

Artist to Collect

Michel Thibert





previous spread, Bird of Peace
above, Joy on the Iceberg of Pond Inlet

The View from Here

written by Brett Anningson

Imagine spending 1500 hours a year flying over the Arctic in an airplane cockpit - a landscape that most of us have never seen, but Michel Thibert knows intimately. As a pilot and photographer, he sees things every day that most of us never will, and when he does, he takes pictures.

"I started taking photos at the age of 15," Michel recalls, "perfecting my techniques while developing

an eye for framing and the management of light. By 1973, I had already worked professionally for over five years in the field of communications and video production. After that I worked in business development for 35 years.

Now at 57 years old, I work as a pilot in command between Quebec City and the Canadian Arctic." He continues, "Photography has always captured my attention and is becoming my preferred way to communicate my vision of the world."

Sharing the Experience

He goes on to explain how he sees it as a shared experience weaving together the people he meets with the landscapes he visits, as well as the experiences he has had. Images he had first captured from the eye of the cockpit have now become infused with deeper meaning and

have reflected his undeniable passion for the Arctic. "The thing is," Michel explains, "I am not a journalist. I am not taking pictures to try and show you something to look at and think about. I am taking pictures for you to enter into and feel."

He describes a time when he was flying with a co-pilot over the expanse of an icy area permeated with cracks as far as the eye could see. The two of them began to speak about what they "saw" in the patterns. This was one of those moments which helped to reinforce Michel's strong belief that seeing is somehow subjective - based on our emotion, unconscious values and our biased iconic perceptions.

We all know a little about the Arctic. It is cold. Michel recalls a situation where he was faced with the challenge of figuring out how he would be able to return safely in minus 38 degrees - with

a snow-packed frozen engine. As he puts it, "Life is never fun when it is minus 38 but it is uniquely challenging, when prepared." The Arctic is also either perpetually dark or always light, which makes it so there is never time for adaptation. One can imagine that this experience of the senses would affect our perspective of a given place, even if we have never experienced it ourselves. It presents as a different world. In essence, distance becomes almost impossible to judge. "I think of this in terms of the vanishing point when I am taking pictures," Michel explains, "if you think about it, we are always using something else to judge how far away something is. There are buildings, or trees, people or telephone poles which help us to judge distance. In the Arctic there is ice, snow and there are clouds and this makes it a really unique place to try and capture





Metamorphism of a Chameleon



The Grise Fjord's Grand Diamond

distance and space." This "scientific" view is quite the complete opposite of Michel's intent. He thinks of photography as falling into two camps, descriptive and evocative, and he is definitely aiming for evocative.

Unique Creative Process

Michel has a unique creative process. His journey begins with him flying to a location, usually veering off course a few miles in either direction trying to imagine how things would look if he were on the ground. When he finds the spark of interest to him he returns on foot - and then the real work begins.

"I invite the viewer to experience, with me, areas that they may otherwise never see," Michel explains, "and so I use vanishing points to allow us to 'enter' nature, not physically but emotionally. This pushes us to go further in a

shared perspective. With my work I hope to carry you in a tumult of impressions, fields, mountains, rivers and clouds."

As he walks around the scene he tries to let it capture him. He thinks, feels, listens to the landscape before him and chooses an angle for the perfect shot. The real theory behind his technique is asking "how" - how can Michel help someone to feel what he feels in that very moment? Perhaps, for this reason, he hardly ever uses the raw image. His initial first step is followed by downloading the image he has captured and beginning an editing process that moves from realism towards emotion. How would the feel change if the image was more blue? Would it prove to be closer to how he himself felt? These are the types of questions he asks. It is not as if the images become abstract; they become emotionally heightened.

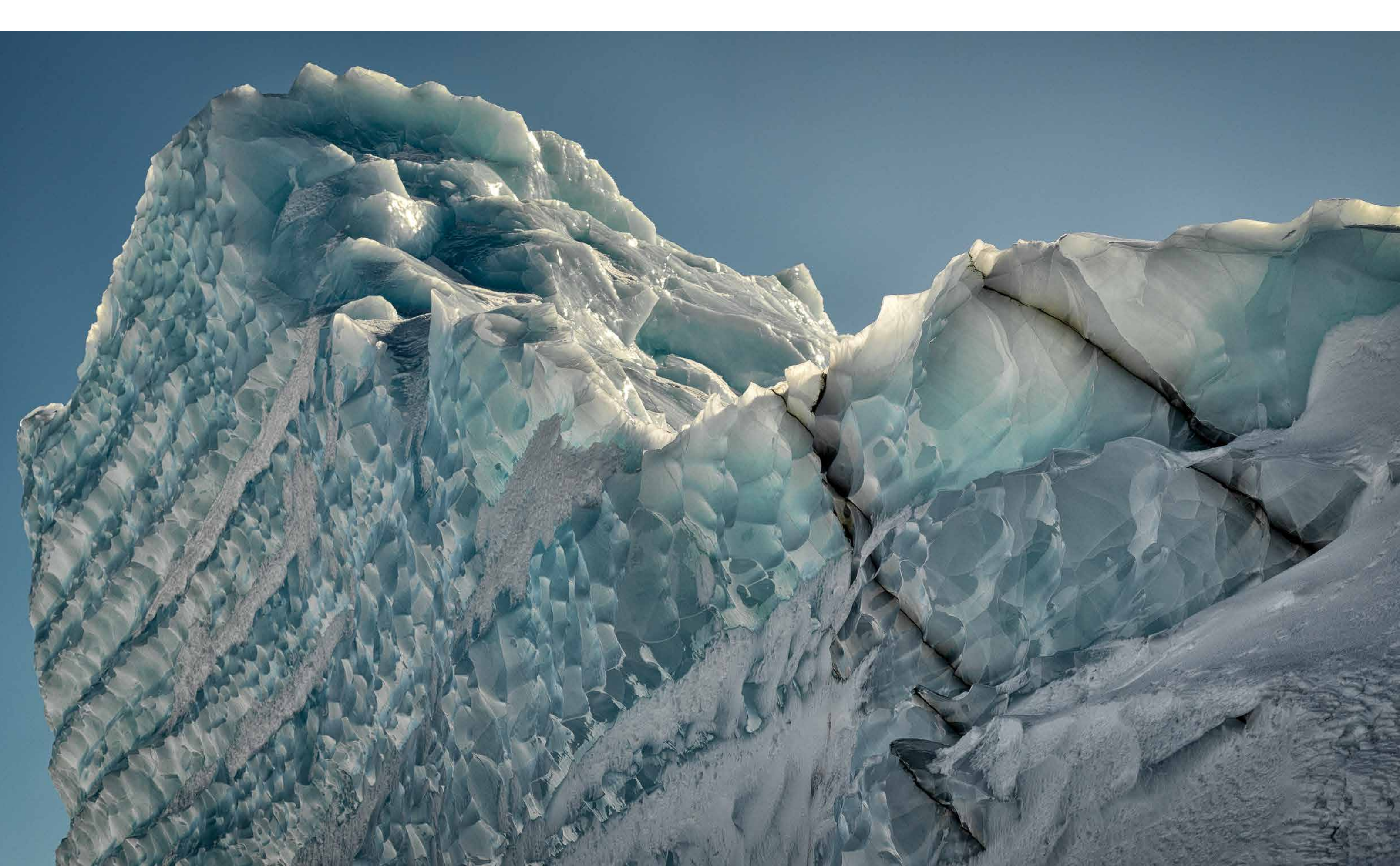
"I guess the thing is that I have never closed my eyes!" says Michel. "Think about it, we never do! Remember the last time you looked at a situation and found something nice, funny or beautiful about it? You just did not have a camera and put the effort in to take a closer look at what could be a great message. We all make a conscious choice in our mental images we want to see. I am offering a viewer the chance to enter into the landscape of their own imagination."

Inspiration, for Michel, has come from various artists who he feels have impacted his technique and subject matter. "The first painter that brought me to art and to a museum is Salvador Dali; the first organization that influenced my choice of subjects and style is the National Geographic; the photographer who showed me a prime example of business positioning and artistic cohesion is Sebastiao Salgado; the French portraitist Edouard

de Blay has ignited my numeric editing style with collaborative work; finally, the film director Ridley Scott for his attention to details and focus on the absolute spirit of a scene instead of realism."

Michel knows he is extremely lucky to be able to do the work he does in the place he finds himself. As he points out, not many people may have the luxury of affording the \$10,000 plane ticket to the place he finds himself at least twice a week. His inspiration is also largely affected by the yearly experience of countless hours of sunlight, cloud and ice.

"It is fairly easy to go to Cuba, or to Disney World, or Paris," he muses, "but think about it this way, if you stop in front of a scene in Paris and take a picture you have captured something that you find interesting, but so have a lot of other people. When you find yourself walking two hours towards the literal edge of the earth and find





Between Life And Deceasing, In Igloolik Dump

something that moves you to take a picture, you are probably the only one who will ever see this, ever photograph this particular ice flow."

The Spirit of the North

Michel has spent a year living in the North as well, and he credits this not only for leading to greater acceptance of those who live there, but also for his spirit having been "captured" by the beauty of the Arctic. Experiencing another way of life has positively influenced his sense of being human, perhaps this is what has led to his photography becoming an avenue in which to share as much as possible with the world from his perspective. "I am 58," he laughs, "and I suppose this gives me a sense of urgency. I mean, I cannot fly forever, so I want to see everything and capture everything in the time remaining." As he sees it, his photos allow the viewer to find their own paths of discovery and rediscover the beauty and mystery of the world around them.

In his photographic world, there is a dilemma of sorts which surfaces around the topic of editing. Michel knows that there are those out

there who advocate for realism in the photos, but that method just does not allow him to make his photography evocative in the way he wishes he could. "When I sit down to edit the picture I spend a lot of time remembering." He explains, "I am taking a picture of something that grabs my attention. I am seeing the scene through the lens of my feelings and my intellect. But the raw image never captures it completely. So in editing I try to remember the emotions of the light, of the texture, of the snow itself. And then I make choices and edit the picture to reflect what I remember from the scene, or what I feel from the scene."

Directing the Show

In this way he sees his role as artist being not so different from that of a theatre director. When a troupe endeavours to perform a Shakespearean play, an initial dialogue is provided; however, the director leaves much of the interpretation to the troupe itself. This interpretation may lead to "something" being chosen for emphasis or a part to be made softer. Perhaps a character may



above, Just Being Happy

below, Just Curious, The Attentive's One And Easy Going Friendship





above, Pond Inlet's Cyan Iceberg



below, A Solo Of The Summit

Ellesmere Island, Grise Fiord





above, Power, Envy, Fractured & Grandiose



below, Living Heritage

Leading To Life



warrant sadness during the reading of the lines. In essence, the dialogue is open for interpretation. For Michel, his photos offer the viewer this same experience of "open interpretation."

"I guess my art comes down to being a reflection of my lifestyle," he says. "People see things completely differently from one another and that is okay. This is the way I see the North and I am trying to be truthful to that in my work. I am making choices, I am leaving things out, I know that's true, but at the same time I am bringing these images to life. I am making conscious decisions about what to show and what not to show."

When Michel hosts a show or gives a presentation, he spends time on topics of contextualizing, setting the stage and offers deep explanations about details and intricacies he has expertly "captured" within each photograph. But that is not the way he prefers people to approach his work. It is about how the viewer feels when he or she sees the image. It is about the individual connection to the soul. "I strive to motivate the viewers to recreate their own paths of discovery," he concludes. "Perhaps my images will help your journey and fill your environments with some of

'The Beauty Rediscovered' that I feel when I am in the Arctic."

View more of Michel Thibert's work, visit www.thibertportfolio.com or email michel.thibert@videotron.qc.ca.





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