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Istituto Italiano Scuola

www.sfiis.org | italianschool@sfiis.org | 628-201-7648

SEATTLE ARTIST SETS SAIL FOR THE ARCTIC

By [Rita Cipalla](#) | August 15, 2023

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Home for two weeks during this Arctic Circle expedition is a sailing vessel specially outfitted for the extreme conditions (Photo: Beau Carey/The Arctic Circle).

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Imagine: two weeks in the Arctic Circle, traveling with international artists of all disciplines, maybe a few architects and educators on board, as well. The destination: Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago just 10 degrees of latitude below the **North Pole**. Although the region is one of the world's northernmost inhabited areas, it's a place where

polar bears and icebergs abound.

Iole Alessandrini will be there soon enough. The Seattle artist is part of a two-week residency and expedition made possible by **The Arctic Circle**, a nonprofit organization, and supported by optical engineer and colleague Ed Mannery. Her journey takes place October 2-19, 2023.



Italian American artist Iole Alessandrini will bring the ephemeral technology of the Laser Plane to the Arctic Circle this fall (Photo: Iole Alessandrini).

Alessandrini calls her project “To the North Pole and Back.” On this photographic and scientific journey, she hopes to create more visibility for climate change and more responsible environmental action.

“As an artist, I am poised to exploit what I do and know best,” she explained. “Over the years my work has been dedicated to capturing the ethereal allure of light, the elusive essence of time and the boundless expanse of space. With the Arctic Circle residency, I hope to inspire dialogue and empathy that transcend political differences and foster a collective sense of responsibility towards our environment.”

Alessandrini has collaborated with colleague Mannery, a retired optical engineer from the University of Washington, for several decades. Together, the duo created Laser Plane technology which uses custom-built lasers, light-sensitive sensors, sound and other equipment to capture a visual record of lingering energies that retain a semblance of the individual long after the person has departed the space.

In bringing her Laser Plane technology to the Arctic, Alessandrini hopes to provide a visual, yet ephemeral, record of the region. “I will use the Laser Plane to photograph the polychromatic blue, white and gray colors of the Arctic against the monochromatic light of the green laser,” she said. “The open space of the North Pole, away from the ground of the Svalbard archipelago, is solid ice and dark blue water. I’ll set Laser Planes in the ice and against glaciers or icebergs floating in the ocean to see how these massive volumes of compact snow appear in the green Laser Plane. There is this idea that space retains occupancy even after someone has departed. My goal is to capture the profound connections between individuals and their surroundings.”

The nonprofit group The Arctic Circle organizes three expeditions a year for artists and innovators. The organization established the expeditionary residency program in 2009 to enable participants to develop professionally through fieldwork and research, interdisciplinary collaborations, exhibit opportunities, and public and classroom engagement. Each expedition draws about 30 participants. Their vessel and home for two weeks is a traditionally rigged Barquentine, a specially outfitted sailboat equipped with workspace, common areas and ample room for privacy and creativity.

“Embarking on a journey to the North Pole is like planning a trip to the moon,” said Alessandrini. “It demands meticulous preparation, specialized gear and unwavering determination. But the project has a real urgency – to raise environmental awareness and focus on the reality of climate change from a new vantage point, that of art.”

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Alessandrini has exhibited her Laser Plane technology in the past, including The Migration Project in Perugia, Italy (Photo: Iole Alessandrini and Arturo Carniti).

Alessandrini is no stranger to Seattle art aficionados. Born in Abruzzo, Italy, she moved to Rome when she was very young. In 1994, she relocated to Seattle to attend the University of Washington, where she earned her second master's degree in architecture (the first was from Sapienza University in Rome). She's been a Seattle resident ever since.

Creatively, she is fascinated by the interplay between light and space. Her complex site-specific installations often use controlled environments to explore these two elements. She sometimes adds video, music or computerized sound to create an intense personal experience that is unique yet fleeting.

This summer at The Grocery Studio's WUG gallery in Seattle, Alessandrini exhibited a selection of images she calls **Ioleograms** (a play on her first name and "holograms") to create awareness for her upcoming Arctic journey. On two occasions during the run of the gallery exhibit, which is called "In Preparation: to the North Pole and Back," she enabled visitors to create their own Ioleograms. Her work is on display in the gallery through August 19, 2023.

A few years ago, Alessandrini was commissioned to create an art installation for Climate Pledge Arena, the new home of the Seattle Kraken, the city's professional hockey team, and the WNBA's Seattle Storm. For that project, Alessandrini created a meditative space that incorporates a playful interactive light installation based on the mythology of the Raven, a mystical creature of great significance.

In 2015, she created a work for the City of Edmonds that ran along the city's 4th Avenue "cultural corridor." The resulting installation, Luminous Forest, consisted of solar LED lights embedded in the roadway, visually connecting the corridor at night and evoking the large trees that once lined the city streets – a nod to the region's forests and logging history.

Alessandrini is looking forward to shifting her emphasis from the light created in urban settings to that in natural environments. She also hopes to illuminate what is happening with global warming. "My work in the Arctic is a response to climate change," she said. "I will share my expedition experiences with artists and scientists; I expect to bring back lots of questions."

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