

Photographs Of Antarctica At Bruce Museum

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One item in the exhibit "Antarctica: Photographs by Diane Tuft: Selections from Gondwana, Images of an Ancient Land" (Diane Tuft / Handout)

By Susan Dunne

Photographs Of Antarctica At Bruce Museum

Photographer Diane Tuft's series "Selections from Gondwana, Images of an Ancient Land"

The Bruce Museum in Greenwich is both an art museum and a science museum, and its new exhibit lends itself to both. Diane Tuft's photographs of Antarctica are both starkly beautiful and instructive about what this mysterious patch of ice, snow and sand has to teach us about global warming.

In 2012, with a grant from the National Science Foundation, Tuft went to the bottom of the Earth to study the "hidden light" of Antarctica, an anomaly made possible by the "ozone hole" in the stratosphere. With a crew of scientists, she traveled around McMurdo Sound, Mount Erebus and Lake Vanda, photographing a land where the snow has been accumulating, unmelted, for millions of years and the wind blows at 60-70 mph daily.

The show is divided into categories "Light," "Water," "Earth" and "Air." The images of myriad contours of snow seem random and almost abstracted, in Tuft's description, "reminiscent of Cool Whip arbitrarily sculpted by the wind." The ice is in varying shades of white, blue and almost purple, and "ventifacts" — rocks shaped by wind — dot the landscape. As one scientist put it, it is "the closest terrestrial environment to that of Mars."

Underneath the surreal beauty are scientific facts that lead to a scary message: "For the past 800,000 years, atmospheric carbon dioxide has fluctuated between 170 and 300 parts per million, but in the past two centuries that figure has increased substantially ... [to] levels above the historic norm that have not been seen for millions of years."

The exhibit of 12 photos is enhanced by a display of six Antarctic organisms collected by Eric Lazo-Wasem of Yale Peabody Museum in New Haven. The crustaceans are fascinating in their form and size, and a marine bristle worm is like something out of a nightmare.

Also at the Bruce, opening Nov. 22, is "Native American Pottery from the Bruce Museum's Collection." Pieces of the famous black-on-black pottery by Maria Martinez of the San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico will be featured along with other specimens.

ANTARCTICA: PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIANE TUFT: SELECTIONS FROM GONDWANA, IMAGES OF AN ANCIENT LAND *will be at Bruce Museum, One Museum Drive in Greenwich, until Feb. 1. brucemuseum.org.*

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