

# KINGS

*Emily Arenas Zarate, Freda Drakopoulos, Cristina Dawn,  
MaggZ, Torre Alain, Chelsea Farquhar, curated by Iona Mackenzie*  
In Other Words

*Iona Mackenzie*

Is that a snowstorm on the horizon or just a smudge on the lens  
of your glasses?

I've been thinking about Antarctica a lot. I know it exists, but I'm into the idea that maybe it doesn't. No matter how detailed the map, it feels fictive, and besides, I don't really believe that anything could be 35 million years old.

It's referred to more as a landmass than land. There are no houses, no roads, no coffee shops, no native population. It's virtually uninhabited, except for the explorers. And to them, I'd ask; how do you get anywhere if every direction is north? I don't imagine there are many landmarks that stick out from the rest. *That thing of ice looks a lot like the thing of ice we saw an hour ago.....are we going in circles?* How do you orient yourself in the absence of external measures? I'd like to think it would come down to the way you feel.

I've heard there's a thing in Antarctica called diamond dust. Millions of minuscule ice crystals can cloud the air and when hit by sunlight, they glitter like floating diamonds. This only bolsters my hypothesis that Antarctica is entirely made up. I've never seen anything that beautiful in my life.

*Do you think they have a lighthouse in Antarctica? Or does the ice reflect the moon so brightly that there's no need for one?*

Supposedly, sun dogs, light pillars, and halos are also common arctic occurrences. I wonder if the esteemed scientists there to study them ever falter—and for a small moment—acknowledge something like divinity. I wonder if ever they regret learning how to analyse, if they want to forget their degrees and diagrams and if they yearn for the juvenile time when just watching was enough. Does assigning speech to the speechless ever feel a bit futile? Either way, their dedication to fitting the extraordinary into ordinary words is admirable.

Speaking of admirable professions, I read an article about a woman hired to count penguins in Antarctica. I don't know if she was a normal person or if she studied to do that. You'd have to have dependable eyes, and now that I think about it, I could never trust mine that much. Like the light, they'd enjoy playing tricks on me. I'd probably develop a habit of dramatising snow-capped rocks into hungry polar bears. *S.O.S....S.O.S! I swear that landform is lurching toward me! It definitely has claws!* After a while, they'd mute the emergency radio and I'd continue to cry wolf, though now into a void. My subsequent obituary would tell of a girl who was torn apart by a distant and vague mass; a true-ish tragedy precipitated by her urge to fill in the gaps.

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*What does an avalanche sound like? Maybe the snow insulates the rumble. I bet it's more of a shh than a crash. Man, what a way out.*

Is it too brazen to say that perspective is a balance of making things up and dumbing things down? I think someone important once said something profound like *we see what we feel*. I'd agree with whoever that was. Ultimately, objective truth sucks, and I hate it. Knowing what's what is hard, especially when everything around you is vast and comparatively, you're small. How can you ever be sure of anything when you could easily fit inside the stomach of a whale? That kind of vulnerability doesn't exactly breed conviction.

For someone who overuses the word *exactly*, I've never really been an exact person. I've never been able to understand things exactly as they are. What do I mean by that? I don't know! Naturally, my greatest fear is getting asked if I can be a little more specific. You should save your breath because the answer is always no.

*If I ever send a message in a bottle, I want it to end up in Antarctica where no one will read it. That is, except for in a million years when they melt it—and all the secrets I thought were important—out of an old ice block.*

While technically everything is complicated, I'm learning that it doesn't always have to be. They say that diamond dust is an intricate collision of electromagnetic particles, but to me, the only probable explanation is magic—duh! Maybe there are 19,456,940 penguins in Antarctica, but I'd rather just say there are a lot of them. The seas they search for krill are likely composed of a thousand different shades of cerulean and turquoise and indigo, but all I'd see is blue. Truly.

I'm no geologist, but scientifically speaking, Antarctica's shorelines are probably bound with enough pebbles to fill a palace. And at the end of the day, I know I'd collect just one. That would be more than enough.

To echo an ancient proverb: *keep it simple, stupid*. If it's not the right shape, it won't fit, and if the load's too heavy, you won't last the journey. Sometimes the truth needs to be chiseled a little to slot into the part of us that understands it—or more simply, accepts it. Maybe my spine needs fixing, or maybe I'm just not that strong, but I'd carry a pebble over a boulder any day.

I think that's why I struggle to believe in Antarctica. It's all too much. It's too big and too beautiful and if it's real then I'm sad I'm not there, so I'll keep trying to believe that it's not. For all I know, it's a styrofoam set and National Geographic is in on the prank.

In conclusion, seeing things for what they are is impossible. A thing is what we feel it is.

Established in 2003, KINGS Artist-Run provides a location for contemporary art practice, supporting distinctive experimental projects by artists at all stages of their careers.

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West Melbourne VIC 3003