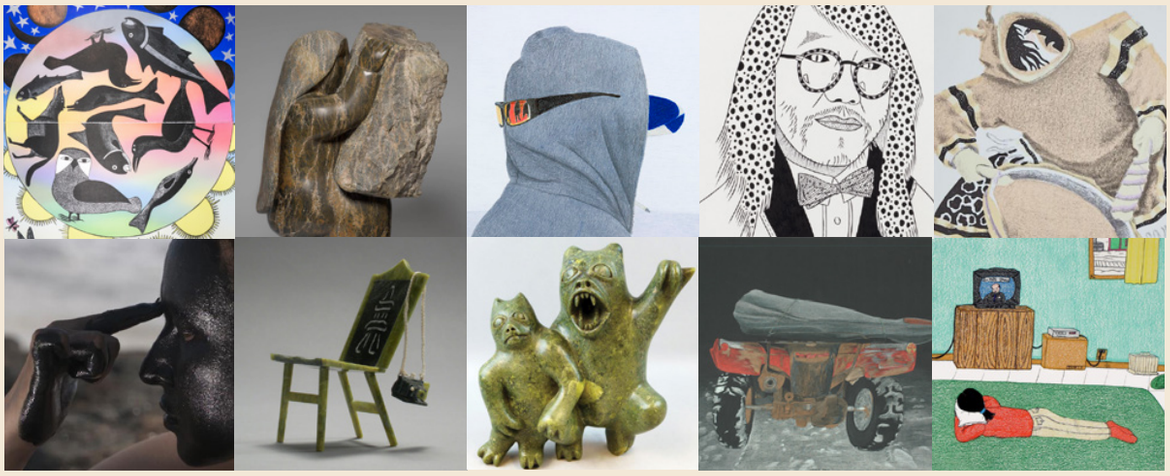
JULY 9, 2021

BRIGHT NORTHERN LIGHTS
TEN ARTISTS OF NUNAVUT

This Nunavut Day, we're showcasing works by some of the most prominent modern and contemporary Inuit artists from the northernmost territory in Canada.



Twenty years ago, Nunavut Day was celebrated for the first time to mark the passing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act on July 9, 1993. This legislation paved the way for the establishment of Nunavut ("Our Land" in Inuktitut) as a separate territory governed by the Inuit on April 1, 1999—a pivotal event in Indigenous and Canadian history that was decades in the making. To mark the occasion, we're featuring works by renowned Inuit artists from this region, including graphic artist and writer Alootook Ipellie, who promoted the creation of Nunavut through his political activism, and Kenojuak Ashevak, the creator of the spectacular commemorative lithograph *Siilavut, Nunavut* (*Our Environment, Our Land*), 1999. With the second-highest concentration of artists in the country, the largest territory in Canada continues to play a vital role in the evolution of Inuit and Canadian art.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

SIILAVUT, NUNAVUT (OUR ENVIRONMENT, OUR LAND)

by Kenojuak Ashevak

Kenojuak Ashevak, *Siilavut, Nunavut (Our Environment, Our Land),* 1999,
Brunnier Art Museum, University Museums, Iowa State University, Ames.

This magnificent lithographic diptych by revered pioneer of modern Inuit art Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013) celebrates the founding of the territory of Nunavut on May 25, 1993 as the homeland of the Inuit of the Eastern Arctic in Canada. Evoking the splendour of the northern lights, the technicolour globe in the centre is inhabited by Arctic creatures of the sky, land, and sea. Through the format of the diptych, Ashevak captures the duality of total darkness and total light in the Arctic (depending on the time of year). The upper portion of the lithograph shows the different phases of the moon in the night sky, while the lower portion depicts the sun rising and setting.

Read more about Kenojuak Ashevak

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH CARVING STONE

by Oviloo Tunnillie

Oviloo Tunnillie, *Self-Portrait with Carving Stone,* 1998, Collection of Fred and Mary Widding.

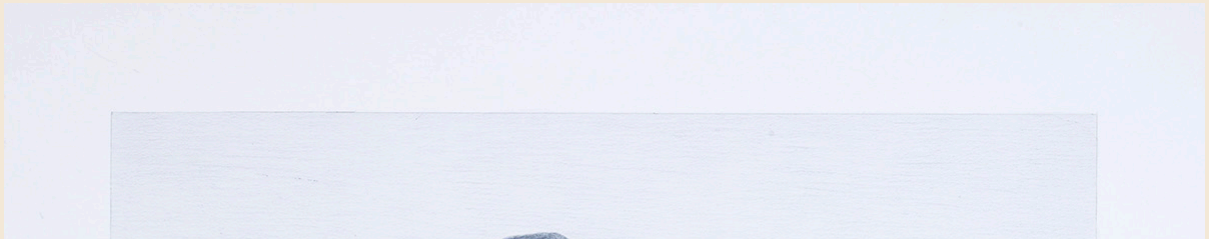
In this tender self-portrait, Kangia-born carver Oviloo Tunnillie (1949–2014)—one of the few Inuit women stone carvers to gain international recognition—pictures herself cradling a slab of raw stone in a rare exploration of her identity and role as an artist. "When I was finishing this up, I didn't want to take this [uncarved] piece off . . . just to let the public know that this is the kind of stone that we carve before we do the actual finishing," Tunnillie said. "I like carvings which have unfinished parts. . . . This is what the stone actually looks [like] before it is finished." The contrast between the smooth surface of the kneeling Tunnillie and the rough, untouched piece of serpentinite she is carrying demonstrates the artist's intimate knowledge of her material and her skill in guiding its transformation from rugged, metamorphic rock to a polished, expertly modelled figure.

Read more in ACI's *Oviloo Tunnillie: Life & Work* by Darlene Coward Wight.

This book was made possible thanks to the Title Sponsorship of Karen Schreiber and Marnie Schreiber. We are also grateful to our Publication Partner, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, for their support.

UNTITLED (MAN WITH HOODIE AND SUNGLASSES)

by Itee Pootoogook



Itee Pootoogook, *Untitled (man with hoodie and sunglasses),* 2012, Collection of Christopher Bredt and Jamie Cameron.

There is a stillness to Itee Pootoogook's (1951–2014) work that is palpable in this image of a lone figure gazing at the body of water before him. Yet we know he is not alone: three figures are visible in the reflection of the UV sunglasses on the back of his head. Through this clever visual device, Pootoogook offers us information about the man's surroundings that transcends what is contained within the framing of the picture. Although the man's face is concealed, this work suggests that his identity is firmly rooted in the land and his community. Based in Kinngait, Pootoogook was celebrated for his evocative depictions of contemporary everyday life within the vast Arctic landscape.

Read more about Itee Pootoogook

THE DEATH OF NOMADIC LIFE, THE CREEPING EMERGENCE OF CIVILIZATION

by Alootook Ipellie

Alootook Ipellie, *The Death of Nomadic Life, the Creeping Emergence of Civilization,* 2007, Estate of the artist.

In this surreal self-portrait, Nuvuqquq-born, Ottawa-based Alootook Ipellie (1951–2007) examines his dual identity as an Inuk living in the South. Superimposed on a depiction of himself as a hunter carrying a bloodied knife and harpoon in the Arctic is another image of him in the South framed by narwhal tusks. He is dressed in a suit and peeking out from his pocket are tickets to see Elvis Presley at the Ottawa Coliseum. Recognized for his poetry, political cartoons, essays, and other writings exploring issues concerning Inuit Nunangat (the homeland of the Inuit in Canada), the multitalented artist was also an activist who was deeply involved in promoting the establishment of Nunavut. Ipellie was inducted into the Giants of the North: Canadian Cartoonist Hall of Fame in 2019.

Read more about Alootook Ipellie

Read ACI's Spotlight on this artist

IGLOOLIK DRUMMER

by Germaine Arnaktauyok

Germaine Arnaktauyok, *Igloolik Drummer,* 1993, Courtesy of the artist and Katilvik.

Commemorative two-dollar circulation coin featuring a design by Germaine Arnaktauyok.

Three years after the toonie entered circulation, Yellowknife-based artist Germaine Arnaktauyok's (b.1946) *Igloolik Drummer,* 1993 (left), appeared on the face of the Royal Canadian Mint's first commemorative two-dollar coin marking the creation of Nunavut that year. Arnaktauyok's coin design features a drummer whose drumstick points to an outline map of Nunavut. The territory is illuminated from its centre by a *qulliq,* a traditional Inuit stone oil lamp. This year, Arnaktauyok received the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in recognition of her vast body of work and inimitable influence on younger generations of artists.

Read more about Germaine Arnaktauyok

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KIINAMIT KIINAMUT

(FACE TO FACE)

by Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory

Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, still from *Kiinamit kiinamut (Face to Face),* 2016, Courtesy of the Inuit Art Foundation.

Shot and edited by Baffin Island-based Jamie Griffiths, the short silent film *Kiinamit kiinamut (Face to Face),* 2016, features Greenlandic Inuk artist Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory (b.1979) performing *uaajeerneq,* a type of expressive mask dancing that has deep roots in Greenlandic Inuit communities. It's a cornerstone of the Iqaluit-based multidisciplinary artist's practice, and she recalls learning its foundations at thirteen through her mother, who was involved in its 1970s revitalization as part of the Greenlandic folk movement. As the artist notes, *uaajeerneq* touches on four main themes: humility, sex, fear, and humour. "For me, it is all about sharing intimate moments with the audience, about creating wonder and unexpectedness with both individuals and groups," says Williamson Bathory. She was the recipient of the inaugural Kenojuak Ashevak Memorial Award in 2018.

Watch *Kiinamit kiinamut (Face to Face)*

PETER PITSEOLAK'S CHAIR

by Jamasee Pitseolak

Jamasee Pitseolak, *Peter Pitseolak's Chair,* 2009, private collection.

Peter Pitseolak, Iqaluit, 1968, photograph by Charles Gimpel 뺣.

Carving runs in the family for Kinngait-born Jamasee Pitseolak (b.1968), who pays tribute to his grandfather—himself an artist and important early photographer—in *Peter Pitseolak's Chair,* 2009. Peter Pitseolak (1902–1973) received his first camera in the early 1940s and used it to take pictures of his community in Kinngait, leaving behind some two thousand negatives produced over a twenty-year period that represented a time of major change in Inuit Nunangat. His camera can be seen hanging off the chair in Jamasee Pitseolak's delicate sculpture, a touching tribute to this foundational photographic chronicler of life in Kinngait. The younger Pitseolak has become legendary in his own right for his intricate sculptures of electric guitars, motorcycles, and sports paraphernalia made of numerous parts carved out of stone, ivory, and antler.

Read more about Jamasee Pitseolak

HOWLING SPIRIT (TORNRAK) AND ITS YOUNG

by Kiugak Ashoona

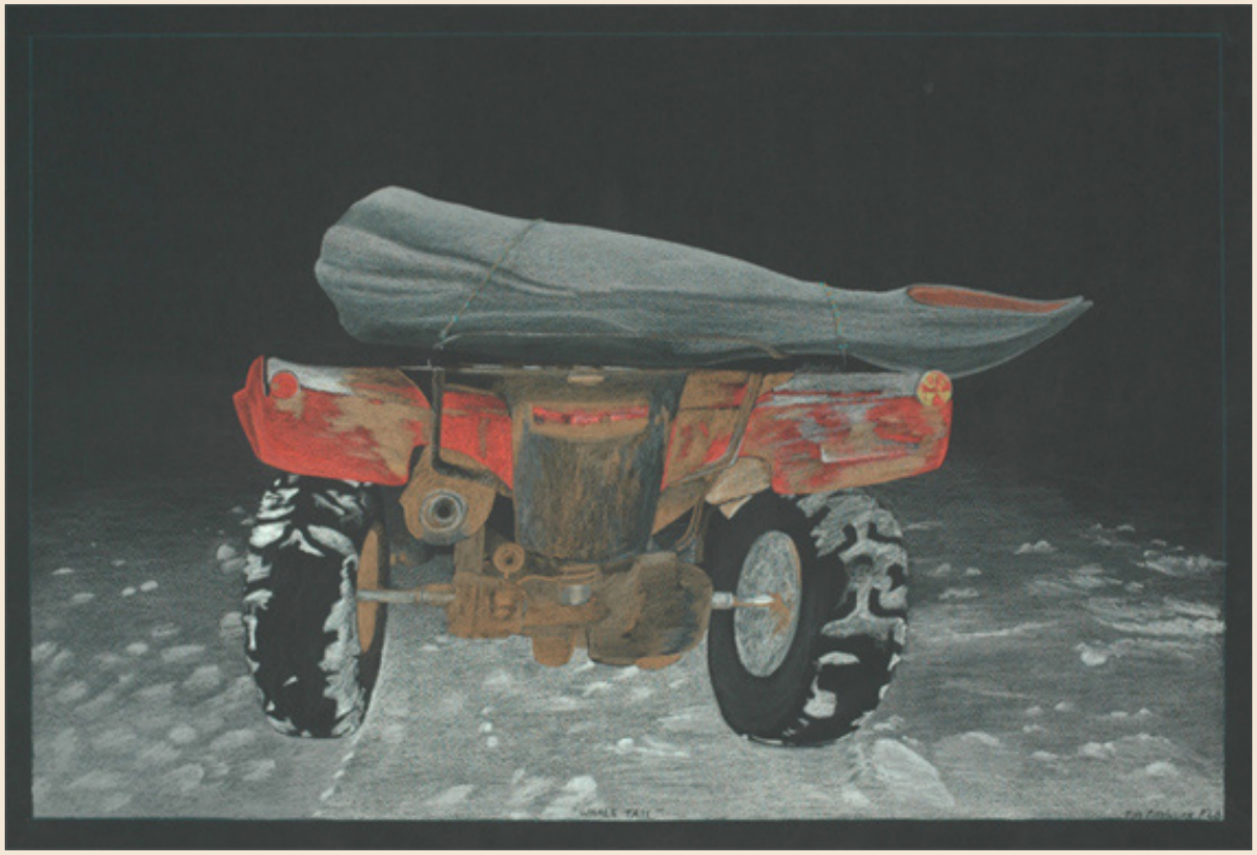
Kiugak Ashoona, *Howling Spirit (Tornrak) and Its Young,* 1962, private collection.

Shortly after celebrated artist Kiugak Ashoona (1933–2014) produced this striking serpentinite carving, James Houston—a key figure in the development and promotion of modern Inuit art—purchased it as a Christmas gift for his friend and president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Arthur A. Houghton Jr. Displaying Ashoona's characteristic dramatic facial expressions and dynamic poses, *Howling Spirit (Tornrak) and Its Young,* 1962, was included in the international touring exhibition of Inuit art *Sculpture/Inuit: Masterworks of the Canadian Arctic* in the early 1970s and featured on the cover of its catalogue, introducing audiences around the world to the power and expressive intricacy of Ashoona's work.

Read more about Kiugak Ashoona

WHALE TAIL

by Tim Pitsiulak



Tim Pitsiulak, *Whale Tail,* 2010, Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts.

In this large-scale coloured-pencil drawing, Kimmirut-born artist and hunter Tim Pitsiulak (1967–2016) depicts a whale tail strapped to the back of an ATV at night. His masterful compositions, often consisting of vividly rendered central figures or objects against a dark background, were inspired by Inuit mythology, traditional life on the land, and his own experiences of living in Kinngait. The nephew of the renowned artist Kenojuak Ashevak, Pitsiulak achieved notable artistic success during his lifetime and his works were highly sought after by southern collectors. He commented, “The best thing about being an artist and a hunter [is that] people [in the south] like it. What more can I ask for than that people are noticing what we have up here?”

Read more about Tim Pitsiulak

DR. PHIL

by Annie Pootoogook

Annie Pootoogook, *Dr. Phil,* 2006, private collection.

Sobey Award winner Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) was a third-generation Inuk artist known for her famed drawings of contemporary life in the North, including this picture of her watching the American daytime talk show *Dr. Phil* while lying comfortably on the floor at home. Satellite television was introduced to Pootoogook's community of Kinngait in 1972, when she was three years old, and it became a regular childhood pastime. Her domestic scenes often depict figures watching television shows, including *The Simpsons* and the CBC news program *The National,* drawing attention to the influence of Southern pop culture on Northern communities.

Read more in ACI's *Annie Pootoogook: Life & Work* by Nancy G. Campbell.

This book was made possible thanks to the Title Sponsorship of Kiki and Ian Delaney.

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