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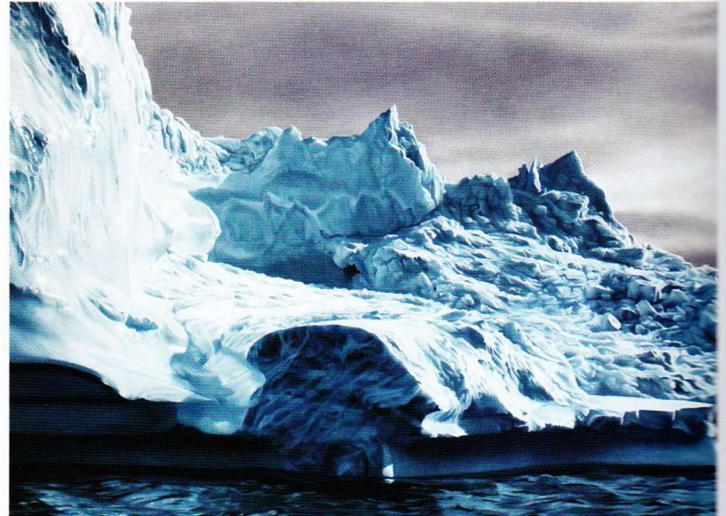


# ZARIA FORMAN

by ERIC GREENE



JOHNSON



In her studio on the edge of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, Zaria Forman sits on a wooden stool and rubs her fingers against a large piece of paper tacked to the wall. She does this most of the day, almost every day. Half-finished drawings hang on the walls, cover the floors, and sit in the corners of the room. A few completed pieces are framed in the hall. Those are rarities. Most of her art has sold, or been given away to friends in moments of generosity.

Anyone who would step into the studio, see her half-finished work, and watch her rubbing her fingers against the wall would recognize that this is not going to last. The career of Zaria Forman is at a tipping point. She has started to blow up, but is about to explode.

Zaria is from New York, and nobody is from New York—they're just there now. Her story is nothing crazy for an aspiring artist. "I've been lucky," she admits. "I got into a gallery in Chelsea [Manhattan] right out of College." She never considered art as a career option until after college when she was travelling. The Chelsea gallery closed during the economic downturn, but it got her name on the radar and showed her the possibility of "making it" as an artist.

Would it be a copout to argue that her work is too good to not have doors opened for her? Nah—that seems pretty accurate. When you stand in her studio and look at the half-finished drawings, you understand why things are working out. There is no argument about skill or talent or creativity or uniqueness in her work. It's just straight up good. No... Great. It's impossible to draw like that.

Zaria's friend briefly dated a guy who was the graphic designer for the Netflix TV series, *House of Cards*. He got some of her pieces on the set and now the whole world has seen her work, even if they don't know it. Zaria hasn't watched the show. Too busy. Today, and for the next two months, she's pulling endless hours on her stool, finishing pieces for her upcoming solo show in Seattle.

Anyways, let's dig into her work. She calls them drawings—not paintings. Pastels on paper, worked with her fingers... Sounds pretty basic, yeah? Well, trust that you could never do what she does. Her current pieces—the stuff that's causing the explosion—are all water scenes. One series is of icebergs in Greenland and the other of shore breaks in the Maldives.

"The Greenland series is about documenting the melting ice and the contribution to the sea level rising," she explains. "The Maldives is the lowest lying country and will be the first place effected by the rising sea levels."

You get it? Good. The scenes she draws are not poached from Google Images. She visits the places she documents. Her trip to the Maldives came after Greenland and although it was the place of contrast in her art's message, she also "really wanted to go somewhere warm."

These two trips scratch the surface of the globetrotting Zaria has done. She grew up following her mother, a professional landscape photographer, to areas like Chile, Turkey, India, and Indonesia. "She was always interested in the most remote landscapes, so we travelled with her a lot growing up," Zaria says.

Greenland was a sailing voyage up the coast planned by Zaria's mother, whose dream was to photograph the iceberg-ridden coastline, but sadly passed away from brain cancer in 2011. They had been to Greenland together prior, in 2006, and Zaria returned in 2012 to scatter her mom's ashes and document the icebergs through her own medium. She's now using her finished pieces to help raise awareness on climate change and donates portions of her sales to 350.org. "I think rising sea levels is one of the biggest issue that humanity faces," she says. "I try to do what I can with my art because it's insane what's going to happen." A dismal thought, but oh so accurate.

So, the show in Seattle is approaching and she's got a growing list of commission work to tackle as her inventory continues to sell off. Zaria's problems are good problems to have and though many in her position would stress with overwhelming anxiety, she is the calmest kind of cool. So skilled, she has nothing to lose.

Her art (all of it) will sell for big money and hang on the walls in the homes of big spenders. "If I wanted to buy one, I couldn't afford it," she admits, laughing. Each drawing takes her hundreds of hours to complete, not to mention the time and investment of travelling to such remote spots to find her scenes. When, and if, she gets caught up on her workload, she will pack her bags and hit the road again. "I really want to go to Antarctica," she reveals. "I'm not sure if that will be my next trip, but I'm hoping it will."

She's in the midst of applying for a grant through the National Science Foundation to make Antarctica happen. From there, she's got many more destinations to get to, including another trip to Greenland. "I want to go back there and also to another island nation of the equator that's drowning," she says. Her idea is to track icebergs over time and make drawings of them as they melt. That, in relation to the whole rising sea level thing.

Zaria is the greatest kind of normal. Her friends are just like your friends. She should be one of your friends. She can hang. But when you stand in her studio and look at her drawings, you will know that she's on a completely different level. Unlike her, the drawings have a shock value and ascendancy that pushes you onto your heels. To say they have "wow factor" sounds silly, but you will likely stand before one and release a long and quiet exhale that sounds like: "Whoooooaaaaa..."

One day you will stand in a gallery or at a show or in the living room of a big spender in front of one of Zaria's drawings. You will be mesmerized and feel strange, wanting to ask many questions. You will want to hang it on your own wall no matter what it costs and you will doubt your concept of beauty and you will want to go to Greenland. Because how did she draw that, anyway? It's impossible.

See more at [zariaforman.com](http://zariaforman.com)

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