

Gasps!



Janet Biggs

My Beautiful Noorderlicht





Fig. 1

When we read the typical artist diary, we usually discover insights into the psychology and working methods of how the artist creates the physical work of art we enjoy. In the case of Janet Biggs, however, we experience the artist at the limit of her endurance. Excerpted below is the artist's own account of her exploration in the High Arctic in 2009 as she began work on what would become her Arctic Trilogy. The Trilogy comprises the final work in the Museum's exhibition, No Limits: Janet Biggs (on view through January 8, 2012).

To set the scene, Biggs set sail aboard an ice-class, two-masted schooner, built in 1910. The expedition explored Svalbard, the Norwegian archipelago that lies between the Arctic Circle and the North Pole. Spitsbergen is the largest island in the group and Longyearben is the largest settlement/town on Spitsbergen and within Svalbard. The expedition is part of The Arctic Circle program that brings artists, scientists, architects and educators together to study and document the Arctic region (www.thearcticcircle.org).

What follows combines the romanticism of travel with the reality of trying to make art in one of the most inhospitable climates on the planet.

October 6

My first view of the Noorderlicht ("Northern Lights") was through a blowing wind and falling ice — exciting and terrifying at the same time. As beautiful as the ship was, it was hard to imagine 23 people being able to fit on board.

We received a welcome talk from Gert Ritzema, Noorderlicht's Captain, and then a "rules for safe behavior" talk from Jan Belgers, our guide (Fig. 1). Jan has an amazing amount of knowledge about the region and can

answer any question we throw at him. He is also a crack shot with a bolt action rifle ... both he and the gun came with us anytime we left the ship.

October 7

We woke to calm seas after sailing all night. We had laid anchor in a beautiful cove off the fjord called Skansbukta. After breakfast, Jan gave a talk on how to go ashore safely. "Don't fall out of the Zodiac, and stay near the guys with the guns to avoid becoming polar bear food." (This is my paraphrased version of his much more technical and professional talk).

The threat from polar bears is real. I heard lots of stories of people who didn't take it seriously and didn't survive. No one (including the crew) is allowed on land without either carrying a bolt action rifle and a flare gun or having someone with them who is carrying the guns. Only two people other than the captain are certified to shoot, our guide Jan and my kayaking crewmember, Audun.

Our whole group shuttled to shore in our one Zodiac (Fig. 2). We visited an old Russian mine, abandoned long ago. There was a small wood trapper hut that was still intact. The mine entrance had collapsed and what was left of the railroad tracks leading to the mine was twisted into a roller coaster ride. We took a hike around to the opposite side of the bay, crossing a frozen river. We had a wet entrance and exit from the zodiac (which means they can't get all the way to shore and we have to wade out to the zodiac), but the wind and the water were calm so it wasn't bad. I'm very happy to say that my boots really are waterproof.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

October 8

We had a tough night at sea. Thankfully I had applied patches for seasickness all over my body. The ship rocked and rolled and crashed through the ice. No one slept well due to moments of sheer terror ... and total disorientation. Our bunks have boards that we put in so that we don't fall out during rough seas, but these don't prevent us from banging about. Between the seasickness patches and the bruises, I've got a kind of Appaloosa horse look going on.

I have the bottom bunk, which on first viewing may not look like the best choice. It feels more like a cubbyhole. It is about 30 inches tall which means no sitting up in bed. We ended up sleeping with a lot of our stuff in beds ... both to cushion us when we were thrown about on rough seas, but also because there was just nowhere to store the stuff.

At 5 a.m. the ship finally arrived at 14th of July Bay (named for the French holiday). The water was like glass and the sun came out for the first time since I've arrived in the High Arctic! Audun Tholfsen, a Norwegian crewmember, has agreed to paddle the kayak and let me film him (Fig. 3). He has had a lot of experience with cold water kayaking and looks great through the camera lens. He was part of the French Tara Expedition, which spent nine months frozen in close to the North Pole. We started out with Audun in a single kayak. Jan (who carried the BIG

gun and drove the Zodiac), Katja Algert (my roommate who had agreed to document the project), Matt Holzman (from NPR Studio 360), and I piled into the Zodiac. We struck out for the glacier at the far end of the bay. I had a hard time shooting because my jaw kept dropping over the incredible beauty. After an hour, we went back to the ship and swapped the single for the double kayak. I got into the rear of the kayak, Audun took the front, and off we went (Fig. 4). After all the kayaking lessons I took in New York, hours of practice, and kayak polo games played in the Hudson, it was fantastic to finally be paddling in the Arctic!!



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

October 9

We sailed again through the night arriving at Sallyhamna in the morning. After breakfast, I was sorting through my equipment when someone shouted "Bear!" We all rushed out on deck. On a nearby shore, eight polar bears were feeding on a dead whale carcass!

Polar bears are usually solitary animals. Normally, when a male bear runs into another male, they attack each other. But the bears we watched eating the whale carcass all had big, full stomachs and no interest in acting aggressively toward us or toward each other (Fig. 5). They slid around on their bellies, with legs stretched out behind, and playfully boxing each other. A couple of bears wrestled and rolled down the snow-covered hill. It was an amazing sight. Our guide said he has never seen so many bears in one place in the twenty years he has been working in the Arctic. Nearby, an Arctic fox and grey fox waited a good distance away from the whale carcass, hoping the bears would leave some of the whale for them.

Needless to say, any plans to go ashore were cancelled due to the polar bears. It only took one quick glance from Audun to send me off to the

Captain and Aaron (the program director) asking for permission to take out the kayak. Unbelievably, they said OK. Two bears had entered the water and were swimming close to shore. We paddled to within 40 meters of the bears. I still can't believe that I went kayaking with polar bears swimming nearby!

The weather was cold and gray with snow falling. My camera was wearing its raincoat so we decided to keep paddling through the ice and snow. We traveled away from the bears and towards the end of the bay where a huge glacier met the sea. It was an incredible sight! Yet again, we were called back by Jan. Even Audun, who has had years of experience with ice, quietly mentioned that if the glacier calved we would be in big trouble. (When the ice on a glacier's face crashes into the sea, it's called "calving.") (Fig. 6) Calving glaciers cause HUGE waves that are never good for kayaks!

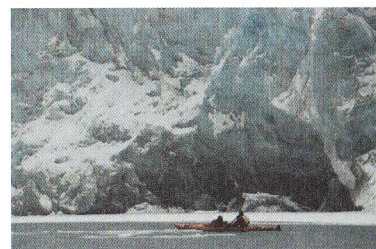


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Knowing the risk, Audun and I decided to ignore Jan's warning and continued on towards the glacier ... it was fantastic and terrifying all at the same time. I got some great footage of Audun paddling hard, as snow and ice formed on his beard and eyebrows, glacier in the background.

October 10

We left Sallyhamna at 3 a.m. and headed farther north to Moflen Island which is at 80 north! Walrus came to meet us shortly after we arrived (Fig. 7). The walrus may be responding to small boats as competition or reacting to human invasion of territory and past encounters with things like boat propellers. They have a strong history of aggression with both kayaks and zodiacs. They have been known to rear up out of the water and come crashing down with tusks and full body weight on small boats. Kayaking was cancelled for the day, but the captain felt that we could use the Zodiac safely to get to shore. Moflen is a completely flat island. It is protected breeding ground for walrus and eider ducks. For most of the year, humans are not allowed to visit the island. Our timing was perfect since all breeding was over for the season and we were able to land. As we approached the island, we saw large brownish shapes scattered on the beach. There were 25 walrus lying about. We had to take a long, indirect route, employing evasive maneuvers to avoid the walrus that were out swimming.

October 11

We woke in the morning in Woodfjordan/Mushamna to what looked like a Caspar David Friedrich painting ... so many shades of white, pink, and blue (Fig. 8). Just after breakfast we heard the ship's bell ring. The bell is used to call us to meals (we have all become some part of a Pavlovian experiment) and to alert us to exciting events on deck ... like polar bear sightings and the aurora borealis at night ... which we saw last night! Anyone who wasn't on deck ran up to see a young, thin male polar bear

walking along the shore. These are the most dangerous bears. They are young and unpredictable and hungry enough to go after anything that might be a meal. The captain decided it was too risky to go ashore, but OK'd a kayak trip!

When the other artist and Audun returned, a thick fog had set in which created an amazing, otherworldly landscape for filming. I jumped in the Zodiac and filmed Audun first in the single, and then we pulled out the double. I sat behind, and we struck out for the location where the polar bear was spotted (seems we both have a bit of the thrill-seeker spirit). We couldn't find the bear, so instead we headed towards the fjord's opening to the sea. Looking through the viewfinder, the image of Audun paddling hard looked amazing. I looked up from the viewfinder for a moment and found myself far from the ship, out in the bay with the waves and wind getting bigger by the minute. We had gone from water that looked like glass to white-capped waves washing over the kayak. To stop myself from freaking out, I glued my eyes back to the viewfinder. It was a struggle to get back to the ship since we had the rudder up for better maneuverability.

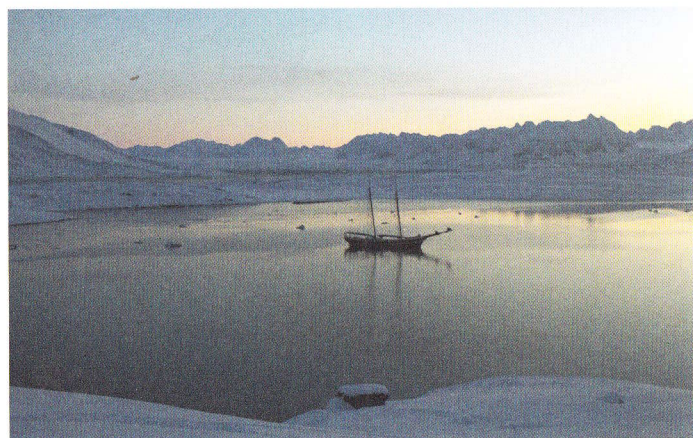


Fig. 8

ty. Eventually we had the Zodiac come alongside and Jan put the rudder in the water. I had to pop my kayak skirt to get to the rudder control cables ... something I was reluctant to do in rough water since I wasn't keen on taking in a lot of freezing water. Once we had the rudder down, Audun paddled hard and got us back to the ship safely.

October 12

Right after breakfast in Harnbaek polten/ Liefdefjorden, we took the Zodiac back to the same location where we were the day before to try and

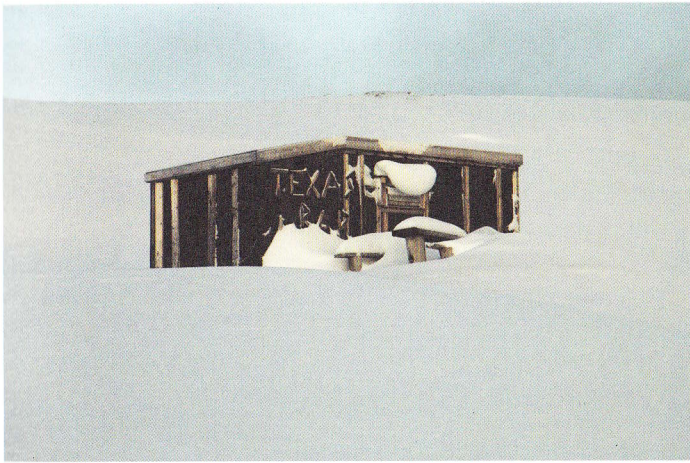


Fig. 9

film Katja's performance ... this time minus the ice on the lens. The piece of land that we had crossed yesterday to get to the cove with all the bitty bergs was thigh-deep in snow. We had trampled a path across the day before so the going was much easier today. As we were retracing our steps, we noticed some yellow snow. Thinking it was probably an artist who had just had to go the day before, I didn't think much about it until Jan came striding up and said that it was from a polar bear, marking his territory. A little farther along, we found HUGE tracks in the snow, complete with claw marks. A polar bear had checked out all the locations where artists were working yesterday. It was eerie knowing that our movements had been seen and explored by a bear. I spent the whole time looking over my shoulder as I was filming.

We went back to the ship for lunch. After lunch I joined the group heading out for a walk on shore. We hiked to a cabin called "Texas Bar" on the northern coast of Liefdefjorden (Fig. 9). The hut was built by the Norwegian hunter Hilmar Nøis in 1927. It was in amazing shape and is still used by hunters, explorers, and recently, a BBC film crew. We had decided to heed the name and brought a bottle of whiskey with us. It's hard to keep describing views — adjectives like beautiful, amazing, and awe-inspiring are starting to feel inadequate. We spotted what Jan and Audun thought might be a bear on an island nearby that seemed to be tracking us so they decided to head back to the ship.

October 13

We then moved our location to Worsleghamns/Liefdefjorden. Worsleghamns has rolling hills, an old hunters hut, and is ringed by



Fig. 10

majestic mountains. A landing party climbed into the Zodiac. We were warned that it would be a rough, wet landing. True to the warning, it was hard to keep the Zodiac from flying out of control and shooting away from the shore. To avoid having the Zodiac flip over we all needed to get out and on to shore before the next wave came in. We employed a D-day kind of tactic, complete with everyone yelling "GO Marine, GO, GO!"

Katja and I hiked up the hill to film Audun, who was watching over the group from the top ridge. It was rough going in the deep snow (and with my bulky snowsuit on), but I got some great footage of Audun watching for polar bears. After slogging back down the hill board the Zodiac, my body was dripping in sweat and my hands were ice cold (Fig. 10).

October 14

We sailed through the night. At breakfast, Jan told us that we would arrive at Magdalenafjorden by 11 a.m. Audun and I decided to take out the kayak even though there was a frozen rain falling and the swells were still pretty big for kayaking. Audun started out in the single and I shot from the Zodiac thinking that it would be easier to film that way ... it wasn't! I was thrown around in the boat and couldn't hold the camera steady at all. I had rigged the rain cover from my big Sony camera to fit my Cannon SLR. It required using electrical tape to secure the cover around the lens. This seemed like a good idea, but made it impossible to get to the focus ring. Most of what I shot was out of focus and jumpy. The few shots that I did get definitely show what rough water kayaking looks like, although my favorite shots are when I'm flying around yelling, "I have no control of the camera!"



Fig. 11

Today was a tough day full of frustration. I'm realizing that the trip is coming to an end and I am missing shots that I need for my project. My feelings are so conflicted. I miss my husband Bob and my life back in New York so much, but I also realize that this is the most amazing time and landscape that I've ever experienced and I don't want it to end. Matt Holzman described it well when he said he was experiencing "present nostalgia." I'm already missing the moments I'm living.

We raised sail about 3 a.m. and started to make our way to Ny Alesund. Shortly after our departure, we hit some major weather. The ship was rolling like crazy. Both Katja and I woke up from being thrown about in our bunks and from the noise of things crashing around us. It sounded like every piece of glass on the boat was smashing. Katja and I played a guessing game of name that thing that just flew across our cabin ... tripods, pelican cases, boots, etc. It was definitely a night of Arctic hysteria and would forever after be referred to as the Night of Terror!

October 15

We arrived at Ny-London, an uninhabited former settlement which is the sight of a mine started by a British miner, Ernest Richard Mansfield, in the early 1900s. He thought he would be able to quarry for marble and make a fortune. The marble was under the permafrost so when he brought it back to the UK it all cracked (Figs. 11-12). This was not his first failed endeavor. Mansfield had tried to mine for gold as well which didn't pan out.

The whole group went ashore after breakfast. After debarking from the Zodiac, we climbed up a steep, rocky embankment. We followed some

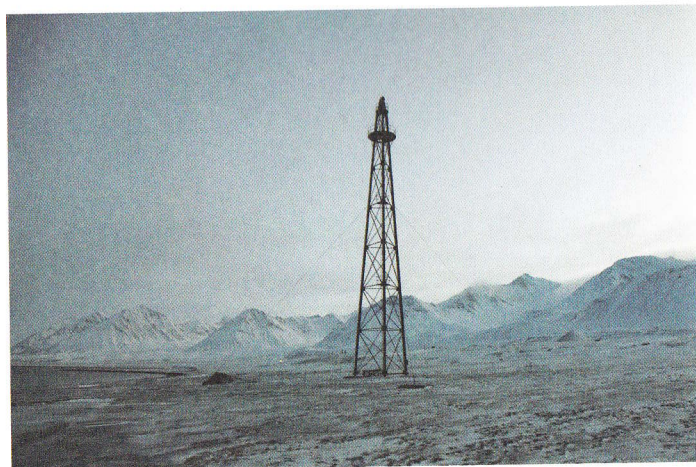


Fig. 12

stone paths (laid by Mansfield's crew) that led to abandoned quarry equipment and huts.

After filming, we skated our way back toward the site where the Zodiac would pick us up. We met up with some others who had stayed behind to work. One by one, we sat on our butts and slid down the steep embankment onto the narrow stretch of beach. As I was waiting my turn my feet went out from under me and I started sliding away from the Zodiac and toward a rocky drop to the sea. Jan yelled out, "Grab her!" With amazing loyalty, dexterity, and super human strength, Katja reached out and caught my sleeve, dragging me away from the precipice and back to safety!

In the afternoon we motored down Kongsfjorden and docked at Ny-Ålesund. Ny-Ålesund is the world's furthest north settlement, populated by 27 international scientists. At present, Norway, The Netherlands, Germany, United Kingdom, France, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and People's Republic of China all maintain research stations at Ny-Ålesund, although not all are inhabited year-round. It's the home of the world's northernmost post office. After a week aboard the Noorderlich, it was strange to be around other people and a society other than the one onboard ship.

Jan took a few of us for a guided tour of the town. We saw the mooring tower where Roald Amundsen began the first flight over the Arctic. We next visited a small graveyard for miners killed in a mine explosion and a memorial for the Italian who accompanied Amundsen. Jan spoke with



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

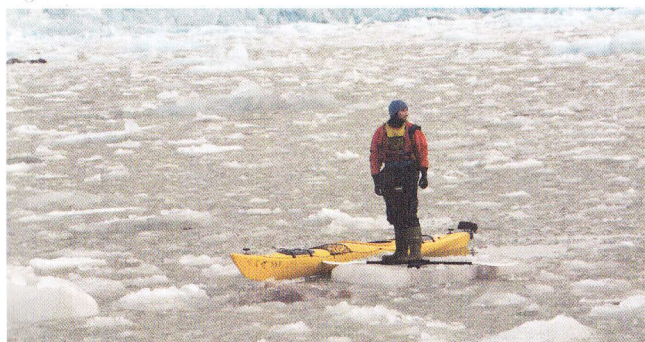


Fig. 16

the scientist/technician at the German station and asked if he would give the whole group a tour in the evening. We had a fantastic inside look at the life and work of the German scientists who were studying atmospheric light refractions and weather changes. They sent up a daily weather balloon and had a beam of light that shot up into the atmosphere. It reminded me of the memorial beams of light that mark the location of the twin towers every September 11 in NYC.

October 16

We left Ny-Ålesund at first light.

Aaron said that we would be reaching our new destination of Kongsvegen/Kongsfjorden, by 11 a.m. He said I could have an hour of kayak time before lunch. I really need to get some detail shots, so I jumped at the offer. I first filmed Audun putting on his drysuit and then lowering the kayak off the ship's side. I then climbed out onto the bowsprits (the pole that sticks out very front of the ship) so I could get some overhead shots of Audun paddling. I had to get the Captain's OK for this since keeping one's balance on the bowsprits can be tough without all the ice that had formed on the ropes (Figs. 13-15).

After filming from the bowsprits I joined Jan in the Zodiac and we followed Audun who was paddling off towards a glacier. The water was dark, menacing, and full of ice. The closer we got to the glacier, the thicker the ice. At one point I asked Audun to paddle out a few meters and then turn and head back towards us. He started paddling away and just kept going. I thought he misunderstood me when he came to a halt. He then magically stepped out of the kayak onto a flat piece of floating ice (Fig. 16). It looked like he was walking on water. He stood there for a minute, getting his balance, and then raised his arms above his head and smiled! He then gracefully got back into the kayak and paddled towards me as I had asked.

Kongsvegen/Kongsfjorden was the most rugged landscape so far! Once we reached shore (later that afternoon), we were able to walk right up to the narrow inlet in front of a massive glacier. The spit of land that we were standing on was covered with all shapes of ice. Jan told us that the ice was due to the glacier calving and warned us to run (and leave our equipment behind) if we heard or saw the glacier calving. If a piece of the glacier falls ("calving") a large wave would completely cover the piece of land where we were all standing.

With this warning in mind, I set up to document another of Katja's performances. Jan and Audun hiked to the top of a hill to watch over all of us. Once we were all finished with our work for the day (this was such an amazing and dramatic landscape, many artists wanted to work on projects



Fig. 17

Once we were all finished with our work for the day (this was such an amazing and dramatic landscape, many artists wanted to work on projects here) we started to walk back to the Zodiac pickup point. As we were leaving I stopped, put down all my cameras and looked around ... telling myself, REMEMBER THIS (Fig. 17)!

After dinner, Katja, Willie Somma (who was filming on the ship and hadn't made it ashore that day) and I asked Aaron if we could stay here for one more day. This will be our last glacier of the trip, and we weren't ready to leave the dramatic ice behind. Aaron said it wasn't possible as rough weather was approaching and the captain wanted to be sure we would arrive back at Longyearbyen on time (this alone was enough of a reason for all of us to be sad, but the thought of no more ice and returning to civilization reduced us all to tears). I'm living in a confusing state of mind... I'm so attached to this landscape that I'm mourning its loss even while I'm still here and at the same time, I'm really looking forward to seeing Bob and home.

October 17

We got underway at around 7 a.m. The passing mountains are a really rugged mix of black and white points. The sea looks dark and uninviting. We are heading for Poolepynten, a rocky sandbar island on Prins Karls Forlandet. We are all feeling anxious about having the time to get our work done. Aaron assured us that there would be time for projects once we arrived at Poolepynten.

Just off Poolepynten the captain canceled any attempt to go ashore as the wind and sea were too rough. He thought there might be an alternative landing location later in the afternoon, but that was canceled as well due to the increasing stormy weather.

The Noorderlicht was moving via motor power today as the wind is against us and we can't raise sail. The time at sea today, without the opportunity to get to shore, has increased the feeling that we are in some mad rush to return to Longyearbyen and then back home.

The captain decided to head for Barentsberg, where several of the shipmates are eager to reach — so they can hit the pub. Barentsberg is an old working Russian mining town. The Captain radioed ahead to request that they open the pub for our arrival and they've agreed (Fig. 18).

Ever since Ny-Ålesund, we had hit some kind of tipping point and our return to civilization seems inevitable. Between the physical strain of trying to stay upright on a ship in rough weather (at one point, four of us lined up in the lower salon, all standing at a perfect 45 degree angle due to the tilt of the ship) and the psychological strain of approaching the end of my time in the Arctic, I decided to spend most of the day in bed.

October 18

The next morning was tough after the previous evening's festivities. I slept through breakfast, assuming everybody else would too, only to be woken by Katja saying Jan was taking us on a tour of town in 5 minutes.

October 19

We woke up to the ship rocking and rolling, while at anchor! The wind was howling outside. The Captain had heard that the wind was going to pick up and it was living up to the prediction.

I had been thinking about the shots I needed for my project. This was the last day I would be able to film Audun kayaking. As much as I personally wanted to get out one last time in the kayak, the shots I needed had to be taken from the ship or the Zodiac. I had to make a choice between indulging my desire to kayak one last time or to stay focused on my project.

I was also struggling with a kind of apathy. The thought of my Arctic experience coming to an end was sapping my energy. I didn't even feel like filming. I've felt this way before when I've spent extended time on location so I knew I needed to push past my apathy and get out there and shoot. I also knew that I was in the Arctic to make art, not enjoy paddling in the wild. I found Audun and asked him to go out in the single. He also seemed a bit sad that we wouldn't enjoy one last time out on the water together.

I went up on deck and realized that none of us should be kayaking! The sea was rough with whitecaps and the wind too strong to go out safely. I went back below deck to let Audun know. He insisted that he would be okay, and that we should just go for it. He has gone from being a somewhat reluctant participant to a real collaborator in the project. He has a great sense of adventure and truly loves this region — suggesting locations

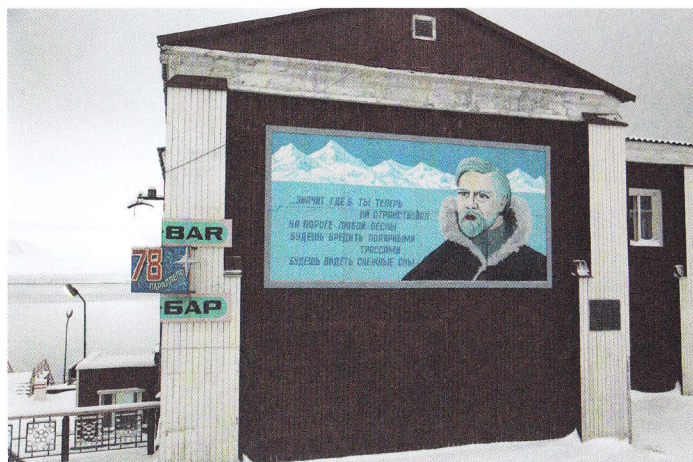


Fig. 18

that we could explore for shots—and now seems to really enjoy being in front of the camera.

I wanted overhead shots and planned to start filming from the ship and then move out onto the water in the Zodiac. I set up my tripod at the stern and waited for Audun to come around the back of the ship. It seemed to take him forever so I went to the side to look for him. He was paddling hard and hardly moving. The sea and wind was very strong, and pushing against him! He made it to the back of the ship and I started filming. It looked as if the ship was underway and Audun was struggling to catch up to it, but we were still at anchor!

The wind was blowing my tripod over as I struggled to stay upright. I took my big Sony camera off its tripod thinking it would be easier to film that way, only to have the camera come apart in my hands. I was holding two separate pieces!!

With the inner workings of the camera exposed to the sleet and high winds, I frantically tried to screw it back together. The whole thing jammed and was unusable. I bolted for my cabin and grabbed my Canon so I could keep shooting. If Audun was going to risk his life for this work there was no way I was going to stop shooting now. I got some amazing footage of him battling the wind and waves.

While I had been filming onboard a group of artists and scientists had joined Jan in the Zodiac and traveled to shore. They had hiked up a big hill and disappeared from sight into the sleet and fog. Sebastian was willing to take Katja, me, and Ian Burns to shore with Audun as our armed



Fig. 19

escort. The Zodiac slammed across the waves and we squinted against the sleet. I had thought that days like this would be the norm for our trip. We had been pretty lucky with the weather ... up to this point.

Once on shore I set up to film Katja's performance. Halfway through, I saw a flare flash in the fog behind Katja. I turned to Audun and said, "I think I just saw a flare gun flash!" As the words were leaving my mouth we heard a gun shot ... and then another!!

We had left the Noorderlicht without a walkie-talkie so there was no way to reach the ship. We yelled from shore and swung our arms in the air, but no one saw us. We gathered the life preservers that the group had left on shore and started down the beach towards the gun shot sounds. It was standard practice to take off our life preservers once we reached shore.

With thoughts of polar bears we rushed along, occasionally stopping to try to get the attention of someone on board the Noorderlicht. My heart was racing and the color had drained out of all our faces. None of us was sure what one more gun, four more people, and a dozen life preservers would do to help if the group was in serious trouble. Even so, we continued to rush towards the gun shot sounds.

Suddenly, we saw the outline of a person heading towards us out of the fog and sleet ... then another. Still short of breath from fear, we realized

that they were walking calmly! Eventually, the entire group could be seen walking casually towards us. We called out to them saying we heard gun shots. Jan sheepishly answered that he had fired off a couple rounds of flares and gun shots (that were out-of-date and needed to be discarded anyway) so that some of the artists could photograph it, and Matt Holzman could get the sound for his NPR piece. Jan had thought his group was too far away for anyone to hear or see what they were doing.

Later, the deck was completely iced over and the sleet was still falling. The crew and any artist with prior sailing experience worked together to raise sail. Not an easy feat under these conditions. At one point the bowsprits sail became tangled. The Captain left the wheel and made it to the bow in about six strides. He slipped only once, righting himself with ease. (Everyone else had gone down repeatedly). He climbed out on the bowsprits and wrestled the sail into submission, and returned to the wheel with a smile on his face.

We will spend one last night on board and then it's back to the Polarriggen tomorrow (Fig. 19) Most of us are in complete denial that this is the end of our voyage. We invited the crew to be our guests at dinner. We chose the Polarriggen since it was close to the dock and large enough to handle our group. We walked to dinner feeling the ground undulate under our feet. It was tough to walk on solid ground after so many days at sea. Dinner was festive, but tinged with the knowledge that tomorrow



Fig. 20

the Noorderlicht and her crew would head to Tromsø without us.

We slowly straggled back to the ship after dinner. As more and more people showed up, the night felt more and more like a party. It finally kicked into gear when chef Anna showed up. She had kept to herself throughout the trip. Tonight she was ready to party with us. Soon the captain, Jan, and Sebastian arrived and the captain started pouring drinks. It was getting late (actually early, as in 3 a.m. early) and most partiers had wandered off to bed. We had to be packed and off the ship at 9 a.m. We were reluctant to let the night with the crew end. We hung on as long as we could and then finally made our way down to our cabins.

October 20

After two hours of sleep, I woke at 6 a.m. and frantically packed my gear (Fig. 20). Not only did I have to pack my cameras, hard drives, computer, etc., but also the kayaks and all their gear (drysuits, neoprene skirts, pogie hand grips, life jackets, paddles, etc.).

Once everything was packed, the lugging began. Jan helped me get the kayaks to land. I had made arrangements with a produce delivery truck driver to transport the kayaks the mile and a half (3 km) back to the Svalbard Sailing Club.

With tight throat, and eyes brimming with tears, we said our goodbyes. The crew stood on the dock in front of the Noorderlicht and waved goodbye. No one spoke on the bus. I avoided all eye contact, afraid that a glance from anyone would start the tears again.

Once back at the Polarriggen we unloaded our luggage and went to our rooms. We were all so sad that our adventure at sea was over. Eventually

hunger drew some of us out of our rooms. We decided to walk to a “downtown” Longyearbyen cafe for a late lunch. As we were climbing over a hill Ian said, “Look!” The Noorderlicht, with her sails raised was leaving the fjord. It was the most beautiful and saddest sight I think I’ve ever seen.

During our voyage, whenever Jan was on shore he would call out to the Noorderlicht on his walkie-talkie in a special way; he would sing her name three times. I will always hear that song in my head and my heart.

Figures 3,4,6,13,14,15, and 16 are courtesy of Katja Aglert. All other figures and cover images are courtesy of Janet Biggs.