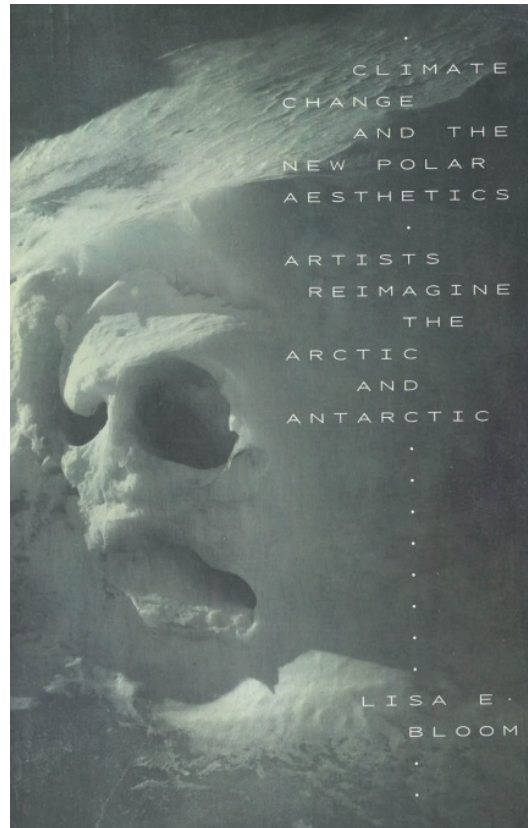


BOOK REVIEW

Lisa E Bloom: *'Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics'*

by Jean Bundy



Getting humanity to accept the reality of Climate Change is difficult. People are selfish and myopic, often striving to acquire wealth, without caring if they pollute in the process. “When you’re rich they think you really know (Fiddler on the Roof, 1964)!” Counterpoint: People need jobs which often cause waste. Developing less polluting industries takes foresight, time and money. Unforeseen: Plastic refuse from the War in Ukraine and Turkey’s earthquake add to ongoing Earthly destruction beyond petroleum spillages and mining for metals which power electronics. Paradoxes are endless.

Lisa Bloom’s book, *'Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics'* entices readers to rethink underlying socio-political themes by “linking racial, sexual, and gendered discriminatory violence to wider environmental destruction (1).” White male domination has narrowed thinking; fresh solutions from marginalized groups expand the narrative.

Bloom insists, “feminist, queer, postcolonial, and Indigenous artists and filmmakers articulate ways of responding to the climate crisis that differ quite markedly from those of their western masculinist counterparts (13).”

Artists from ‘Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics’



New Zealand photographer Anne Noble’s ‘Photo Spot, Petermann Island, 11 Spectacular Days Antarctic Tour’ 2008, documents tourists wearing snow gear, obscuring their gender, as they snap penguins on rocky, icy terrain, a sign of ice melt. Antarctica has intrigued male explorers to brave the elements, or in some cases to die trying, which has made it the world’s biggest man-cave. Bloom writes, “the historic exclusion of women altogether from the continent until the 1960s and 1970s and the way the visual tropes of Antarctica as the last great wilderness on earth contribute to maintaining the perception that Antarctica is still an all-male continent or a living memorial to this earlier moment, when only men could populate the continent (29).” Although women scientists and support staff are now allowed, they often experience harassment or get ignored.

Bloom continues, “The point for Noble is that what is sold in these contemporary tourist images is not global warming or the threat of pollution but the promise of Antarctica’s mythical past, in which icebergs, glaciers, penguins, and white male heroes dominate and define the horizon and (white) man’s endurance.” Female tourists as paying guests are cocooned within the cruise ship safety net, likely unaware that women working in Antarctica are often abused. Beyond this continent lurk the simulacra; Antarctica gets reproduced in zoos, discovery centers and ice bars, which are pollution free, easily

accessible and climate controlled. Like Vegas' Eiffel Tower, some tourists believe faux Antarctica is the real thing. Absent from these venues are the harsh realities, which extend beyond Antarctica's evolving weather to gender biases (33).



Swedish artist Katja Aglert used this photograph, 'Andrée Standing by a Polar Bear He Shot' 1897, a cliché of white masculinity, for her book 'Winter Event--Antifreeze'. It depicts Salomon August Andrée trying to survive after his failed attempt to reach the North Pole via a hydrogen balloon. His team ultimately died from exposure and/or food poisoning from eating Polar Bear (65). Andrée's photo pose was common to images about America's Western expansion or African safaris, with guns always positioned as phallic symbols of macho white males conquering the submissive. Today the Arctic is no longer just a playground for white dudes, whose adventures would waft with cigar smoke across gentlemen's clubs beneath animal trophy heads, further celebrated in hunting magazines.

A myth Bloom debunks is that non-white people never escorted white explorers. Matthew Henson (1886-1955) was a Black explorer who accompanied Robert Peary, along with Inuit guides, on his journey to the North Pole. Henson actually made it, while Peary lagged behind, but took the credit as reimagined in a film, 'True North', 2004 by Isaac Julien. Julien further twists the story by turning Henson into a female Black explorer. Another myth: "Black people could not belong in the North because it is racially impossible (75)." People-of-colour and Indigenous are being recognized for their generational knowledge of the economic and strategic 'North' along with its escalating Global Warming.



Environmental artist Amy Balkin's scientific sample bottle, which came from an Antarctic lab, morphed into sculpture for her ongoing project, 'A People's Archive of Sinking and Melting' 2012. Balkin writes that objects of trash, "are intended to form a record of the future anterior, prefiguring foreseen or predicted disappearance (s) and related displacements, migrations, and relocations (133)." The bottle's printed coding, important for lab workers, helps validate this container as art, as opposed to just being detritus. In the movie 'Sabrina', 1954, Humphrey Bogart, through comedic scenarios, insists plastics will be the future—he was right! Plastics are waterproof, pliable, stretchy and germ resistant. Some get recycled, but most get tossed after one use, and recycling is a joke in many parts of the world. Bloom writes, "Plastics are nearly immortal in relation to the human timescale and even in the scale of geological time (136)." Balkin's bottle deserves its place on a plinth for museum goers to contemplate plastic's ambiguous contribution to civilization.



Canadian Edward Burtynsky's photograph, 'Highway #1, Los Angeles', 2003, is one of his 'manufactured landscapes'. This spaghetti-junction is crucial engineering where automobiles are the only practical way to get around. Becoming art, this spiralling roadway is aesthetically beautiful. Fact: The more roads, the more traffic. The gasoline engine is a major contributor to air pollution. Growing sales of electric cars are supposed to reduce emissions; however the auto industry is taking advantage and designing larger pickups. Bloom writes, "The awe-inspiring industrial scale in his 'ravaged earth' photographs provides a substitute for the old sublime of spectacular natural landscapes (178)." Burke and Kant might have to rethink!

Lisa Bloom's 'Climate Change and the New Aesthetics' integrates text with imagery to highlight problems, not isolated to one location or a particular ethnicity. She confirms that going about daily routines in polluted areas where water tables are rising can be stressful, even if citizens are not directly involved with addressing Global Warming. Close-scrutiny of artworks which contextualize Climate Change brings problems and hopefully solutions to the forefront without verbally scolding, which doesn't work. De-colonializing Climate Change approaches is a good idea too.

Thank you to Ken Wissoker at Duke University Press for providing materials. Images were taken from 'Climate Change and the New Aesthetics, Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic' by Lisa E Bloom, which is available at Amazon.

AICA E-MAG Editor, Jean Bundy, MFA, PhD

email: 38144@alaska.net