ICE WOMEN

Cold was never their biggest obstacle

A documentary by
Jens Becker & Dorothea Braun

Written by Dorothea Braun & Jens Becker | DOP: Susanna Salonen
Editing: Annett Ilijew, Britta Kastern | Sound: Lotta Sahlstedt
Producer: Dorothea Braun, Kurt Otterbacher, Hansjürgen Schmölzer
Commissioning Editor: Marc Brasse (NDR)

Voices: Annette Casey (Josephine Peary), Alix Martin (Ada Blackjack),
Nina Fog (Louise Arner Boyd)
Animations: Cindy Schmid (swinx), Anne Löper, Antje Borchert

Music: Hannes Gill | Sound Design – Katharina Pichler | Sound Mix – audio! tonstudio

A door+bridge Film production with strandfilm Produktions GmbH
In cooperation with Norddeutscher Rundfunk NDR

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ICE WOMEN

Tagline

Three women. Three paths into the ice. Three voices that have gone unheard for too long.

Logline

"ICE WOMEN" reimagines the history of the Arctic: from a female perspective. Moving away from the male-dominated narrative of heroic conquest, toward scientific and feminine curiosity, intuition, and resilience. From Josephine Peary, who wrote and conducted research in the ice, to Ada Blackjack, who fought for survival on Wrangel Island, to Louise Arner Boyd, who led seven major Arctic expeditions and documented them with technical precision. Their voices have not been silenced – they find their echo in the present: in glaciologist Angelika Humbert, Inupiat linguist Maddy Kiminaq Alvanna-Stimpfle, and social worker Kaalannguaq Eipe Uvdloriaq from Qaa-naaq in North Greenland.

Synopsis

"ICE WOMEN" dismantles the male-dominated narrative of Arctic research and exposes its colonial and patriarchal structures. For over a century, the Arctic was portrayed as a "discovered" space – from the perspective of white men who claimed territories that had long been inhabited and culturally rooted. The film shifts the focus to the women whose knowledge, resilience, and scientific work were systematically overlooked, thereby fundamentally questioning what we mean by "exploration."

The film centers on three extraordinary pioneers: Josephine Peary, who gave birth to a child in the ice while her husband sought fame, and who discovered her own creative power in the isolation of Northwest Greenland; Ada Blackjack, an Iñupiat seamstress who survived alone on Wrangel Island after a failed expedition, sustained by her concern for her sick son; and Louise Arner Boyd, a wealthy explorer and self-taught scientist who financed and led seven major Arctic expeditions, combining scientific precision with innovative technology and poetic imagery.

Their legacy resonates in the voices of contemporary Arctic women: Maddy Kiminaq Alvanna- Stimpfle, who preserves and passes on a language threatened with extinction; Angelika Humbert, who translates the movement of the ice into measurable signs of climate change; and Kaalannguaq Eipe Uvdloriaq, who gives a voice to daily life in Qaanaaq, one of the world's northernmost communities.

Visually striking and narratively rich, "ICE WOMEN" weaves together rare archival treasures – including restored footage by Danish filmmaker Jette Bang and previously unpublished footage by Louise Arner Boyd – with contemporary images of the melting ice landscapes in Greenland and Alaska.

This creates a cinematic bridge between past and present, between tradition, colonial history, and a complex present. "ICE WOMEN" honors women whose greatest obstacle was never the cold.

Credits

Written by: Dorothea Braun, Jens Becker
Directed by: Jens Becker, Dorothea Braun
Narrators German: Nina Petri, Katrin Daliot, Ninja Reichert, Marc Vogel
Narrators Englisch: Annette Casey, Alix Martin, Nina Fog, Jim Libby
Cinematography: Susanna Salonen
Editing: Annett Ilijew, Britta Kastern
Sound: Lotta Sahlstedt, Angunnguaq Larsen, Tobias Müller
Composer: Hannes Gill
Sounddesign: Katharina Pichler
Rerecording mixer: audio! tonstudio
Production: Dorothea Braun – door & bridge film, Kurt Otterbacher – strandfilm, Hansjürgen Schmölzer BSX Schmölzer GmbH
Coproduction: Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR)
Funded by: Hessen Film & Medien GmbH, MV Filmförderung GmbH, FISA Plus

Title: ICE WOMEN
Genre: Documentary
Year: 2026
Country of origin: Germany
Drehorte: Greenland, Bremerhaven, Alaska, California, Maine, Washington DC, Seattle
Runtime: 90 Minuten
Screeningformat: DCP
Audio format: 5.1
Language versions: Deutsch, Englisch
Rating: 12+
Theatrical release: tba
Festivals:
DokFest Munich 2026, Official Selection

Protagonists

Ada Blackjack

Back then: 1898–1983 Ada Blackjack A story of survival and silence

Ada Blackjack's early years were marked by the painful loss of her father and the stripping away of her language and cultural identity. These hardships led to a lifelong struggle: first against violence in her marriage, later against the relentless cold of Wrangel Island, and always for a place in American society. In the process, Ada developed remarkable resilience; she learned to adapt to the harsh Arctic
climate and to survive as the only woman in a group of adventurers. But what kept her going in the face of death, hunger, and cold? Perhaps it was the universal power of a mother's love, the deep bond with her child, that gave her an unshakable will to survive in the isolation of the Arctic.

Today: Maddy Kiminaq Alvanna-Stimpfle Preserving Cultural Heritage Through Language

Maddy Kiminaq Alvanna-Stimpfle is a passionate Inupiaq teacher with a clear mission: to preserve her endangered language and culture. In Nome, a small town in Alaska that shaped Ada's youth, Maddy carries on her legacy and fights for cultural acceptance. Her work illustrates how deeply the emotional wounds of colonialism extend into the present and how crucial the revival of cultural roots is to a community's identity.

Louise Arner Boyd

Then: 1887–1972 Louise Arner Boyd
From Wealth to the Depths of the Arctic

Born into a wealthy family in California, Louise Arner Boyd defied societal expectations early on and became the first woman to independently organize and finance seven major Arctic expeditions – an extraordinary achievement that secures her a unique place in history. The film honors her diverse contributions to science, cultural preservation, and covert wartime missions during World War II, highlighting her lasting impact on Arctic research. Boyd was a pioneer in the use of visual media: she employed photography and film to map them, and make them accessible to a wider public. As a self-taught leader of her expeditions, she hired men as scientists, sailors, and technicians, thereby challenging the prevailing gender roles of her time. The documentary explores the ambivalence of her actions in a male-dominated environment and paints a portrait of a woman who carved out her own space through determination and contradictions.

Today: Prof. Angelika Humbert

Angelika Humbert is a leading German glaciologist who, following in the footsteps of Louise Arner Boyd, researches and visualiz climate change. "ICE WOMEN" accompanies her to a research camp in East Greenland, where she compares today's glacial landscapes with the photographs Boyd captured in the 1920s. In this way, changes over the course of a century become tangibly perceptible. The conversations also address the question of how open science is to women today – and which structures persist. In this way, the film builds a precise and personal bridge between the past and the present.

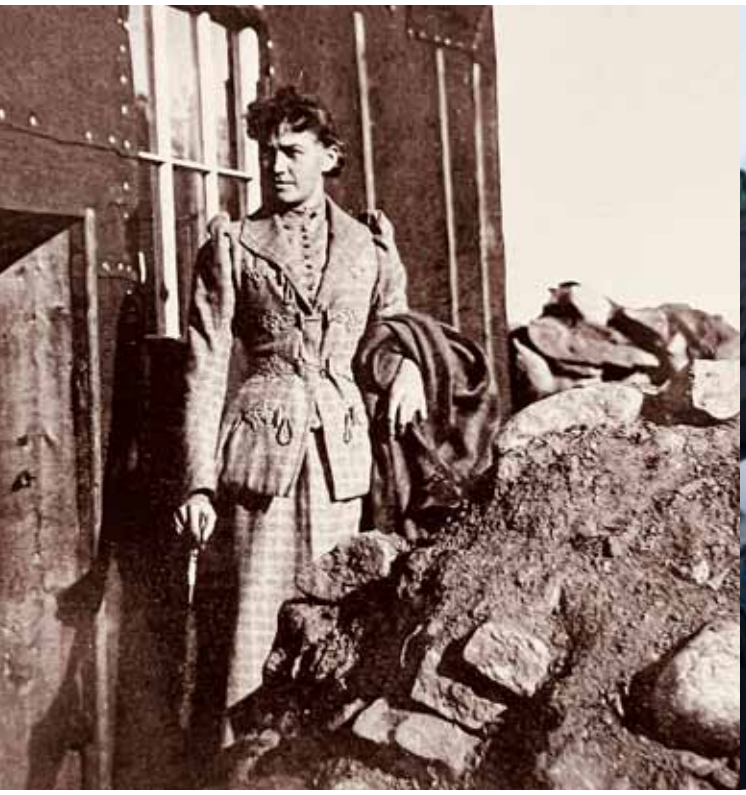
Josephine Peary

Then: 1863–1944 Josephine Peary
A Woman Between Ethnography and Betrayal

Josephine Peary carried out remarkable ethnographic work, yet to this day she is often perceived merely as the wife of North Pole explorer Robert E. Peary. Her relationship with Robert was complex and marked by deep disappointments. "ICE WOMEN" shows how Josephine played a decisive role in making these expeditions possible and fought to carve out her own place within a male-dominated team. At the same time, the film critically examines the problematic aspects of her story: Josephine's condescending, racially biased view of the Inuit, as well as her silence regarding the abuse of women and girls in the community, are part of this legacy. The documentary approaches these contradictory facets with precision and candor.

Today: Kaalannguaq Eipe Uvdloriaq
From Dysfunction to Resilience

Kaalannguaq Eipe Uvdloriaq is a modern Inuk in Qaanaaq who faces the challenges of family, career, and cultural identity. ICE WOMEN chronicles Kaalannguaq's journey from a difficult past to a present in which she works to empower others at the "Family House." Kaalannguaq's story reflects the enduring legacy of Arctic exploration in the lives of the people of Qaanaaq, where the Pearys once set up their base camp to become the first to reach the North Pole.



Director's Note

ICE WOMEN is not just a film, but a collective journey – into a turbulent past, into the everyday life of the Arctic regions today, into magnificent landscapes. Our motivation is to bring three moving women's stories back to light from the shadows of history. Josephine, Ada, and Louise encourage us to walk the path of self-empowerment.
A Greenlandic shaman once taught: "A bird needs two wings to fly. There must be balance."
This wisdom forms the backbone of our narrative. Just as balance makes flight possible, our film connects the majestic grandeur of the Arctic landscapes with the intimate, untold biographies of remarkable women into a harmonious whole. Our expedition took us deep into the archives: we have brought forgotten letters, photographs, and records to light, not only to document the legacy of these pioneers but to make it tangible. It is our mission to honor their courage and thus pave the way for a new era of empowerment.

Producer's Note

It all began with a single photo: a woman in arctic gear, a rifle on her back.
I remember thinking: Why don't I know her? Why have I never heard of women like her? The deeper I researched, the clearer it became that this absence is no coincidence. Women were present in the Arctic. They traveled, researched, documented, survived, yet they rarely found their way into the dominant narrative. The so-called "Golden Age" of exploration was written as a male history.
Working with the archives revealed something else: the photographs and films are not neutral. They were created within colonial structures. Indigenous communities were often depicted in them as objects – to be studied, measured, or exhibited. Images carry power, and this power determines what is remembered and who is forgotten.

"ICE WOMEN" emerges from this tension.
The film brings historical material into dialogue with contemporary voices – with women who live, research, and reflect in the Arctic today. It asks how we interpret archival images today: what we unconsciously perpetuate and what we must re-examine and reinterpret. For me, this process was less about "correcting" history and more about taking responsibility for how history is handled today. ICE WOMEN is an attempt to carefully preserve the archive, recognize the colonial perspective embedded within it, and create space for narratives that have long existed but have rarely been the focus. It is not about replacing one myth with another. It is about broadening the perspective.

The Production

Productiondetails:
ICE WOMEN is a 90-minute theatrical documentary and a 3 x 52-minute TV series
Teaser: https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/1160178588

Dorothea Braun, Producer, Writer, Director
In 2019, Dorothea Braun founded the production company door+bridge film. With ICE WOMEN, she brings her first feature-length documentary to the big screen. Her work is shaped by her studies in cultural and social anthropology with a focus on visual anthropology, as well as her training in directing and story development at the ZELIG Film School. She has been working as a producer, screenwriter, and director since 2015.

Jens Becker, Director, Writer
Since 1986, he has produced more than 70 screenplays, feature films, TV series episodes, and documentaries for cinema and television, as well as non-fiction books. Since 1991, he has worked as a freelance writer, director, and dramaturg. In 2004, he was appointed professor of screenwriting at the KONRAD WOLF Film University Babelsberg. He serves on selection and funding committees.

Kurt Otterbacher, Producer strandfilm
Founder (1977) and producer (since 1986), involved in more than 70 productions for cinema and television, author and film critic.

Hansjürgen Schmölzer, Producer, BSX Schmölzer GmbH, Österreich

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