

PRESS RELEASE

Polly Townsend
Antarctic Paintings

23 April - 17 May 2024

John Martin Gallery, 38 Albemarle Street, London, W1S 4JG
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In January 2023, Polly Townsend spent five weeks in Antarctica as Artist in Residence. The position, sponsored and awarded by the Friends of the Scott Polar Research Institute, and hosted on the Royal Navy's Ice patrol ship HMS Protector, is the latest in a series of artists' residences to the world's most remote and environmentally sensitive landscapes.



The five-week residency was as demanding as it was exhilarating. Antarctica is the coldest, highest, windiest, most isolated continent, and accessed across one of the most treacherous stretches of ocean. With the permission of the captain, Polly Townsend was given the use of the ship's crow's nest as a studio, accessed by three ladders, and giving her a complete 360 degree view of her surroundings. Whenever possible she also worked on land, having developed techniques and equipment which allowed her to paint and draw

in sub-zero conditions. With over fifty paintings and drawings made on the expedition, she then returned to the UK to continue working in her studio. This exhibition is a ‘first response’ to the vast creative and psychological possibilities, of Antarctica.



Polly Townsend writes:

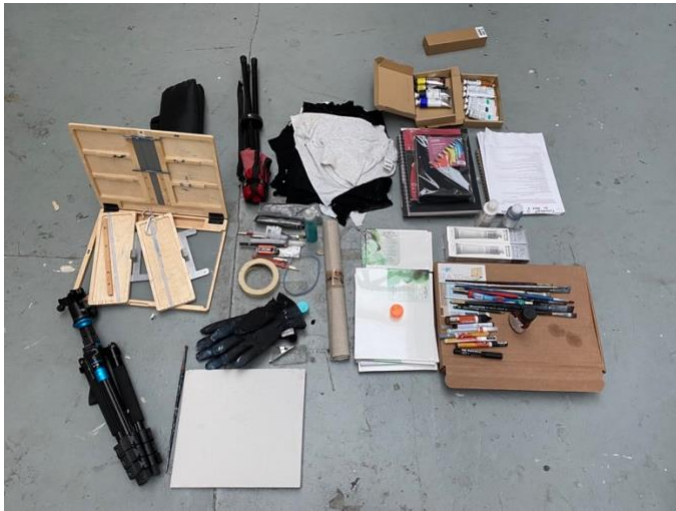
“The works I produced since returning to London are darker than the original vistas. I realised that climate concerns have cast a shadow over the journey. Sea ice in 2023 was at a record low – we saw none. At times I painted in a t-shirt. Later this year temperatures were 30 degrees Celsius above the norm, in both the Antarctic and Arctic. My children’s future was constantly on my mind.

Time could seem as suspended as the ice; often trapped in slumber between cloud and sea. Sudden awakenings and unveilings could bring sky-scraper sized slabs crashing down and pinnacles accelerating up. Colour was both playful and tortuous, dancing between impossibly delicate hues and bold swathes of pure pigment.

From a moving vessel the landscape changed rapidly. As did the weather and the visible distance. Light could bounce, mollify, and sharpen within seconds. Antarctica had a seemingly infinite range of personalities.

The entire experience had the contrasting qualities of dream and hyper-real movie and perhaps it is these two qualities that I most hope to convey in this exhibition”.





ABOUT POLLY TOWNSEND

Polly Townsend's paintings draw on the solitary journeys through many of the most remote and hostile landscapes in the world. Recent works come from visits to Kashmir and Kyrgyzstan and, as well as completing artist's residencies in Death Valley and The Badlands National Park, in January 2023 she was the Artist in Residence in Antarctica. Her paintings present a view of the world beyond the familiar, of places vast in scale, apparently desolate and mostly uninhabited.

Townsend treats the land as a singular subject, a still life; disembodied the form whilst remaining faithful to original patterns, colours and light. This objectification helps probe the gap between the tender and the unnerving; the beautiful and the bleak. The use of titles and the empty spaces serve to emphasise the tension between absence and presence, reflecting on the current state of landscape: one of flux, impermanence and a challenging passage of time.

Townsend produces small works on site using a collapsible easel, sketchbooks and photography, building up larger canvases in her London studio.

BIOGRAPHY

Polly Townsend (b.1977) completed an MFA at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 2001. She has exhibited widely throughout the UK and USA and has won several painting and drawing awards, including the Slade Life Drawing Prize (judged by Paula Rego), the Duveen Travel Scholarship, the Worshipful Company of Painter Stainers Award, The Sir Ben Bowen Studio Prize for Fine art, The Contemporary Art Prize for Wales Studentship award and she was shortlisted for both the Gilchrist-Fisher Landscape Painting Award and, in 2019, the Jackson Painting Prize.

Townsend has several paintings in the Permanent Collection of the Department of State USA, currently on display in Beijing, Karachi and Mumbai and has work in the National Parks Collection USA, The Alpine Club Collection UK, and the Ben Uri Collection. Polly Townsend has travelled extensively for her work and has twice been selected for the prestigious National Park Artist-in-Residence schemes (to Death Valley and Badlands National Park). Polly Townsend lives and works in London.



John Martin Gallery

Operating from Mayfair since 1992, the John Martin Gallery represents established international artists, artist estates as well as providing a platform for emerging painters and sculptors. Opening hours during the exhibition: Monday - Friday 10-6. Further information please visit our website or contact Laura Campbell laura@jmlondon.com



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