

Tiina Itkonen | *Ice Has a Memory: Greenland's Vanishing Song Lines*

Exhibition: 2 July – 3 September 2022

Opening: Friday, 1 July 2022, 6 – 9 pm



Tiina Itkonen,
Oeqertarsuaq,
Qaanaaq, 2019

“Now the ice is gone. When I was a child, there was always ice for hunting.”

– Quote from Inuit Hunter

Persons Projects is proud to present Tiina Itkonen's solo exhibition, *Ice Has a Memory: Greenland's Vanishing Song Lines*, which centers around her *Piniartoq*¹ project on Greenland's Inuit community, which is indigenous to the region. It captures the effects of climate change on the broader Inuit community, its hunters, traditions, and the entire village's way of life. The dire situations shown in her photographs reveal the various complexities involved, if there is to be any hope of reversing the negative effects of global warming. Her images remind all of us, wherever we live, that real change relies not only on working closely with these local communities, but respecting their cultural values and way of life as a mirror of our own.

Tiina Itkonen's quest in 1995, to photograph the northern most inhabited place on earth, ended up landing her in the small Inuit village of Siorapaluk, Greenland. This remote, polar, largely forgotten cluster of small wooden houses, unknowingly to her at the time, would grow into her lifelong work. What began as an adventure for a 27 year old woman traveling alone, grew to become a photographic historiography of the direct effects of global warming. Itkonen's travels brought her back periodically to the same place for the past three decades. Her photographs record not only the environmental changes to that whole region of the world, but also how it impacts the human factor, both sociologically and emotionally. Her work systematically documents how climate change has altered a traditional way of living from a hunting society into a new uncertain reality.

In Greenland, the sea ice is rapidly disappearing at a rate of almost ten percent per decade; Scientists even predict that the Arctic will be mainly ice-free in the summertime by the mid-century. This creates a disruption for the Inuit community whose lives are based in this region. Hunting seals, walruses, polar bears, birds, and other Arctic animals has been a vital part of life and a main food source for many Inuit households, as, agriculture is not an option in the far north. Their age-old culture of on-ice subsistence hunting has already become more difficult, as, the hunters encounter more open water. Normally, dogs pull the hunters on a sled through the ice, but increasingly, the hunters must rely on their boats to reach safer, unmelted ice as their dog sled routes have disappeared. This

makes their only viable method of survival more dangerous. It's possible this way of life can be lost forever.

As the sea ice disappears, so do the indigenous peoples whose monetary incomes are derived from its natural bounties. An example of this is Itkonen's austere rendering of these small wooden framed homes over a thirty year period. These once brightly colored houses are now gradually fading with the climate change, turning into grey abandoned remnants of what they once were, as their inhabitants move into towns to find employment. Itkonen's images are filled with a knowledge that can only be attained through decades of earning the local trust of its people. The children she so innocently captured on film in 1995 are now the leaders of the community. Their story has many chapters and Itkonen helps to bind them into a rich but tragic history, where their way of life is slowly being forgotten. Her intimate photographs of this tiny but proud community, unfold and immortalize a storyline that's filled with love and loss, hope and tragedy, but no ending.

Tiina Itkonen was born in 1968 in Helsinki, where she currently lives and works. She graduated in 2002 from the University of Art and Design Helsinki (today, Aalto University School of Art). Her work was presented in various solo and group exhibitions, including shows at Kunsthalle St. Annen (Lübeck, 2020), Anchorage Museum, (Alaska, 2016), Rogaland Art Museum (Stavanger, 2010), Biennale of Sydney (Sydney 2010), The National Museum of Photography (Copenhagen, 2009), Scott Polar Research Institute Museum, (Cambridge, 2008); and are part of important collections such as Moderna Museet Stockholm, DZ-Bank Frankfurt, Helsinki City Art Museum, and many others. Currently, Itkonen is collaborating with the US-American *Piniartoq* project in Greenland, to monitor and record global warming in their efforts to understand and preserve the beauty of this fragile yet disappearing environment.

¹ Meaning „hunter“ in native Greenlandic