

Countering colonial nostalgia and heroic masculinity in the age of accelerated climate change: The Arctic artworks of Katja Aglert and Isaac Julien

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ABSTRACT

This article explores two screen-based artworks: Katja Aglert's Winter Event – Antifreeze (2009–18) and Isaac Julien's True North (2004) respectively, that exemplify diverse viewpoints contesting the essentialized identities of the Arctic past. These artworks recover the histories of women, the Inuit and African American men's involvement in polar exploration, reimagining heroic narratives from historically excluded or ignored perspectives. By employing irony and humour, these artworks expand our understanding of how media-based art can respond to the ironies of a warming planet and challenge colonial nostalgia for White male heroism. The artworks traverse not just the human imperialism of the colonial era but also the newer imperialism in the age of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, decentring the mythic and exotic qualities of expedition narratives. Ultimately, the irreverent artwork encourages us to rethink an aesthetics of the distanced sublime from Romantic aesthetics and its roots in European Universalism, promoting a more inclusive and intersectional approach to the Arctic and its representation.

KEYWORDS

climate change and art
Matthew Henson
polar regions
polar art and film
Arctic representation
queer ecocritical art
art in the Capitalocene
art in the Anthropocene

1. This article has been revised from earlier publications including my recent book, *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic* (2022), as well as numerous articles, including Bloom (2006, 2010, 2014).
2. For more particularly on Black artists and explorers in the Arctic, see John Akomfrah's video art installations. Also see the writings of Miller (2008), Luthersdottir (2015), Pushaw (2021), Foy (2012) and Harper (1986).
3. For more on ways writers confront serious environmental problems by way of unserious texts, see Seymour (2018).
4. Much of my feminist and postcolonial writing on the Arctic and Antarctic since then builds on this initial foray, including the Special Issue of the online peer-reviewed journal, *The Scholar and the Feminist*, at Barnard College that was the starting point for some of my current research. See the Barnard Center for Research on Women's web journal, *Scholar and Feminist Online*, a special edition on polar gender identities in 2008 (Bloom et al. 2010). For more on my 2022 book *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics*, see my 2023 interview with Thyrsa Goodeve and Elena Glasberg in *Art Journal*, <https://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=17743>, (accessed 22 August 2023).
5. Some have suggested the 'Capitalocene' instead of the Anthropocene, see Haraway (2015) and Demos (2017). Aglert was also influenced

Introduction

The Arctic has long been romanticized as an untouched and perilous wilderness that has functioned as an icy stage for the performance of heroic deeds, perpetuating colonialist ideologies since the arrival of the first European explorers in these regions.¹ However, with the accelerating effects of climate change, the Arctic has become a global concern due to the melting of the polar ice caps, the opening of new shipping routes and increasing exploitation of natural resources under late capitalism. In response to this context, artists, filmmakers and scholars have been reimagining the Arctic, using feminist, queer, Indigenous and Black aesthetic perspectives to challenge the dominant mainstream colonial narratives and to reclaim the region for marginalized voices.²

Using irony and dark humour, these artists expand our understanding of how contemporary media-based art can respond to some of the strange ironies of a warming planet. Such a self-reflexive approach is fitting in the context of mainstream Arctic art, which is often wrapped in a colonial nostalgia for White male heroism in keeping with the discourse of polar conquest and western imagery of the Arctic in modernity.³ This article explores from a feminist intersectional approach screen-based artworks by Katja Aglert's *Winter Event: Antifreeze* (2009–18) and Isaac Julien's *True North* (2004) that exemplify these diverse viewpoints that contest the essentialized identities of the Arctic's past.

Building upon my previous scholarship, including *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (1993), which first raised the issue of how the polar regions was perceived by explorers in the early twentieth century as 'a tabula rasa where people, history, and culture vanish' (Bloom 1993: 2) I argued that these so-called empty regions composed of impregnable ice made these ideal sites for the social construction of distinctive forms of White manhood and nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁴ Typically, these regions were presented in a temporal terms, as a battling ground for the superhuman struggles of a few exceptional White men against the force of 'nature' (with the desire ultimately to master and appropriate it), in which the values and masculine virtues of these heroic figures were seen to symbolize the nation. By revisiting this legacy, my work challenged and re-evaluated the narratives, lives and sacrifices that were deemed significant or overlooked.

In this article, I revisit my earlier book and my new book, *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic* (2022) which investigates the way contemporary artists are devising a new polar aesthetics that challenges the dominant narrative of mainstream media, which equates climate change with apocalyptic spectacles of melting ice and desperate polar bears, and green capitalism with masculinist imagery of sublime wilderness and imperial heroics. By uncovering the histories of women, the Inughuit and Black American men in polar exploration, Aglert's and Julien's media artworks reimagine heroic narratives from the vantage point of historically excluded or overlooked subjects. Aglert employs diverse media and aesthetic techniques to disrupt colonialist and nationalist masculinist narratives on the ice. Julien's reinterpretation of Black American polar explorer Matthew Henson challenges prevailing homophobic and racist accounts of imperial heroism at the North Pole.

Their media artworks traverse not just the human imperialism of the colonial era but also the newer imperialism in the age of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene.⁵ Both artists reshape the traditional sublime associated with Arctic landscapes, rendering it less intimidating despite the heightened dangers facing the region. In doing so, their irreverent artworks prompt us to re-evaluate the aesthetics

of the distanced sublime rooted in Romantic traditions and European Universalism – an aesthetic that champions a White, male-oriented conquest of nature.

Performing the everyday and acts of transformation in Svalbard: Katja Aglert's conceptual mediawork

Katja Aglert is a feminist artist and professor based in Stockholm, Sweden. She is known for her ongoing project *Winter Event – Antifreeze*, which began as an artistic residency research trip to Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago in the Arctic Ocean in 2009.⁶ A complex conceptual artwork that began in 2012, it incorporates performance, photography and video, drawing inspiration from feminist artists like Andrea Fraser, Renee Green and Martha Rosler, who have transformed object-oriented formats into discourse-oriented exhibitions (Figure 1).

In my recent book, *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics: Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic*, Aglert's work is contextualized within a broader group of international feminist artists, including Judit Hersko, Anne Noble, Connie Samaras and Joyce Campbell. These artists explore the connections between regional climate change, gender, human–nonhuman relations, territoriality, knowledge production and empire in their artworks focused on Antarctica. Working in areas of the Arctic like Svalbard, which lacked a native human population and had very few women visitors until the 1950s, Aglert employs strategies influenced by Fluxus and postmodernist art to challenge routine assumptions about the region (Figure 2). To engage viewers in critical reflection, she subverts the lingering tourist gaze shaped by white masculinist imagery from the Heroic Age of Exploration (1897–1922) and contemporary travel brochures that lure tourists to the Arctic for polar bear sightings with spectacles of sparkling icebergs in crisp and exhilarating weather.⁷ By presenting instead antisublime or unsublime images, such as snapshots of walruses asleep who appear behind the scenes, Aglert's artworks mock such offers to provide photo opportunities of rare animal sightings, which have increasingly become part of mass culture and the media spectacle of Arctic tourism.

Through her art, Aglert also recontextualizes historic Arctic images, such as those from Salomon August Andrée's ill-fated 1897 balloon expedition to the North Pole by depicting Andrée posing with his rifle over a dead polar bear that he had presumably shot. By altering the meaning of such iconic images of imperialism in the Arctic, she exposes the paradoxical nature of this heroic pose from 'hunting trophy/triumph' to the paradox that this leads to the explorers' death. In so doing, she challenges the reverence with which they were treated. Notably, the parasites found in the uncooked polar bear flesh consumed during the expedition were later proven to have caused Andrée's death.

Aglert's use of dark humour is not limited to her choice of images but encompasses the totality of her thinking about what it means to follow in the footsteps of these failed male fortune seekers, who have been travelling to the Arctic since the sixteenth century in the hope of returning home with fame and fortune. Her art draws inspiration from the Fluxus artist George Brecht's simple score titled *Winter Event – Antifreeze* as a basis of her own radical feminist critique of White male failure. Brecht's score was a way for art to 'ensure that the details of everyday life, the random constellations of objects that surround us, stop going unnoticed' (Johnson 2008, n.pag.) Aglert expands on the impact of Brecht's work, transforming how we perceive the Arctic today, challenging clichéd romanticism and the traditional sublime associated with the region (Robinson 2008).⁸

by reading some of the rare early women writers such as Christainne Ritter who wrote about her experiences travelling to Svalbard with her explorer husband Hermann Ritter. See Ritter's 1938 memoir *A Woman in the Polar Night* (2010) and the book *Expeditionen: Min kärlekshistoria* (Uusma 2013).

6. Katja Aglert's *Winter Event – Antifreeze* is a complex conceptual artwork that began in 2009 and has been exhibited as a solo exhibition at various performance spaces and museums in Columbia, Sweden and Norway, with the most recent being at the Polarmuseet in Tromsø, Norway (2017–18). For the exhibition in Tromsø, the piece title changed to *Antifreeze: Rehearsals as Score*.

7. In the Nordic context Aglert was influenced by Ritter's memoir *A Woman in the Polar Night* (2010) and the book *Expeditionen: Min kärlekshistoria* (Uusma 2013).

8. For more on late eighteenth-century philosophers' use of the term the sublime, see Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry* (1844); and Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

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Figure 1: Artist Katja Aglert facing the camera with broken Arctic sea ice in the background, in a video still from her exhibition *Winter Event – Antifreeze*, 2009. Curated by Stefanie Hessler at Weld in Stockholm, 2012. Photograph by M. Wreland. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2: Close-up of the artist Katja Aglert melting ice in her bare hand, 2009, photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

9. For writings on the contemporary sublime, see Morley, 'Introduction' (2010). I am using the term 'the contemporary sublime' differently than Simon Morley, who does not take into account climate change or neo-liberal economics in his detailed description of the term. For exhibitions that focus on the lure of the polar regions in Edwardian culture, with specific attention to the uses of the sublime in art and in the choices of the explorers themselves, see the website for the exhibition *To the Ends of the Earth: Painting the Polar Landscape*, shown at Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, 2008–09, <https://www.pem.org/exhibitions/to-the-ends-of-the-earth-painting-the-polar-landscape> (accessed 5 October 2023). For more critical writings on the history of Arctic photography, see Bloom, Glasberg and Kay, *Gender on Ice* (1993).

10. *True North* has been realized in a number of formats including: four-screen, three-screen, two-screen and single-screen projections. Julien has also produced a series of 100-cm² colour photographs, some conceived as single images and others presented as diptychs and triptychs. See also Julien's film installations *Fantôme Créole* (2005) that combines *True North* (2004) and *Fantôme Afrique* (2005).

For Aglert, the changing Arctic landscape represents a contemporary sublime that poses dangers to humans.⁹ As the epicentre of catastrophic climate change, the Arctic is no longer viewed as the most extreme and inhospitable environment for humans. Aglert's videos and extensive collection of Arctic photographs featured in her book *Winter Event – Antifreeze* exemplifies the tension between her lack of belonging, shaped by masculinist power relations, and the authoritative mechanisms that construct the Arctic's imaginary and its associated imagery.

Aglert's artistic approach rejects the visual references that detach the viewer's focus from the Arctic's sublime landscape alone. Her work deliberately challenges the heroic narrative, adopting a critical distance amidst the Arctic's captivating scenery. By emphasizing the mundane aspects and behind-the-scenes actions, she disrupts the romantically charged portrayal of the transcendent Arctic Ocean. Aglert's deliberate modesty and self-consciousness in her self-presentation contrast with the narrative of the lonely White male hero or artist. She brings attention to the banal actions happening in the background – the sounds, objects, directions from the camerawoman and warnings from fellow travellers about polar bears or gunshots.

Aglert uses performance and documentation of the behind the scenes of the performance to explore forms of criticality of the traditional sublime of the Arctic, through ongoing transformation (through performance), rather than as static representations claiming a grand narrative. Through repetition and the act of melting ice in her hands, she symbolizes modes of transformation and challenges the notion of the Arctic as a frozen inhospitable landscape. Instead, she emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals and the climate issues. As Aglert states, 'the melting ice is an act of performing the entangled bodily porous relationships that also are at the core of the "climate issue" – we are all connected in this together' (Aglert 2020: n.pag.) By bringing the melting Arctic down to a graspable scale, she engages with the climate crisis in an absurdist and tangible manner.

Katja Aglert's conceptual mediawork in Svalbard, as exemplified by her ongoing *Winter Event – Antifreeze* project, invites viewers to question the traditional narratives and media representations associated with the Arctic and challenge the notion of heroic masculinity. Her art reconfigures historic images, and subverts established norms by employing dark humour as she critiques the tourist gaze, transforming how we perceive and engage with the rapidly changing Arctic. By foregrounding issues of climate change, belonging and power dynamics, Aglert's work offers a compelling exploration of the Arctic's complexities and its significance in the contemporary world.

Reimagining the absences and erasures in the Arctic archive: Isaac Julien's *True North* (2004)

Isaac Julien is a renowned British installation and moving image artist, filmmaker and professor whose multi-screen film installations and photographs create a poetic and unique visual language by incorporating different artistic disciplines. *True North* (2004–08), his film and installation, is usually shown as a large-scale, multiple-screen audio-visual installation and offers one of the boldest examples of the new departure in the artistic and scholarly discourse on polar expedition narratives.¹⁰

True North, like Aglert's work, takes us back to the Heroic Age of exploration, when many of the Arctic regions had not yet achieved independent Indigenous self-governance systems. That did not come until a century later, as did Nunavut's independence in 1999 and Greenland's in 2008; both continue to remain part of

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larger countries (Canada and Denmark, respectively).¹¹ In Euro-American histories of the Arctic, the heroic era is often seen as distinct and is often contrasted with the current era, although the earlier colonial viewpoint persists and contributes to the crisis in the present.

Julien's film resonates with its audiences because it responds to a larger visual culture of western polar exploration narratives by exploring the relation between aesthetics and politics as well as the Robert Peary's U.S. expedition's complex politics of exclusion that I wrote about in *Gender on Ice*.¹² *True North* takes poetic licence and restructures the story of the Black American arctic explorer Matthew Henson in unexpected ways. The official public discourse allowed Henson to participate in the expedition but not to receive equal credit for his central place in this national story as it was told by Peary and by institutions such as the National Geographic Society. At that historical moment, women and people of colour had no protagonist role in nation and culture building and the advance of scientific knowledge. The Greenland Arctic Inughuit men and unpaid women helpers, companions and guides were also erased from their roles as travellers and explorers by the historical preference for white heroic masculinist narratives.

True North is a film about the North Pole but was filmed in Iceland and northern Sweden, which is made evident to the viewer through shots of Iceland's ice caves. It focuses on descriptive re-enactments but draws from the documentary genre, historical documents and non-fiction material, and like Aglert's work was inspired by the scholarship in my own book, *Gender on Ice*. Significantly, in Julien's film, we do not see Robert Peary or his rival, Frederick Cook or evidence of the bitter controversy that ensued between the two American men who were both competing to be the first to attain the North Pole at that historical moment. In lieu of the driving anxiety and the competition in these White male exploration narratives, Julien's film foregrounds the sheer physical attraction of the Arctic, as well as the significance of the Black American Arctic explorer Matthew Henson.¹³ The film situates Henson front and centre, drawing the tensions between Peary and Henson to the fore of the historical narrative, to question the veracity of Peary's account of Henson's role. Julien rewrites these older stories using Sámi actors from Iceland to represent the four Arctic Inughuit men from Greenland in Peary's actual expedition to remind us of their importance; in Julien's film, they ultimately replace Peary as the narrative's focus (Figure 3).

In Julien's film, he utilizes close-ups of the Sámi faces on multiple screens. This approach destabilizes Peary's racialized hierarchy and portrays the Sámi individuals as legitimate subjects rather than as the labouring bodies and exotic props, as presented in Peary's photograph of Henson and the four Inughuit men from the Greenland Arctic at the North Pole in 1909. The men in Peary's image, namely Egingwah, Utah, Ooqeath and Seegloo, accompanied Peary and Henson. However, Peary's photograph aligns with prevailing Euro-American photographic conventions of the era in *National Geographic* magazine, which often depicted distant and remote places through photographs of local 'Native inhabitants'. In this specific case, all the men's identities are subordinated to the prominence of the American flag.

At the same time, Julien seduces the audience visually when he rewrites the narrative of a subservient Henson concocted by Peary in a visual register far different from what one would expect. In doing so, he subverts an older pseudoscientific history known as climate determinism, which argues that Black people could not belong in the North because it is racially impossible. In his installation, Julien shifts registers to mock such older racial notions as climate determinism and other baseless pseudoscientific accusations that Peary hurled against Henson. To do this, the film radically departs from Henson's story by including a Black actor, Vanessa Myrie, scantily dressed in high fashion to impersonate Henson in the Arctic (Figure 4).

11. For more on self-governance systems across the Arctic and the ways Indigenous self-determination relates to gender regimes and gender-based violence, see Kuokkanen (2019).

12. This larger culture includes *Nanook Revisited* (1999), *Atanarjuat* (2001) and *Qapirangajuq: Inughuit Knowledge and Climate Change* (2010).

13. For more on Henson and Peary's expeditions and the involvement of Inughuit people, see Foy (2012), Harper (1986) and Pálsson (2008).



Figure 3: Isaac Julien, Inuit and Black faces in *Fantôme Creole* (four-screen projection combining *True North* and *Fantôme Afrique*), installation view from Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, 16 mm colour film transferred to DVD, 2005, photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4: Isaac Julien, untitled photograph from the *True North* series, digital print on Epson Premium Photo Glossy 250 g paper (102.9 Å~102.9 cm), 2004. Courtesy of the artist.

Julien's use of the commercial aesthetics of fashion photography, casting Myrie wearing a white summer dress, transforms the Arctic into an inviting place with sunny skies and warmer weather, all because of global warming. This brazen and incongruous strategy queers and parodies not only an older anti-Black discourse of climate determinism which erases the importance of the Inughuit women in the expedition who made the clothes that enabled the men to survive in this freezing and inhospitable region. But also the racial notions of patriarchal leadership and the era's regressive gender politics – especially a highly simplified and formulaic narrative of White masculinist heterosexual agency prevailing over a feminized space as depicted in Robert Peary's 1898 photograph titled *Mother of the Seals (an Eskimo Legend)*, where his mistress Allakasingwah is cast as occupying an uncertain position between the human and the animal, lying nude on a rock and rendered passive as a natural resource or sexual object for Peary's use. In comparison, Myrie in Julien's film is presented as a Black sovereign subject who surveys the landscape and appears self-possessed and sexually unavailable. She might be subject to a male gaze through an older politics of representation, but is not controlled and subjugated by it like Allakasingwah.¹⁴ Indeed, both Henson and Peary had Inughuit mistresses and illegitimate children in the Arctic and maintained relationships with these women and children over multiple expeditions. This very fact complicates the Arctic explorer myth that assumes that Black people do not belong there, as generations of descendants of Henson's and Peary's mixed offspring remain in the more liveable parts of the Arctic.¹⁵

But the inclusion of Myrie impersonating Henson is ironic since it also signals that Peary sanctioned Inughuit mistresses on his expedition to protect against what was seen as the potential and more dangerous carnal relations between men on his expedition.¹⁶ Julien's film, in response, camps up the homosocial and racial relations between Peary and Henson. Julien may queer the homosocial relationship between the two men, but by substituting Myrie, he alludes to their relationships with Inughuit women only indirectly. The incongruous and self-possessed presence of Myrie, shown washing her hands and fondling the ice, turns the landscape of dangerous ice flows into just ice, not a theatre of life or death, and in this respect recalls Aglert's images of her hands melting the ice. However, in the case of Julien, the contrast between the stunningly spectacular landscape and Myrie's banal gesture underscores his ambition to remind us of how fetishized the ice and the Black female model are. Julien emphasizes this visually since there is nothing more incongruous than putting a Black fashion model on melting ice and having her wear white summer clothing to aesthetically mark her off from a landscape and further highlight its sublimity.

Julien rethinks the relations among cinema, aesthetics and the racism endemic to earlier, well-known representations of Arctic exploration by highlighting the aesthetic drive and imperial ambitions that powered the early exploration narratives, which unfolded in sublime landscapes.

In contrast to Aglert, who relies on the discourse of the everyday, the mundane and the banal, Julien pushes and celebrates the aesthetic (as he does in all his work), challenging the foundational assumptions of the sublime as overwhelming, humbling and invigorating. He takes aim at the notion of polar sacrifice and the way polar exploration was seen as a moral touchstone and an artistic device. The suffering that Henson endured was due less to the privations of the Arctic than to the racial hierarchies that Peary reproduced. Rather than offer us an unmediated vision of the Arctic that encapsulates the spiritual investment in power over a realm inimical to habitation, he presents it instead as highly technologized and artificial.

Presented across multiple screens, with lush production values, the film and photographs immerse the viewer in their technological beauty. However, the use of multi-screen immersion disrupts the possibility of a coherent overview, challenging

14. For more on the photography of Moodie, see Hatfield (2018). For more on the ways Greenland's contemporary Indigenous women artists and writers are contesting the dichotomies and essentialized identities from their past, see Thirsted (2017).

15. See Counter (1991) for more on Black, White and Eskimo relations.

16. See Pálsson (2008) for more on the production of food and clothes for Peary's expedition team and how this affected Inughuit women and men.

desires for possession that cannot be exhaustively explained by nationalism or ownership. Despite the aesthetic appeal, Julien does not prioritize beauty over politics. Instead, he intentionally politicizes the aesthetic as an ironic critique of Heroic Age polar exploration photography, which erases the political dimensions of such activities. Asked why he combines beautiful, compelling images with marginalized voices in his work, Julien writes:

We tend to think that [for] images to be posing certain political questions, or to be intellectually interesting, they need to somehow not be too aesthetically oriented. In a sense, anti-aesthetic image-making is the normative view made for politically 'authentic' content. So, of course, I want to oppose that. And I want to oppose that because I think perhaps it is too easy to exist in this binary; and I want to think about the possibility of making images that can exist aesthetically in a culture that poses difficult questions. I think those images are connected to trying to reclaim desire politically or reclaim images that are more poetic and more associated with the lyrical, or 'queering' of the image.
(2012: 26)

Julien further emphasizes that these beautiful pictorial images simultaneously convey a sense of trauma, generating a disturbing resonance that he refers to as a 'contaminated sublime' (2012: 26). This concept unsettles the idea of pleasure that we derive from beauty.

Visualizing new absences and erasures in the melting Arctic

Katja Aglert's and Isaac Julien's works engage with the gaps and omissions in the Arctic archive and its representation in visual culture, while also addressing the ongoing degradation resulting from extreme climate change in the region. Katja Aglert's work offers a more direct commentary on climate change and the melting ice compared to Julien's. Nevertheless, both artists can be regarded as artists of environmental pieces that explore the absences and erasures of past histories from the earlier era of exploration. Simultaneously, they shed light on how climate change disrupts our perception of the Arctic today, considering that the planet's environmental concerns have become a matter of great significance, intertwined with issues of extractive capitalism, injustice, inequality and imperialism. It is evident that the melting of the Arctic makes certain scenes more accessible, and Julien utilizes this transformative process by placing a Black fashion model and actress on ice, using the Arctic as a runway, and capturing her interactions with the melting landscape. This approach aims not merely to aestheticize the melting Arctic but to reveal the radical alterations by industrial modernity in these landscapes.

While Julien reimagines and parodies polar imperial fantasies, Aglert challenges the representation of Svalbard's natural and cultural landscape. They both complicate the Arctic as a bastion for the construction of heteronormative masculinities dominating nature. Aglert draws from Svalbard's European occupation history and absence of Indigenous populations, depicting it as a region visualized through narratives of heroic polar exploration, maritime exploration, commercial fishing and hunting and industrial mining. These visualizations are intertwined with politics and socially inscribed power structures, defying the notion of pristine emptiness. Isaac Julien's *True North* echoes these issues, reflecting Hester Blum's exploration of how Arctic expeditions of the nineteenth century were influenced by anti-Blackness, exemplified by using black-face minstrelsy on Arctic ships (Blum 2019). Additionally, Sámi men played significant

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roles in Nordic aspirations for Arctic discovery and claim. By incorporating these perspectives, we gain a deeper appreciation of the multi-layered meanings associated with ice and the Arctic in the artists' works (Pushaw 2021).

Together, Aglert and Julien are creating new aesthetic and political possibilities for understanding the Arctic. Both reframe the landscape in terms of an agent in a more-than-human social life, and what Julien calls a 'contaminated sublime' in which the melting Arctic appears as a springboard for reinvention, creating in Julien's artwork an entirely new parodic counter discourse, enabled by a different deployment of new technologies, that underscores the coexistence between humans and nature that he represents.

Beyond critiquing the human imperialism of the colonial era, Aglert's and Julien's artworks also confront the newer forms of imperialism in the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. They reframe the traditional sublime of Arctic landscapes, exposing the region's increased dangers while questioning the aesthetics of a distant sublime rooted in European Universalism and a white, male-oriented conquest of nature.

As we confront the pressing challenges of climate change, the works of Aglert and Julien remind us that the Arctic is not solely a site of environmental concern. It is a space of cultural and political struggle, urging us to engage with its complexities and to consider its colonial and nationalist histories. These artworks serve as a call to action, inviting us to dismantle the legacies of colonialism and imperialism and to work towards a more just and sustainable future for all, embracing a more inclusive and nuanced perspective on the rapidly transforming Arctic.

In the face of the Arctic's recognized crisis and the urgent challenges of climate change, artists like Aglert and Julien prompt us to expand our perspectives and delve into the Arctic's intricate complexities, including its masculinist, colonial and nationalist histories. By embracing a more inclusive and nuanced perspective on the Arctic, we can work towards a future that upholds principles of justice, sustainability and respect for the diverse voices that contribute to its history. The melting Arctic calls for our attention, our action and our collective commitment to creating a world that embraces the interconnectedness of humans, nature and the Arctic's intricate web of life.

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