

GUNKS CHRONICLES LAURA WATERMAN

Alpinist 72



MICHAEL KENNEDY **CLIMBS THE INFINITE SPUR**

BARRY BLANCHARD **ESCAPES A MAELSTROM**

ZARIA FORMAN **DRAWS A MELTING WORLD**

MAURICIO PORTILLO **DARES TO DREAM**

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52 Gunks Chronicles

Barely 100 miles north of New York City, the steep, airy cliffs of the Shawangunks have long collected a rich lore of hard routes, wild antics and eccentric personalities—from the legendary conflicts between the rule-making Appies and the rollicking Vulgarians to the stylists of the clean-climbing revolution and the age of Lycra, and all the varied bands of old and young climbers who continue to enjoy the crags today. Northeast climbing historian Laura Waterman presents a collection of stories from Gunks protagonists across the decades, including Steven Jervis, Bonnie Prudden, Joe Kelsey, John Bragg, Russ Clune and Whitney Boland.

[Cover] **Shelma Jun**, the founder of Flash Foxy and the Women's Climbing Festival, on a route in the Lost City area of the Shawangunks, New York. Climbs in this region of the Shawangunks have not appeared in any printed guidebook. Chris Vultaggio | [This Page]

78 Soft Power

For years, artist Zaria Forman has created drawings of glaciers so intense that viewers feel as if they're present. Herein, *Alpinist* contributor Mailee Hung presents some of Forman's work and her potential impact on climbers' understanding of climate change.

84 Taken Before Its Time

After decades of remote expeditions, Nick Bullock travels to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison to seek "the essence of climbing." Amid the area's deep voids, he finds himself haunted by absences of his past and uncertainties of the future.

Wilhelmina Bay No. 2, 53 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 74 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", soft pastel on paper, 2019. In an interview for *This is Colossal*, artist Zaria Forman explained, "If people can experience the sublimity of these landscapes, perhaps they will be inspired to protect and preserve them." Zaria Forman



Soft Power

Zaria Forman's Pastel Glaciers

BY MAILEE HUNG





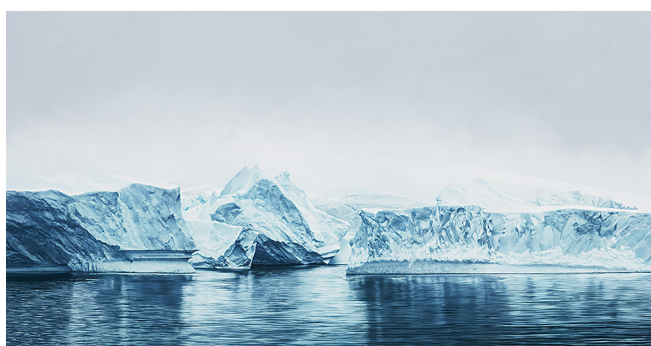
WONDER IS A CONNECTIVE THREAD THAT TIES US TO THE LAND.

As climbers gazing at maps, we fantasize about following icy chutes and snowy tendrils toward faraway summits we may never be able to visit ourselves. Mountain art can elicit daydreams that morph into a kind of empathy, inviting us to enter both outer and inner ranges distant in place, time or mind. Although I haven't seen the glaciers or the icebergs of Patagonia firsthand, when I look at the sepia-toned black and white photos of Rena Bass Forman—at the ice that blooms like strange flowers or arcs like glass cathedrals—I can sense the awe she must have felt when she encountered those giants. I can conceive how joy might have crept through her mind faster than the cold as she waited for hours until the light hit their facets just so. I can imagine her daughter, Zaria Forman, learning to recognize this feeling

herself, years later, on a trip with Rena to Greenland in 2007. Zaria was twenty-four then, an artist working in pastel. At first, she recalled in a PBS interview, “I was terrified to draw ice and I omitted it from all of my drawings. It's hard. It doesn't lend itself to very crisp, hard lines, specific details.” Upon her return home, she tried her first glacier drawing. “It didn't turn out so bad,” she reflected. “And I have been doing it ever since.”

Rena and Zaria planned to return to Greenland in 2012 to follow the route of nineteenth-century American painter William Bradford's first artistic Arctic expedition, tracing similar fleeting paths across reflections of light on water and ice. But Rena died in 2011, six months after a brain cancer diagnosis. Zaria led the Greenland trip in her mother's honor and spread her ashes there. “A way for me to process my grief,” she told *Elle* journalist Brianna Kovan. Since then, Zaria's renderings of shrinking glaciers

[Opening Spread] Zaria Forman before her drawing of *De Vicq Glacier, Antarctica*, 60 x 90", soft pastel on paper, 2018. François Lebeau | [Facing Page] *Whale Bay, Antarctica No. 1*, 60 x 90", soft pastel on paper, 2016. | [This Page, Top Left] *Jakobshavn Glacier, Greenland*, 68 x 102", soft pastel on paper, 2018. | [This Page, Bottom Left] *Deception Island, Antarctica*, 72 x 128", soft pastel on paper, 2015. | [This Page, Right] *Perito Moreno Glacier, Argentina No. 8*, 15 x 10.3", soft pastel on paper, 2018. Forman participated in Operation IceBridge with several NASA flights and was a resident artist on the *National Geographic Explorer*. Zaria Forman (all)



have become a means for viewers to confront their own sense of loss on a global scale. Her large-scale, photorealistic pastel drawings communicate the urgency of addressing climate change by forging a visceral bond between viewer and subject. “[People] need that kind of emotional connection that art is able to give in order to absorb the information that the scientists are collecting,” she explained in a BBC News video.

Watching Zaria work is hypnotic. In time-lapse videos, the soft susurrations of her gloved hand sound like falling snow as she moves from top to bottom, left to right, to account for the way that pastel flakes drift onto the canvas below. She works so closely she seems to lose herself in minute details of color and form, unable to see the entirety of glaciers and waves until she steps back. Her focus resembles that of a climber chipping to make an axe placement in friable ice. Pastels are delicate, soft, and easy to smudge away. Although the fine texture of her paper enhances vibrant colors, she can only apply a few, thin layers to it—a demanding, high-consequence style that doesn’t readily permit corrections or changes. Gradually, the pigment builds into a sumptuous, yet

fragile image. The result demonstrates the kind of optimism she hopes to imbue in her audience: small gestures add up to significant impacts.

Zaria’s drawings are, on average, five feet tall by seven and a half feet wide, taking hundreds of hours to complete. “I expanded the scale of my compositions to give you that same sense of awe that I experienced,” she said in a TED Talk. She wants her viewers to sense the vastness of these glaciers and to feel how small humans are in their presence. But she also aims to create an impression of intimacy, for us to become absorbed in the intricacies of the ice. What once seemed so far away and indifferent transforms into something we can imagine ourselves standing beside and caring for—not only seeing, but *beholding*.

“I hope that I am rendering the feelings that I have when I’m witnessing the ice firsthand,” she recounted in the film *Colors of Change*, “because I want viewers to be able to have as much of the same experience as I had as I can give them.” The huge pictures envelop the viewer, allowing them to feel present in experiences that, likely, have already melted away. The ephemerality of ice evokes a tension between the



wonder of the moment and the awareness of its passing. It is difficult to look at the grandeur of her drawings without wondering: How will we also learn to say goodbye? And what can we save from the vanishing?

Zaria's newest work comes from a 2018 expedition to the Perito Moreno Glacier, the only one in Patagonia's Southern Icefield that isn't currently retreating. Here, she goes further into abstraction, pulling the viewer deeper into her internal experience of drawing. In *Colors of Change*, she recognizes the influence of Georgia O'Keeffe's floral paintings, the soft, close-up views of petals that evoke a tender strangeness, making an emotional encounter more immediate. In Zaria's new paintings, fins of ice appear smooth, delicate, translucent, defamiliarized into shapes that seem even more mysterious and yet tangible, like embodiments of our own inner worlds. There is more light in this work—not the distant light from a satellite perspective or the dim glow from cloud-filtered polar rays, but the brightness and heat from a radiant sun. You can almost feel the ice sweating through the paper. You can imagine

**“I HOPE THAT I AM
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what it must feel like to be engulfed by such a searing blue, a sensation of cold as exhilarating as it is intolerable—the incongruity of the desire to touch something you know to be painful, or to embrace something you realize is much greater than yourself. Grief is much like this: learning to hold joy and suffering, presence and absence, mourning and love, together, like the braided strands of a rope that still connects us as we move forward into an uncertain future.

This body of work also marks Zaria's second trip to Patagonia, the place where her mother fell in love with ice. Like her mother all those years ago, Zaria has kept her vigil within the glaciated landscape, waiting for the light to hit the ice just so. ■

[Above] Forman with works in progress: *B-15Y Iceberg, Antarctica No. 1, 72 x 72"*, soft pastel on paper; and *B-15Y Iceberg, Antarctica No. 2, 60 x 90"*, 2017 François Lebeau |
[Right] *Cierva Cove, Antarctica No. 2, 70 x 105"*, soft pastel on paper, 2017. Zaria Forman



