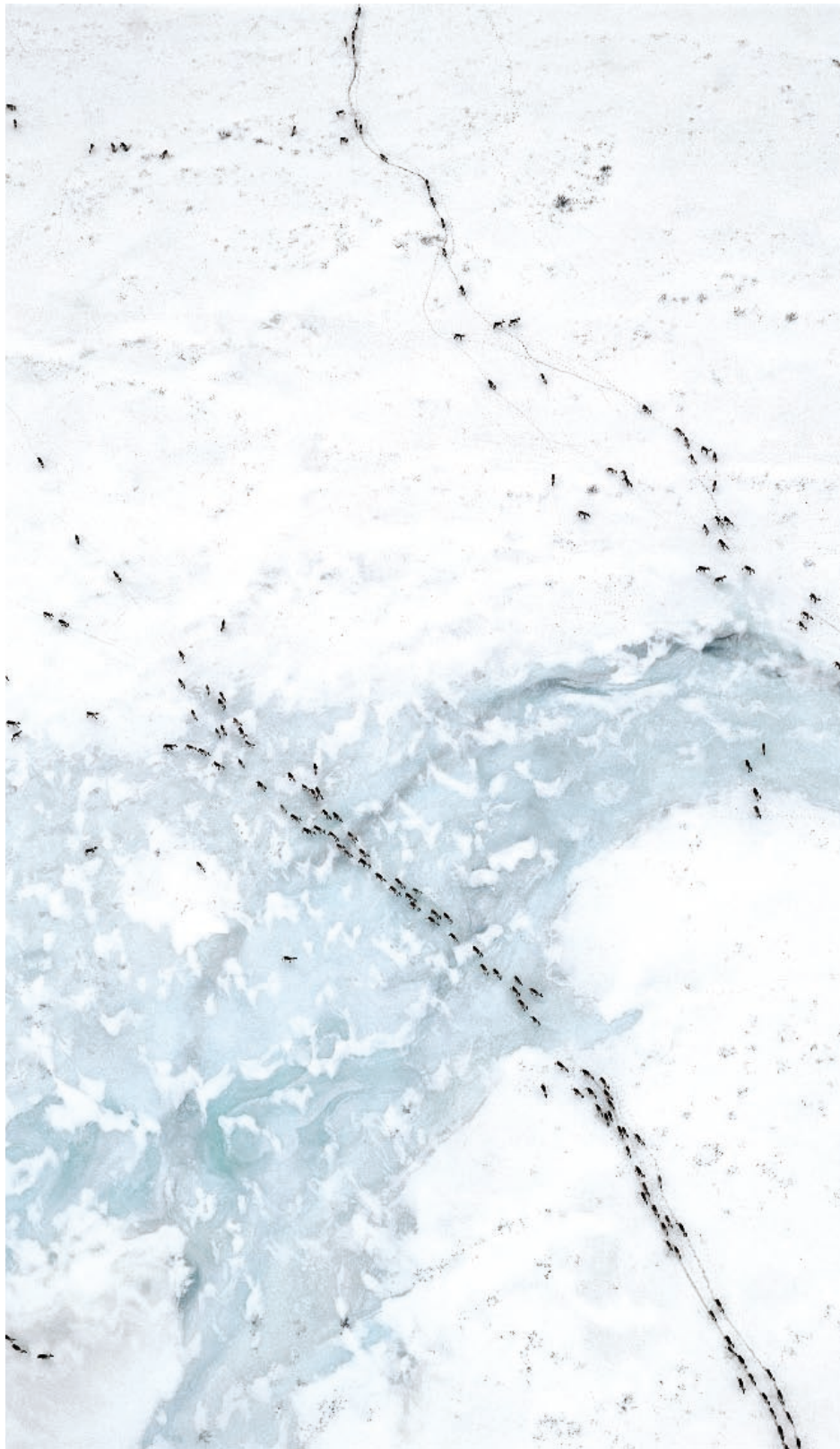


Caribou Migration I, 2002 by Subhankar Banerjee



The treasures of the Arctic

Resource Wars

by Subhankar Banerjee

Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York

25 March to 19 April

Reviewed by Andrew Robinson

OPPONENTS called it an ugly place, suitable chiefly for copper mining, yet in 1908 President Roosevelt designated the Grand Canyon a national monument. Today, the protection of the less-famous Arctic Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is not so assured. The US Congress has long debated oil and gas exploration there, and as Arctic ice melts, pressure to drill is mounting.

Against this backdrop, Subhankar Banerjee's photographs of the refuge, exhibited across the US between 2003 and 2006, have made an impact. His irresistible images of a polar bear and its newborn cubs, displayed in the Senate, helped to turn a narrow vote against the Bush administration, which then pressured the Smithsonian Museum to downgrade Banerjee's exhibition. Now he returns to the fray with a new show, called *Resource Wars*, at Sundaram Tagore Gallery in New York, in which these migrating Alaskan caribou take centre stage.

The photograph shows pregnant female caribou crossing a frozen river on the way to the coastal plain for calving. They make one of the longest migrations of any land animal, with some individuals travelling more than 4500 kilometres in a year. As a result of climate change, their numbers have declined by 3.5 per cent per year since 1989.

Born in India, Banerjee is a former physicist and computer scientist who gave up a well-paid job in Seattle to pursue Arctic photography and conservation. Naturalist Peter Matthiessen, his collaborator on three gruelling expeditions, calls him "a scientist by profession but an artist at heart". He also quotes Banerjee's friend, an Inupiat hunter: "That young feller from tropical India was ready and willing to go out in weather when even us Eskimos would much rather stay home." The result is a sensational but also subtle blend of adventure, science and art.

See more of Banerjee's photographs at www.subhankarbanerjee.org.

Andrew Robinson is the author of *Earthshock* and *The Story of Measurement*