

# Artist Spotlight:

## Zaria Forman

*At first you could be excused for thinking you're looking at a photograph, but look again and you'll find that the ripples of the water have been created using pastels. Zaria Forman talks about what motivates her to create her large-scale, photo-realistic seascapes.*

**INTERVIEW** Samantha Stocks

**DRAWINGS** Zaria Forman





CRAFT & CREATE ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

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**Previous page:**  
Greenland #56,  
40" x 60", soft pastel  
on paper, 2013.

**Above:**  
Greenland #50,  
40" x 60", soft pastel  
on paper, 2012.

**T**he sea is a recurring subject in your work. What inspires you to create these incredible seascapes on paper?

I'm drawn towards water, like most human beings! It makes up more than 75 per cent of our bodies, and covers most of the Earth's surface. We need water to survive, but we also gravitate towards its beauty: the respite, shimmer, and movement it adds to a landscape.

Water provides me with an endless amount of inspiration as it constantly changes, taking on new forms from one moment to the next. There will always be more for me to learn about the methods with which water can be conveyed in pastel, and I enjoy that never-ending challenge.

Why do you choose pastels for your works?

I've always preferred soft pastels over the myriad of materials I have experimented with. The process of drawing with pastels is simple and straightforward: cut the paper, make the marks. The material demands a minimalistic approach, as there isn't much room for error or re-working, since the paper's tooth can hold only a few thin layers of pigment. I rarely use an eraser; I prefer to work with my 'mistakes', enjoying the challenge of resolving them with limited marks. I love the simplicity of the process, and it has taught me a great deal about letting go. I easily become lost in tiny details, and if the pastel and paper did not provide limitations, I fear I would never know when to stop, or when a composition was complete!





It sounds as if working on each piece can be quite a time-consuming process. How long does it take to create these artworks?

The process begins with planning a trip. When travelling, I take thousands of photographs and I often make a few small sketches on-site to get a feel for the landscape. Once I return to the studio, I draw from my memory of the experience, as well as from the photographs, to create large-scale compositions. The actual drawing can take anywhere from one to six weeks, depending on the size and detail of the composition.

Why create your drawings at such a large scale?

I want viewers to feel transported to these remote regions that they might never get the chance to see. Since the landscape I depict is so vast, large-scale compositions make the most sense to me.

Is there anything else that you hope people will get out of viewing your work?



Artists play a critical role in communicating climate change, which I believe is the most important challenge we face as a global community. I've dedicated my career to translating and illuminating scientists' warnings and statistics into an accessible medium that the general public can connect with, on a level

**Top:**  
Greenland #71,  
50" x 60", soft pastel  
on paper, 2014.

**Above:**  
Zaria Forman by  
Francois Lebeau.











that is perhaps deeper than scientific facts can penetrate. Neuroscience tells us that humans take action and make decisions based on emotion above all else. Studies have shown that art — and in particular images (drawings, paintings, photographs, film) — impacts viewers' emotions more effectively than an essay or newspaper article.

**Previous pages:**  
Greenland #63,  
50" x 75", soft pastel  
on paper, 2013.

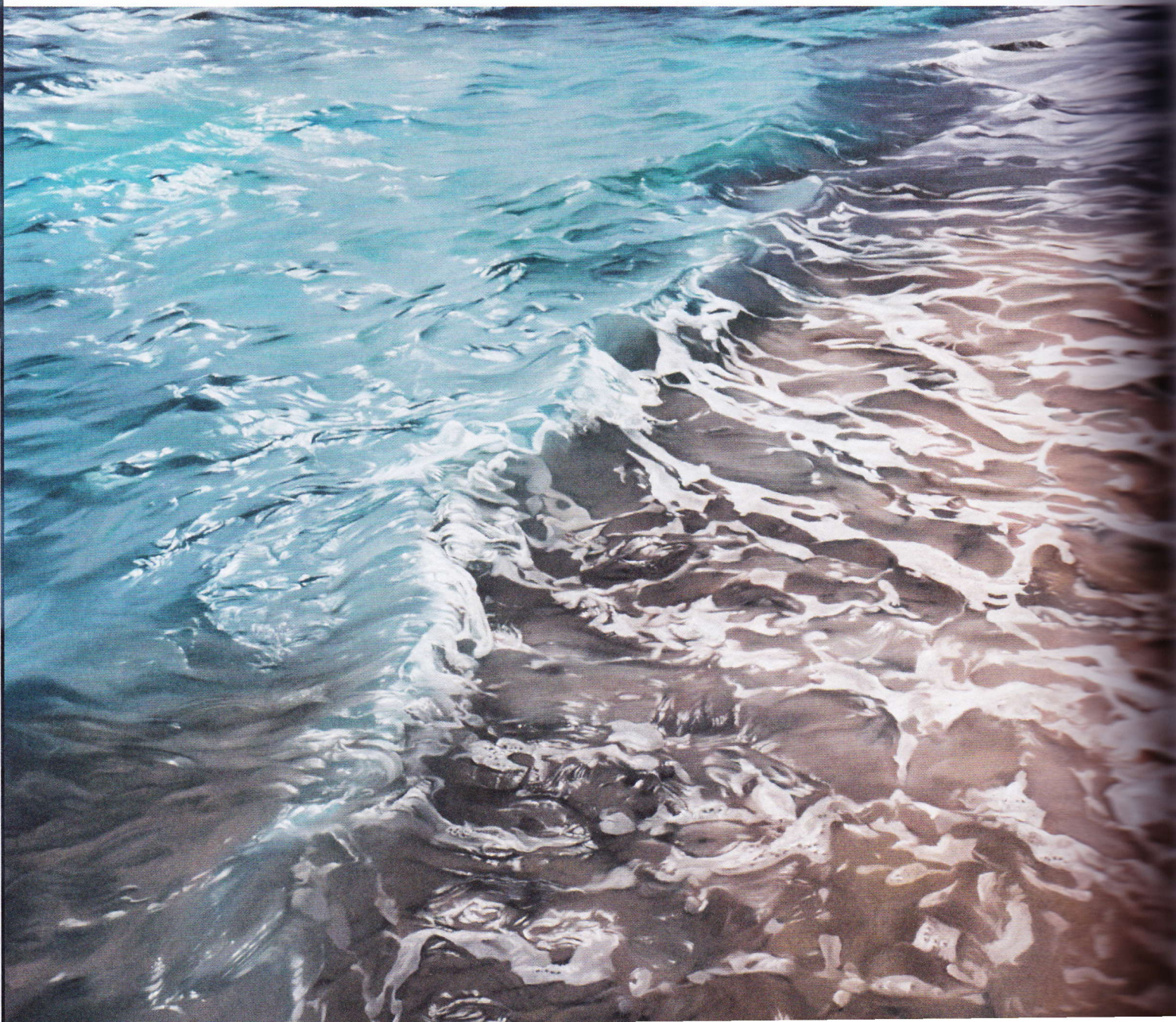
**Below:**  
Maldives #9,  
38" x 50", soft pastel  
on paper, 2014.

My drawings explore moments of transition, turbulence, and tranquillity in the landscape, and their impact on the viewer. In this process I'm reminded of how small we are when confronted with the powerful forces of nature. The act of drawing can be a meditation for me, and my hope is that the viewer can share this experience of tranquil escape

when engaging with the work. I choose to convey the beauty, as opposed to the devastation, of threatened places. If people can experience the sublimeness of these landscapes, perhaps they will be inspired to protect and preserve them.

Going back to the beginning of your career, when did you first begin drawing? Was it always something that came naturally to you, or was there a defining moment that compelled you to take up the craft?

I've been drawing since I was a child. Since my mother was an artist, we always had art supplies around the house and were encouraged to use them.





I also travelled with my family as a child to some of the world's most remote landscapes, which became the subject of my mother's fine art photography. I developed an appreciation for the beauty and vastness of the ever-changing sky and sea. I loved watching a far-off storm on the western desert plains; the monsoon rains of southern India; and the cold Arctic light illuminating Greenland's waters.

How do you feel your work has evolved since you started drawing?

Since I've been drawing professionally, my compositions have become increasingly more detailed over the years. I think part of that has to do with my understanding of the subjects that I draw; the more I learn about them, the more accurately I'm able to depict them. There's always more to learn, and I can only hope that my work continues to evolve.

Tell us about some of your recent works.

In August 2012, I led Chasing the Light,<sup>1</sup> an art expedition sailing up the north-west coast of Greenland, retracing the 1869 journey of American painter William Bradford, and artistically documenting the rapidly changing Arctic landscape. In Greenland, I felt both the power and the fragility of the landscape. The sheer size, majesty, and beauty of the icebergs is humbling. The ice fjords are alive with constant movement and thunderous cracking—reminders of their destructive capabilities. Yet while their threatening potential is evident, so is their vulnerability; I could see the ice melting under the unseasonably warm sun.

Continuing to address climate change in my work, I spent September 2013 in the Maldives, the lowest and flattest country in the world, collecting material and inspiration to create a body of work celebrating and representing a nation that could be entirely underwater within this century. Exploring the flat islands of the Maldives gave me a similar sense of duality between power and fragility. The looming, vast ocean demanded my attention, as it tightly surrounded each tiny island. The colour, clarity, and warmth of the water endlessly invited me while the waves crashed ominously along the encroaching coastline.

1. [kickstarter.com/projects/7013514/14/chasing-the-light](http://kickstarter.com/projects/7013514/14/chasing-the-light)



What projects can we expect to see from you next?

I have a solo show that I'm working towards right now, which will be held in September 2015 at Winston Wachter Fine Art<sup>2</sup> in New York. It will feature my Greenland and Maldives works, and draw the connection to the melting ice, rising seas, and drowning island nations.

I've also been forming a collective with two other artists that came to Greenland and the Maldives with me: Lisa Lebofsky<sup>3</sup> and Drew Denny.<sup>4</sup> Our project, titled Ice to Islands,<sup>5</sup> continues to evolve and take shape through drawings, paintings, film, performance, and education. Future exhibition plans involve a group showing of our work, as well as other artists', pertaining to the subject of climate change, specifically ice melt and sea level rise. Along with exhibits, there will be educational and performance based events, including panel discussions with climate change scientists, activists, and artists. **L**

**Above:**  
Greenland #62,  
47" x 70", soft pastel  
on paper, 2013.

2. [winstonwachter.com](http://winstonwachter.com)

3. [lisalebofsky.com](http://lisalebofsky.com)

4. [mydrewdenny.com](http://mydrewdenny.com)

5. [facebook.com/icetoislands](https://facebook.com/icetoislands)