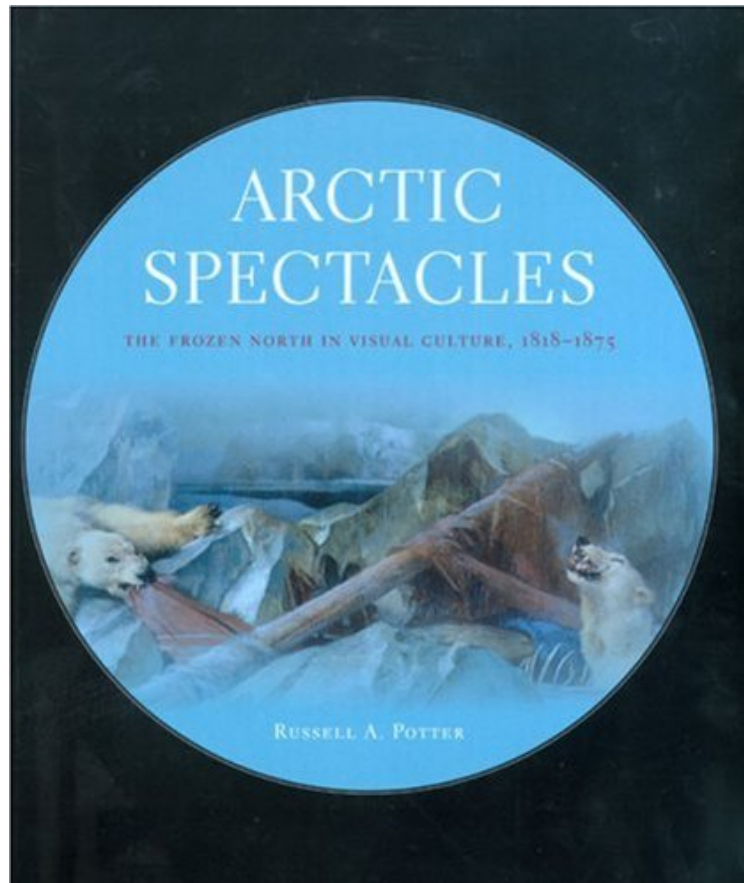


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Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875 (Samuel and Althea Stroum Books)

Russell Alan Potter

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#4054609 in Books 2007-10-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 10.18 x 1.19 x 8.771, 2.74 #File Name: 0295986794272 pages | File size: 63.Mb

Russell Alan Potter : Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875 (Samuel and Althea Stroum Books) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875 (Samuel and Althea Stroum Books):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A well-researched, fascinating foray into Victorian-era popular edutainment By Leserin About 150 years ago, the mystery of the icy, remote polar regions held as much fascination for a wide audience as space travel would a hundred years later. Panorama shows, true mass mediums of their day, were very popular then and many Arctic-themed panoramas toured Britain and the United States, making use of spectacular paintings and light effects, lantern slides and photography. These dramatic visual shows, accompanied by lectures and music, were a mix of education and entertainment particular to the 19th century. For a book on visual culture and media, I'd have expected more images 44 plates instead of 14 would have been suitable but those included are mostly lesser-known gems you'd be unlikely to casually stumble upon. They show different types of imagery the Victorian

public was familiar with: daguerreotypes, photographs, Arctic sketches drawn from life, studio oil paintings, stereoviews, and engravings even wax figures! The book gives a great idea of how the directors of panorama shows drew upon every available resource and technology to create the most compelling viewing experience. The author outlines technical aspects of Arctic panorama shows and how they changed and evolved over time. Each of these spectacles is put into historical context, starting with Britain's first attempt at both a Northwest Passage and the Pole in 1818, which inspired the first large-scale Arctic panorama in 1820. The disaster of Franklin's lost expedition and failure of several subsequent expeditions to ascertain its fate sparked public interest in the Arctic regions even further. Entire books tell this dramatic story. Here, the author focuses on its representation in 19th century media (beautifully illustrated with engravings from magazines and newspapers of the day), and successfully conveys the terror and desperation Franklin's crew faced in the end. You need not be a Frankinite to enjoy those quite literally chilling chapters: they are a good introduction for those unfamiliar with the subject. Insights into the backgrounds of great Arctic-themed paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, Frederic Church, Edwin Landseer, William Bradford and their public reception, round off this book. A fascinating read for anyone interested in Victorian-era culture and Arctic exploration.

When every land seems already explored, and space travel has declined in scope and prestige, the northern exploits of our Victorian forebears offers a pleasantly distant mirror from which to regard our own time. The Arctic regions have been the subject of a long-lasting visual fascination, one which has from the outset crossed boundaries between fine art and mass entertainment, "high" and "low" cultures, and even national identity. In the mid-nineteenth century, this polar passion reached a peak, dominating the visual culture of both Britain and America, and yet its history is scarcely known. *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North on Visual Culture, 1818-1875* illuminates the nineteenth-century fascination with visual representations of the Arctic, weaving together a narrative of the major Arctic expeditions with an account of their public reception through art and mass media. In a century that saw every corner of the globe slowly open to the examining eye of Western science, it was the Arctic - remote, mysterious, untamable - that most captured the imagination of artists and the public alike. Its impact could be seen in a range of visual media from fine art to panoramas, engravings, magic lantern slides, and photographs, as well as hybrid forms of entertainment in which Inuit were "exhibited" alongside a cabinet of assorted Arctic curiosities while Western gentlemen looked on. In a lively and accessible style, Russell Potter traces the story of the long, drawn-out exploration of the Northwest Passage and the beginnings of the push toward the North Pole, each new expedition producing its own artistic response. While early visual representations focused on the natural wonders of a world of magical beauty and purity, later responses would darken, as the public struggled to come to terms with the human toll of Arctic exploration: lives lost, reports of cannibalism, and a sense of purpose gone asunder. Drawing from letters, diaries, cartoons, and sketches, as well as oft-overlooked ephemera such as newspaper advertisements, playbills, and program booklets, Potter shows how representations of the Arctic in visual culture expressed the fascination, dread, and wonder that the region inspired, and continues to inspire today.

"Russell Potter does an excellent job of describing and analyzing public enthusiasm for visual representation of the Arctic . . . he connects the successes, tribulations, and failures of explorers with accounts of how . . . presentations . . . were imagined, assembled, promoted, and received." Jeffrey Mifflin, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, Vol. 9(4). "One of the most notable features of *Arctic Spectacles* is its emphasis on the transatlantic culture of entertainment as far as stories about exploration were concerned. National myths and obsessions certainly abound and are here demonstrated in accounts of the expeditions of John Ross, Elisha Kent Kane, and many others . . ." *Victorian Studies* "This is a scholarly, extremely well-written book . . . [that] is pleasing to the eye in many senses . . . In addition to being a fascinating contribution to the study of the history of arctic exploration, the book is a welcome addition to the study of images, whether literal or metaphorical, and should be enjoyed by all those interested in the Arctic, or 'The Frozen North.'" *Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research* "In Potter's capable hands, the relationships between public art, exhibit technology, and the lure of gaining hegemony over northern landscapes are woven together compellingly, suggesting that realistic art played an important role in the history of the Arctic." *Pacific Historical* "Potter's fine study the work of over a decade's research and collecting forcefully shows how the Arctic imagination in the nineteenth century was constructed through a visual vocabulary sourced in the aesthetic of the sublime, but directed also, under the pressure of historical events, towards melodrama, horror, sensationalism, and voyeuristic curiosity." *Journal of Popular Culture* "It is the evolution of Arctic imagery that Russell Potter traces in a narrative tinged with an artistic bent and the literary skills of the English professor that he is. . . . Both the casual reader and the scholar will find *Arctic Spectacles* revealing and thought-provoking." *Alaska History* "A well-written book that fills a little-known area in studies of both Victorian culture and Arctic history. Recommended." *Choice* "Russell Potter traces the story of the long, drawn-out exploration of the Northwest Passage and the early quest to reach the North Pole. Potter paints the visual pictures of the Arctic by gathering letters, diaries, cartoons, sketches, and even playbills and newspaper articles to show the Arctic in all of its beauty and savage glory. He uses full-color plates of the era to create a visual history of the mysterious,

untamable frozen North. He has created a work that is conceptually unique in its handling of the polar passion to explore the nineteenth century Arctic."Barbara Bertoldo, The American Association of School Librarians, 2008"Potter closely analyzes the range of this peculiarly Victorian fascination, covering the complete range of literary and visual effortsworks that focused on sensational death above all, and the relatively few works that captured the beauty of the arctic apart from the misunderstandings and myths. The illustrations here are especially well-chosen, so much so that readers may need to put on a sweater."Book NewsAbout the AuthorRussell A. Potter is professor of English at Rhode Island College. For more information go to <http://www.arcticspectacles.info/>