



NEW RELEASE

Ragnar Axelsson
Arctic Heroes
A Tribute to the Sled Dogs of Greenland

Essays by Ragnar Axelsson
 Designed by Einar Geir Ingvarsson
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For 4,000 years, the Greenlandic sled dog has been the true hero of the Arctic – today, with global warming melting his world away, his fate is uncertain.

Arctic Heroes takes a poignant look at the fate of the Greenlandic sled dog. In Greenland, where the melting ice sheet is irrevocably disrupting the hunters' 4,000-year old traditional way of life, the stark reality of global warming is an immediate and direct threat to their everyday survival.

The Greenland dog, essential to Inuit settlement and survival, now faces extinction as hunters are forced to adapt to the vanishing world around them. The sled dog population has shrunk from about 30,000 in 2009 to about 12,000 in 2019.

In approximately 150 stunning images, and through hunters' personal stories, retold by the author, this book bears witness to the animals' magnificence and the deep, integral role they play in the hunters' lives.

The photographs included in this book were taken in Greenland between 1986 and 2020.

For over forty years, Icelandic photographer **Ragnar Axelsson**, also known as RAX (b. 1958), has been photographing the people, animals, and landscape of the most remote regions of the Arctic, including Iceland, Siberia, and Greenland. In stark black-and-white images, he captures the elemental, human experience of nature at the edge of the liveable world, making visible the extraordinary relationships between the people of the Arctic and their extreme environment – relationships now being altered in profound and complex ways by the unprecedented changes in climate.

A photojournalist at Morgunbladid since 1976, Ragnar has also worked on free-lance assignment in Latvia, Lithuania, Mozam-

bique, South Africa, China, and Ukraine. His photographs have been featured in LIFE, Newsweek, Stern, GEO, National Geographic, Time, and Polka, and have been exhibited widely.

Ragnar Axelsson has published seven books in various international editions.

Awards for his work include numerous Icelandic Photojournalist Awards; the Icelandic Literary Prize for non-fiction; The Leica Oskar Barnack Award (Honorable Mention); The Grand Prize, Photo de Mer, Vannes; and Iceland's highest honor, the Order of the Falcon, Knight's Cross.

Arctic Heroes was on the Shortlist for the Leica Oskar Barnack Award 2020.

Artist's website: www.ax.is

Exhibitions / Events

Reykjavik Art Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland
 30.01.–09.05.2021

Kunstfoyer der Versicherungskammer Kulturstiftung
 Munich, Germany, Spring 2022

Further venues to be confirmed.

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Barbara Karpf, barbara.karpf@kehrerverlag.com
pr.assistance@kehrerverlag.com
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From the **Preface** by Ragnar Axelsson:

»Time and again, I visited small villages all over Greenland to collect stories of dogs and hunters. Sometimes I'd be lucky to get one story, other times none at all. I can safely say that it was just as difficult to squeeze stories out of these hunters as it was to photograph them out on the freezing cold of the sea ice. But bit by bit, they opened up enough to share them with me and these hunters and dogs grew in my estimation with each story. Their respect for their ancestors, nature and the sled dog was evident in every tale. These were a proud people who were happy to tell me about the friendships forged between hunters and sled dogs, creatures who in times of trouble fought for their lives and those of their masters in some of the most difficult situations imaginable – dogs with a sixth sense that made them stand out from all the rest. The bond that grew between these creatures and their masters was truly unique. Some of their stories are retold in this book.

I want to take you across the sea ice on a dog sledding trip with me to give you a glimpse into the world of these Arctic heroes who have survived in conditions that are both alien and mesmerising to us, a world that is fraught with peril and comprises some of the most breathtaking nature to be found on earth – but we'll get home safe and sound.

There is something inexplicable about the Arctic that speaks to you, a force that draws you to it like a magnet. I feel I have to tell this story of the heroes of the Arctic for the world to see.«

From the text **Where the World is Melting** by Ragnar Axelsson:

»Imagine waking up early one morning in the world's northernmost settlement — midwinter, pitch black outside. The baying of a lonesome dog pierces the silence. Outside it is bitterly cold. The village itself seems to be asleep. No one is up and about. The howling multiplies as the village dogs wake each other up. The plaintive call of the Greenlandic sled dog bears with it an unexpected solace that soothes the soul. Its wistful song is the story of the greatest heroes the North has ever known, heroes who have made it possible for mankind to reach both poles of the Earth. A tenacious creature that, at the bleakest point in a raging Arctic storm, will bring its hunters home safe and sound.

The song of Greenland's dogs is one that has echoed through the ages. There is perhaps a message in its sorrowful baying that ought to be heeded: the world around it is quickly changing.

(...)

'There would be no Inuit without the Greenlandic dog,' said an elderly Greenlandic woman who has lived through the old times and the new. 'It has kept us alive for 4000 years,' she continued.

Nothing under the sun lasts forever. And now the importance of the dog is waning. The snowmobile has taken over, and the dogs are dwindling in number just like their hunters.«

From the text **Keep on Taking Pictures** by Ragnar Axelsson:

»It's only befitting to dedicate this book to the two women who actually came up with the idea for this project. Some of the greatest animal and dog lovers that I know. Over coffee at my home about 15 years ago, they suddenly said, apropos of nothing, why don't you do a book on the dogs in Greenland. I felt like a fool. The idea had been right in front of my nose. I had been looking at the dogs like any other dogs. I hadn't considered the heroic role they had played throughout the ages. As often happens, you can't silence some ideas once they've been planted. It became a calling that I just had to deliver on, particularly in these times when the world really needs to hear it, and Greenland is undergoing changes that are drastically transforming it beyond recognition.

My thanks for this excellent idea go to my friend Mary Ellen Mark and my wife Björk Hreiðarsdóttir.«

Press images



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