

TRO PRO  
CLIMB. TRAVERSE. CONQUER.  
SUMMIT. INSPIRE. REPEAT  
OFTEN.



TOYOTA  
Let's Go Places

LEARN MORE



Options shown.



MENU

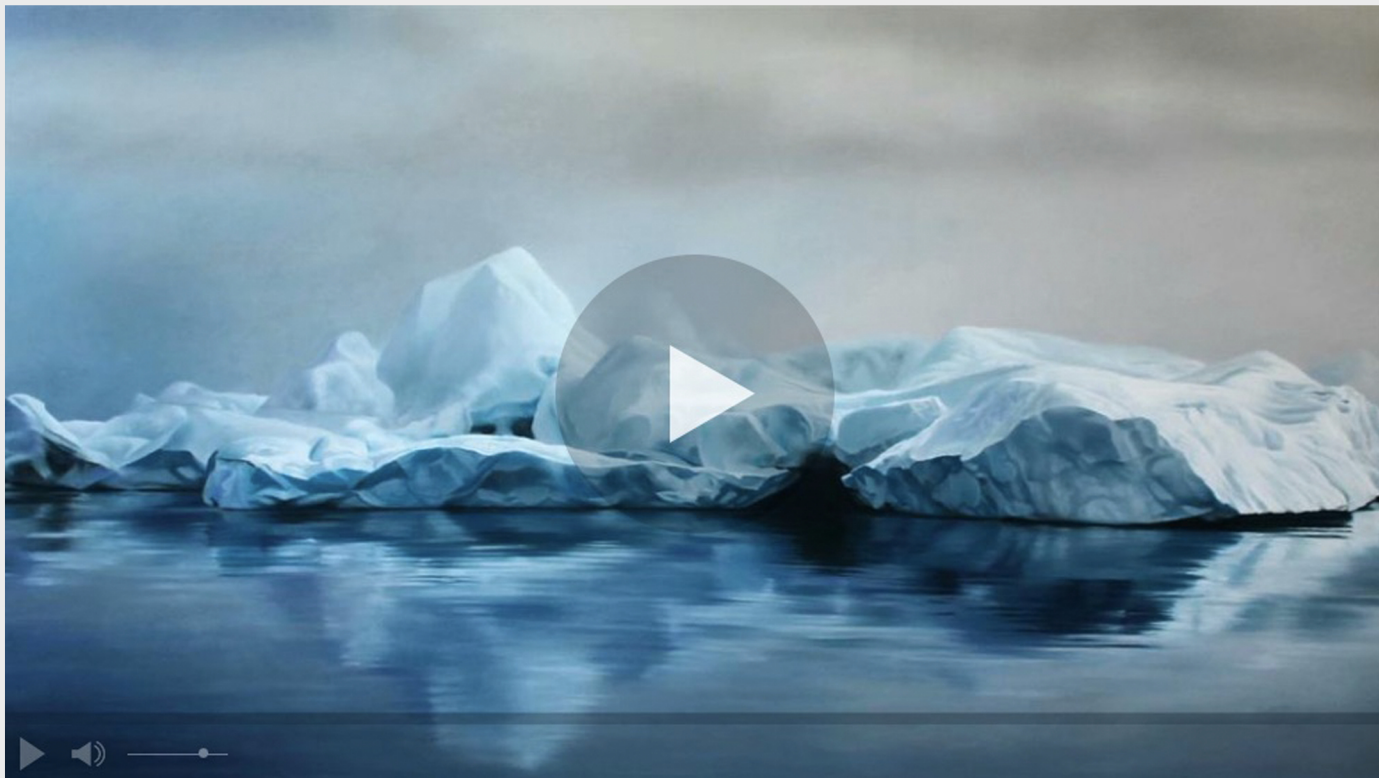


NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



# PROOF

About PROOF



PROOF:

## A Mother's Legacy of Art, Icebergs, and Inspiration



Author

Rachel Link



More »

When I first saw [Zaria Forman's](#) work, I thought I was looking at a photograph. Instead I discovered that these incredibly detailed images are actually hyperrealist pastel drawings. They depict places that are profoundly affected by climate change—Antarctica, Greenland, and the Maldives. Her renderings of ice, waves, and water are astonishingly tangible and compelling. I discovered Forman's work in a short film called [Perspective](#). It had just the right characteristics that I look for when curating National Geographic's [Short Film Showcase](#).

This film presents a beautiful portrayal of Forman's vision and her relationship to her mother, photographer Rena Bass Forman. The elder Forman photographed the Arctic from 2001 until her untimely death in 2011. I corresponded with the younger Forman over email about her art, the Arctic, and the ways that her work is influenced by her mother's photography.





PHOTOGRAPH BY RENA BASS FORMAN

11





DRAWING BY ZARIA FORMAN

**RACHEL LINK:** Can you tell me a little bit about your mother?

**ZARIA FORMAN:** My mother dedicated her life to photographing the most remote regions of the Earth. The cold and isolated landscape of the Arctic consumed her interest from 2001 until her passing in 2011. She always said that she was a polar bear in a past life, and watching her spend endless hours in the frigid winds, patiently and happily waiting for the moment when the light was right, gave me no doubts that this was true!

She taught me the importance of loving what you do and carrying out projects full force, no matter what obstacles lay in the way. She created her own series of journey's entitled "Chasing the Light," and the Greenlandic expedition would have been the third in the trilogy. Her work from her Arctic trips have been compared to [the work of] 19th-century photographers [John L. Dunmore](#) and [George Critcherson](#), who were on American painter [William Bradford](#)'s 1869 expedition to Greenland. She was inspired by Bradford's journey and did extensive research, even finding glass plate negatives from the trip by Dunmore and Critcherson.





PHOTOGRAPH BY RENA BASS FORMAN

11





DRAWING BY ZARIA FORMAN

**RACHEL:** When did she start photographing icebergs?

**ZARIA:** Her first encounter with icebergs was in Patagonia, Argentina, in 2001. Usually we traveled as a whole family, but during that particular adventure I was in my first year of college and couldn't afford the time off. I believe her obsession with cold, icy landscapes was born on that trip.

**RACHEL:** Can you talk about the trip you took to Greenland to spread her ashes?

**ZARIA:** In August of 2012 I led an Arctic expedition up the northwest coast of Greenland. In 1869 William Bradford embarked on the very first Arctic art expedition, and our trip followed his path to find inspiration in the dramatic geography, as he had. We compared exact locations with photographs from Bradford's trip, discovering both similarities and differences in the landscape almost 150 years later.

My mother had conceived the idea for the voyage but did not live to see it through. She was diagnosed with brain cancer on Mother's Day in 2011 and passed away six months later. During the months of her illness her dedication to the expedition never wavered, and I promised to carry out her final journey. In Greenland, I was compelled to address the concept of saying goodbye on scales both global and personal as I scattered my mother's ashes amidst the melting ice.





PHOTOGRAPH BY RENA BASS FORMAN





DRAWING BY ZARIA FORMAN

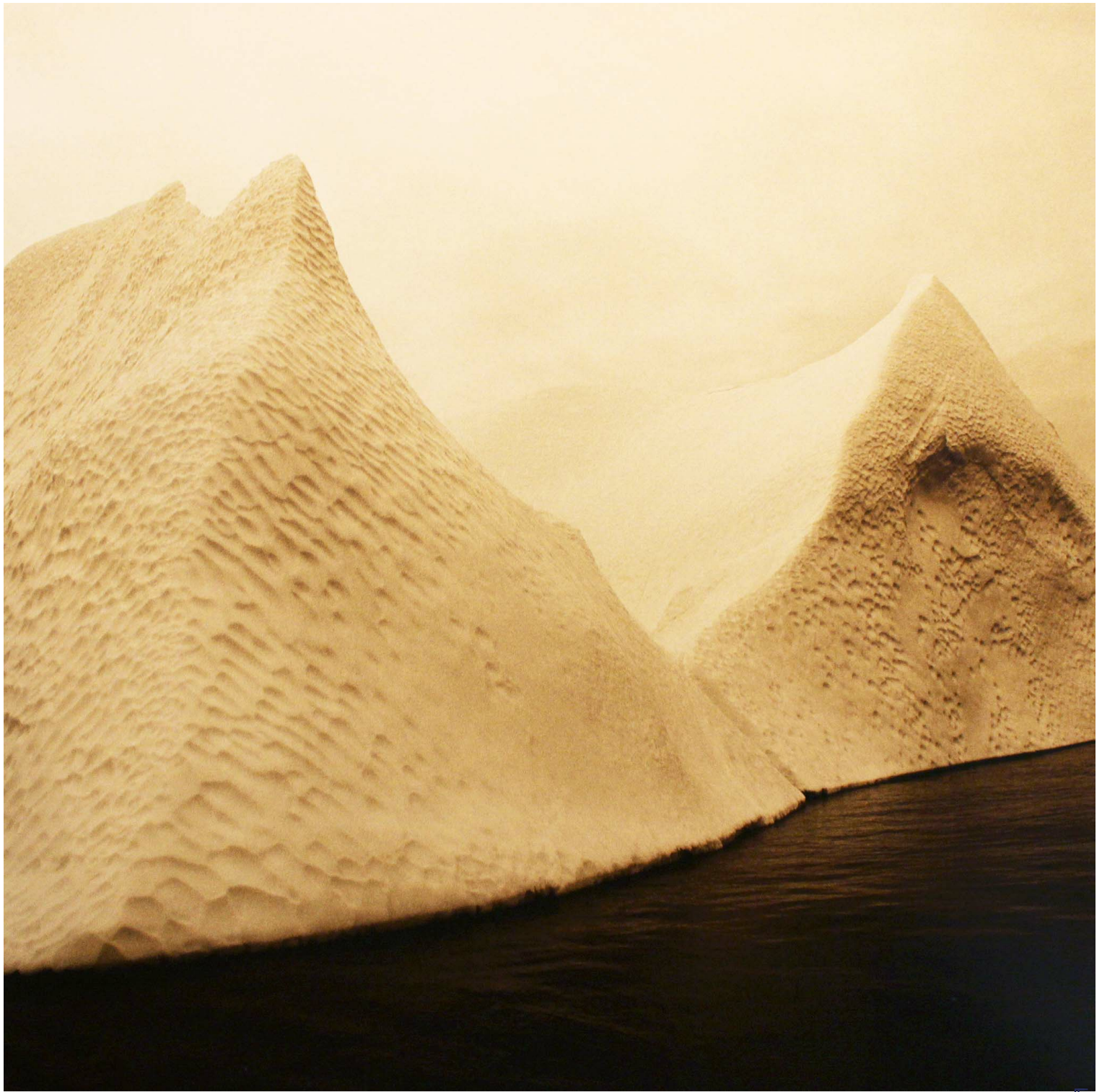
**RACHEL:** How does she continue to inspire the work you do?

**ZARIA:** Fulfilling my mother's dream to follow Bradford's voyage in Greenland was one of the most meaningful gifts my mother gave me.

Her sickness and passing was by far the most challenging experience of my life. I had never before faced such a tremendous loss. The mourning process I went through (and continue to go through) shaped and paralleled the concept of the trip to Greenland, which in turn had significant effects on my art. I often thumb through my mother's negatives and contact sheets from the trips we took together, to find inspiration for my drawings.

Above all though, her dedication, passion, and perseverance continue to inspire me. She would spend hours on an icy cliff edge, waiting for the sunlight to illuminate the frame through [the] camera lens that she had chosen, smiling and happy, long after the rest of the family's toes had gone numb. We would whine and complain, urging her to call it a day so we could return indoors and have a warm meal. She wouldn't budge until she knew she had captured what she wanted.





PHOTOGRAPH BY RENA BASS FORMAN





DRAWING BY ZARIA FORMAN

**RACHEL:** Could you explain your artistic process?

**ZARIA:** I have always preferred soft pastels over the myriad 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 reworking, 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 become easily 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 were complete!

When I travel, I take thousands of photographs. 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. Occasionally I will reinvent the water or sky, alter the shape of the ice, or mix and match a few different images to create the composition I envision. I begin with a very simple pencil sketch, so I have a few major lines to follow, and then I add layers of pigment onto the paper, smudging everything with my palms and fingers and breaking the pastel into sharp shards to render finer details.





PHOTOGRAPH BY RENA BASS FORMAN





DRAWING BY ZARIA FORMAN

**RACHEL:** What do you hope people will take away from the art you create?

**ZARIA:** Artists play a critical role in communicating climate change, which is, I think, the most important challenge we face as a global community. I have dedicated my career to translating and illuminating scientists' warnings and statistics into an accessible medium that people can connect with, on a level 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—in particular drawings, paintings, photographs, and film—can impact viewers' emotions more effectively than an essay or newspaper article.

My drawings explore moments of transition, turbulence, and tranquility in the landscape, allowing viewers to emotionally connect with a place they may never have the chance to visit. I choose to convey the beauty, as opposed to the devastation, of threatened places. If people can experience the sublimity of these landscapes, perhaps they will be inspired to protect and preserve them.

---

Zaria Forman's drawings will be on display at [Winston Wächter gallery](#) in New York from September 10 to October 17.

View more of Zaria's work on her [website](#).

---

## ADD YOUR COMMENTS

*All fields required.*

YOUR NAME



YOUR EMAIL

YOUR COMMENTS

POST COMMENT

☐ NOTIFY ME OF FOLLOW-UP COMMENTS BY EMAIL.

☐ NOTIFY ME OF NEW POSTS BY EMAIL.

[RELATED ARTICLES](#)



PROOF,  
[A Photographer Shares LGBT Stories of Love and Discrimination](#)







PROOF,  
An Artist's Twist on Taxidermy Blurs the Boundaries of Humanity







PROOF,  
Ten Nat Geo Images That Look Incredibly Familiar ... Here's Why







PROOF,  
A Photographer Explores Sweden's Secret Summer Camps







PROOF,  
The Love Between Mother and Child, in Photos





PROOF,  
Tracking Gandhi's Ghost: A Sensory Tour Through Rural India







PROOF,  
Portraits of Katrina: Seven Photos of Destruction and Resurrection





PROOF,  
Photo Camp Sarajevo Inspires a Generation That's Moving Past War



 National Geographic Home » Photography » PROOF

[HOME](#) | [PHOTOGRAPHY](#) | [ANIMALS](#) | [ENVIRONMENT](#) | [TRAVEL](#) | [ADVENTURE](#) | [NATGEOTV](#) | [KIDS](#) | [VIDEO](#) | [SHOP](#)

[News](#) | [The Magazine](#) | [Maps](#) | [Science & Space](#) | [Education](#) | [Games](#) | [Green Living](#) | [Events](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Movies](#) | [Explorers](#) | [Mobile](#) | [Site Index](#)  
[Subscriptions](#) | [Buy Prints](#) | [Stock Footage](#) | [Stock Photos](#) | [Our Trips](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Global Sites](#) | [Sustainability](#) | [About](#) | [Contact](#)  
[Donate](#) | [Press Room](#) | [Customer Service](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)



