

TOOLS OF MY TRADE

Rachel Sussman, Photographer

Time Travel

BY KATE ROCKWOOD

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF ELKINS



Rachel Sussman lives in the past. The Brooklyn, New York-based photographer has spent the past six years chronicling the world's oldest living organisms, from 3,000-year-old lichen in Greenland that grows 1 centimeter every 100 years to 100,000-year-old sea grass in the Spanish Balearic Islands to 500,000-year-old bacteria she snapped under a microscope in a lab in Copenhagen. "I decided 2,000 years and older would be my cutoff in order to get close to year zero," says Sussman, whose landscapes of craggy, quiet, and regal beauty have shown internationally. "I wanted to put our time frame in perspective and ignite people's imaginations." Before heading to Antarctica for the final trip of the project (the biggest to date), Sussman shared a few of her favorite tools.



Sequoia map [4]

"Every trip is so different. It took me two years to secure the right passage to Antarctica, but for photographing the sequoias in California, I could just go." Sussman used this map of felled trees and standing sequoias to navigate her way to an unmarked tree—the oldest in the forest.

Ogasawara sea salt [5]

When friends invited Sussman to Japan in 2004, she was torn between a beach trip to Ogasawara or a two-day hike to Yakushima to see a tree that locals said was 7,000 years old. "I was ready for an adventure," she says, and chose to skip the beach. In place of the sun and sand, she bought a bag of sea salt at a Tokyo department store. "It is delicious."

Lichen [6]

While shooting groves of lichen in Greenland, Sussman found this pebble that hosts the same species of the slow-growing organism. "Living in the city, I love having a connection to the remote places I work in. These trips are so a part of me now—each has been such an adventure."

Ziploc bags [7]

A meticulous note taker, Sussman files every scrap of paper from her travels in jumbo Ziplocs. "I don't throw anything out that's related to a project." (\$3 for 15, ziploc.com)

Mamiya 7 II camera [1]

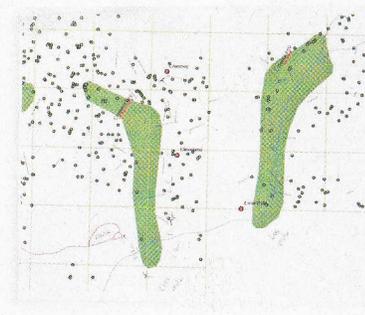
"A gadgety person who can't wait for the newest lens—that's so not me," says Sussman, who's been taking photos since she was 8 years old. "This camera suits me. It's very rugged, and I love that it's a medium-format range finder. (\$2,500, mamiya-usa.com)

Vintage Chanel bottles [2]

Sussman's studio is crowded with vintage mementos such as these old Chanel No. 5 bottles, which her dog dug up in her Baltimore backyard when she was a teenager. She now uses them as miniature vases. "There's something about surrounding yourself with a sense of history," she says.

Fujifilm Pro pack [3]

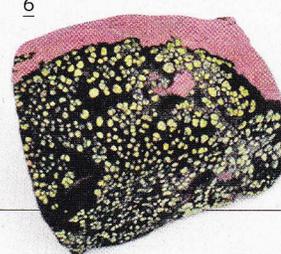
"I've used Fuji for years—I love it. I'll pack between 30 and 40 rolls for a trip. There's no way I'm getting more film in Sri Lanka or Namibia." (\$40 for five rolls, bhphotovideo.com)



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