

Postscript to Letters from My Sister in New Zealand

Antarctica: a pivotal touchstone

In 2006, I had the opportunity to journey south by ship from Bluff, New Zealand across the Southern Ocean to Antarctica.

As an amateur expressionist artist I wrote the following introduction as an 'artist's statement' to my ensuing exhibitions which I called "Extreme Landscapes".

"When confronted with the extreme forms of the sub-Antarctic islands and Antarctica itself I found myself in sensory overload.

How to express fear and beauty so inextricably entwined in Antarctica became an exciting challenge. The silence, the distances, the often monochromatic scenery, images within images and the wildness, isolation and coldness of these southern forms all left their impression. Many times the continent presented as surreal; bathed in an unearthly glow. The soft and subtle colours; blues, yellows, mauves, contrasted with the never-ending white.

It was simply an enormous privilege to be somewhere so exquisitely beautiful.

I felt overwhelmed by the environmental significance of the continent and the size of its surrounding protective barrier, the Southern Ocean. The overlay of 100 years of human endeavour in such extreme conditions added another dimension to the whole experience. How to convey that ruggedness?

As we crossed the Antarctic Circle we took a pledge to advocate for the Antarctic 'til death denies that opportunity'.

This exhibition invites the viewer to discover and then to care."

In the end I held three exhibitions using the series of works that resulted from this voyage of discovery. Through expressionism and abstraction I revisited on canvas the natural power of wind and ice, the massive landforms, and the immense distances of Antarctica.

Seeing the environmental degradation on Macquarie Island was heartbreaking and alarming. Many of us on the expedition wrote to the Australian Federal Minister for the Environment (or

equivalent at the time) deploring the lack of financial assistance to the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service. Did those letters make any difference? Who knows? What is happening on Macquarie Island now is evidence of what just can be done to restore the balance of nature, post human interference.

Antarctica represents a pivotal touchstone in the climate change debate and a rallying point for those concerned about our environment's degradation.