

Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz
Artist Statement

This body of work continues my exploration of Arctic imagery begun in my ARCTIC ABRASIONS 2017 exhibition. Both of which cull from the more than two thousand photographs I took in the North Pole in 2013. Throughout the decade I have sought ways to use the detailed information of my photographs to create tactile, moving stories that employ surface, touch and materiality to allude to the breakdown of our precious northern landscape and its ice. Abstraction is used as a deconstructing force to undermine reality. I create collisions of imagery and physicality, illusion and corporeality, the fine and the rough, the controlled and the accidental, the safe and the threatened, and of painting and sculpture.

In a complex method I cast pigmented plaster to create reliefs that stain, buckle, crumble and break. After careful rebuilding, I use these built physical objects as a substrate to lay in translucent veils of photographic emulsion. Sometimes these veils of “reality” are so thin as to reveal underlying abrasions and shifts of pigmentation in the plaster. Elsewhere they form a skeletal layer of imagery to be enhanced later and made more luminous by glazes and scumbling in oil.

A long process ensues in which I obliterate, destabilize, or—on the other hand—augment the initial “reality” of the photograph. Toward the end, I no longer remember what is paint and what is photograph; sometimes the piece is so fully painted over that no photograph remains at all. That one cannot know exactly how each work is made contributes to its embodiment of precarity. The works are meant to invite a visceral response to the subject presented: our Arctic landscape and the threat of its disappearance, to the headlines we live with every day about melting ice and vanishing glaciers and all that they portend.