

NORWAY

MI TULAR. I am the border

by Valentina Tamborra





Longyearbyen. A container at the Arctic World Archive (AWA), the “safe repository for the world’s memory”. Among the institutions storing their documents here are the Vatican Apostolic Library, ESA (European Space Agency), the National Archives of Mexico and Brazil, the National Museum of Norway, the Museum of the Person and the Alinari Archives (“Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia”, Alinari Foundation for Photography) in Florence.



SVALBARD, LIVING ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

In the language of the ancient Etruscans MI TULAR means “I am the border”. Here, on this patch of frozen land set in the Arctic Ocean, polar bears and humans vie for an invisible border. The word Tular also brings to mind the legend of farthestmost Thule, the last island at the very edge of the known world.

For a long time, Svalbard was very much a short-term destination: somewhere to work for a limited period to make some money to then build a life on the mainland. In recent years, however, something has changed and more and more people are deciding to settle here. But who are the inhabitants of Svalbard really?

A diverse and multi-ethnic society: miners and scientists, sled dog breeders, chefs who open gourmet restaurants with the largest selection of wines in Europe in a place where alcohol is rationed, primary school teachers who, during biology class, teach how to kill a reindeer to then learn all about its anatomy. Established in 2017 on the site of the original

Global Seed Vault, the Arctic World Archives (AWA) stores an impressive collection of valuable digital artefacts and irreplaceable information from around the world (from more than 15 contributing nations) including manuscripts from the Vatican Apostolic Library, data and documents from the European Space Agency (ESA), the National Archives of Mexico and Brazil, the National Museum of Norway, and valuable documentation relating to political history, scientific discoveries, and artistic masterpieces from different eras.

And then there is Pyramiden: a semi-abandoned Russian settlement. In this surreal setting communication with the outside world is only possible by satellite phone. Three people live there permanently, in a place built to accommodate more than 1,000.

Where nature can be lethal, human beings have to find a new balance to survive. Solidarity is life. And here, in a remote corner of Norway, at the edge of the world, people have achieved it. This is the border. Perhaps it is farthestmost Thule, after all.



Pyramiden. The few remaining inhabitants are now the custodians of those buildings that remain intact since the town was abandoned. Today they welcome tourist visitors, taking them to visit the buildings and then returning them to the vessels they arrived on.



Longyearbyen. Miner Tommy Albrigsten is in charge of safety at Mine number 7.



Longyearbyen. Walking the roads beyond the secure, signposted perimeter is dangerous because of the polar bears. It is necessary to carry a gun for protection.



Longyearbyen. A mother with her pups: they too will become sled dogs.



Barentsburg. The Art Arctic Gallery houses exhibitions that tell the story of the exploration of Svalbard over the centuries as well as the story of William Barents, the celebrated Dutch navigator who explored the Arctic and the Barents Sea that now bears his name.



Longyearbyen. Kim Holmén has been the director of the Norsk Polarinstitutt (NPI, Norwegian Polar Institute) until 2021. Over the past 30 years, Holmén has held many research positions on Svalbard. Today, he is an associate professor at the ITU, the Arctic University of Norway, located in Tromsø.





Longyearbyen. A miner takes a break inside Mine number 7.



Longyearbyen. A film conserved at the Arctic World Archive (AWA), the structure that stores a remarkable collection of precious digital artefacts and information from all over the world.



Longyearbyen. A concert organized by the Store Norske mining company. The miners, and others, perform traditional Norwegian and mining songs.



Longyearbyen. Guide Jan Hvizdal with the dogs he works with every day.



Pong works as a waiter and has been living on Svalbard for seven years, but this does not mean he has become a Norwegian citizen: the islands, administered by Norway, are subject to an international treaty that grants them a certain degree of autonomy. It is therefore possible to obtain permanent residence on Svalbard without the need for any visa or residence permit, but this is not a way to acquire Norwegian citizenship.

A rescue helicopter hovers over the valleys near Longyeabyen.





A storm during the night in Longyearbyen. People leave the doors to their homes open for those who might be unlucky enough to find themselves outside and in need of shelter.



Longyearbyen. In summer, sledge runners are replaced with wheels and the dogs continue to pull their human mushers.



Longyearbyen. Bullets and flare guns: working in the Arctic in the middle of nowhere is a dangerous job. You need to be prepared and able to protect yourself in case of an attack by a polar bear.

Longyearbyen. A man walks amid the immensity of the Arctic landscape, a rifle slung over his shoulder.





Longyearbyen. Jan Hvizdal reads by the light of a light box, used to simulate the sun's rays during the long Arctic nights.



Longyearbyen. Astrid from Sweden moved to Svalbard to experience nature in a less contaminated setting. She originally intended to stay a few months but has remained for 5 years.

