

# NARRATIVES OF THE POSSIBLE



**Ian van Coller**

Bozeman, Montana

## ***Kilimanjaro: The Last Glacier***

“A series of landscape photos of the glaciers on Kilimanjaro alongside portraits of men who work on the mountain.”

Drum Leaf binding; Asuka washi, bookboard, book cloth, glue.

(On exhibit but not pictured: *Suess and Canada Glaciers*)

### **Artist's Statement**

Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro is iconic and mythical. Its flat-topped, ice-covered summit rises dramatically from the surrounding lowlands of Tanzania to a height of 19,341 feet above sea-level. Due to their latitude, Kilimanjaro's "tropical" glaciers are particularly susceptible to sunlight and climate fluctuations. The glaciers have thinned by 85 percent over the last century, and nearly half of that loss occurred between 2000 and 2011. Scientists predict that the Northern Icefield will have completely melted within the next 30 years, and Furtwängler Glacier will vanish within the next decade. Encased within Kilimanjaro's ice are the microscopic particles of pollen, bacteria, dust and atmosphere gasses that have recorded millennia of deep time and global history. The loss of these glaciers promises to carry heavy cultural and scientific significance.

As the highest mountain in Africa, over 16,000 tourists attempt to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro every year. Many are drawn by the dramatic glacier landscape of the summit. These tourists employ hundreds of local Tanzanians who carry all the food and equipment needed for each expedition. The (mostly) men who are employed in this trade are, thus, intimately connected to the mountain's landscape. As the glaciers continue to melt and disappear, the men whose livelihoods depend on Kilimanjaro's glaciers will be dramatically impacted.

In August 2016 I travelled to Tanzania with renowned tropical glacier scientist Dr. Douglas R. Hardy (University of Massachusetts), to document the rapidly melting glaciers on the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro, and to make portraits of the Tanzanian porters. This project reflects my recent focus on creating projects that bring art and science together in an effort to make the monumental issue of climate change both tangible and comprehensible on a human scale. By placing the portraits of the Tanzanian porters, cooks and guides alongside dramatic ice landscapes, I intend to blur the boundaries between artistic memorial and scientific record in order to underscore the transience of this iconic landscape.

### **Biography**

Ian van Coller was born in 1970, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and grew up in the country during a time of great political turmoil. These formative years became integral to the subject matter van Coller has pursued throughout his artistic career. His work has addressed complex cultural issues of both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, especially with regards to cultural identity in the face of globalization, and the economic realities of every day life.

Van Coller received a National Diploma in Photography from Technikon Natal in Durban, and in 1992 he moved to the United States to pursue his studies where he received a BFA from Arizona State University, and an MFA from The University of New Mexico. He currently lives in Bozeman, Montana with his wife, children, and three dogs, and is a Professor of Photography at Montana State University.

His work has been widely exhibited nationally and internationally and is held in many significant museum collections, including The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Getty Research Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Library of Congress, and The South African National Gallery. Van Coller's first monograph, *Interior Relations*, was published by Charles Lane Press (New York) in 2011. He is a 2018 Guggenheim Fellow, and a Fellow at The Explorers Club.

Van Coller's most recent work focuses on environmental issues related to climate change and deep time. These projects have centered on the production of large scale artist books, as well as direct collaborations with paleo-climatologists.

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