

LIVE THE PROCESS



*"Humans take
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on emotion
above all "*

A Moment With Zaria Forman

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For Zaria Forman, art is the process.

Her formative years—spent traveling with her family to remote locations across the globe—shaped her expansive worldview and acted as an inspiration for her current drawings. Depicting landscapes in moments of flux and peace, Forman intends to incite an emotional connection to nature, moving viewers to engage with issues of climate change.

The young Brooklyn-based artist studied at Student Art Centers International in Florence, Italy and at Skidmore College in New York. Her work has been featured in publications including National Geographic Magazine and Smithsonian, and on shows like Good Day New York, ABC7 Eyewitness News and as set design for House of Cards.

In 2012, Forman led a "Chasing The Light" expedition to Greenland, retracing the steps of a similar 1869 journey by painter William Bradford and chronicling the changing arctic landscape. Recently, she participated in Banksy's Dismaland, spoke at a live TED event and had a solo show at Winston Wächter Fine Art.

As her career flourishes, though, it becomes progressively difficult to balance work, travel and her own well-being. Here, Forman shares why saying "no" can be a saving grace:

Live The Process: How did travel in your early life impact your current artwork?

Zaria Forman: The inspiration for my drawings began in my early childhood when I traveled with my family throughout several of the world's most remote landscapes, which became the subject of my mother's fine art photography. We rode camels through the Sahara Desert and went mushing in Svalbard, 400 miles from the North Pole. I developed an appreciation for the beauty and vastness of the ever-changing sky and sea. I loved watching a far-off storm on the western desert plains, the monsoon rains of southern India and the cold arctic light illuminating Greenland's waters.

I have very fond memories of our family trips and consider them a vital part of my upbringing and education. I feel very fortunate that I had the opportunity to see so much of the world and to learn firsthand about cultures so vastly different from our own. This myriad of experiences instilled in me a love and need to continue exploring and learning for the rest of my life.

LTP: Living in an urban environment like Brooklyn, how do you stay connected with nature?

ZF: Travel is necessary for my art and life experiences—one cannot exist without the other. While living and working in Brooklyn, I try to soak up as much nature as I can. I ride my bike to and from my studio every day, which is such a blessing during the busiest months, when I am working nonstop and don't have time to relax and go for a hike upstate. I also live right next to Prospect Park, which is really the only way I can handle living in a concrete jungle! I try to spend time in the park as often as I can.

In August 2012, I led an Arctic expedition up the NW coast of Greenland. Called "Chasing the Light," it was the second expedition of its kind, the mission of which was to create art inspired by this dramatic geography. The first, in 1869, was led by the American painter William Bradford. My mother, Rena Bass Forman, had conceived the idea for the voyage, but did not live to see it through. During the months of her illness, her dedication to the expedition never wavered, and I promised to carry out her final journey.

This winter, I will be heading to Antarctica for a five week expedition. I will be the artist-in-residence aboard the National Geographic Explorer with Lindblad Expeditions.

LTP: What is the relationship between climate change and your work?

ZF: Studies have shown that art can impact viewers' emotions more effectively than an essay or a doom and gloom newspaper article. Neuroscience tells us that humans take action and make decisions based on emotion above all else. My career is dedicated to translating and illuminating scientists' warnings and statistics into an accessible medium that people can connect with, on a level that might be deeper than scientific facts can penetrate.

My drawings explore moments of transition, turbulence and tranquility in the landscape, allowing viewers to emotionally connect with a place they may never have the chance to visit. I choose to convey the beauty, as opposed to the devastation. If people can experience the sublimity of these landscapes, perhaps they will be inspired to protect and preserve them.

LTP: As you travel and channel so much energy into your artwork, how do you keep yourself grounded, healthy and connected?

ZF: Great question! It's one I am still struggling to answer. For the past three years, I have been working at a fairly unsustainable pace and, although I am able to keep up a yoga practice usually, during the busiest times I often fail at keeping a good balance. I am learning how to say "no" to wonderful opportunities that present themselves. Of course, it's a good problem to have, but a problem nonetheless: My instinct is to say "yes" to everything, biting off more than I can chew. Moving forward, it will be a matter of saying "no" more, as well as creating (and therefore exhibiting) less work per year, in order to make sure the rest of my life is balanced. Balance is a priority for me, but, as I said, I slid offtrack a bit in the last few years while my career started demanding more from me. Yoga, travel, time spent in nature, eating healthy and sleeping well are all priorities for me! No matter how busy I am, though, I do make sure I sleep eight hours every night. Otherwise I can't function!

LTP: What does happiness look like to you?

ZF: A balanced life, filled with loving family and friends, health and nature.

LTP: What does it mean to you to "Live The Process" and how can we all do that more each day?

ZF: Art is my process, and I do live it every day. That doesn't necessarily mean that I work in the studio every day, but my "downtime" is also fuel and inspiration for my process. I surround myself with loving, supportive people. I venture outdoors whenever possible. I try to be on, in or in sight of water as much as possible. As an artist, I am a visual person, so I fill my home with "visual nutrition"—things I enjoy looking at and living with. I think it's important for all of us to find what inspires us most and figure out a way of incorporating it into daily life. It's a constant practice though, like yoga and art, for which there is never a point of "arrival." Instead, there is always more to learn and room for growth.