

## An Arctic Painting Odyssey by Rowan Huntley

A piercing turquoise glint at the corner of my eye caused me to gasp momentarily. Fleeting, far, far below, several jewel-like pools in a myriad of blues glistened in the sunlight. We were flying over the Greenland icecap on route to Ilulissat. Thus began my latest artistic challenge.

Painting around the mountains and glaciers of Europe had given me an appetite for further exploration of what our landscape would once have looked like just after the last major period of ice cover. Greenland is probably the last place on earth where remnants of that prehistoric ice still exist. The UNESCO World Heritage status of the Ilulissat icefjord on Greenland's west coast, together with its connection with British Polar exploration, singled this out straight away as a perfect destination. And I was not to be disappointed.

Nothing could have prepared me for my first view of the Icefjord - I was stopped in my tracks by the magnificent sight of an enormous river of gleaming icebergs, jammed together and rising out of the sea in all directions. The colourful flashes of aqua and pale lime were startling, between the dazzling white ice and inky grey sea. As were the booming thunder cracks from beneath a cloudless sky.



Ilulissat icefjord, watercolour.



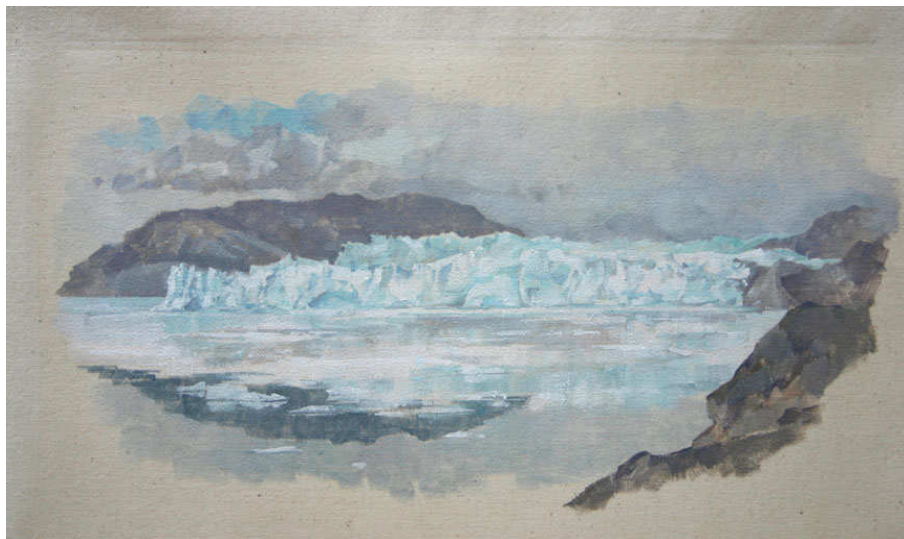
Iceberg from the boat, watercolour pencil.

I wove patches of colour together on the canvas in front of me. So many intricate patterns and colours and such beauty and complexity in the ice meant I fought a constant battle with establishing necessary information and simplification. This was definitely a painting experience like no other!



Icebergs in the mouth of Ilulissat icefjord, chroma on canvas.

And so it continued day after day. As I explored I produced further paintings on canvas and watercolours too. My adventure saw me take numerous long boat trips on which I 'speed sketched' whilst on the move: south to Ilimanaq and back, an historic settlement which took us past the mouth of the icefjord; north a short distance to Rodebay, an old whaling post/port; a 'midnight sun' cruise among the berg 'mountains' of the icefjord with fulmars gliding silently alongside; and, a 7 hour voyage north east to the actively calving Eqip Sermia glacier.



The Eqip Sermia glacier from Ice Camp Eqi, chroma on canvas.

Eqi was one of the camps for the British 1934 Trans-Greenland Expedition of Martin Lindsay, Arthur Godfrey and Andrew Croft in Martin Lindsay's book 'Sledge'.

I found a unique 'spirit of place' around Ilulissat icefjord. I felt an incredibly strong sense of both history and of the ice 'belonging' during my time there. Painting the icefjord allowed me to spend long periods of time observing and absorbing it: its movement; its noises; its colours; and its presence. The elemental forces which surrounded me as I worked, the crisp, clear air, a bitter cold wind, brilliant sunshine and mist which periodically approached and retreated, served only to enhance my experiences and my fleeting connection with the ice. The impact that this has had on me as a human being is the realisation of how tiny and insignificant I am. I feel deeply privileged to have been able to visit and paint such a special place.



The icefjord in the midnight sun, chroma on canvas.

Climate change issues inevitably played a part in my decision to visit this part of Greenland. As an artist who has a deep love for the natural landscapes of our planet, I care greatly that our most fragile environments are protected against further damage which could contribute to their total demise. If the pictures I produce can show to others what we stand to lose and demonstrate that there is an absolute need for conservation and preservation, then my work will be worthwhile. Ilulissat icefjord sustains an ecological life balance in the sea and a way of life for a community. It has a very significant

role in maintaining the natural stability of this arctic region and to lose it would be catastrophic, for the marine wildlife, for the people and for the world.

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Painting the icefjord from above Sermermiut.

My painting expedition to Greenland took place in June 2009.  
For my full report please see  
[www.rowanhuntley.co.uk](http://www.rowanhuntley.co.uk)