


# Diane Tuft: Capturing Moments Without Spectral Boundaries

 [web.archive.org/web/20171214014737/http://easthamptonstar.com/Lead-c/2017427/Diane-Tuft-Capturing-Moments-Without-Spectral-Boundaries](http://web.archive.org/web/20171214014737/http://easthamptonstar.com/Lead-c/2017427/Diane-Tuft-Capturing-Moments-Without-Spectral-Boundaries)



Above, Diane Tuft has been photographing the Arctic landscape since 2001. Below, “Transition,” Franz Joseph Land, Northern Barents Sea Angela Jones and Diane Tuft Photos

Diane Tuft has always loved the landscape, and she goes to extraordinary lengths to photograph it. At first it was on a snowmobile at Independence Pass near Aspen, but before long she graduated to a single-engine plane over Iceland, helicopters over Norway and Greenland, a slow-moving trailer in Antarctica, even a Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker at the North Pole.

Hers is not conventional landscape photography. She has been driven by two fundamental goals: to capture the mountain glaciers and other geologic features of the Arctic as they succumb at a startling rate to global temperature rise, and to record on film what the naked eye cannot see.

The former is dramatized in her new book, “The Arctic Melt: Images of a Disappearing Landscape,” just published by Assouline.

During a recent conversation, she spoke of a series of photographs from 2001 called “Icelandic Glaciers.” “The snow was huge, I was in crevasses, we almost got killed. It was amazing.” That series was shot with infrared film.

“I went back six years later because I was shooting in color then. I thought I’d get the same beautiful mounds of snow in color. But the snow was gone. I flew over the same glacier, and all I could see were the volcanic eruptions from 1,000 years ago.”

The first of several turning points was the trip to Aspen in 1998. One morning Ms. Tuft loaded her Leica and took off in a snowmobile. “It was the first time I used infrared film, and I didn’t know what I was going to get. Every single photograph was mind-boggling. I could take a picture and see what I can’t see with the naked eye.” Or, as she wrote in “The Arctic Melt,” “My photographs capture a moment in time without spectral boundaries.”

She decided to print the photographs using the platinum process, in which, unlike with regular black-and-white photographs, the emulsion seeps into the paper, resulting in a rich, subtle tonal range.

Hollis Taggart, an art dealer in New York, saw her work and gave her an exhibition, her first. Titled “Distillations,” it consisted of the photographs from Aspen. Since then she has shown her work at Marlborough and Pace Wildenstein in New York City and at galleries and museums throughout the country.

Another turning point came when she decided to photograph Robert Smithson’s “Spiral Jetty” in the Great Salt Lake. She received permission from the Dia Foundation to photograph the piece, but the difficulty of getting infrared film through an airport led her to purchase a Nikon digital camera.

“I spent the day at the jetty, photographed it, and, when I looked at the prints on the computer, the color photographs were so vibrant. All of a sudden, I was on the UV light spectrum, which is also not in my visible spectrum.”

She understood that in order to continue with UV photography she had to travel to locations with abundant ultraviolet light. “You have to go where there’s more ozone depletion, because that’s where more ultraviolet comes through the stratosphere. Those are places that are cold and at high altitudes. That was when I began to really think about ozone depletion and climate change.”

She first went to Greenland in 2007 and returned to Iceland a year later. Her first monograph, “Unseen: Beyond the Visible Spectrum,” consisted of photographs taken between 1998 and 2008 in the American West, Nepal, North Africa, Iceland, and Greenland. William Fox, director of the Center for Art and Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art, wrote the foreword to the book and suggested she go to Antarctica.

It took her four years before she received a grant to visit Antarctica, where she lived at McMurdo Station for six weeks. “I navigated minus-40-degree-Fahrenheit temperatures and 67-m.p.h. winds, and reached remote places that few have ever seen.”

“After going to the South Pole, I said to myself, ‘I want to go to the North Pole before I die.’ And I knew the Arctic was melting very rapidly.” She made it, but not without a great deal of difficulty and expense. The piece of ice closest to the North Pole is owned by Russia. She was finally able to get there on the nuclear-powered icebreaker.

“It wasn’t a luxury accommodation — it makes a lot of noise — but I needed to be physically on the ocean to see exactly what’s happening. You read about it, but, unless you’re there, you really don’t know.”

A subsequent trip took her to Svalbard, Norway, an archipelago 600 miles above the northernmost part of that country and the farthest north that anybody can live. After many months, she was able to arrange for a helicopter to fly over the mountain glaciers so she could film them. Many photographs in “The Arctic Melt” are from that trip.

Another excursion to Greenland followed in 2016. There she photographed the Russell Glacier in Kangerlussuaq. “You can see the water coming from underneath the glacier. It’s like rapids. You have melting from above and melting from below.”

The Arctic is far from East Hartford, Conn., where Ms. Tuft grew up. Her house was situated in a large pasture with lots of trees. “I spent my childhood playing outside, making little installations with pebbles and twigs. I was a 4-H club member, a Brownie, a Girl Scout. Nature has always been very important to me.”

After graduating from the University of Connecticut, where she majored in mathematics, she went to New York City and worked for an actuarial assistant. She subsequently had jobs with the Burroughs Corporation and Computer Design Corporation. When she became pregnant, she decided it was more important to be home with her family than working.

In 1974, she and her husband bought a house in East Hampton. “I was out here all summer. I took classes at Guild Hall and the Parrish Art Museum. In those early years, there was a little independent movie theater on Newtown Lane where Barefoot Contessa was later located.” The late Ken Robbins, a photographer, had his studio upstairs, and she interned with him for two years.

She also spent four summers in the master workshop in art at the former Southampton College, and, from 1981 to 1989, wanting more formal art training, she studied at Pratt Institute. She was painting at that time, first on modeling paste, then with encaustic, but she decided both processes were too toxic.

“Life gets busy, your kids get older, you don’t have as much time, so the best thing I could do to continue doing art was to go off for a while and photograph. That’s really how it sort of began.”

Ms. Tuft's three-minute video "The Arctic Melt" was shown on Earth Day during the March for Science at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. A selection of her photographs will open at the National Academy of Science in September.



Above, "Broken Arches," and below, "Ultraviolet Shapes," both from Disko Bay, Greenland, Diane Tuft Photos



## About the Author

---

Mark Segal

Arts Assistant/Reporter

631-324-0002

e-mail: [mark@ehstar.com](mailto:mark@ehstar.com)