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The **Northern** Review
Exploring human experience in the North

Book Review

***Into the White: The Renaissance Arctic and the End of the Image*. By Christopher P. Heuer. Zone Books, 2019. 264 pp. 72 black and white illus.**

Reviewed by Mark David Turner

Published in 2019, it is curious that Christopher P. Heuer's *Into the White: The Renaissance Arctic and the End of the Image* continues to primarily circulate within art history circles. While Heuer certainly writes from within the discipline, his book makes for useful, albeit somewhat problematic, reading for anyone interested in the history and cultural logic of European colonialism in the Circumpolar North. Likely, its circulation remains limited in part because of the absence of a corresponding body of literature. Even though *Into the White* makes clear that there is a long tradition of European visualization of the Far North in word and image, I am unaware of any comparable study that critiques that tradition over such a long period of time, wide body of material, and vast geography. The scale of the analysis may lose some readers, but it reinforces one of Heuer's central arguments. For early European explorers, Arctic and Subarctic regions defied contemporary techniques of quantification and qualification. Heurer's project is to contextualize this indescribability.

"This book's focus," he tells us, "is upon what might be called the visual poetics of the Far North: the codes, strategies and operations of the region's construction, interpretation and representation by early artists, writers and natural historians" (18). Using the introduction to set out his subject, he devotes the second chapter to tracing the concept of the Arctic (the geographical concept of Thule) from Antiquity through the Renaissance writing and image-making. The remaining five short chapters are organized according to related experiences and objects. Chapter 3, "A Strange Quantity of Ice," focuses on cartographic pictorial representations of the Arctic and Subarctic, grounding them in Reformation iconoclasm. Chapter 4, "The Savage Episteme," examines visual representations of Arctic and Subarctic Indigenous Peoples and fauna that were brought to Europe. Chapter 5, "A Roman

Interruption," is devoted to the Swedish ecclesiastic Olaus Magnus and his *History of Northern Peoples* (*Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*) published in 1555. Willem Barentsz's (Barents) ill-fated voyage to discover the Northeast Passage, and the archaeological record of that voyage, are the subject of Chapter 6, "Arctic Ink." An outlier, Chapter 7, "There Are No Fortresses," begins by discussing Soviet representations of technical achievement in the Arctic before moving into a consideration of monumental art inspired by the region.

A peculiar assortment on the surface, but one that has a clear through-line until Chapter 7. Heuer's analysis is most cogent when it is focused upon Early Modern representations of the Arctic and Subarctic and particularly still when focused on the issue of perspective. "If perspective promised early moderns *access* to the world, access granted in a flash from a single consoling viewpoint," he writes (with italics), "the Far North suggested an imaginary where 'the furthest things' forever resisted visual capture" (33). In the latter half of Chapter 2 and beginning of Chapter 3 he draws out the implications of that resistance across a range of artwork, travel writing, and cartography. In contrast with representations of temperate and tropical New World geographies and intertwined with Protestant iconoclasm, Early Modern representations of the Arctic and Subarctic were as much reckonings of perspective as they were attempts at geographical quantification. That tension would feed back into the lived experiences of European explorers in these regions as well as the work of European artists.

Heuer's analysis of the work of those artists adds to the discussion on historical representations of Indigenous Peoples from the Arctic and Subartic. Particularly useful are his readings of the 1567 Augsburg woodcut of Labrador Inuit (Lucas de Heere's "Portrait of Inuit man, 1577") and the watercolours of John White as products of early ethnographic exhibition. At times Heuer's discussion drifts into post-structuralist conjecture, particularly his discussion on implied/real cannibalism. But as dense as the language can be, he is able to direct it towards teasing out European anxieties and preoccupations bound up in coming face-to-face with unknown peoples.

Less effective in the context of the book is his writing about contemporary Eurocentric art practices and their relation to the Early Modern tradition. The first of such passages falls in Chapter 3 when he makes a quick detour from a chronicle of Martin Frobisher's last voyage to Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island) to a lengthy critique of work produced for a 1969 exhibition at the Edmonton Art Gallery called *Place and Process*. While the conceptual connection between the detritus of the Frobisher expedition and the work of *Place and Process* artists is clear, the precise logic for comparing the two in this context is not. He makes a similar diversion in Chapter 6 in his consideration of the archaeological record of the third Willem Barentsz's expedition (on Novaya Zemlya) as art installation.

The reading is sound and has clear connections to contemporary land-based art in the Arctic. But in the context of the book, the Barentsz record does not seem entirely relevant. Along with Chapter 7, those sections could form the basis of a separate study focusing on contemporary European art practice in the Arctic and Subarctic.

Influence of post-structuralism aside, a larger issue for readers working outside of art history will be one of language. While Heuer makes clear that the "Renaissance Arctic" is a geography in process, readers familiar with its various regions will likely take some issue with his lack of attempt to reconcile historical description with contemporary understandings. At times, this is understandable. Newfoundland, for example, which figures throughout Chapter 4, may not count as either Arctic or Subarctic, but it is a gateway to a "Renaissance Arctic." At other times, Heuer's fidelity to sources leads to imprecision. In his discussion of the portraits of Kalicho, Arnaq, and Nutaaq—Inuit captives taken by Frobisher—Heuer attributes them as belonging to the "Nuguminut tribe," an incorrect transcription of "Nugumiut" in his source, Paul Hulton's *America, 1585: The Complete Drawings of John White*. As Anita Kora and Kenn Harper have pointed out in correspondence with the author, "Nugumiut" or "Nuggumiut" is itself a somewhat archaic term for Inuit who lived in and around the northern mouth of Tasiujarjuaq (Frobisher Bay). His definition of the word *skrælings* as "ancestors of the modern Inuit" (21) is likewise antiquated. And on pages 90 and 92, "Inuit" is spelled "Intuit." None of these imprecisions sink the larger argument. But alongside the sections on contemporary art practice in the region, they do limit its effectiveness outside art history circles.

For readers who are not art historians, *Into the White* makes a useful contribution to the slowly emerging field of Arctic Humanities. What is required, however, is that the book is read from the vantage of its European sources rather than from contemporary perspectives.

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