its own. Perhaps that in itself is perfectly reasonable. However, in a world unraveling from the meta-narratives of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the early Anthropocene requires a more profound consideration of our sense of place in the world and how this is shifting. As the photographer Anna Noble so eloquently states, “*There’s a mistaken idea that a brief experience in Antarctica will provide the inspiration for art. That’s got nothing to do with art—that’s tourism. Art serves best as a mode of critical inquiry, as important as science in our understanding of Antarctica and our relationship to it. Art deserves*

*a place alongside the science programme with the same thoughtful selection processes and logistical support”* (p163). Given this importance, perhaps an international publisher with the same foresight of Massey University Press might take up the challenge and provide a synthesis of all artist programs in Antarctica.

Unfortunately, the current Antarctic New Zealand program was halted by the COVID-19 pandemic and also by the redevelopment of the Scott Base research station. Enabling this to resume, in some form at least, would seem to be a critical component of an increasingly complex engagement with the Polar regions in the early Anthropocene. As the CEO notes in her foreword, “*these artists, writers and creators have built a picture of what a frozen Antarctica has looked like over many decades. But if we don’t act soon their work will also document its melting*” (p7).

Bob Frame 

Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury, Christchurch,  
New Zealand

Email: [bob.frame@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:bob.frame@canterbury.ac.nz)

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