



# Pia Arke and ‘Arctic Hysteria’: Visual Repatriation and the Problematics of a ‘Lost’ Artwork

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## Abstract:

This article examines Pia Arke’s artistic practice that engages with the phenomenon of ‘Arctic hysteria’, which apparently gripped large parts of the female indigenous population in the Arctic during the early contact era. By focusing on the ‘lost’ photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997), I aim to show how Arke’s method of re-appropriating photographic material from colonial archives can be seen as an act of visual repatriation, of “working through” and reclaiming the repressed histories of indigenous Kalaallit women.

## Keywords:

Pia Arke, Arctic hysteria, visual repatriation, photography, social biography, colonial archive

In spring 1995, Danish-Kalaallit artist Pia Arke (1958–2007) travels to New York where she visits the Explorers Club. Here she stumbles across a photograph of two white male Arctic explorers forcefully holding back a ‘hysterically’ screaming, semi-naked Kalaallit woman. Arke found the photograph among the *Peary Arctic Club* archive collection, which contains expedition documentation by American polar explorer Robert E. Peary (1856–1920).<sup>1</sup> According to the Club’s curator – Arke recounts in an interview four years after the visit – the photographed woman experienced a fit of ‘Arctic hysteria’ or *pibloktoq*.

In autumn 1995, Arctic and Inuit history scholar Lyle Dick publishes an article that critically investigates the discourse around exactly this phenomenon: a Western-termed psychopathological illness, which apparently gripped large parts of the female indigenous population in the Arctic during the early contact era. He writes “Beyond what it might say about hysteria, this intriguing aspect of High Arctic history offers the potential to enhance our understanding of European as well as Native behavior in the Arctic, and the historical construction of relationships between these two groups.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not known whether Arke and Dick were aware of each other's findings, yet there are significant parallels in their attempts to problematise how entire scientific discourses on non-Western cultures were constructed by the European explorer/coloniser while their presence and impact remained largely undiscussed. In her treatise *Ethno-Aesthetics*, published in Danish in 1995 (translated into English and reprinted 2010), Arke develops this stance out of her own hybridised position. With a particular reference to Clifford's critical analysis of late nineteenth and early twentieth century emergent social sciences and Western modernist art, Arke notes: "The only people actually present are the people, i.e., the Europeans, that are not on display."<sup>3</sup>

*Ethno-Aesthetics* does not problematise or contextualise the occurrence of 'Arctic hysteria' in the colonial contact zone, allegedly because at the time of writing Arke was not yet aware of this phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> However, her conceptual artistic approach to 'Arctic hysteria' following her New York visit is already theoretically anticipated in the treatise. Here Arke states that "ethno-aesthetics can be analysed as an event combining ethnocentrism and anthropological humanism" where Western appropriation and marginalization of the alien is constantly at work. Also 'Arctic hysteria' can be posited there: at the intersection between late nineteenth and early twentieth century Euro-American patriarchal scientific discourses (in this case: treatment of women and/with hysteria) and Western conceptions about indigenous peoples as primitive and without agency. Dick's article corresponds:

When American explorers first witnessed episodes of "pibloktoq," their perceptions were conditioned by then-current Western conceptual frameworks. ... Euro-American semantic associations surrounding the term "hysteria" formed an important part of the perceptual repertoire which American observers carried with them when they first witnessed episodes of "pibloktoq."<sup>5</sup>

Arke in fact still detects these frameworks within global modernity and to make these visible, she proposes:

To the extent that such global modernity can be found, it will have to include us Greenlanders. Indeed, we have to abide by the same general terms as the rest of the world and we only have the same pieces to move around. At one moment, therefore, we have to cling to the authentic values cultivated by the anthropologists and let our cultural capital work for us. And that is perhaps precisely what we are doing when at the next moment we turn towards anthropological humanism to study it studying us, re-appropriating its conceptions of our selves. The alien element that is at play is ourselves, we say. And this can, if nothing else, explain why we throw ourselves with such energy into the game.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, I aim to show how Arke threw herself "with such energy into the game" and both conceptually and literally moved the same pieces around to not only make visible these still prevalent frameworks, but also process traumatic historical events that Arke had not directly experienced herself, yet whose effects reverberated in her own biography. I will focus here on Arke's photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997, ill. 1) to show how her method of appropriation, reappropriation and recycling of photographic material from the colonial period can be seen as a post-memorial act of empathizing with and "working through" what Arke's long-term friend and collaborator Stefan Jonsson has called the repressed world history of "brutalised women – materially and mentally violated, racialised, objectified and dehumanized."<sup>7</sup>



III. 1 Pia Arke: *Arctic Hysteria IV*, 1997. Yellow toned b/w photomontage, framed (reproduction), 79.3 x 202.5 cm. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk.

In this argumentation, I will challenge the commonly used (art) historical classification of 'lost', which has also been applied to *Arctic Hysteria IV*.<sup>8</sup> While 'lost' postulates that the work was intended as a permanent, commodified artwork, I instead argue that this and other 'lost' works should rather be seen as what I call performative 'ephemeral materializations' of processes leading to visual repatriation and reclaimed ownership. In that sense, *Arctic Hysteria IV* can be read as both a metaphor for loss, recuperation and regained belonging.

### Theoretical Approach

In this endeavour, I will read *Arctic Hysteria IV* from a material perspective whereby I draw my inspiration from Elizabeth Edwards's and Janice Hart's approach, who argue that photographs "are both images *and* physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience (*italics in original*)."<sup>9</sup> Without denying the importance of the image content, their main argument is that we cannot understand photographic images without paying attention to their materiality. Photographs are things made, used, kept, stored, transported, relocated, dispersed, damaged, torn, cropped and so on. As reproducible objects, they belong in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning. They are objects enmeshed in social relations and not merely passive entities.<sup>10</sup> As material objects, they have 'social biographies', or, as Edwards more recently noted, "objects with active biographies in a constant state of flux."<sup>11</sup> Although this analysis of photography primarily relates to museological and archival contexts as well as vernacular photography, I term this approach useful in reading Arke's work because it appropriates material from exactly those contexts: the colonial and private archive. By tracing the appropriated material's and the 'finished' artwork's 'social biography', I aim to show how both have 'travelled' from one format and context to another and how they are in turn reframed and re-owned by Arke. Here I will first trace back the original context of the appropriated material then investigate what Arke does with it and how it publicly (re)materialised, to finally arrive at a contemporary reading of the work.

In doing so, I will build upon Arke's own published writing as well as existing research and scholarly literature, most notably the thoroughly assembled and to date most comprehensive publication edited by Kuratorisk Aktion. The majority of the published material problematises and reflects on how Arke's work cannot be read without considering the impact of colonialism on her identity and practice. Thus, her statement "I make the history of colonialism part of *my* history in the only way I know, namely by taking it personally," which

originally appeared in *Stories from Scoresbysund*, has since become the most cited quote in literature on Arke.<sup>12</sup> Within these postcolonial analyses also performative and auto-ethnographic aspects are highlighted, including notions of self-representation and the violated female body.<sup>13</sup> My research contribution builds particularly on Jonsson's and Sandbye's analysis of Arke's work, focusing on the one hand on the female subject from the colonial margin and on the other on a post-semiotic analysis of photographs as objects, and as instigators and performers of social and affective relations.<sup>14</sup> The performative aspect of the very material used by Arke (thus not the performative aspect within the works) will become especially evident in the latter part of my re-reading of *Arctic Hysteria IV*, while the violated indigenous female body is the focus in the former. However, to date Arke's work has not been read in the light of visual repatriation and post-traumatic recuperation processes in connection with the (im)material aspects of her work.

### ***Arctic Hysteria IV***

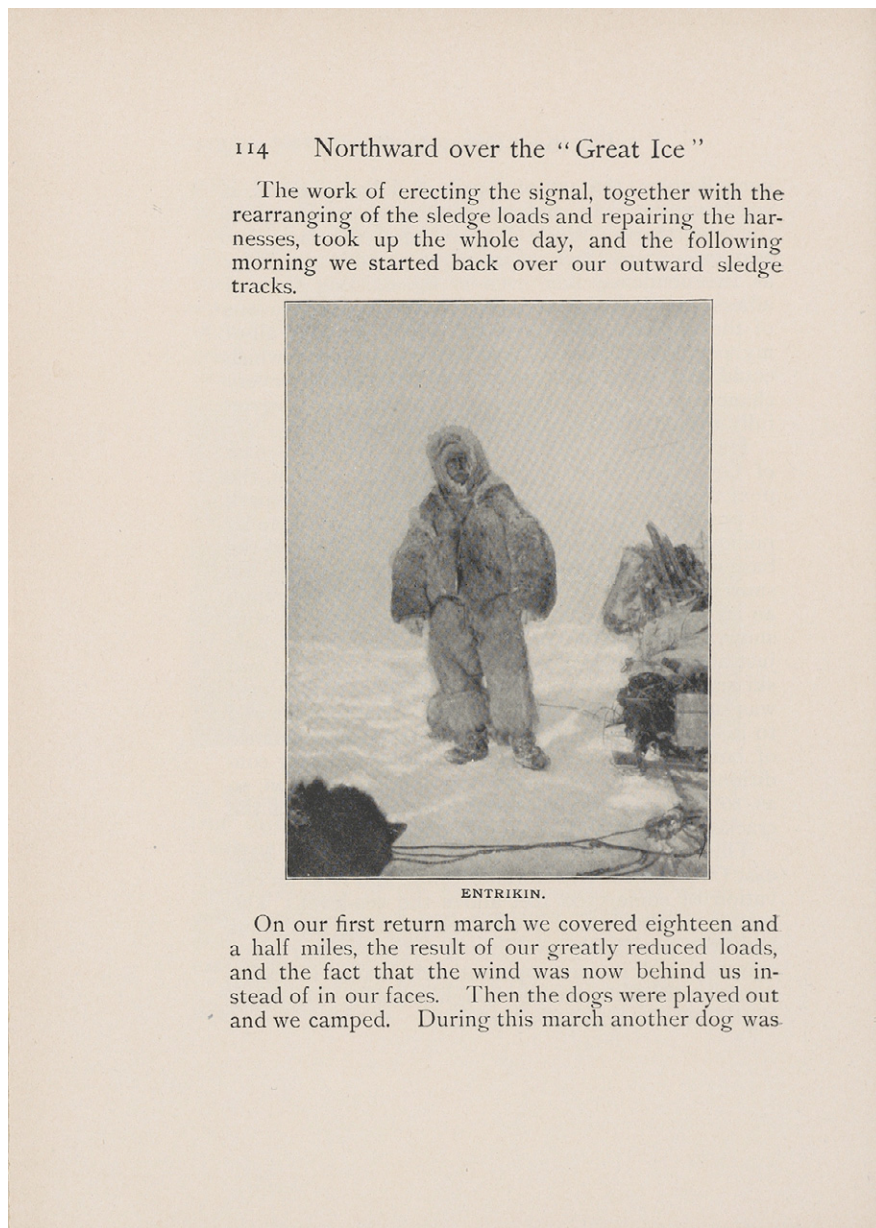
The photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* appears to be Arke's last in a series of works that refers to the invented psycho-pathological illness she stumbled upon in 1995.<sup>15</sup> For the work Arke reproduced seven black-and-white photographs from the second volume of Robert Peary's



III. 2 Installation view from the group show "MAP: In Differences", Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki (3 October – 2 November 1999). Photo: Pia Arke. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.



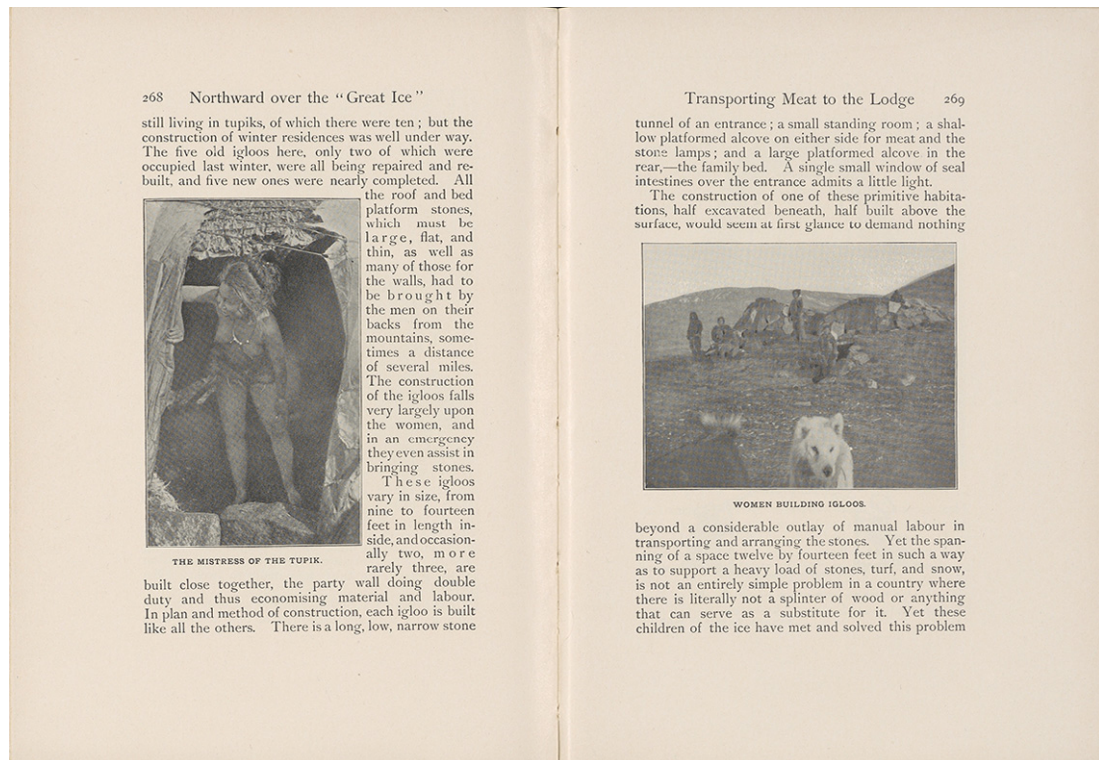
book *Northward over the "Great Ice": A Narrative of Life and Work along the Shores and up on the Interior Ice-Cap of Northern Greenland in the Years 1886 and 1891-1897*.<sup>16</sup> Four of these are full-body portraits of American polar explorers Peary, Baldwin, Enrikin and Clark, indicated through their captions. Dressed in a full fur outfit within a snow-covered landscape, the explorers alternately frame three naked or semi-naked Kalaallit women, their captions reading: *The Mistress of the Tupik* (left), *An Arctic Bronze* (middle) and *Flash Light Study* (right). Arke blew up the reproductions to almost life-size dimensions. The only alteration she undertook was to slightly crop each original photograph on the sides, resulting in a coherent composition with a frieze-like character, as seen from an exhibition in 1997 (ill. 2).



III. 3 Page 114 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice". A Narrative of Life and Work along the Shores and up on the Interior Ice-Cap of Northern Greenland in the Years 1886 and 1891-1897* (1898).

The portraits of all four explorers appear in the fifth chapter of part III, *On the Great Ice (continued)* (pages 114, 116, 118, 119). It recounts the story of Peary's unsuccessful trip to the Inland Ice in March/April 1884. In the book, the photographs were inserted into the text and showed the men with their equipment and/or sled dogs (ill. 3).

The photographs of the Kalaallit women, in turn, do not just appear in one chapter but are spread over different ones in the book. *The Mistress of the Tupik* shows a woman with a loosened hairdo and barely covered by her clothes, revealing her breasts, legs and the rest of the upper body. She holds the opening of a tent and gleams to the side. The photograph originally appears in *Transporting Meat to the Lodge* (Part IV, chapter IV) (ill. 4).



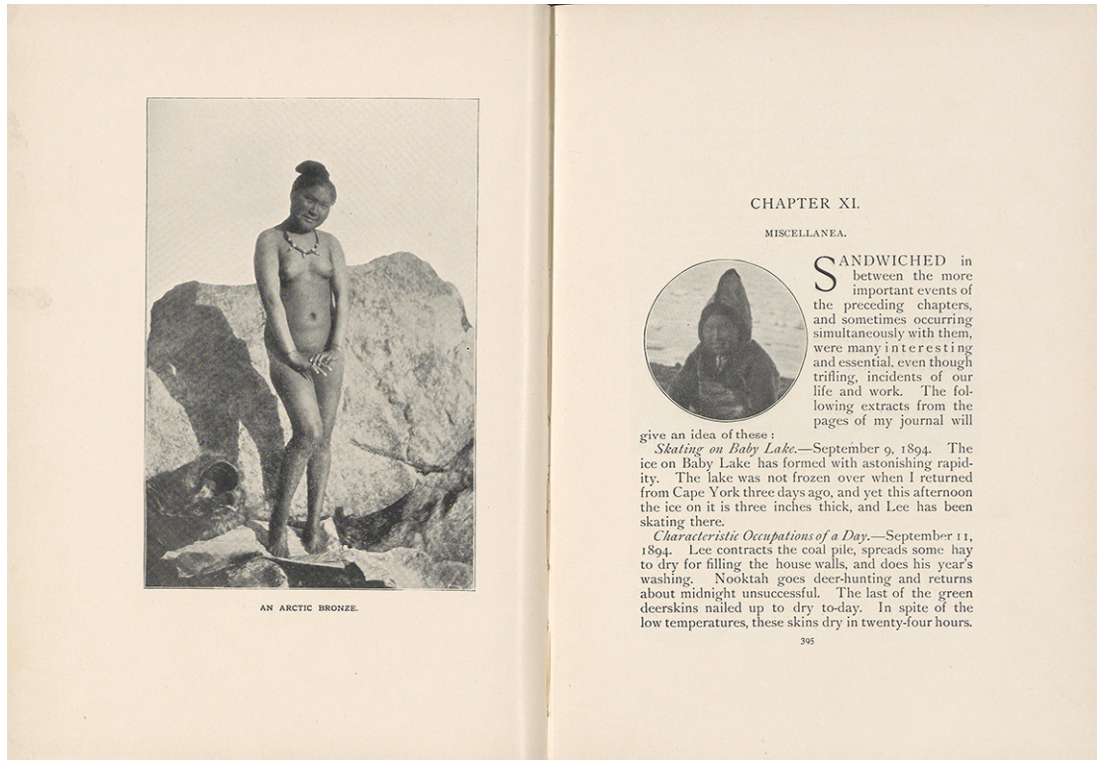
III. 4 Pages 268–269 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice"* (1898).

When reading the entire chapter, one finds no indication of whom this woman might be, what her name is and why Peary has photographed her. Peary instead describes his stay at the village Karnah and how the Kalaallit families start to prepare for the winter – shifting their housing from *tupiks* (tents) to igloos. We thus presume that the photograph was taken there. Other photographs and related descriptions indicate that the temperature inside tents and igloos was considerably higher than outside and thus, when being inside, the inhabitants were often quite lightly or barely clothed. This was probably the case here also. Peary must have then photographed the woman "spontaneously" when she looked out of the tent. However, through Peary's caption *The Mistress of the Tupik* this assumption is diverted. Instead, the woman is turned into an object of male desire, as if she were in attendance of her lover who will soon be granted access to her 'love cave'.

The second image is of a full standing nude, only adorned with a neckless and her hands



shyly folded in front of her genitals. She stands in front of a rock, otherwise nothing distracts from her nudity. *An Arctic Bronze*, as Peary titled the photograph, originally appears in *Miscellanea* (Part IV, chapter XI) (ill. 5).



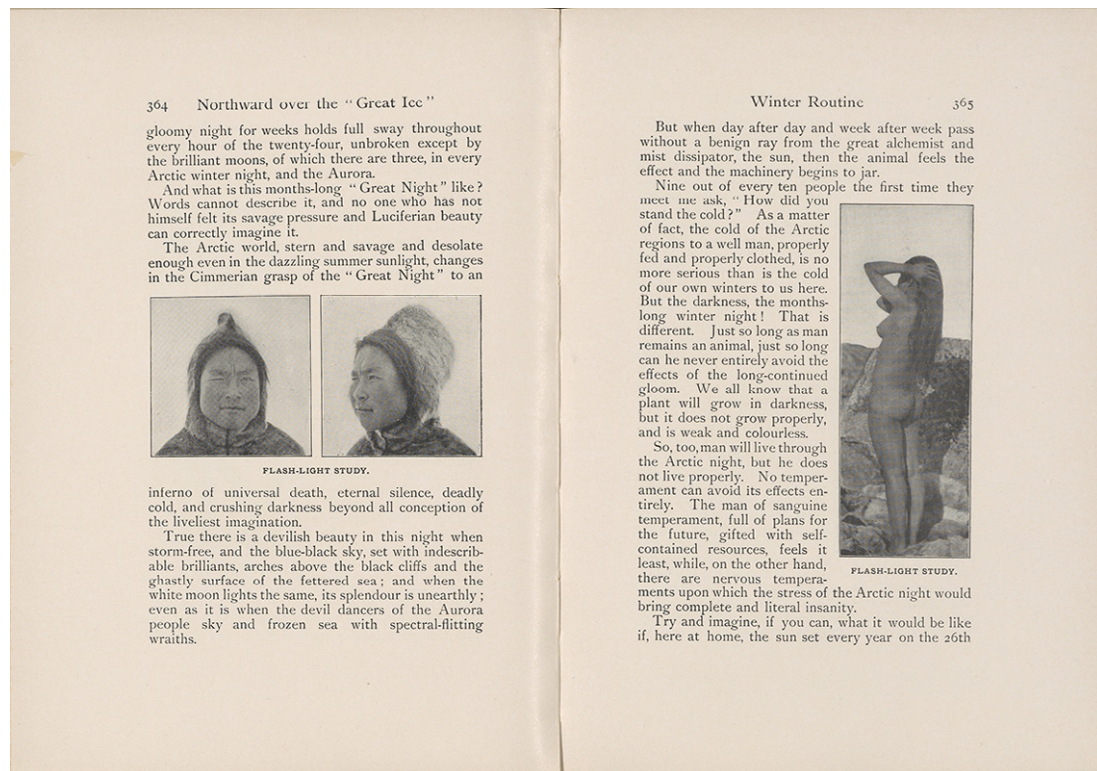
III. 5 Pages 394–395 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice"* (1898).

The chapter is a description of events that, according to Peary, did not fully fit in with the others. Like in *The Mistress of the Tupik*, there is no hint at whom this young woman might be. However, there are two narrated episodes in the chapter that catch attention: On 10 November 1894, Peary writes that he is left by his male companions (who go for a hunting trip) and that he is put "in the somewhat embarrassing position of being left, alone and unprotected, with five buxom and oleaginous ladies, of a race of naive children of nature, who are hampered by no feelings of false modesty or bashfulness in expressing their tender feelings." Peary reasons, "My years, and at present semicrippled condition from a fall on the rocks, will, I trust, protect me".<sup>17</sup> The next episode in the chapter tells of a fourteen-year-old girl called Alakahsingwah who had frantically escaped the camp in the middle of the night to reach the settlement of Karnah. Peary expresses bewilderment and cannot find an explanation for this behaviour.

Sources exist that prove Peary and his companions had Kalaallit mistresses. It is known that Peary's mistress was Alakahsingwah, with whom he had also fathered two children.<sup>18</sup> According to Arke's own research, the photograph entitled *An Arctic Bronze* was in fact her, which is surely one of the reasons why Arke included her centre-stage in the montage. With this information at hand, the story of the girl that frantically – or should I say hysterically – escaped to Karnah needs to be read against the grain, with speculations arising whether their relationship was consensual. Here, Dick's article again sheds light on the uneven power

relationships between the explorers and the Kalaallit: Dick points out that for Peary's expeditions to be successful, he placed women at the bottom of the hierarchy and organised his "crew" along racial and gender lines. According to Peary himself, native women were a necessity not only to cause "greater contentment but as a matter of both physical and mental health and the retention of the top notch of manhood ..." <sup>19</sup> In the article, Dick goes on to quote from Baldwin's diary – one of the explorers accompanying Peary and appearing in Arke's photomontage – which describes how there were "repeated attempts by four Americans to coerce Inuhuit women into sexual relations," how he compared their lodge to a "whore-house" and recounts scenes in which young native women, mere girls, were crying following attempts to "have them submit to their [the explorers'] carnal desires". In the same diary entry, Baldwin notes that this behaviour was known to Peary yet that he did not act upon it. Thus, sexual abuse of Kalaallit women was not just silently accepted, but more than that, it was seen as an explorer's basic 'right' to submit these native women to their desires in order to preserve their manhood. From this perspective, *An Arctic Bronze* raises doubts about the woman's voluntariness of being depicted in this pose. The photograph rather points to (Peary's) male desire and interrelated European modernist conceptions about the primitivist female nude, as is also mirrored in the modernist Western art historical canon.

The photograph of the third woman, entitled *Flash Light Study*, is a nude in semi-profile yet slightly turned away from the onlooker. Her left-hand breast is visible, but not her face. Her hair is not tied up in the hairstyle common at the time but falls down on her body. The pose appears as intensely private, yet this appears unlikely. Knowing that the average summer temperatures in Nuuk around the time were around 5.5 °C (while Peary was further northeast where it was colder), it would be unlikely to feel comfortable without clothes in such temperatures. Furthermore, the question remains whether female nudity in the open Arctic landscape was common practice then. *Flash Light Study* appeared in *Winter Routine* (Part IV, chapter IX) (ill. 6).



III. 6 Pages 364–365 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice"* (1898).



Again, no names are mentioned. But there are in fact several photographs of (primarily) naked women with the same caption found in this chapter. Here photographs are entirely of Kalaallit people and reminiscent of ethnographic photographic studies of the period, recording and measuring the people's routines, postures and physique. Peary's writing confirms this reading: "I continued work on the ethnological photographic record of the tribe as in the previous winters, but now that new subjects were comparatively scarce, it gave me an opportunity for an auxiliary series of pictures showing action, special positions, characteristics, etc." Closing the "ethno-aesthetic" circle, he expresses: "Some of these photos scattered through this chapter, will give an idea of the work. Many others, while not adapted for a narrative of the nature of this, are of much interest to the artist and ethnologist, and contain many surprises."<sup>20</sup>

### Appropriation, Ownership and Visual Repatriation

Arke appropriated the photographs from Peary's book more than seventy years following his death. Thus, during the period Arke formed her own work (1995–99), the material was not only publicly available but also copyright claims had expired. However, regarding appropriated photographs that found their way into artworks such as *Krabbe/Jensen I* and *Krabbe/Jensen II* (both 1997) this is not the case (ill. 7).



III. 7 Installation view of *Krabbe/Jensen I* and *Krabbe/Jensen II* at the exhibition "Landscape '97," Jyväskylä Fair, Jyväskylä, Finland (21 November – 14 December 1997). Photo: Pia Arke. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

Here, Arke appropriated photographs from the book *Greenland, Its Nature, Inhabitants, and History* by Danish doctor T. N. Krabbe (1861–1936). Here, copyright would have expired in 2006. Regarding other photographs Arke frequently appropriated, namely those by Danish telegraphist Sven Lund Jensen, the material was in fact intended for others to be used. In

*Stories from Scoresbysund*, Arke recounts how she discovered that Jensen had placed his negatives at a photo shop in Copenhagen for acquaintances to make their own “Greenland album”. This explained for her why she stumbled upon photographs of her mother taken by Jensen in 1947 in private archives.<sup>21</sup> These would re-appear in *Krabbe/Jensen I* and *Krabbe/Jensen II* together with Krabbe’s ethnographic photographs.

Arke’s method of appropriating photographic material was of course already common practice at the time she assembled her photomontages. Artists from the so-called *Picture Generation* had prominently expatiated on the appropriation of photographs, predominantly from mass media. Also, historical photographs were appropriated. The 1990s saw an increased engagement with the postcolonial appropriation of ‘legacy images’, as Jessica Neath has noted.<sup>22</sup> While questions of copyright and ownership arise in all cases, the appropriation of ‘legacy images’ specifically poses questions as to whom this ‘raw material’ belongs.<sup>23</sup> Shall its ownership be attributed to the person who has taken the photographs, to the subjects depicted or to the author who has assembled them (here: Arke)? This question is important because it steps into discussions of repatriation and, more concretely, visual repatriation.

Beside tremendous scholarly engagement regarding the physical repatriation of cultural objects in the past decades, scholars discussing the concept of visual repatriation have focused on how images play a crucial role in uncovering the histories and memories of the formerly violated and repressed.<sup>24</sup> Elemental in this process is the close collaboration and partnership with the ‘source communities’ from which those images originate.<sup>25</sup> However, as Kirsten Dobbin has expressed, visual repatriation entails not necessarily the return of physical objects/photographs, but “rather elements of history, memory, and identity that are associated with the images.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, “[a]s visual repatriation predominantly involves the return of modern copies of images rather than the original vintage print, visual repatriation can be seen as subset of ‘knowledge repatriation’, where information is returned, as opposed to artefact repatriation, where the original piece is returned to the source community.”<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, the process of visual repatriation through re-engagement with photographic images has the potential for empowerment, renewal and contestation.<sup>28</sup>

Although visual repatriation is conventionally practiced in collaboration with source communities, I argue that this concept can be applied to Arke’s work (while being aware of current contestations of the term in favour of ‘rematriation’). Born to a Kalaallit mother and Danish father, Arke was, metaphorically speaking, a descendant of Peary and Alakhsingwah – while it is evident that Arke identified more with the Kalaallit woman.<sup>29</sup> As a diasporic member of a female Kalaallit community (even if Arke met challenges belonging to it), the appropriated photographic material would also ‘belong’ to Arke, giving her every right to claim ownership and tell its “other histories”.<sup>30</sup>

## Meeting the Gaze

Arke’s visual repatriation, however, differs from conventional scholarly practices of re-owning colonial photographic material. Instead, by appropriating the photographs and “moving the same pieces around”, she makes meanings and relationships shift. In setting the figures of the pompous polar explorers against the nude Kalaallit women, she reminds us of the imbalance in power relationships that occurred in such encounters: the indigenous woman as an exoticised and eroticised object that cannot escape her powerless status as either model, mistress or servant. But not only that: by blowing up the photographs of explorers and women to almost life-size dimensions, they meet both their own and our gaze at eye level (ill. 8).



**III. 8** Pia Arke standing next to *Arctic Hysteria IV* when it was exhibited at the group show “MAP: In Differences,” Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki (3 October – 2 November 1999). Photo: unknown. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

Here the photographs become, through their materiality, as Roberta McGrath has noted, a locus of “intersecting gazes” where it is possible to contest or confirm the gaze of others and our own.<sup>31</sup> Arke not only makes us aware of our own gaze but also what happens when historical material and discourses are reframed and re-contextualised: as objects of evidence and post-memory devices to disclose repressed histories and overcome the traumatic events hinted at earlier in this article.

Arke repeatedly pointed out that traumatic events were ingrained in the colonial history of Kalaallit Nunaat. However, they were not talked about because they were associated with shame and loss. Such events not only entailed the brutalization of Kalaallit women by polar explorers as highlighted through the artwork discussed. Other examples include the resettlement of Kalaallit communities for the purpose of colonial territorial expansion (such as from Angmassalikk to Scoresbysund, officially to ease famine and disease but, in reality, about the Norway-Denmark territorial dispute), forced removal of children to Danish boarding schools for the purpose of ‘assimilation’, denial of hunting rights leading to hunger and starvation or ethnographic activity including measuring naked bodies. While these events were repressed in the Greenlander’s memory, Arke does the opposite: she lifts them out of oblivion. She appropriates and reappropriates historical photographs to repeatedly materialise the ‘other’ repressed histories. This becomes evident through the different formats and presentation modes Arke applied when showing the work in various contexts.



## Loss, Abandonment and Performative ‘Ephemeral Materializations’

Information retrieved from Arke’s survey publication shows that *Arctic Hysteria IV* was last exhibited at “ATTACK! Photography on the Edge”, Amsterdam (5–26 June 1999).<sup>32</sup> The work’s first appearance seems to have been in “Tätatät – Ny nordisk kunst” at Bildmuseet, Umeå (8 June–7 September 1997). Available installation views from this two-year exhibition period, as well as material showing the photomontage in Arke’s studio, confirm that the work’s format shifted variously. A slide found in Arke’s archive shows a version where the boards are cropped, leaving out the original captions, and in which one nude was exchanged with another (ill. 9).<sup>33</sup>



III. 9 Slide found in Pia Arke’s archive. Today titled *Untitled (Arctic Hysteria sketch)*, c. 1996–97. Collection Nuuk Art Museum. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

A conversation with Arke’s brother Erik Gant reveals that she gave him two of the seven photostat elements (*An Arctic Bronze* and *Clark*) while doing his PhD at Aarhus University in the 1990s. He had pinned them to the wall in his office. When he left he donated them to the university, upon which they were mounted on cardboard and displayed in the breakfast lounge, Gant seems to remember.<sup>34</sup> For the exhibition at Bildmuseet, curator Jan-Erik Lundström recalls that *Arctic Hysteria IV* was mounted on cheap board, possibly KAPA.<sup>35</sup> In a museum context, KAPA is rarely used as support material for photographs of collectible/museological value but rather as affordable, lightweight material easily to be installed and discarded of. This makes it suitable for temporary exhibition presentations and appears to have been the case for the materialization of Arke’s work in the exhibition.

A photograph from spring 1999 shows Arke in her studio with seven separate reproductions of Peary’s photographs mounted on cardboard (ill. 10).



**III. 10** Pia Arke showing the photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* to curator Johan Swinnen during his studio visit to her apartment in Copenhagen, spring 1999. Photo: Johan Swinnen. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

With Arke holding one of the plates, it is evident that they were almost life-size, in contrast to a 76 x 200 cm reproduction made for Arke's survey exhibition in 2010 (today The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art collection, Humlebæk). According to the curators, the reproduction was made from a colour photo of *Arctic Hysteria IV* at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen (ill. 1).<sup>36</sup>

This practice of assembly and reassembly, of creating a work in “a constant state of flux”, to refer back to Edwards, I argue, can be seen as a cathartic method of trauma processing and a practice of visual repatriation. Thus, the physical manifestation of the artwork becomes of minor importance because it constantly evolves and transforms itself. It is rather one step amongst several, where an old version gets abandoned in favour of another one, an ‘ephemeral manifestation’ of a continuous process of reclaiming ownership and coming to terms with one's own legacy.

Consequently, to this day, none of the “original” works/boards have been retrieved. This will presumably not happen in the future because *Arctic Hysteria IV* was not ‘lost’ but rather abandoned, where elements from it were discarded or recycled. This could also explain why there are no physical traces found regarding works that could have preceded *Arctic Hysteria IV*, such as an *Arctic Hysteria II* or *III*. Arke's video *Arctic Hysteria* (1996) appears to be the only still “physically” existing original work that engages with the phenomenon – a performance recorded on 25 March 1996 showing Arke crawling naked on a photograph of a Kalaallit landscape which she eventually destroys.

The programme of the conference *Kunst og sted* (Art and place), organised by the late Eli Høydalsnes at UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø (25–26 April 1997), gives evidence of Arke's participation together with her brother Erik Gant. Arke's presentation was entitled *Arctic Hysteria III* and followed Gant's *Eskimoer og kunst* (Eskimos and art).<sup>37</sup> Recent

conversations and retrieved notes from conference participants reveal that *Arctic Hysteria III* evolved around two images/narratives.<sup>38</sup> Firstly, an early twentieth century photograph of long-bearded Western men standing in a ring and laughing at a naked Kalaallit woman lying and screaming in the snow.<sup>39</sup> Such a photograph is in fact reminiscent of Dick's critical examination of photographs depicting episodes of *pibloqtoq* archived at The Peary MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, an image of a cliff that had white marks on it. The story Arke told was about three brothers who had urinated on it and that the ammonia had left their traces in the landscape.<sup>41</sup> Arke expressed, presumably with an underlying sense of humour, that Greenland's landscape was thus altered by human piss. These recollections reveal *Arctic Hysteria III*'s performative character, even if no other archival material nor written literature could be retrieved by the author. But it shows that Arke engaged with and processed her engagement with 'Arctic hysteria' in various formats and over an extended period of time, as Arke's long-term friend and scholar Kirsten Thisted has also highlighted.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

*Arctic Hysteria IV* made its last public appearance in 1999, thus eight years prior to Arke's death. Few traces of *Arctic Hysteria* photomontage versions remain, similar to other artworks from the same period classified as 'lost' (*Black & White Ornament* (1996), *Krabbe/Jensen I* (1997), *Krabbe/Jensen II* (1997) or *Untitled (Krabbe/Arke/Jensen montage sketches)* (1997)). Those artworks that do 'survive' from this period are predominantly housed in public and private collections. It appears that their survival was guaranteed because they were acquired or donated close to their period of making.<sup>43</sup>

Whereby those artworks that did not, could continue their life as 'raw material', as material that would get continuously recycled – if only conceptually – and sometimes reappear in/as other works. Labelling *Arctic Hysteria IV* and other works as 'lost' would thus appear misleading and rather contribute to mythologizing Arke's work.

But what this work does today, precisely because it only lives on through documentation and because, as I have argued, it never became a permanent artwork, is that it can become a metaphor for loss, belonging and recuperation. *Arctic Hysteria IV* is emblematic for Arke's practice of reappropriation leading to visual repatriation and, in a sense, personal reconciliation. Thus, her work has not lost in actuality. On the contrary, I believe that the increased interest for Arke's work happens when voices for decolonization are becoming even more articulated, and Western powers must not only face their non-glorious role in colonial history but also pro-actively work for shifting still prevalent power imbalances, issue public apologies and repatriate what does not belong to them. Arke shows us how artistic practises are valuable contributions to pushing these processes.

## Noter

- 1 This story is told through an article in *Weekendavisen*, 29 April–6 May 1999, reprinted in *Tupilakosaurus. An Incomplete(able) Survey of Pia Arke's Artistic Work and Research*, ed. Kuratorisk Aktion (Copenhagen: Kuratorisk Aktion, 2012), 75.
- 2 Lyle Dick, "'Pibloktoq' (Arctic Hysteria): A Construction of European-Inuit Relations?," *Arctic Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (1995): 1–2.
- 3 Pia Arke, *Ethno-Aesthetics/Ethnoaestetik*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Ark, Pia Arke Selskabet & Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010 (1995)), 27.



- 4 A book entitled *The Arctic Hysterias of the North Alaskan Eskimo* by Edward F. Foulks (1972) was found in Arke's library posthumously. It is unknown when she acquired the book. But all her (known) works referring to 'Arctic hysteria' follow her visit to New York.
- 5 Dick, "'Pibloktoq' (Arctic Hysteria)," 11.
- 6 Arke, *Ethno-Aesthetics/Etnoæstetik*, 23–24.
- 7 Stefan Jonsson, "On Pia Arke," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 44, (2017): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1086/695509>.
- 8 Louisiana Museum, *Pia Arke*, exhibition catalogue (Humblebæk: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 112; *Tupilakosaurus*, 86.
- 9 Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Introduction," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 1.
- 10 Edwards and Hart, "Introduction."
- 11 Elizabeth Edwards, "Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image," *Annual review of anthropology* 41, no. 1 (2012): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092611-145708>.
- 12 "Atlantikum // Atlanterhavet. Pia Arke Jessie Kleemann Jeannette Ehlers," (Nuuk: Nuuk Kunstmuseum, 2021), 1; Anders Keuger, "Värstascenario. Fyra konstnärer från Grönland / Worst-Case Scenario. Four Artists from Greenland," ed. Lunds konsthall, exhibition catalogue (Lund: Lunds konsthall, 2021), 126; James Andrew Billingsley, "An Arboretum at the End of an Epoch," *Avery Review*, no. 46 (April 2020); "Threshold(s)," CAMP Center for Art and Migration Politics, 2020, accessed 08.06.2020, <http://campcph.org/past/thresholds>; Carl Martin Faurby, "Foreword," in *Pia Arke. Wonderland*, ed. Kunsthall Trondheim (Trondheim: Kunsthall Trondheim, 2019), 4; Jonsson, "On Pia Arke," 13; David Winfield Norman, "Do you think it's over?: Performance and the 'third place' of Greenland's art history" (Master of Arts, University of British Columbia, 2016), 23; Mette Sandbye, "Blasting the Language of Colonialism: Three Contemporary Photo-Books on Greenland," *KULT. Postkolonial Temaserie* 14 (2016): 77; Kirsten Thisted, "The Hate in the Body. Language, Gender, and National Affiliation in New Greenlandic Literature," *The History of Nordic Women's Literature* (12.10.2016), <https://nordicwomensliterature.net/2016/10/12/the-hate-in-the-body-language-gender-and-national-affiliation-in-new-greenlandic-literature/>; Kirsten Thisted, "De-framing the Indigenous Body. Ethnography, Landscape and Cultural Belonging in the Art of Pia Arke," *Nordlit* 16, no. 1 (05/01 2012): 291, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7557/13.2318>; Vanessa Gregory, "The Unforgettable Pia Arke," *Hakai Magazine* (14.02.2017): 11.
- 13 Charissa von Harringa, "'Arke-Typical': Dialogues in Art, Anthropology and the Writing of Self in the Work of Pia Arke" (Master Thesis, Concordia University, 2016); Stefan Jonsson, "Disclosing the World Order: Decolonial Gestures in the Artistic Work of Pia Arke," *Third Text* 27, no. 2 (2013), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2013.772349>; Thisted, "De-framing the Indigenous Body."
- 14 Jonsson, "On Pia Arke"; Mette Sandbye, "Making Pictures Talk: The Re-Opening of a Dead City through Vernacular Photography as a Catalyst for the Performance of Memories," in *Tupilakosaurus*.
- 15 There exists no published material to date mentioning work following *Arctic Hysteria IV*.
- 16 Robert E. Peary, *Northward over the "Great Ice"*, vol. 2 (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1898).
- 17 Peary, *Northward over the "Great Ice"*, 2:404.
- 18 This came to light in the 1980s when researcher A. Counter tried to rectify the role of African-American explorer Henson alongside Peary. The website of Peary's great-grandson gives elucidating information. "Homepage of Hivshu (Robert E. Peary II)," Hivshu (Robert E. Peary II), accessed 02.03.2022, <https://www.hivshu.net/robert-peary>.
- 19 Peary's quote was taken from *Robert E. Peary Papers. Papers Relating to Arctic Expeditions, 1886-1909. Greenland 1886, Notebook 1886, Equipment Lists, Notebook, Planning Notes, 1885-86, Notes dates 13 October 1885* in Dick, "'Pibloktoq'" 15.
- 20 Peary, *Northward over the "Great Ice"*, 2:361.
- 21 Pia Arke, *Stories from Scoresbysund: Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping*, ed. Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen (Copenhagen: Pia Arke Selskabet & Kuratorisk aktion, 2010 (2003)), 86–90.
- 22 Brook Andrew and Jessica Neath, "Encounters with Legacy Images: Decolonising and Re-imagining Photographic Evidence from the Colonial Archive," *History of Photography* 42, no. 3 (2018): 220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2018.1440933>.
- 23 I use the term 'raw material' as proposed by Elizabeth Edwards, "Introduction: Observations from the Coal-Face," in *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 5.

- 24 Kristen Dobbin, “‘Exposing Yourself a Second Time’: Visual Repatriation in Scandinavian Sápmi,” *Visual communication quarterly* 20, no. 3 (2013), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2013.820585>;
- A. Smith David, “From Nunavut to Micronesia: Feedback and Description, Visual Repatriation and Online Photographs of Indigenous Peoples,” *Partnership* 3, no. 1 (2008); Jocelyne Dudding, “Visual repatriation and photo-elicitation: recommendations on principles and practices for the museum worker,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 17 (2005); Edwards, “Talking visual histories: Introduction”; Ann Fienup-Riordan, “Yup’ik Elders in Museums: Fieldwork Turned on Its Head,” *Arctic anthropology* 35, no. 2 (1998); Ann Fienup-Riordan, *The living tradition of Yup’ik masks: Agayuliyararput (our way of making prayer)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press / Anchorage Museum of History and Art, 1996).
- 25 Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers, “Introduction,” in *Museums and Source Communities. A Routledge Reader*, ed. Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers (London, New York: Routledge, 2003).
- 26 Dobbin, “‘Exposing Yourself a Second Time,’” 128.
- 27 Dudding, “Visual repatriation and photo-elicitation,” 228.
- 28 Edwards, “Talking visual histories: Introduction,” 86.
- 29 Evident through Arke’s name change from Gant (father’s name) to Arque (mother’s name), then turned into ‘Arke’. In *Ethno-Aesthetics* she writes from the perspective of “us Greenlanders”, clearly identifying with her Kalaallit heritage.
- 30 Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, *Photography’s Other Histories, Objects/histories*, (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 31 Roberta McGrath, “Reviewing the Gaze,” in *A Companion to Photography*, ed. Stephen Bull (Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 189.
- 32 *Tupilakosaurus*, 361–63.
- 33 Today Nuuk Art Museum collection.
- 34 Email conversation between Erik Gant and the author, July–August 2021.
- 35 Email conversation between Jan-Erik Lundström and the author, September–October 2021.
- 36 *Tupilakosaurus*, 86.
- 37 Eli Høydalsnes, *Program “Kunst og Sted”*, (Tromsø: UiT The Arctic University of Norway, 1997).
- 38 Eli Høydalsnes, *Kunst og sted. Rapport fra konferanse 25.–26. april 1997*, (UiT The Arctic University of Norway, 1998).
- 39 Email conversation between Jan Martin Berg/Elin Haugdal and the author, October 2021; email conversation between Jan von Bonsdorff and the author, May 2021.
- 40 Dick, “‘Pibloktoq,’” 20–21.
- 41 Email conversation between Jan Martin Berg/Elin Haugdal and the author; email conversation between Jan von Bonsdorff and the author.
- 42 Thisted, “De-framing the Indigenous Body,” 289.
- 43 The database *Kunstindeks Danmark & Weilbachs Kunstnerleksikon* registers artworks acquired by public collections including date of acquisition (when available). Arke’s registered works show that the majority were acquired in the same year of making. Few were acquired later, the latest four years after its making. The same applies to works in the Moderna Museet collection, Stockholm. *Kronborg-Suite* (1996) Arke donated in 1996. *Nature Morte* alias *Perlustrations* (1994) Arke donated in 1995.