TIINA ITKONEN

Persons
Projects

Tiina Itkonen's quest in 1995 to photograph the northern most uninhabited 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, unbeknownst to her at the time, would grow into her lifelong work. What began as an adventure for a twenty-seven-year-old woman traveling alone, grew to become a photographic historiography of the direct effects of global warming. This project captures the effects of climate change on the broader Inuit community, Inuit hunters, and the entire community's way of life. The dire situation Itkonen photographs shows how any hope of reversing the negative effects of global warming relies not only on working closely with these local communities, but respecting their cultural values and way of life.

Tiina Itkonen was born in 1968 in Helsinki. Her work has been presented in various solo and group exhibitions, including shows at Kunsthalle St. Annen, (Lubeck, 2020); Anchorage Museum, (Alaska, 2016); 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 Muset, Stockholm, Sweden; and DZ-Bank, Frankfurt, Germany.

SEA ICE IS MY BEAUTIFUL GARDEN, 2018-2019

In this series, Itkonen's photographs record not only the environmental changes to that region of the world, but also how those changes impact the human factor sociologically and emotionally. 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 mostly 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.

In the small settlements of North West Greenland, hunting seal, walrus, and other Arctic animals remains a vital part of daily life and a primary source of food for many families. Inuit hunters still travel by dog sled across the sea ice, which grows thinner with each passing year. This ongoing loss of sea ice threatens their traditional way of life—a way of life that may soon disappear forever.

Anori - Silence of the Glacier, 2023, Finnish Mueseum of Photography, Helsinki

Qillaq, Qaanaaq, North West Greenland, 2019, Archival pigment print, 60 x 71 cm

Aaggiunngguaq, Qaanaaq, North West Greenland, 2019, Archival pigment print, 80 x 95 cm

Qeqertarsuaq, Qaanaaq, 2019, Archival pigment print, 80 x 110 cm

Ilannguaq 2, Siorapaluk, North West Greenland, 2019, Archival pigment print, 60 x 71 cm

Anori - Silence of the Glacier, 2023, Finnish Mueseum of Photography, Helsinki

HOME, 2015-2019

Itkonen's work systematically documents how climate change has altered this traditional way of living, from a hunting society into a new uncertain reality. An example of this is her austere rendering of these small wooden framed homes over a thirty-year period. These once brightly colored homes are now gradually fading due to climate change, turning into grey abandoned remnants of what they once were, as their inhabitants move into towns to find employment. Her intimate photographs of this tiny but proud community, unfold a storyline that's filled with love and loss, hope and tragedy, but no ending.

Ice Has a Memory: Greenland's Vanishing Song Lines, 2022, Persons Projects, Berlin

Home 7, Isortoq, 2016, Archival pigment print, 60 x 85 cm

Home 12, Isortoq, 2017, Archival pigment print, 60 x 85 cm

New Perspectives Through Photography - 25 years of the Helsinki School, 2021, Tadehalli Helsinki

Home 13, Qaanaaq, 2019, Archival pigment print, 60 x 85 cm

Home 17, Isortoq, 2017, Archival pigment print, 60 x 85 cm

Home 20, Savissivik, 2018, Archival pigment print, 60 x 85 cm

Home 16, Kuummiut, 2017, Archival pigment print, 60 x 85 cm

Groenland, Tiina Itkonen, 2023

Ice Has a Memory: Greenland's Vanishing Song Lines, 2022, Persons Projects, Berlin

PINIARTOQ, 2016-2019

The skill and courage of Greenland's subsistence hunters have kept Inuit people alive and fed for more than a thousand years. In small settlements, hunting seal, walrus, polar bear, and other Arctic animals is still a vital part of life and a main source of food for many households.

A successful polar bear hunt rewards a hunter with hundreds of pounds of meat; a hide for sewing hunting clothes; cash from hides, canines, and claws; and something no less important – respect, identity, and reciprocity within the community.

Today the loss of sea ice caused by climate change poses a grave threat to polar bears' existence. To conserve polar bears in a world of disappearing ice, scientists and wildlife managers in Greenland work hand-in-hand with hunters and Inuit communities, respecting their cultural values and traditional ecological knowledge. In the interests of sustainability, polar bear hunters observe limits called quotas, determined by the government through a combination of scientific data and hunters' knowledge.

Photographer Tiina Itkonen's photo essay captures an intimate portrait of polar bear subsistence hunters, their families, communities, and landscape. We hope it can stir viewers to take action in their own lives and communities to combat climate change.

Qimmit, Savissivik, 2018, Archival pigment print, 80 x 110 cm

Nanoq 9, 2015, Archival pigment print, 40 x 52 cm

On top of the iceberg, Savissivik, 2018, Archival pigment print, 80 x 110 cm

Sunset, Savissivik, 2016, Archival pigment print, 80 x 120 cm

Ice Has a Memory: Greenland's Vanishing Song Lines, 2022, Persons Projects, Berlin

GREENLAND LANDSCAPE, 2002

Greenland is the world's largest island – roughly twice as large as Sweden, Norway, and Finland combined. Though it is associated politically and historically with Europe, Greenland is geographically part of North America, lying off Canada's northeast corner. Much of the island lies above the Arctic Circle where the sun never sets in summer and never rises above the horizon in winter. An ice sheet a mile thick covers most of the island's surface. Only parts of its coastal fringe are inhabited by humans.

Over the past several thousand years, successive waves of Inuit and Viking settlers arrived and, in the extraordinarily harsh conditions, died out. The ancestors of today's Inuit Greenlanders, the Thule people, reached Greenland around 800 CE, traveling across the frozen sea from Canada. Greenland became a colony of Denmark in the early 1700s and remained so for more than 200 years. During the 20th century Greenland established increasing levels of independence and self-rule. Today Greenland is self-governing, with its own elected parliament. It retains close ties with Denmark, which still maintains jurisdiction over some areas such as foreign policy matters.

Today some 57,000 Greenlanders, primarily Inuit, live in the capital city, Nuuk, and in isolated towns and settlements. No roads link the settlements. Travel between them relies on dog sleds, boats, or aircrafts. While there are sheep farms in South Greenland, and vegetables can be grown there during the short summer season, elsewhere Greenland is too cold and barren to support agriculture or livestock. People rely on fishing and on hunting of birds and land and sea mammals, including seals and polar bears.

Pohjoinen, 2012, Korjaamo Gallery, Helsinki

Kullorsuaq IV, 2010, C-Print, Diasec, 50 x 140 cm

Sermermiut II, 2007/2012, C-Print, Diasec, 50 x 140 cm

Graveyard Qaanaaq, 2005/2012, C-Print, Diasec, 70 x 200 cm

Inaugural Exhibition, 2016, Makasiini Contemporary, Turku, Finland

Ikerasak, 2009, C-Print, Diasec, 70 x 200 cm

Ikerasak II (dogsleds), 2009/2012, C-Print, Diasec, 70 x 200 cm

Kullorsuaq V, 2006/2012, C-Print, Diasec, 70 x 200 cm

Uummannaq 6, 2010, C-Print, Diasec, 70 x 200 cm

Photo festival La Gacilly, France, 1 July – 31 Oct 2021

Falling Iceberg, Uummannaq, 2010, C-Print, Diasec, 70 x 200 cm

Dawn, Savissivik, 2002/2012, C-Print, Diasec, 70 x 200 cm

Haddeq, Savissivik, 2018, Archival pigment print, 70 x 200 cm

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