



Antarctica, Art and Archive Polly Gould

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Antarctica, that icy wasteland and extreme environment at the ends of the earth, was - at the beginning of the 20th century - the last frontier of Victorian imperialism, a territory subjected to heroic and sometimes desperate exploration. Now, at the start of the 21st century, Antarctica is the vulnerable landscape behind iconic images of climate change. In this genre-crossing narrative Gould takes us on a journey to the South Pole, through art and archive.

Through the life and tragic death of Edward Wilson, polar explorer, doctor, scientist and artist, and his watercolours, and through the work of a pioneer of modern anthropology and opponent of scientific racism, Franz Boas, Gould exposes the legacies of colonialism and racial and gendered identities of the time. Antarctica, the White Continent, far from being a blank - and white - canvas, is revealed to be full of colour. Gould argues that the medium matters and that the practices of observation in art, anthropology and science determine how we see and what we know. Stories of exploration and open-air watercolour painting, of weather experiments and ethnographic collecting, of evolution and extinction, are interwoven to raise important questions for our times. Revisiting Antarctica through the archive becomes the urgent endeavour to imagine an inhabitable planetary future.

Polly Gould is an artist who shows with Danielle Arnaud. She is a tutor at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, UK and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

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