

SUBHANKAR BANERJEE PHOTOGRAPHY ENDORSEMENTS

“In Banerjee’s expressive work, vehicle tracks across the vast tundra become as menacing as a terrorist alert; a whaler’s wooden coffin washed out of a beach bank, the bones of humans, the bones of caribou starved of their usual diets, are contrasted with the sustainable hunting of Gwich’in people, who have lived interdependently with Arctic wildlife for millennia.”

Lucy R. Lippard, from *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change*, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art & EcoArts

“By weaving the land and its inhabitants into a carefully constructed composition, Banerjee reinforces the delicate interconnectedness of life in a rapidly warming polar environment, reminding us that the Arctic supports a varied and complicated ecosystem.”

Dr. Lisa Hostetler, from *Photographs from the Ends of the Earth*, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

“I am a great admirer of the work.”

Sarah Greenough, Senior Curator of Photographs, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

“Thank you for a most stimulating and energetic presentation at the Hood Museum of Art last Friday [March 30, 2007]. Your lucid and powerful advocacy for resource management and sensitive regard for the rights of the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic made a great impression on us all. You so deftly and lightly touch on so many subjects and art forms in your talk, showing both intellectual depth and a global perspective. Your splendid photographs, taken with skill and imagination, left none of those present in any doubt about the beauty and diversity of the Arctic lands. They must be protected and not squandered.”

Brian Kennedy, Director, Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire

“Banerjee’s exhibit and catalog offer a different way to see the Arctic, a perspective that challenges not only the worldview of conservative politicians but also the prevailing wilderness motifs deployed for a long time by mainstream environmental groups. ... Banerjee’s striking aesthetic compositions, together with his attention to ecological context, reframe the Arctic landscape and question some of the reigning assumptions about the relationship between nature and culture in modern America. ... Throughout American cultural history, a number of nature writers, including Henry David Thoreau and Joseph Wood Krutch, along with influential artists such as Eliot Porter, all tried to understand the passage of time in particular landscapes. ... Likewise, by photographing seasonal change in the Arctic, Banerjee hoped to immerse viewers not only in the aesthetic of the landscape but also its community life. Using the motif of the four seasons, he wanted them to consider the difference between temporality of nature, governed by ongoing cycles, and the temporality of modern society, marked by restless linear change. ... On the surface, Banerjee joins a long line of artists – from nineteenth-century painters like Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran through twenty-century photographers like Ansel Adams – in presenting mountains as sacred landscape that occupy a realm separate from the profane space of human society. Yet the caption point toward a different view. ... Banerjee’s treatment of global warming uses captions in a completely different manner. ... In these juxtapositions of text and image, beauty and ecology collide, producing rich dialectics of meaning. ... Banerjee’s ecological perspective also incorporates human beings into the picture, portraying the Arctic not as untouched wilderness, but rather as a space where people have developed complex relationships with their environment. ... Instead of portraying them as passive beings capable only of genuflecting before nature, Banerjee captures scenes of death and violence to illustrate how hunting rituals are woven into the fabric of community life. In these ways his ecological vision enables audiences to discern the interrelationships among humans, animals, and the environment, to see the arctic as a landscape where people are not excluded, but instead form bonds of exchange and interdependence with the nonhuman world. ... many viewers will likely feel that his work brings them closer to the Arctic, not only by offering memorable portrayals of the refuge, but also repeatedly reminding them of the ties that bind this distant land to their own lives.”

Professor Finis Dunaway, Excerpted from *Reframing the Last Frontier: Subbankar Banerjee and the Visual Politics of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, *American Quarterly*, Volume 58, Number 1, March 2006, Pages 159-180, Johns Hopkins University Press. Revised version to appear in the anthology, *A Kenner Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, edited by Professor Alan C. Braddock and Professor Christoph Irmscher, foreword by Professor Lawrence Buell, University of Alabama Press (forthcoming).

“It has been a pleasure to look at your work over the last few weeks. You have made some very satisfying images. Congratulations on your fine achievement. ... Very good to hear your thoughts. I am reminded of an essay by Jonathan Williams which I published in a book called *The Land* in 1975. JW remarked: 'People talk of a Return to Nature - I wonder where they could have been!'"

Professor Mark Haworth-Booth, Honorary Research Fellow and former Senior Curator of Photography (1977-2004), Victoria & Albert Museum, London

“I appreciate your kindness in sending me the catalog “Subhankar Banerjee: The Last Wilderness, Photographs of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge”, which I found interesting and good. ...Plate 11 in the catalog, *Caribou Migration I*, is one of my favorites. ...I have for several years been forming a collection of photographs for UBS which attempts to suggest how the work of photographers – historic and contemporary – has touched on the issue of land use in the American continents. Your work is certainly relevant to this subject.”

John Szarkowski, Director Emeritus of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

“Banerjee’s large-format color images seem less controversial than stunningly beautiful. Alternating between sweeping vistas and exquisite details, sometimes in the same picture the works show untouched nature in all its diverse grandeur. Pictures shot from an airplane rehabilitate the phrase ‘purple mountains’ majesty’ and reduce migrating caribou to strands of antlike marks on fields of ice. A glass-smooth lake mirrors the surrounding landscape, giving the plant life an air of Magic Realist menace not unlike one of Gregory Crewdson’s early photographs. ... But such diversity is part of the point. ... Last year a book of Subhankar Banerjee’s large color photographs of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was brandished on the floor of the Senate to help defeat a move to open the refuge to exploratory drilling for gas and oil. ... Senator Barbara Boxer, Democrat of California, presented Mr. Banerjee’s images to rebut the pro-drilling argument of Interior Secretary Gale A. Norton, who had said that the refuge was ‘a flat white nothingness’. These images suggest a vastly different reality. ”

Roberta Smith, Senior Art Critic, The New York Times, Art Review, Oct. 13, 2004

“Banerjee’s landscapes seem epic, and there is something about them that is haunting. ... His best photographs have an authenticity, a gravitas, and a beauty that more rote imagery is without. ... Ansel Adams may have influenced Banerjee the most, and Adams’s best photographs - romantic please, really, against building a road through every mountain and every forest - are a continuation of the photographic arguments against indiscriminate industrialization that were begun by 19th-century greats such as Carleton Watkins and Timothy O’Sullivan. One day Banerjee’s work maybe seen as part of this legacy. ... when you see Banerjee’s most memorable pictures, it’s not hardship that’s evident but beauty. A non-formulaic beauty. ... he shows the beauty of ordinary scenes and of the passing of the seasons. He finds grace in tangled up branches and unruly weeds. Two of his best photographs - a mountain scene with spruce trees reflected on a lake that has cotton grass running wild in the foreground, and another lake view that includes a chaotic foreground of fall colored vegetation, some of it dead - could hang beside any great 19th -century landscape photograph. ... Banerjee’s pictures ... contradicts notions such as the one put forth by Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton when she famously described the refuge as if it were an object of conceptual art - a ‘flat white nothingness’. It is the ‘everythingness’ that Banerjee’s photographs capture that has made them politically explosive. They are relevant to both art and science; in fact, their strength is that the two ways of understanding the world can’t be untangled in these pictures. Their ultimate so-called crime was that they did not depict a wasteland.”

Excerpted from an extensive profile story on Banerjee in *Vanity Fair*, December 2003

Ingrid Sischy, Editor-in-chief of *Interview* & contributing editor of *Vanity Fair*

“Thank you for sending information on your impressive work from the Arctic. You are to be congratulated for such a beautiful and important project.”

Willis E. Hartshorn, Ehrenkranz Director, International Center of Photography, New York

“... in 2001, Seattle artist Subhankar Banerjee aspired to produce photographs of such intimate beauty and formidable scale that he could do for Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge what Moran (Thomas Moran) and Jackson (William Henry Jackson) did for Yellowstone: preserve it for future generations. ... To look at his photos is to walk into the wild.”

Regina Hackett, Art Critic, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Art Review, June 25, 2005

“Subhankar Banerjee's expansive, crystalline views of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge first got wide public exposure in 2003, when Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) used them to argue effectively against drilling for oil in northeastern Alaska. These powerful photographs were shown here (Gerald Peters Gallery, New York) in Banerjee's first solo gallery show. Born in India, the self-taught artist began as a scientist before switching to art. The 30 large-format, unmanipulated photographs on view here vividly document an arduous two-year, 4000-mile journey begun in 2001 in which Banerjee traveled with a native guide. To capture *Bear Den I* (illustrated), an image of a tunnel freshly dug out of gleaming snow surrounded by a big and little polar-bear paw prints on a luminous frosty plain, Banerjee spent 28 days in a tent in minus-70-degree weather waiting for the mother and her cub to leave. More typical were broad aerial shots of mountains, rivers, lakes and plains undergoing seasonal changes. Some were punctuated by migrating snow geese or caribou that, from a soaring vantage point, read more as abstract patterns against the ground. The vivid colors were a surprise—whether the tangerine sky of a sunrise in a ice fog over grazing musk ox or the saturated blue water splicing burnt terra-cotta swirls of land in an abstracted composition evocative of paintings by Antoni Tàpies. These images, summoning a sense of the sublime in a tradition of 19th-century American landscape painting, silently refuted the government's stance that this terrain is a flat white nothingness.”

Hilarie M. Sheets, ARTnews, New York, Art Review, March 2005

“Taken absent artifice with the simplest of manual cameras, Banerjee's photographs of heart-stopping beauty defy verbal description. ... *Bear Den I* is an intimate portrait of the relationship between bears, wilderness, earth, and sky. Its stark simplicity evokes the human presence as witness, not intruder. He most often chooses to take pictures on cloudy days... the tiniest of wildflowers become layered, boundless vistas seeming to reach the end of imagination itself. On overcast days the snow is not gleaming white but blue; the earth and sky reflect myriad colors so pure the mouth waters; tangled dead branches compete with wild weed; lakes reflect spruce trees sharp as spades. Life's raw and eternal will to renew itself devours the deep shadows and monumental illusions of more golden light. Caribou herds making their annual 800-mile trek to primordial calving grounds have no shadows.”

Soledad S. Vural, PASATIEMPO: The New Mexican's Weekly Magazine of Arts, July 15-21 2005

“Banerjee's sumptuous pictures, however terrifically forbidding in their cold and lonely beauty they may be, are also an homage to the vast majesty of America's last wild terrains. ... Banerjee's magnificent images speak of landscapes that are necessarily somewhat mysterious to eyes unaccustomed to experiencing such vast and rugged terrains which are uninhabited by our own species. To witness their existence through photographs is also reassuring, and plants a seed of rediscovery and reevaluation of what we are about. *Lagoon*, one of four photographs printed for the first time in large format for this show, shows a reflection of a distant mountain range in pristine, pastel, serene waters that are exquisitely seductive. A small evidence of land in the lower left corner of the photograph functions as a grounding principle. *Hulahula River I* evokes a difference fascination, reminiscent of an Arthur Dove abstract landscape, the rich bold veins of color outlining shapes whose perspective is impossible to assess without the reference point of a title.”

Rinchen Lhamo, Art Critic, THE: Santa Fe's Monthly magazine of the Arts, Santa Fe, Aug. 2005