

The Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center
Presents

Olivia Petrides

The daughter of a noted wildlife ecologist, Olivia Petrides spent much of her childhood traveling such remote areas as Uganda, Kenya and South Africa. The topography and geological history of these settings inspired her. As an adult, she went on to draw and study in Yellowstone National Park, whose mountains, geysers and thermal pools reinforced her passions for the fascinating and terrifying aberrations of nature. She eventually found her way to Iceland, which has provided her primary source of inspiration for the last ten years.

These seemingly unrelated locations share a common trait; they are sited along the edges of the earth's tectonic plates. Their meeting points are magical places in constant flux, where earth's primal forces result in awe-inspiring natural formations. Their shifting and settling cause earthquakes, geysers and volcanic eruptions. These are dramatic places where creation and destruction are daily manifestations.

By the nature of their climates, these areas are sparsely populated which is reflected in the solitary quality of Petrides' iceberg paintings. Curiously, however, these paintings do not instill loneliness but offer a contemplative look at nature, a meditative place to rest the eye. Petrides is interested in the "moment before speech; the moment of silence" one experiences in the presence of these sublime forces. The intimate scale of her paintings further serves her purpose of making accessible the overwhelming presence of her subjects.

Despite her interest in and experience with science, these paintings are devoid of the scientific detail of textbook illustrations. They are "mental icebergs"; more than what she sees, Petrides paints what she knows and feels before these landscapes. Some of the mood-laden scenes like "Greenland Iceberg IV" are merely vehicles to express a state of mind. Some, like "Greenland Iceberg VI" and "Greenland Iceberg II", are clearly portraits.

Most of the paintings in this exhibition are from Petrides' travels through Greenland and Iceland. The irony of the naming of these neighboring Antarctic countries is evident in the artist's palette. The paintings of Greenland – so named to encourage settlers to venture to this treacherous place – are dominated by icy blue, stark white and steely black. The paintings of Iceland – named to discourage overpopulations and perhaps to deter visitors – are dominated by warm earth tones: ochres, siennas and greens. In addition to the paintings, we are fortunate to have a selection of watercolors torn from the artist's Iceland and Greenland sketchbooks. Their immediacy and candor provide us with a window into the mind of their creator.

- Kiki Haralambides
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