

explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano, though not to the extent of spelling his name correctly—boasted the longest suspended span in the world: 4,260 feet, or four-fifths of a mile. Even after the great era of steamships had passed, the bridge held sway, dictating the design of the Cunard liner *Queen Mary 2*, once the world's largest passenger ship, which first sailed in 2003, so that at high tide its funnel would pass beneath the roadway with 13 feet to spare.

Connecting Brooklyn with Staten Island, it is still the longest suspension bridge in the Americas, 11th in the world. The crowning achievement of the structural engineer Othmar Ammann and of New York's imperious master planner Robert Moses, it was built for \$320 million (about \$2.5 billion in today's currency), more or less on budget, a standard of frugality that present-day New York can only dream of. Ten thousand men worked to build the bridge, from "punks" lugging heavy bolts to foremen dubbed "pushers" to John Murphy, the superintendent, whose temper and sun-and-wind-hardened face led his charges to call him Hard Nose behind his back. Three men died. The bridge's construction was vividly chronicled by Gay Talese, then a cub reporter for the *New York Times*, whose book, *The Bridge*, is now being reissued in an expanded edition by Bloomsbury. It tells of Mohawk Indian ironwork-

ers who made a specialty of walking the high steel and of James J. Braddock, once a world heavyweight boxing champion (Joe Louis took his title), by then a welding machine operator. "The anonymous hard-hatted men who put the bridge together, who took risks and sometimes fell to their deaths in the sky, over the sea—they did it in such a way that it would last," Talese recalls in an interview.

When it was finished, a ride across cost drivers 50 cents, or the equivalent of less than \$4. But we should be so lucky: Today the cash toll is \$15. Old-timers still mourn the Sundered neighborhoods of Brooklyn, where hundreds of homes were destroyed to make way for the approach, and the sleepy, almost rural character of Staten Island when it was linked to the rest of New York City only by ferryboat.

To Talese, the Verrazano is about more than transportation. "A bridge, in its ultimate form, is a work of art," he says, and one can see his point. Sunlight glints off the pair of monumental steel towers, 70 stories tall, carrying the curvature of the earth into the sky, where their tops are exactly 1 7/8 inches farther apart than at their base. At night, lights pick out the graceful curve of the four great cables, each three feet in diameter, spun from enough steel wire to reach more than halfway to the moon. The bridge thrums with the traffic of a million and a half vehicles weekly, its passengers "suspended," as the poet Stephen Dunn wrote, in 2012, "out over the Narrows by a logic linked / to faith." —JERRY ADLER



Snow Globe

A Brooklyn artist has Arctic landscapes at her fingertips

Zaria Forman's ominous landscapes of ice

and water could easily be mistaken for photographs. But they're actually an advanced kind of finger painting. Wearing latex surgical gloves to protect her hands, she rubs soft pastels on paper and spreads them with her fingertips. "Since I was little," says the 32-year-old artist who lives in Brooklyn, "it just seemed like the most natural way to move the material around." She created the 4-by-6-foot *Greenland #63* (above) after leading an

expedition of artists that revisited the 1869 Arctic voyage of the American painter William Bradford. Comparing photos and sketches made during his trip with landscapes she encountered, she saw signs of climate change, such as receding glaciers. Her drawings, one on display at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art in Indiana, convey the Arctic's "pristine allure," she says, "as well as the imminent threat of rising temperatures." —MAX KUTNER

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