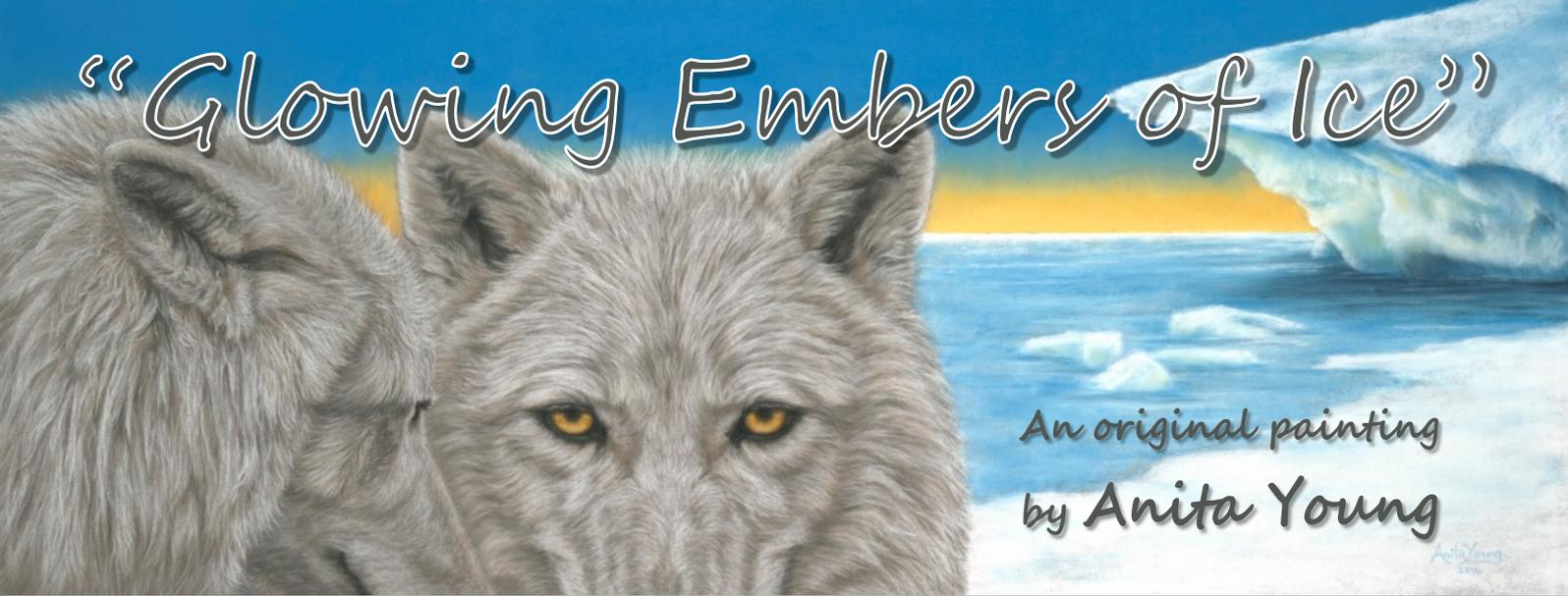


"Glowing Embers of Ice"



An original painting
by Anita Young

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Glowing Embers of Ice

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Embers of a fading world, or embers of hope for a beautiful new Arctic dawn?

In the narrative painting "Glowing Embers of Ice" we are offered a glimpse into the world and mind of the arctic wolf. Surviving, albeit in small numbers in the harshest of conditions, the arctic wolf (*Canis lupus arctos*) is born of ice. Inhabiting the high arctic regions of Canada and Greenland, it has thus far been relatively protected by its remote location and a low density of human population from the large-scale persecution and hunting still suffered by its more southerly relations in the endless competition for land, food and natural resources – or simply in man's pursuit of "sport".

Romanticised and demonised in equal measure – loved and loathed, feared and revered. Despite the negative influence over two millennia of myths, fables, fairy tales and horror stories, the wolf still holds a place in the human psyche as a potent symbol of the wild and of the wilderness places of planet Earth. It is in this unsought but fitting role as representatives of all wild species, that the wolves depicted here invite you to engage with issues whose outcome will ultimately affect your way of life as much as theirs. But their voice – so familiar to our ears from its common use to evoke "the call of the wild" – is frozen in the Arctic air. For their voice is insignificant in the world of men. The wild inhabitants of the Arctic – of land, sea and air – have no say in the decisions which determine the fate of their home. Their call must take a different form if they are to rouse our collective consciousness from sleep.

In this alpha pair of arctic wolves lies the potential for the future of their pack and of their species. Equal partners – each with his or her own strengths, and each with their own important role to play in the struggle for survival. Together they carry the responsibility for finding food and shelter to sustain their family. But with each passing year this task grows ever more difficult. From tundra to forest, mountain to valley, deserts of sand or of frozen ice, the wolf has proven itself to be infinitely adaptable to a huge diversity of conditions and environments. But now our arctic pair sense a much more profound threat approaching. The male wolf expresses his uncertainty about the future and looks to his mate for solidarity and reassurance. She, in turn, looks directly to you with a silent question Rest a while in the stillness and intensity of her gaze and allow your soul to hear her message Before the embers of life in her eyes are extinguished, perhaps you will hear your own voice speaking out for those who have no say.

The glowing horizon symbolises the challenges which all of the indigenous population of the Arctic – wildlife and human alike – now face as a consequence of global warming, and of rapidly increasing industrial development. A warming climate is changing the ecosystem and bio-diversity of the Arctic at an alarming rate. The arctic wolf is only one of many species whose means of survival is threatened as their traditional sources of food either diminish or move with the climatic conditions. For the wolf, this increases the potential for the age-old conflict with human hunters who hunt the same animals, or with herders when livestock become the wolves' prey of necessity. Moreover, as the ice and permafrost melt, the rich oil, gas and mineral resources of the region become more accessible to man's exploitation, bringing industry and pollution to the very heart of one of the last wilderness places on earth. Both climate-induced and man-made factors are having far-reaching, and possibly irreversible, effects upon the Arctic environment and beyond. This is not a prediction of the future – this is happening now.

The issues are complex, and there are no simple solutions. The human race is constantly expanding and, it could be argued, has an evolutionary right to use all of the intellectual and technological ingenuity at its disposal to focus upon supporting its own interests, economic well-being and growth. But surely the human race also has an evolutionary responsibility to employ that same ingenuity, along with wisdom and reason, to at the same time ensure the survival of the fellow creatures with whom it co-exists, and the habitats upon which they rely. Whether we acknowledge it or not, whatever species, race, colour or creed, all of life on our planet is connected and interdependent – but only we humans are in the privileged position of being able to take considered and decisive steps to ensure its conservation or its destruction.

Whilst we argue and fight amongst ourselves – politically, economically, religiously and physically – despite international treaties and conventions, a truly global, coordinated, commitment to urgent action seems like a distant dream. In the meantime, perhaps the glowing embers of ice signal the silent melting away of countless treasures of the natural world. Hopefully we will awaken soon to remember our connections – our common purpose rather than our differences – and allow the voice of wisdom to prevail. Then, maybe, the glowing horizon might yet herald a beautiful new Arctic dawn.

Anita Young

"We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive"

Chief Dan George (Teswahno)- Salish 1899 - 1981