



## ***Gondwana: Images of an Ancient Land***

**by Diane Tuft**  
(Assouline, 2014, 128pp, \$95)

**Reviewed by Jeff Rubin**

Tuft, who received an Artists and Writers grant from the National Science Foundation in 2012, aptly quotes Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte (“Everything that is visible hides something that is invisible.”) in this book that showcases her attempts to reveal what she calls “the hidden light of Antarctica”: ultraviolet and infrared radiation. The more than 50 photographs included here, only some of them in that invisible part of the spectrum, are abstracted nearly to the point of surrealism, “characterized by an irrational, noncontextual arrangement of material.”

We see beautiful sun-lit pieces of Lake Vanda ice with wind-blown grains of sand clinging to them like points of data on a colorful graph. A closeup of the frozen lake surface, with alternating bands of milky and clear ice and Vanda’s azure waters showing through, resembles an abstract painting that would not be out of place at a seven-figure sale at Sothebys.

One image, titled “Mount Erebus 12:15PM,” illustrates Tuft’s sometimes too-conscious effort to make her photographs “art.” On the left, snow is scattered across a rocky surface while cloud (or something merely out of focus) obscures the right-hand third of the photo. Without context, we don’t know whether this is an extreme close-up or an aerial view. The best clue we have that we’re viewing the latter is an author photograph on the book’s last page, showing her taking aim with a Nikon through the window of an airborne helo.

More often, though, the photos are interesting reflections on pattern and light, as in the view of the surface of a “permafrost drift” in Victoria Valley or a sun-washed closeup of a zeolitised dolerite ventifact at Bull Pass, each reproduced across two of the 13 x 10 inch pages.

Handsomely printed on heavy paper, *Gondwana* may be that rarest of Antarctic photography books—one that succeeds brilliantly with viewers who have no interest whatsoever in the frozen continent itself. After all, there’s not a penguin anywhere in sight, only arresting images of undeniable aesthetic appeal.

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