

Leah will be remembered for many things: for her long advocacy of Inuit heritage, particularly Inuktitut; for her volunteer community work in Igloolik; for her accomplishments as an interpreter and translator; and for her knowledge and skills as a seamstress. Those who knew her well will especially remember her, as she would have wished, as a caring and compassionate mother, grandmother, aunt, sister, and friend.

(MacDonald, 2018:259–260)

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UP HERE: THE NORTH AT THE CENTER OF THE WORLD. Edited by JULIE DECKER and KIRSTEN J. ANDERSON. Seattle, Washington: The University of Washington Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-29599-908-1. 189 p., b&w and color illus., Hardbound. Cdn\$44.95.

Up Here: The North at the Center of the World, edited by Anchorage Museum director Julie Decker and deputy director Kirsten Anderson, accompanied an international art exhibition held at the Anchorage Museum between May and October 2016. As noted on the front cover, the exhibition and the publication explore “the ideas of ‘wilderness’ and ‘remoteness,’ the lessons to be learned from cold places and Indigenous knowledge, and how the Arctic is a signal for global change.” Like the exhibition, this book of northern storytelling seeks to re-situate the Arctic from the periphery to the center of our consciousness.

The volume gathers voices from across the Arctic for a wide range of perspectives. Fourteen essays and poems, along with two photo essays, convey personal narratives of the North and the Arctic. Directed toward a broad, non-academic audience, the book generally foregoes citations, bibliography, and index, offering instead experiential descriptions of changes in the North. The exhibit catalog reinforces the curatorial vision of “View from Up Here: The Arctic at the Center of the World” and gives weight and permanence to the ephemeral voice of that exhibition, while not necessarily contributing new or original scholarship.

Up Here contributors vary in perspective and background, to create what Decker refers to as “a conversation about an authentic Arctic, to convey a voice of the North—one that rings true for insiders and offers

outsiders a glimpse of a vibrant, unlimited place” (p. 3). Readers living outside of the North might question the value of such a presentation, but the Arctic has captured the imagination of explorers, authors, and artists for centuries, most of whom are outsiders interpreting this space from their own external perspectives. For its residents, a publication that redirects that narrative back to the people who live and work within the realities of this mythical space is welcome.

The contributors to this volume come from many Arctic locations, including Norway, Iceland, Finland, and Alaska, and others considered northern, if not fully Arctic: the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands. Essays represent stories told in Alaska, eastern Canada, Greenland, Iceland, and Svalbard in particular, while some Arctic regions are notable for their absence: Russia, Sweden, western and central Canada. The Arctic’s Indigenous peoples are noticeably underrepresented. Alaska Natives contributed only two short pieces and many of the compelling photographs. No selections represent the voices and experiences of Sami, Canadian First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, the diverse Indigenous groups of Siberia and the Russian Far East, or the Greenlandic Inuit.

The book begins with an excerpt from Barry Lopez’s award-winning *Arctic Dreams*, seemingly to set the stage and define the Arctic. This first chapter by one of the most recognizable authors of Arctic popular literature may lend legitimacy to the publication and the words contained within. The editors never clarify, however, what constitutes “the Arctic” or even “the North,” leaving readers uncertain of the region’s generally accepted boundaries.

Each of the 14 essays and poems conveys the author’s particular perspective to his or her homeland; for instance, the “insider” piece by King Islander Ted Mayac, Jr., reveals his people’s cultural changes, their connection to polar bears, and the loss of traditional values. The short but impactful confession by Carol Richards, “Miss Arctic Circle (Runner Up)” (p. 45), illustrates the consequences of the *tourist’s gaze*, relating uncomfortable recollections by Alaska Natives who have performed to gain approval of the tourists visiting Alaska.

Elizabeth Bradfield’s “Two If by Sea,” the story of a naturalist from Cape Cod who guides tourists on board expedition ships along the coast of eastern Canada (p. 144), best addresses the tough philosophical questions many of us face. She illustrates the paradox of Arctic tourism, describing how locals are torn by the economic and cultural revitalization opportunities brought by tourists and their money, but also the costs. How they “turn our kids into beggars” (p. 153) and how a ship’s presence interferes with the community’s ability to hunt sea mammals close to shore. From two different sides of the Arctic, whether in Canada or Svalbard, Bradfield (p. 155) poses a familiar question: “What is better for visitors, to see the infrastructure that protects and provides for their experience, or to keep all that hidden and allow them to feel, for a bit, that they are part of a world apart?”

Throughout the book, I appreciate the similarities of experiences and emotions in places on the other side of the pole. A story by Karl Ove Knausgård about the “magical realisms of Norwegian nights” (p. 135) feels as familiar as the aurora borealis that streaks across the skies of Interior Alaska. This emotional connection unites Arctic dwellers and gives this publication some cohesion, despite the vastly different emphases and tones of the essays—the truths within the volume resonate with northern readers, even if the story-telling style does not.

The final essay, by Anchorage Museum director Julie Decker, an Alaskan born and raised in Anchorage and trained in art history and arts administration, lends the volume a curatorial voice. Decker’s words and personal photographs effectively convey the North through her eyes and thereby resonate with readers, whereas many of the other essays miss the mark in this regard. Curiously, in all but a few sections, the written words do not correspond with the accompanying photographs. For example, in the haunting essay “Inland Empire,” Craig Medred (p. 97) describes the abandoned communities along the historic Iditarod Trail, eliciting a desire to see the lost landscapes of the boom and bust economic cycle that even now plagues Alaska. Yet, coastal community scenes by the talented Brian Adams accompany Medred’s piece. This seemingly

arbitrary placement of photos is distracting at least, deceptive at worst.

Decker’s final essay, “This is the North I Know” (p. 171), conveys two key messages: one, the Arctic is a real place where real people with varying perspectives live and are impacted by the millions of visitors who travel here every year; and two, residents of the North have always wanted to control our own narratives. Decker and her fellow contributors work at these goals, like all of us in the North, but the truth is we will never be totally in control of our own stories any more than we can be in total control of the global impacts occurring to our regions of the Arctic. Like residents from other locations of extreme beauty and contrast that excite the imagination of people around the world, we can hope that through publications like *Up Here*, readers will gain insight into how we Northerners view our place in the world—this unique place that defines us—and hopefully be compelled to participate in the fight to protect it.

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