



The Oldest Living Things in the World

Rachel Sussman

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The Oldest Living Things in the World is an epic journey through time and space. Over the past decade, artist Rachel Sussman has researched, worked with biologists, and traveled the world to photograph continuously living organisms that are 2,000 years old and older. Spanning from Antarctica to Greenland, the Mojave Desert to the Australian Outback, the result is a stunning and unique visual collection of ancient organisms unlike anything that has been created in the arts or sciences before, insightfully and accessibly narrated by Sussman along the way.

Her work is both timeless and timely, and spans disciplines, continents, and millennia. It is underscored by an innate environmentalism and driven by Sussman's relentless curiosity. She begins at "year zero," and looks back from there, photographing the past in the present. These ancient individuals live on every continent and range from Greenlandic lichens that grow only one centimeter a century, to unique desert shrubs in Africa and South America, a predatory fungus in Oregon, Caribbean brain coral, to an 80,000-year-old colony of aspen in Utah. Sussman journeyed to Antarctica to photograph 5,500-year-old moss; Australia for stromatolites, primeval organisms tied to the oxygenation of the planet and the beginnings of life on Earth; and to Tasmania to capture a 43,600-year-old self-propagating shrub that's the last individual of its kind. Her portraits reveal the living history of our planet—and what we stand to lose in the future. These ancient survivors have weathered millennia in some of the world's most extreme environments, yet climate change and human encroachment have put many of them in danger. Two of her subjects have already met with untimely deaths by human hands.

Alongside the photographs, Sussman relays fascinating – and sometimes harrowing – tales of her global adventures tracking down her subjects and shares insights from the scientists who research them. The oldest living things in the world are a record and celebration of the past, a call to action in the present, and a barometer of our future.

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