

She's in the Brooks: Portraits of Arctic Mountains

Just as women's bodies were aggressively pushed and pulled into corsets to create gentle curves, the sedimentary sea beds of Alaska's far north were shaped by powerful geological forces into mountains of sensuous lines and folds. Some conglomerate rocks of northern Alaska are two billion years old; however, most of the Brooks Range, Alaska's most northern mountain range, was created during the Cretaceous period about 140 million years ago by a pileup of northbound oceanic fragments and terranes. This northern range has been uplifted, moved, heated, cracked, folded, scrapped, eroded, frozen, gouged, smoothed – and shoved and shoved and shoved and shoved to its present place. To say these mountains over millions of years have been through a lot is definitely an understatement.

At times I wish the mountains could verbally tell their long story of where they have been and what has happened to them. Luckily, since much of the far north lacks trees and excessive vegetation on its high slopes, some understanding of the Brooks Range's long history is accessible through its exposed rock. In my paintings I try to capture where the land is in its millions-of-years transformation. Like people, mountains show much of their character and their life secrets through surface features; thus, minimally altering the rocks' basic structure is important because the lines and shapes of these formations reveal a look at the mountains' creation and long term existence. Using oil paints, I hope to show the essence and the spirit of the mountains and their surrounding environment and to show each mountain's character.

When viewing portraits of elderly women, ones with weathered complexions and ravine-like-creases throughout their countenance, I am often struck by the individual's spirit and strength. They, obviously, have encountered challenges and disappointments, yet they have reached a place of wise serenity. These older women remind me of many mountains in the Brooks Range: the mountains are eroding physically; cracks cover their surface; they have survived unbelievable forces. And yet, like the women, they are standing with dignity, emanating a spirit of place, silently telling us about their long, long trip to be with us today.

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