



'RAINBOW OVER FOOTHILL VALLEY'



Jeff Jones photos

'CLOUD PATTERNS ON SNOWSCAPE'

ART REVIEW

'ARCTIC SANCTUARY: ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE'

When: through Jan. 8, 2012**Where:** John and Peggy Maximus Gallery, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta Del Sol**Gallery hours:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday**Information:** 682-4711

Remote Splendors at the Top of the World

Now at the Museum of Natural History, respected landscape photographer Jeff Jones' stunning imagery takes us to the vast Arctic Sanctuary

BY JOSEF WOODARD
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

While Americans in the lower 48 relish the knowledge and access to its protected national parks and forests, we more rarely contemplate the earthly splendors to the far north of these United States. One enticing and easily accessible redress for that is a fascinating current exhibition at the Museum of Natural History, "Arctic Sanctuary: Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," with illuminating imagery by respected landscape photographer Jeff Jones and text by Laurie Hoyle.

Its scale is almost staggering. At 19.5 million acres, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is vastly larger than any of our National Parks, and encompasses a diverse ecosystem including dense forest in the southern section and rugged tundra to the north. This exhibition, in fact, started its long trek in Alaska in 2010, soon after the publication of a book that spawned the show, commissioned as part of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the refuge. The traveling exhibition finishes its tour in March at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

Suitably enough, the tour itinerary has included institutions dedicated to both art and nature, and the blend thereof. Jones' often panoramic photographs do the starkly inspirational terrain poetic and documentary justice, but the earth science element makes for a poignant commentary, implicitly and otherwise.

A question arises: in this remote corner at the top of the known, "owned" world, where does the line between natural wilderness and earth worthy of government-mandated preservation begin and end? Clearly, areas such as this deserve some strict control and oversight, when both oil-lusty efforts threaten from the lower states and more invisible climate-change demons are afoot, across borders.

As an imposingly physical presence and symbol of the region, a massive taxidermied polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*, if you must know) stands like a mute sentry and canary in a coalmine metaphor in the middle of the gallery space. It's a majestic creature, even posthumously, and a reminder of what stands to be lost in the global warming scenario, a subject that lurks in the scenery before us in this show.

Doomsday prospects aside, though, what greets the eye in this show is a celebration of a dramatic slice of earthly life. Remarkable, remote, desolate and beautiful by any standards, it's a world that Jones captures with his sensitive eye for landscape, especially in the broad swath of the panoramic format.

Naturally, many of Jones' images are white and wintry scenes, as in the dramatic triptych "Sanctuary Sunrise," with the Brooks Range spread out across three wide prints. There is an implied visual challenge, combined with an aura of chilled luster, in his white-on-white study "Cloud Patterns on Snowscapes" and in the white, undulant sprawl of "Late Winter Sunset," in which the setting sun could verge on the sentimental, but somehow errs on the side of poetry.

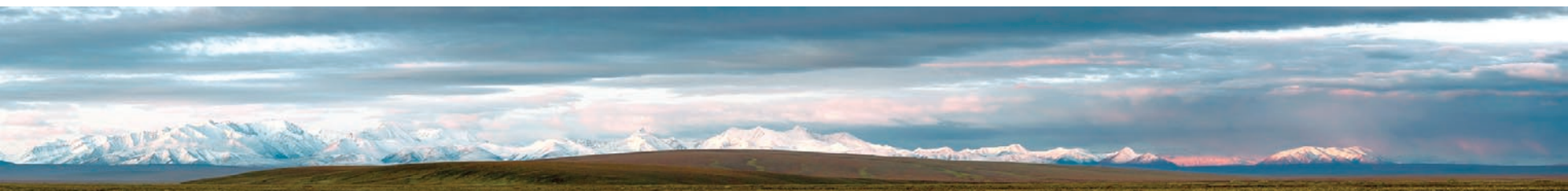
Some of the striking imagery in the show, however, takes place in warmer climes, as the earth thaws and reveals her beauty in fuller color palettes — mostly in the more southerly section of the designated Refuge acreage. "Evening Valley View" presents a lovely, yawning and verdant valley expanse, ringed with craggy mountain contours, capturing

the luster of fleeting arctic summer.

In the main, Jones generally opts for the responsible, reportorial view over any self-consciously artistic tactic, but his innate sense of art slips into the scenery. One of the more interesting and unusual photographs, from a visual perspective, is "Summer Showers Over Boreal Forest," an enigmatic jewel of an image. A slightly oblique and disorienting aerial shot, the image is half-cloaked inside a dark rain cloud and half-peering down on the terrestrial blanket of green below.

And who can resist the lucky charm factor of the double rainbow scene of "Foothill over Foothill Valley," despite the potential kitschy fantasy and easy metaphor attached? The image, along with the show as a whole, makes you proud, somehow, to know that this, too, is "America."

Of course, from the darker subplot aspect of the show, these pictures can also trigger an inchoate sadness, when pondering the assorted eco-perils and land use pressures in the region. For the foreseeable now, anyway, the Refuge is a northerly slice of largely frozen paradise, more than worthy of a pictorial valentine such as this one.



'SANCTUARY SUNRISE'