Antarctica—an immense and nearly pristine continent—inspires imaginations, inhospitable yet enticing exploration, discovery, and artistic reflection. Governed through treaty by multiple nations that all stake political and research capital there, Antarctica is a contested space. With climate change and resource exploration leading to increased interest in the southernmost continent, we all live seemingly closer to Antarctica than ever before.

Antarctica’s visual presence has become iconic through paintings by artists such as Frederick Church and in photographs by explorers such as Frank Hurley. These images evoke either the sublime qualities of the landscape or the heroic stance of man against nature. This is the Antarctica of imagination and myth: the unknowable, a place most of us are unlikely to experience in any other way than through mediated artifacts. Photographs and sound recordings provide some of our most direct analogs for sensory experience and thus serve as reliable transcriptions of the real. Yet they remain highly interpretive and coded representations of the visual and sensory world.

In December 2008, the two of us sailed from Ushuaia, Argentina, to the Antarctic Peninsula. We spent a week recording sound and making photographs along its northwest coast and on proximate islands. Of particular importance to our journey was Deception Island. It was formed when a large volcano erupted and then collapsed into the sea, forming a water-filled caldera with only one narrow entrance to a mountain-ringed central basin about five miles across. This provided an ideal safe, natural harbor for vessels and sailors seeking shelter from the fierce storms of the southern ocean. Eventually the whaling industry took advantage of this refuge, mooring factory ships in the harbor at a place called Whalers Bay and flensing whales of their blubber to be boiled down for whale oil. Cookers were constructed on land to boil down the whale remains and skeletons to extract the last bits of oil that were then stored in huge tanks. Over the years, tens of thousands of whales were processed at Whalers Bay, and their remaining boiled bones were scattered over the beach and in the waters of the caldera.

Deception Island’s starkness was dichotomous. The island’s geography presented an image of volcanic renewal, an active caldera in a cold sea. Yet the additional remnants of human industry on the island presented visual and sonic clues to its grisly past. Large eruptions in 1967 and 1969 created heavy mudflows that partially buried the rusting machinery at Whalers Bay. The dull iron hues of the sinking tanks resonate with microsonic pings from pebbles flowing in streambeds underneath. Although the island is a place of stillness, for us it was also a restless place that invited deep introspection.

When we returned, we had gathered more than thirty hours of recordings and over 2,700 photographs. From this, we mounted a major exhibition at the University Museum at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The exhibition, Antarctic Dreams, had three major components. The outer walls of the gallery were hung with Gary Kolb’s photographs of the landscape of the Antarctic. Re-purposed antique gramophone horns converted into electro-acoustic emitters with custom electronics hung throughout the gallery. The five horns each radiated a different sound work composed by Jay Needham from the Antarctic field recordings.
digital montages. Needham’s creative focus is on the sounds of “place.” By composing with the sounds from specific landscapes he creates an imagined space, a composed soundscape that presents opportunities for listeners to consider the artistic and philosophical meanings of locality.

With this project, we follow a long tradition. The collection of “data” through drawing, painting, photography, and sound recording, to name a few media, has for centuries been part of aesthetic and scientific exploration of the natural world. These records have helped form the public conception of “unknowable” spaces that are beyond the reach and view of the average person. As the romantic, late-Victorian era faded into the twentieth century, scientific inquiry intensified and began to define our relationship to the natural world. Our conception of geographies, such as that of the Antarctic, is framed almost exclusively through media and scientific data that have been gathered over more than a century of exploration and study. We have introduced culture into nature and largely defined our understanding of the latter through the former. We found ourselves creating art at a place where historic exploration was implicated as an important component of our own creative and artistic responses.

Antarctica remains a contested place. Its future is open to many paths. Ultimately, it will be our emotional, as well as our intellectual, responses to such issues as climate change, resource development, territorial governance, human use and occupation, and cultural and scientific value that will determine the future of this remarkable continent.

Gary Kolb
received a BA in religions from Northwestern University and an MFA in photography from Ohio University. In 1979, he was hired in the Department of Cinema and Photography at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. He served as chair of the department, associate dean of the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, and dean of the college until his retirement in 2012. He continues work revolving around landscape and its reflection in natural artifacts and cultural ideas. His photographs have been exhibited internationally, and he has published two acclaimed textbooks, *Photogravure: A Process Handbook* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1986) and *Photographing in the Studio* (McGraw-Hill, 1993). gpkolb@gmail.com.

Jay Needham
is a sound artist, electro-acoustic composer, teacher, and scholar. He utilizes multiple creative platforms, and his works often focus on recorded sound, archives, and the interpretation of artifacts. His sound art, works for radio, and visual art have appeared at museums, festivals, and on the airwaves worldwide. Through applied aspects of his research, Needham strives to affect positive change and bridge the gap between the arts and the sciences. His latest sound installation is on permanent display at the new Bio-Museo in Panama. His recordings of the Panamanian rain forest are arranged into a cycle that loops from sunrise to sunset inside the museum. He is the president of the American Society for Acoustic Ecology. www.jayneedham.net

The combined sound sculptures allowed museum attendees to experience an individualized soundscape as they moved through the gallery space. A central image installation and sound sculpture consisted of an octagonal room constructed in the center of the gallery with photographs on the outer and inner walls. On the outer walls were images of the remains of the whaling station at Whalers Bay on Deception Island. On the inner walls were images of whale bones originally found buried in the black volcanic sands of the Whalers Bay beach. In the interior of the room, with these photographs, was an additional gramophone horn sound sculpture that featured recordings of sounds emanating from the whale oil cookers and storage tanks at Whalers Bay.

Thus the exhibition contrasted the pristine landscape and soundscape of the Antarctic with the industrial age of whaling and resource exploitation of the early twentieth century. Juxtaposing these two “realities” allowed for a much richer understanding of the natural and cultural history of Antarctica and the collision between the two.

In the spirit of looking closely at one’s own “place,” Kolb has photographed extensively in the Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois. His images explore the varied topography of the forest and intimate details of its layered complexity. He has also incorporated objects from the landscape in studio still lifes and...
At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplored, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomable because unfathomable.

—Henry David Thoreau, Walden, 1854

Deception Adventure
Gary Kolb and Jay Needham share the adventurer’s itch. And I suspect if they could have traveled from the Tierra del Fuego shore to Deception Island on a nineteenth-century whaling brig they might have. Instead, Kolb and Needham traveled from the Argentine port Ushuaia to Deception Island on a decommissioned 275-foot naval cutter updated and designed with a modern understanding of endurance and survival in the Antarctic waters.

Deception Island (62° 57’ S, 60° 38’ W) is more accurately described as an active volcanic caldera. Somewhere between a crescent shape and a broken circle, the island has a history steeped in the residue of the whale oil industry, a contest among nations for its ownership, scientific research, and the aesthetic romanticism of a ghost town as played out in the tourism industry. Landing there as an artist requires focus, patience, and a strong sense of self. It also requires a way on and (more importantly) a way off the island.

Any idea of going to Antarctica has a romantic quality. As a remote and mysterious destination, Antarctica was replaced by the moon as “the place to discover” only in the mid twentieth century. It also must be said that the idea of adventure itself is the decided province of the colonist (pun intended), the well-funded, or the ideologically compelled.

And keeping in mind the inter-cultural cost of global adventure, in one lucky turn of human history, Antarctica had no indigenous populations to subdue or kill. We’ve all been saved that tragedy. Nonetheless, on this island we still face the artifacts of our deeds and the haunting footprints.
etched into its otherwise unyielding volcanic and glacial surface. It is a place of harsh climate, a subtlety of texture, color, and life. Deception Island seems a place where a quiet and thoughtful meditation on the world, or one’s art, requires the infrastructure of giants to protect us from the island’s immense challenges. Only a few groups of people venture there: government employees, scientists, tourists, the working people supporting them, and artists. And although Kolb’s and Needham’s individual efforts take ultimate precedence as a best indication of their distinct commitment to making art, their collaboration in the exhibition Antarctic Dreams proves something of what can be done when discrete approaches from similar minds agree to perform together. At least this is what I gather from seeing Gary Kolb and Jay Needham’s work and our ongoing conversation about their experiences together and alone.

**Requiems Are for the Living**

The contradictions or predicaments of history, global decay, militarization, eco-tourism, or the effects of traveling for one’s art are not lost on Kolb and Needham. Some compulsions transcend our uneasy guilt over our carbon footprint and effectively hold at bay the irrecusable sense that one’s daily life is in direct conflict with our long-term survival as a species. It is an unsustainable trade that we make. It is a kind of bartering between the artistic and intellectual pursuits of the individual and the effects this has on our globe. It is a trade that is becoming an agreement sliced more thinly with each circling of the sun. As Gary Kolb pointed out while discussing our collective historic impact on Deception Island: the whale oil industry gave way only when kerosene, and following that, electricity took its place as the power source meeting our insatiable demand to live in the light. The most aggressive whaling for oil largely died by mid century, but not until after it was used as sticky stuff in a treatment for trench foot during World War I and later as a component in automatic transmission fluid for automobiles through 1971 that we fully replaced its commercial uses with the current predicament of petroleum.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the bodies and bones of whales and people began to litter the shores of Deception Island. Large boiling kettles for rendering whale oil, small buildings, and the remnants of a military air station remain. The confluence of the remote beauty of such an alien landscape and the fact that what has transpired there (in the not-so-distant past) feels like a crime scene makes it seem obvious that two people with an existentialist’s edge or an empiricist’s desire could see this arctic desert as fertile ground. This is the friction that artists often crave, and in the best of hands it heightens the conflicts, the compromises we’ve made, and provides a little space for thinking.

Kolb and Needham are composers. This is evident when one considers the visual arrangements inside each frame or the more difficult task of editing and sequencing images; and for Needham, collecting noise and articulating it as sound, and organizing each element into a receivable signal is the task at hand. It is the palpable and sometimes even melodic experience of his sound compositions that tests a successful translation. Through these acts a more complete thought is made available. These artists carry devices for synthesizing, not just recording, experience. Making art is a life of...
Together/Alone—In an Interview

Gary Kolb and Jay Needham’s work in Antarctic Dreams is not a frigid Heart of Darkness redux. The installation simply conveys too much that is truly lovely to hear and see, and the work speaks too proudly of today to be that version of the dark. But a literary-like debt is being paid through Kolb and Needham’s translations of a melancholy that comes from visiting a site that is naturally cool to our presence. Deception Island is a place that has so much visible and audible past attached to its present that the island cannot escape being one of many litmus test sites of the environment. There is just too much blood on the tracks. And it is the sublime experience (“sublime” in this case should include both beautiful and audible past attached to its present that the island cannot escape being one of many litmus test sites of the environment. There is just too much blood on the tracks. And it is the sublime experience (“sublime” in this case should include both beautiful and

Gary Kolb’s photographs are beautiful and articulate. They provide a window into his career as an artist, and they are his direct and thoughtful vision of what the medium can do in capable hands. His experience as an artist is primary, yet the years of thinking and teaching are easy to see. For the initiated and uninhibited alike, the landscapes and the deceptively monochromatic images of bones and work as details describing both the actual and experiential ground Kolb has covered. His photographs are striking and ruthlessly clear when confronted in person. They are often compositionally or metaphorically layered (think landscape, then bone photographs), and the images give a sense of the stratigraphy of both geologic time and human artistic experience. One can see the studied and careful efforts of Kolb’s use and extraordinary understanding of the 4 x 5 and 8 x 10 field camera even if in his current work those cameras were not used. And when pressed, Kolb will relent to an admiration of and friendship with photographer Ray Metzker and a significant acquaintance with pianist Rudolph Serkin; both men are exceedingly bright lights in their respective fields. They both express themselves through a dedication to practice that prefers a masterful control of their medium. All three share a virtuoso’s rigor and thereby stay fluid and ready to produce for the big moments. In thinking of Metzker’s and Serkin’s works, other nuances of Kolb’s seem more obvious: a devotion to detail, horizontality, and the layered and the specific invocation of a single form and medium.

The physical installation and sculptural elements of the exhibition Antarctic Dreams deserve particular thought. The sculptural and architectural elements act as a kind of reference for both the sound and the images. The horns that Needham provides as places to get close and listen to his mixes are obvious in their gestalt. The horns themselves are curious, old, hand-hammered objects, and to get close and listen to his mixes are obvious in their gestalt. The horns themselves are curious, old, hand-hammered objects, and in our more playful moments we wonder if we could sneak a yell into their bells or put our ears close to the funneled ends like the earliest of hearing aids. As such they are very successful in charming us into paying attention to the real work done inside them. Spread throughout the exhibition site, they physically locate the sound in the room, telling us where to go to listen. They also act to join the ideas of the two artists. Like a small rock wedged between two giant boulders holding them apart but articulating their mass and the inevitability of their comparison and sameness, each horn becomes a syntactical hyphen for the show. Aesthetically admired, the horns provide a simple solution to a complex problem of installing a key element (sound) that innately has no visual presence.

In the center of the exhibition is a nine-sided room. For those of us who skipped geometry class, this structure is a nonagon. The unusual structure leads one to read the room as part nineteenth-century panorama, part curio cabinet, and part private meditation room. It has a modulated and modest authority yet voices the kind of spiritual intentionality that the Rothko Chapel in Houston exudes. This space within a space acts as a focal point for both artists. It is a place where Kolb and Needham’s work is more lonely and contemplative, but it is also where their collaboration takes on one another’s interests directly. One of Needham’s horns hangs in the center of the room, spilling micro sounds of windsept sand and rock, the groans of corroding metal, and the restless ocean into the quiet small space, while Kolb’s photographs of whalebones line the inner walls of the room. Both the sound and the images are hyper details—describing their subject carefully and combining into a collaboration that speaks of the history of the island at the scale...
of both human and geologic time. Kolb's images at first appear to be somewhat abstract because all one can see is the surface and contours of the giant mammals reduced to their archeological fragments. The photographs are deceptive in that they appear to be black and white. What the images show are bones weathered and gray from time on the hard shore. These are the last shards of some black and white. What the images show are bones weathered and crushed the Endurance in 1915 is now the subject of some weird and hedonistic salvage mission to find some of the dark liquor in the Antarctic ice and then replicate it for the drinking public today. As Needham pointed out, this is the idea of 'being able to drink history' instead of being part of it, or reflecting on it. In this case we can simply be intoxicated by history.

Satellite of Love—The Mind's Eye from Above Twenty-first-century viewers may believe that the volume and quantity of information that can be seen from the computer offers an experience that is close enough to the real thing. And art education or practice may not be entirely exempt from "online" fever. This is a kind of education that one can participate in from one's home and typically does not require special clothing to accommodate the weather. And while social media is clearly both social and an active political agent, it is not expressly interpersonal. Much of the imaging of experience that passes for information today relies on identifying with the person that posts it. And while it appears to be effective and true, and may in fact be about a kind of democratizing of information, its formulation in these sites is largely validated through its entertainment value. Kolb and Needham, however, have made a pretty good argument for the primacy of the field trip and the act of composing meaning, and that requires editing and focus. What is possible is an honoring of synthesis as a means to relate both tension and a fractured sense of peace.

Andrew Freeman is a photographer, writer, filmmaker, and occasional curator based in Los Angeles. He has exhibited at national and international venues, including the Belstaff Biennale (2008) and the Center for Creative Photography (2010). He has received grants from the LEF Foundation (2002 and 2003), the Graham Foundation (2003), and the Center for Cultural Innovation (2009), as well as having been the recipient of the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Individual Artist Fellowship (2007). Freeman's work was recently featured in the exhibition Conservation/Deconstruction: Defining Architectural Photography at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2013, and he recently finished a new book entitled This Year's Irony (Golden Spike Press) in conjunction with an exhibition at the University of Redlands, California. His book [Manzanar] Architecture Double [2009] was published in 2006 (RAM Publications/Center for Land Use Interpretation) in conjunction with the acquisition of the work by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. He has taught in the Photography and Media program at the California Institute of the Arts since 1990, and from 1995 through the present has helped direct the Community Arts Partnership photography program. www.andrewfreeman.net
Favorite Antarctica Cruises. Antarctic Peninsula. Antarctic Express - Fly South, Cruise North. Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica: Explorers and Kings. Polar Circle & Antarctic Peninsula. Antarctic Peninsula - Basecamp Plancius. Antarctic Explorer: Discovering the 7th Continent. Antarctica Express Air Cruise. Antarctica - Off the Beaten Path. Tell us your travel interests, dreams and desires, then let our experts tailor the perfect trip for you! Find a Seasonal Job with Antarctic Dream Cruises. Insights from their hiring manager. How to get a job, perks, and job postings from the cruise industry worldwide. Cool Jobs - Arctic & Antarctic Cruise Adventures. Who knows and can explain the cruise line hiring process better than anyone else? The people in charge of staffing! MV Antarctic Dream is a Chilean Antarctic expedition cruise ship, which originally served as the Chilean Navy auxiliary Piloto Pardo from 1959 until 1997. The vessel was built for the Chilean Navy by the Haarlemsche Scheepsbouw Maatschappij ("Haarlem Shipbuilding Company") of Haarlem, Netherlands, launched on 11 June 1958, and commissioned on 7 April 1959. She was constructed specifically for servicing the scientific bases established in the Chilean Antarctic Territory. The ship measures 83 meters