ANTARCTICA

JOHN PAUL CAPONIGRO

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Antarctic Adventures

Antarctica changed me. They say you go as a tourist and return as an ambassador. That's certainly been my experience. I've been absolutely captivated by Antarctica. Antarctica is a remote region of overwhelming grandeur and stunning beauty. It has global significance geophysically and biologically. It is a climate indicator and regulator affecting weather and ocean currents. The highest, driest, windiest, coldest, most isolated continent contains 90% of the world's iceberg mass and 68% of the world's fresh water. This crystal desert contains the lowest biotic diversity inland and some of the richest oceanic biotic diversity. Only recently discovered in the last century, Antarctica has never had an indigenous culture and will remain an international territory devoted to science until at least 2048 providing an example for all global cooperative efforts.

Strange things happen in this other-worldly region of our planet. Antarctica is the only continent that is completely surrounded by an unimpeded current giving rise to the roughest seas in the world. From the southern pole, which experiences a six month period of daylight in summer and a six month period of sunlight in winter, you can point in any direction and call it north. The Dry Valleys have not had precipitation in over 2 million years. Lake Vostok, buried under 11,000 feet of ice, is the size of North America's Lake Huron. The weight of the up to 15,700 feet thick ice sheet depresses the continental crust by more than half a mile. The largest recorded iceberg, B15 (183 by 23 miles, or 11,000 square miles, larger than Jamaica) broke off the Ross Ice Shelf in 2000 – and more than a decade later parts of it had still not melted.

Antarctica seems so far away and remote, but this magical land affects our weather and our tideline. I've never been to a place that so clearly demonstrates how deeply connected everything and everyone is on this tiny blue marble floating through space that we call earth. You can't go to Antarctica and return unchanged.

Antarctica changed my photography. After my first voyage to Antarctica I was surprised to step off the boat with a finished body of work, which contained a majority of images that were directly representational with very little alteration. Because I'm best known for producing highly altered photographs, to many this may seem like a reversal of my previous practices. In fact, what was reversed was the balance of practices; more unaltered than altered images were produced. I have always presented minimally altered photographs and highly altered photographs together to clarify the nature of photography itself as well as our uses and expectations of it. This time, I decided to present them not together in the same body of work but apart as separate bodies of work. Antarctica was the first (and so far only) time that I have produced dual bodies of work that run in parallel with one another, one minimally altered (like the ones in this ebook) and one highly altered. This shift has been in response to many factors, including my desire to continually challenge myself artistically, but primarily to satisfy my desire to make effective conscientious contributions to culture by intensifying the use of my work for environmental advocacy.

To date I've made six voyages to Antarctica in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2014. Every voyage has had a markedly different character. Our 2005 voyage was brilliant. The air was filled with pure, clear color. We had endless amounts of sunshine. We were amazed by sunsets that lasted hours. The sun never truly seemed to set, even among the magnificent high spires of the La Mer Channel.

Our 2007 voyage was moody. We hardly saw the sun amid rain, snow, ice, and fog. On one occasion the winds were so strong they created whirlwinds on the surface of the ocean and blew waterfalls back up the mountainsides. We were astonished by an ever-changing parade of ice sculptures emerging out of these heavy atmospheres, never more so than when we sailed into Plenneau Bay otherwise know as The Iceberg Graveyard.

Our 2009 voyage was ethereal. A high transparent veil of clouds diffused the light for days making our nightless days below the Antarctic Circle even more dreamlike. We were lucky enough to be able to sail into the narrow channel that separates the high glacier walls of the Gullet on a

crystal clear day. Blindingly white, it was as if clouds descended from the heavens to touch the ocean and froze.

Our 2011 voyage was raw. A rough passage was followed by ragged weather, with winds that blew us off our first landing, fog that shrouded our night-long push through an icy channel, snow that veiled the mountain tops, and clouds that descended on us calming long enough to create a mirror-like surface for us to glide through the icebergs that had calved off the high glaciers surrounding us on all sides above Paradise Bay.

Our 2013 voyage was animated. While the Antarctic continent is permeated with a vast silence, our adventure at its edges was anything but quiet. I had been looking for a different quality of light and weather that characterized this voyage (they hadn't been the same on any two voyages) and looking up, as we were tossing in front of a couple of magnificent ice arches off Cuverville, I realized what was unique about this voyage was the wind. It shaped both the water and the sky. It added a unique rhythm and cadence to each day.

Our 2014 voyage was varied. Our flight to King George Island allowed us to avoid the Drake Passage. We experienced a little bit of everything – sun, overcast, rain, sleet, snow, fog, wind. Fog hid the ice-locked entrance to The Gullet as we zodiaced through quickly opening and closing channels between sea ice in the morning and lifted by mid-day to giving us stunning 360 degree views as we walked on the ice. For the first time I have visited Antarctica, I wasn't surprised by a different quality of light but rather by how different the quality of light can be from moment to moment. Antarctica is constantly changing.

There is a profound sense of privilege that comes from being in the presence of such rare beauty, at once timeless and ephemeral. It touches you deeply. Witness to the extraordinary, you leave changed – for the better. It's a blessing born of grace and giving birth to more grace. It's as if you've been given a gift and you feel compelled to keep giving it.

Antarctica CLXV

Antarctica XI

Antarctica XIII

Antarctica XXV

Antarctica LXIII

Antarctica CXLIV

Antarctica XXXVII

Antarctica XXXII

Antarctica XXX

Antarctica XX

Antarctica LXXXIX

Antarctica LXXXIII

Antarctica LXXX

Antarctica LXXXV

Antarctica X

Antarctica CXII

Disclosure of Practices

This body of work is editorial in nature. In this book, I've included only images created with appropriate limitations for that type of work. What exactly are those limitations? Cropping, lens distortion corrections, limited color adjustment, sharpening, and despeckling. (A few other practices are deemed acceptable in specific contexts.)

It's surprisingly hard to find concise specific lists of these criteria. Most discussions of appropriate practices offer ethical guidelines about how to approach content creation more than specifically how to and how not to create it. I know this because I began researching this subject in depth after I began this body of work. That's interesting, because I've spent a lifetime with photography and have been a professional photographer for over twenty years. I didn't go to journalism school; I went to art school. But, in addition to being a fine artist, I am on occasion a journalist. My work in Antarctica bridges both worlds.

It wasn't clear to me until after my initial voyage to Antarctica what kind of project I was developing. When I returned I realized I had developed a small body of work on site and that 80% of them fit editorial criteria. As my work from Antarctica became clearer and clearer, I realized putting certain restrictions on my standard practices would be useful. It was stimulating in terms of the development of my vision. And, it might intensify the spirit of environmental advocacy in all of my work, whether minimally or highly altered. For this project, I shifted the balance of my working methods deliberately. Subsequently, I continue to do this in other regions of the world, developing both minimally and highly altered bodies of work simultaneously.

I'm best known for creating highly altered images. In that type of work, it's anything goes. Within those bodies of work, I also create images that are minimally altered, which fit editorial criteria but the body of work as a whole does not. Usually, in the selection and presentation of my work, no distinction is drawn between the two types of images. This engages viewers with a set of questions. What's been altered? How has it been altered? Why was it altered? How do I know it's been altered? Assumptions are abandoned in favor of questions. This sets up a rich dialog out of which come many valuable insights. The viewer becomes more aware of conventions in looking, their involvement in the act of looking, and themselves. A heightened awareness of the interrelation between the subject, the medium, the author, and the viewer is created. Each viewing is a reenactment and a reinterpretation. New life is constantly breathed into the work. And this vital force is carried forward in new actions and sometimes the production of new things.

Antarctica is the first body of work I've produced that uses classic place and date titles. That type of title doesn't adequately describe a majority of images I make. Most of my images are titled with a series name, usually describing a process not a thing, and an order of creation number. They become timeless and placeless. They're universal rather than particular.

Many images weren't included in this book. I've produced many highly altered images from material shot in Antarctica, but I don't title them the same way or present them mixed with images from my body of work entitled Antarctica. I present these kinds of images in separate contexts or clearly separated to make it clear that they're different kinds of images. I think it's conscientious to do this. It also makes clearer statements. The intents of both kinds of statements become clearer when compared and contrasted with one another.

Several images were changed for inclusion in this book. Why? The original versions contained small, but significant, elements that were composited from other sources. So I removed them, creating project specific versions. Even though it is always interpretive, editorial work is about representing the scene as it was witnessed; aestheticizing is a secondary concern and sometimes eschewed.

While I've limited my practices in my work from Antarctica to those adopted by editorial photographers, I'm interested in pushing the envelope respectfully to stimulate useful dialogs on contemporary media practices. Here's one example. Many of my panoramas were stitched

together from multiple shots. I think that practice is useful in the context of journalism, as long as it represents what the witness saw or what was before the camera eye. Yet one panorama here is different. The exposures for this particular panorama were made over the course of several minutes. There was a lot of parallax at the time so the icebergs had different relative positions in the exposures that were merged. Because of this, you can actually see more icebergs, which otherwise would have been hidden. This type of composite actually presents the viewer with more information than a single exposure could. So do HDR merges; multiple exposure composites can show more detail in shadows and highlights. These new practices, ones that weren't possible or couldn't be adopted practically a few decades ago, are easy to do today because technology has evolved so rapidly. What new tools will help us advance representation? What assumptions will we make tomorrow? These answers depend on what we do and don't do today. Are these appropriate photojournalistic practices today? I think they can be, if the author and media outlet disclose their practices.

Disclosure informs the viewer so they can enhance their own points of view and in some cases provides independent sources of verification. Media outlets use standard practices to create specific kinds of information and assumptions about those practices to deliver information efficiently. Often, viewers learn these conventions without consciously considering them. Too many assumptions are made. They sometimes make things too simple and in some cases mislead. I think everyone involved in news media of any kind ought to disclose much more information than they ordinarily do – now more than ever as media is evolving rapidly. That's why I make statements like this. Disclosure empowers viewers. Disclosure also regains credibility for the messengers. We all know the media (authors, mediums, outlets) is not perfect. Many viewers continue to maintain an uneasy faith in media because they see no alternative. Many viewers have lost faith in media completely. Trust can be regained through disclosure and verification. We need to know more about who the media is and how and why they make and deliver different kinds of information in different ways. Media and media practices need to evolve as the mediums they use do.

There are many important questions to ask. Who is the author? How are documents produced? How are they edited? How are they presented? Who delivered them? What context are were placed in? What accompanies them? How does that influence our perception of them? What time constraints influenced them? What financial restraints influenced them? What financial objectives influenced them? Who funds them? Who funds the media outlets? What legislative limits are put on media? I'm asking those questions. And, I'm asking you to ask them too.

You want answers. That's what I'm providing here. And I provide even more online and in public on an ongoing basis.

Biography

John Paul Caponigro is one of the most prominent artists working with digital media. His art has been exhibited internationally and purchased by numerous private and public collections including Princeton University, the Estée Lauder collection, and the Smithsonian.

John Paul combines his background in painting with traditional and alternative photographic processes using state-of-the-art digital technology. His life's work is a call to reconnect with nature through conscientious creative interaction with our environment.

Respected as an authority on creativity and fine art digital printing, he is a highly sought after speaker, lecturing extensively at conferences, universities, and museums, in venues as diverse as TEDx, MIT and Photoshop World. He leads workshops globally.

John Paul's work has been published widely in numerous periodicals and books including Art News and The Ansel Adams Guide. A contributing editor for Digital Photo Pro and a columnist for the Huffington Post, he is the author of Adobe Photoshop Master Class and the DVD series R/Evolution. John Paul is a member of the Photoshop Hall of Fame, Canon's Explorers of Light, Epson's Stylus Pros, and X-Rite's Coloratti. His clients include Adobe, Apple, Kodak, and Sony.

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JOHN PAUL CAPONIGRO

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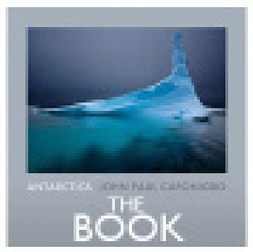

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