

ARTFORUM

Ellie Ga

AGNÈS B.'S LIBRAIRIE GALERIE
1/F, 18 Wing Fung Street, Wanchai,
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The Arctic landscape, though barren and disorientating, proves to be a fertile ground for New York artist Ellie Ga. Her solo exhibition "At the Beginning North was Here" is divided into three chapters, with the works drawing upon Ga's experience as the sole artist-in-residence on a scientific research sailboat, the *Tara*. For months, Ga worked on the vessel as it drifted, course unknown, through ice. Even the length of the stay was uncertain. In the Arctic, Ga tells us, predicting the weather can become a form of divination. The future shifts with each fissure in the ice.

The works in this exhibition are part documentation, and part reflection and analysis. The video projection *A Hole to See the Ocean Through*, 2008, is both a guide to what life was like aboard the *Tara* and an examination of how we cannot help but look at a landscape such as the Arctic through a personal lens, even when armed with scientific data. The video is an entrance, like a rabbit hole, to the world of the north and its punishing landscape. In one scene, an image of a petri dish of plankton is superimposed on the image of the two people wandering around in the ice. Ga's use of materials outside of what was documented during the voyage anchors the experience with a previous body of knowledge, as well as a personal narrative.

In the exhibition's title work, *At the Beginning North Was Here*, 2009, Ga proposes that the only way to map the Arctic is through a narrative. She interviews each member of the crew about the landscape, and a map is produced from each account. Cartography here draws heavily on personal experience; the crew members use reference points outside of the physical realm of their immediate surroundings to locate themselves. There is no single version of the territory around the *Tara*: Each interviewee's memory of the landscape differs. The strategies of both these works expand the story of the north beyond textbook science, lending to it a Jacques Cousteau-like wonderment and sense of adventure.



Ellie Ga, *At the Beginning North Was Here*, 2009, still from a color video, 7 minutes.

— Doretta Lau