

Arctic Sunrise 2020
Extracts from a daily diary



Arctic Cracking, Oil, Gloss, Pigment on Board, 2019 (310 x 100 x 3 cm).

17.02.20, 09.45 We took off North, from Oslo Airport, over amazing snowy mountains and layers of cloud, steadily rising higher until the distant horizon was smoothly curved like a large, wide-rimmed, white, plate. Then the gradient began; As we moved further North our perspective of the sun gradually began to emanate a sunrise spectrum again- for the second time this morning (I had already watched the sunrise from my hotel window in Oslo). The light became pinker. The fluffy, translucent, peach clouds hovered over the deep, dark, Arctic Ocean. The distant waves were littered with ice bergs; Floating, scattered across its surface like ribbons of magnetic pearls, some swirling together, joined in long clusters and others, bobbing apart, a-drift in singular freedom.

As we descended towards Svalbard the jewels and sheets of sea ice were of a much greater volume than I have ever witnessed in other seasons. I was struck by the notion of Polar Research in itself, and the sheer volume of it being constantly carried out- the massive value of Glaciology, Oceanology, Biology, Geology, the study of Aerosols and migrating particles around the globe- all incredibly vast and inspiring practices, which provide crucial, factual, guidance to the world, enabling various levels of understanding about climate change.



The Edge of the Sea Ice, Central Svalbard, 16/02/20

I looked North West and could see the recognisable mountains and the beautiful wiggle of Adventdalen Fjord, turning into Billafjorden and the sea passage up to Pentuniabukta- the location of the Czech research station where I stayed in 2016, during Midnight Sun, (Petuniabukta is not easily accessible during this current season). Beneath the cloud layer, we then flew directly into the long, low sunbeams. Bright golden, pink light erupted over the gleaming snowy mountain tops and dazzled us through the small plane windows.

Scientists and Artists have a valuable job to do, and then an important message to give to the world. My role is to decipher the Arctic environment on many levels, to absorb and communicate what I experience as I dissolve into oneness... Then, to channel the essence into paintings, which express and communicate the reality of this precious and changing world.



Crescent Moon, Sea Ice and Antigua Ship, October 2018

I feel somewhat upside down in this season of spring sunrise- and I wonder if it is due to having last been here when natural light was quickly diminishing (October 2018). Now I am back here and natural light is quickly growing, I feel like I have just come down from a hand stand- my whole being has flipped round from the last expedition. That was a voyage around the Svalbard archipelago on board a Barquentine tall ship- the Arctic Ocean was home. Now it is February 2020, 1.5 years later, and I am walking on the deep snow through Longyearbyen, with the sun rising and setting in the south, behind Longyearbreen Glacier. After a 14.5 hour working day I need to rest and let the subconscious dreams return to guide me- desiring to find ways to paint in the very minus Arctic environment- Boiling water? 96% Ethanol as a medium to mix with pigment? Painting outside from inside- Ny Alesund Artists hut/ Kingsbay windows?! We shall see...



Blandal Sunrise Concertina, Watercolour, Pigment, Ink, Moleskin Sketchbook, GRM, 2020

18.02.20, Longyearbyen Sunrise 10.42- Sunset 13.43

A good sleep, window open with snow crystals floating in and distant musings of the possibility of Polar Bears smelling me and prizing the window open to get inside. Some interesting dreams and rest when I finally got to sleep. I woke, wrote dreams and made plans to visit the Arctic pool and harbour ships- desires to connect to the ocean and to be inside water. I dressed minimally and ventured outside with a small sketchbook and camera in my pocket, to capture the mystical light. I began running tentatively, feeling the environment with the possibility of Polar Bears around and low visibility in the pre-sunrise light.

Beautiful rising peach gradient filling the sky to the North West, down at the end of Adventdalen towards Edgeoya Island. The subtle colours dancing around the daily emergence of the mountains, on the North shore of Adventdalen was wonderful- real magic created by our universe. I returned to the Czech station and prized the stack of bikes out of a snow drift and kicked the snow out of the spokes, chain and breaks- an optimistic idea about an alternative mode of transport, however after a brief trial, I discovered that the steering was minimal and the back breaks non-existent, which with going up and down hills on thick snow and sheets of ice was not safe.

After initially setting out without it, I soon returned home to get my big Canon camera, to capture the beautiful magic dawning on the Adventdalen mountains and the distant northern range beyond the mouth of the fjord. A fluorescent pink, glowing blanket, gently laid across the top of the peaks.



Adventdalen Sea Ice, Sunrise, February 2020

Walking East, to the edge of the 'Polar Bear safe zone' (although I was constantly questioning the reality of this 'safe zone', after a bear visited Longyearbyen town centre recently...) I wore my spectacles for clearer vision, until they steamed up with my hot breath and instantly ice crystals formed across the panes and I had to take them off. Constantly faced with two options: Short-sighted vision or obscured icy vision...I realised I had forgotten my snowboarding goggles, when I needed them to protect my eyes, cheek bones and forehead, against the extreme elements today.

Second full day here and I am losing things and feeling at one with dissolving and connecting to everything and nothing. I hitched a lift through the mad, dark, night, gale to the supermarket, got supper supplies and headed home in the darkness, whilst filming and running the last section of the journey, unable to see properly amid the dark twirling Arctic sheets of snow and ice in the air, and with steamed spectacles from breathing into my face mask- the preferred option, instead of having sore eyes if they remained exposed, whipped by fast flung, icy snow flakes. 25 Knots of near gale force wind, rising to 30 knots in the morning...

20.02.20, Longyearbyen Sunrise 10.10- Sunset 14.14

Amazing pink light as the sun began to rise. I did two trips carrying equipment to the Loff Bird hut (I was given the keys by Atle, the owner, yesterday)- my painting studio, to use as I need throughout the month of my stay on Svalbard. I cleaned the outside of the windows to remove lots of dry Arctic, desert dust and snow crystals, then beautiful clear views and much more light became available through the big panes from the inside. I set up the tripod outside and took some spectacular photos of the exciting and mystical sea ice, which blew into Adventdalen over night, with the near gale force winds.

Walking fast, to warm up, with top and bottom eyelashes sticking together and freezing thighs and hands. Glowing pink cheeks and nose when I returned to the station after documenting the morning performance of colours in the sky.



One Universe Painted Flag, Adventdalen Sea Ice, March 2020

22.02.20, Longyearbyen Sunrise 09.44- Sunset 14.40

After a mostly wakeful night I finally had three deep hours of sleep between 06.30-09.30. Every time I spend time working in the Arctic landscape, the globally recognised circadian cycle becomes stretched and squashed, depending on what is happening in the sky: Colour and light take precedence over normal time and bodily rhythms. Then got up, dressed and left for my bird hut studio with hot water in a flask, ready to paint the sunrise before breakfast. Very cold air and strong wind from the South East, driving icy air out of Adventdalen towards the open sea. A lot of sea ice had been blown North West and there were deep teal waves undulating with floating reflections of light from the sky again. Slices of ice were streaking down the fjord with the fast tide.

Yesterday, turquoise mist rose from the horizon and obscured the fjord and mountains, today the long views North West out towards Billafjorden and towards the Western mountains were clearer than I've seen this season- the change in scale was surreal and exciting. Gleaming pink snow outlining the shapes of the majestic peaks, adorned with the classic Arctic sunrise and sunset spectrum- as long as it is not cloudy and snowing, this magical gradient can be witnessed during this precious window of fast transitioning light, during springtime.

At about 15.00 this afternoon, as I began walking uphill towards Galleri Svalbard I looked back towards the Adventdalen mountains and the peaks were glowing deep blue in the fading light. The residing colour in the sky was a shade of violet which I imagined is generic of this time of year, but which I have never seen before- it was astoundingly unique and specific to the exact time and surrounding environment of snow and freezing wintery light- beautiful!

23.02.20, Longyearbyen Sunrise 09.32- Sunset 14.51

The best sleep yet- I quickly got up and ventured to my studio, to see that the sea ice had returned! The air was freezing and the great volume of icicles on the bright turquoise studio door was striking. Then, when inside, all of the window panes were obscured by icicles too- the weather was telling me to pack up and take a day of rest and let my materials and equipment thaw out, ready to pack and journey up to Ny Alesund, tomorrow. With burning, freezing, fingers it was hard to operate, tingling sharp icy pains chimed through my nerves, whenever my freezing fingers touched anything made of metal- tripod/ camera/ door handle... I did some filming of the moving sea ice which was swaying and cracking near the Loff bird hut- bewitching, instrumental sounds....



Sea Ice and The Three Crowns, looking East from Ny Alesund Harbour

This daily diary continued in the form of writing with coloured pens in my sketchbook, whilst I spent 8 days working as Artist in Residence at Kingsbay Research Community in Ny Alesund and again when I returned to the Czech station and the Loff bird hut, where I continued painting until the 13th of March, when I flew South from Longyearbyen to Oslo.

Please visit my website for further information about the research journeys I go on and the resulting work I create:

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