

Adapted from an article in the New York times January 4th, 2026 “10 Minute Challenge – The Artist in Greenland” by Larry Buchanan

Editor’s note: we feel this is an interesting and important article and so are providing an illustrated transcript, adapted from the non-interactive parts of the article.

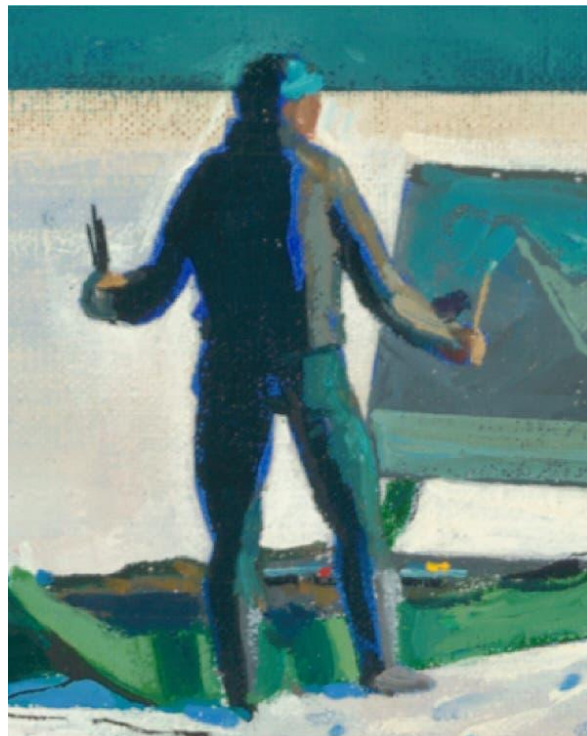
“In Greenland, one discovers, as though for the first time, what beauty is,” Rockwell Kent wrote in 1935. “God must forgive me,” he continued, “that I tried to paint it.”

It’s a feeling that anyone who’s taken a photo of the sunset knows: It’s hard to capture the beauty of a moment through any medium. *You had to be there.*

But that didn’t deter Kent. He painted Greenland, in his own words, “incessantly.” He wrote effusively and extensively of its beauty, its people and its hold over him.

In a world of constant digital distraction there’s something alluring about the world shown here:

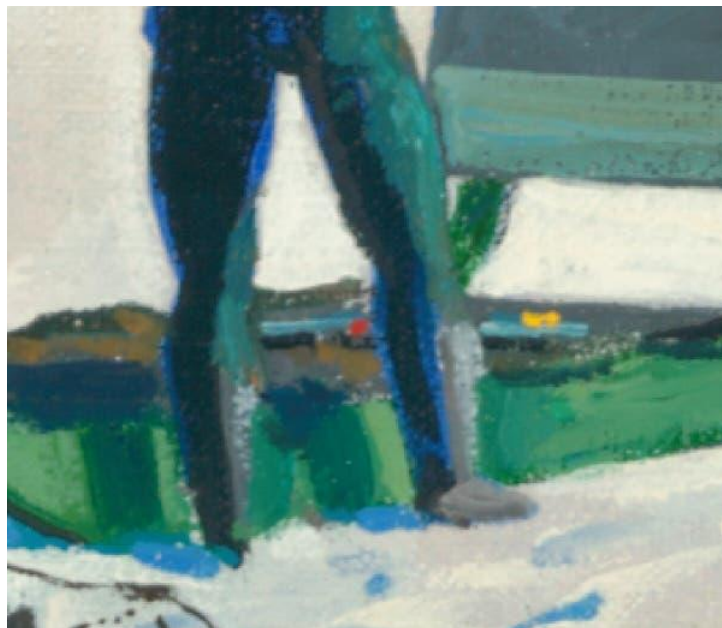
a man,



his dogs



and his paints,



humbled by a monumental iceberg.

Yet in 1934, Kent himself was feeling distracted and annoyed.

“Because modern American life irks him, Rockwell Kent, artist, left New York yesterday on the liner Deutschland on a trip to Greenland,” reported The New York Times.

ROCKWELL KENT OFF ON TRIP TO GREENLAND

***Artist, Irked by City Life, to
Live 2 Years With Eskimos—
Son, 13, Accompanies Him.***

“To get away from the annoyances of New York life, automobiles, radios, cocktail parties and such is a wonderful experience in itself,” he said.

Kent, a swashbuckling American painter, writer, political activist and book illustrator, made three trips to Greenland from 1929 to 1935. The first trip ended in a shipwreck where he lost many of his painting supplies. Later, he built a house, lived (and loved) among the locals and established himself in a small community hunting, writing, exploring and, most important for us, painting.

He turned his nine-foot-long sledge into a mobile studio by mounting his canvas to the stanchions to create an easel.



He'd gather his dogs in a fan formation and drive them out into the landscape, ready to paint.

"I'd halt my dogs, swing the sledge into precisely the position that I wanted it, lay out my paints and brushes, get to work," he wrote.

That's the scene we find here: an artist at work.



The striking diagonal of the iceberg is echoed in the shapes of the dogs staring back at us:



Slanted lines run throughout the landscape:



Take a look back here, at the mountain peeking around the corner.



“He didn’t like abstraction and he was a champion of realist painting, and I think that’s kind of true and that’s kind of not true,” said Virginia Anderson, a senior curator at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

She directed my attention to this mountain — the dark brown underpainting with blue streaks creating the relief of the cliff surface. When you zoom in close, it looks abstract.

“But then when you pull back, it really resolves beautifully into the way that light would flow across that surface in a really indirect way,” she said. “He really nailed it.”

The gradient above this dark spot glows, as the electric teal sky dissolves into a warm yellow:



At the center of it all, there's the bold top face of the iceberg soaking up the sun in a warm white-yellow:



These connect to the other highlights across the canvas,



but each is different — some a bit warmer, some a bit cooler, absorbing, reflecting and reacting to the light around them.

“The beauty of those northern winter days is more remote and passionless, more nearly absolute than any other beauty I know,” Kent wrote.

“It is so overwhelming and it is so indescribable how beautiful it is and how humbling it is in terms of scale,” the photographer Denis Defibaugh told me. Inspired by Kent’s journeys, Mr. Defibaugh has taken several trips to Greenland [to document the people and the landscape.](#)

Here, in the fall of 2016, he captured a similar sky:



“You get such pure color there because there’s no pollution. There’s nothing changing the light and the sky except reality.”

This simple world of blue sky, white snow and brown mountains becomes anything but.

Look again at the colors Kent used on the side of the iceberg facing us. Warm oranges scuff across cool blues. Purples are dancing with greens:



Our artist is also trying to capture it all, mixing dabs of red, blue and yellow.



To keep from freezing, Kent painted in down-stuffed mittens with a hole in them where he would insert his brush.

But there's one twist in this case: He wasn't really there.

The painting we've been looking at, "Artist in Greenland," was painted by Kent in 1960, when he was warm and back in America. It's a copy of a 1935 work called "Iceberg" that he painted in Greenland:



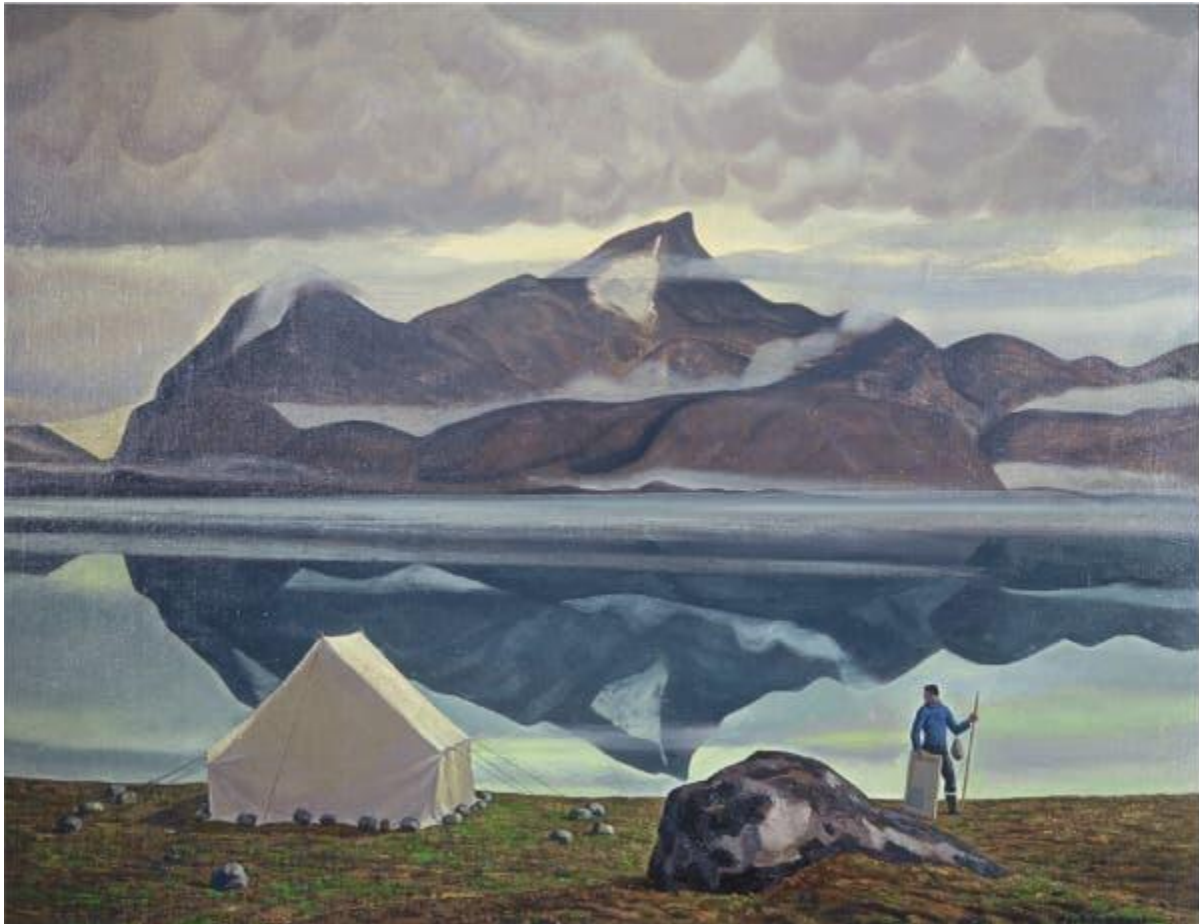
This earlier painting shows the iceberg (and the dogs) as seen instead through the artist's eyes.

It hung in the Kents' home bar.



Some friends wanted to buy “Iceberg,” but it was already promised to another collection, so Kent copied it for them — with some changes, according to Scott Ferris, a specialist in the art of Rockwell Kent.

He had already painted himself into the scene before, in a work from 1929 also called “Artist in Greenland.”



So, it wasn't a leap for him to introduce the theme of the artist at work into his “Iceberg,” creating another self-portrait, according to Mr. Ferris.

“Except for the dogs and me in the foreground of your picture,” Kent wrote in a letter to his friends, “I would find it quite impossible to detect the difference between the original and the copy.”

“He's such a master at painting that he can just duplicate them,” Mr. Ferris said.



Kent was now close to 80. It had been 25 years since he painted “Iceberg” and 25 years since he had been to Greenland, but he was able to put himself there again, back on the snow, just a man, his dogs and his paints.

“Artist in Greenland,” 1960, Plattsburgh State Art Museum, State University of New York, Rockwell Kent Collection, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton, image provided by the Baltimore Museum of Art; Photo of Rockwell Kent in Greenland, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Video of Rockwell Kent in Greenland, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Photo of Illorsuit Sound and Mountains of Upernivik Island by Denis Defibaugh; Photo of Uummannaq, Greenland, Magenta Fjord at Sunset by Denis Defibaugh; “Iceberg,” 1935, Plattsburgh State Art Museum, State University of New York, Rockwell Kent Collection, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton, photo courtesy of Scott Ferris; Photo of Kent’s bar by Dan Burne Jones, collection of Scott Ferris; “Artist in Greenland,” 1929, Plattsburgh State Art Museum, State University of New York, Rockwell Kent Collection, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton, photo by Susan Muniak, © Susan Muniak and Scott Ferris.

This series was created and produced by Larry Buchanan, Nico Chilla and Francesca Paris. New York Times, January 4th, 2026