



# INUIT ART

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Inuit Identity  
Recent Carvings  
Pucker Gallery



1. Pitsiulak Michael  
*Inuk*, 17 x 9"  
Lake Harbour



2. Terry Pitsiulak  
*Narwal*, 8 1/2 X 7 1/2"  
Lake Harbour

FRONT COVER  
George Arlook  
*Bear*, 13 x 11"  
Arviat

## An Introduction to Contemporary Inuit Sculpture

While on a sketching trip in 1948, the young artist James Houston was shown soapstone and ivory carvings by the Inuit peoples of the Canadian Arctic. Impressed by the beauty and quality of the work, Houston brought several examples back to the Canadian Handicraft Guild and was authorized to return north the following year to purchase additional works for the Guild shop. This initial and casual contact had immense consequences; in the 1950's and 60's the Guild provided artistic training, set up co-operatives, and helped create an educated market for the work, thereby initiating the "tradition" of contemporary Inuit sculpture. The carvings in the present exhibition were selected from among works produced by members of the Arctic Co-operatives Limited and represent the recent work of Inuit artists continuing and expanding this new art form based on economic necessity, traditional skills and modern aesthetics.

Ancient Eskimo cultures did not practice "art" as the term is used in the West but traditions of magico-religious and decorative carving did exist within the Dorset and Thule cultures. In the nineteenth century a secular carving tradition emerged, producing miniatures of Eskimo life for trade with explorers and whalers. Contemporary Inuit sculpture draws on both of these histories, representing traditional myths and activities for a Western audience, but transforming them in a self-conscious re-creation and reaffirmation of Inuit culture at a moment of threatened extinction. As Gerhard Hoffman writes, "Inuit artists...are reasserting Inuit identity by fictionalizing or rather aestheticizing the Inuit past of primal experience." (p. 383).

Subjects from ancient myth, animal imagery and scenes of traditional Eskimo life draw upon a common Inuit past, representing a way of life that has been all but destroyed over the past fifty years yet retains its vitality and validity as a way of understanding the world as a unifying force for the Inuit people. Animal subjects such as bears, musk oxen, and walrus are reminders of the nomadic hunting experience of traditional Eskimo life (see Palaya Qiarsuq's *Walrus and Bears* by Iola Ikkidluak and Simeonie Kavik).

As a recent exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery demonstrated, the significance of animal imagery in contemporary Inuit art ranges widely, incorporating both magico-religious elements and the tradition of close observation born of dependence on animals for survival in a harsh climate. Each work in this exhibition presents a different approach to these themes, but all evoke this past, not as a primitive foil for the West but as one means of asserting a separate and valued experience. The use of myth serves a similar purpose; the current exhibition includes a carving of Sedna (also known as Nulijuk or Taleelayo), the sea goddess whose fingers and hands become the sea mammals in one ancient myth (thus her missing arms). The sculpture represents traditional Eskimo beliefs about the unity of humans and nature in both subject and form; the goddess is part woman and part fish in a seamless fusion of form and texture that seems far more natural than the Western mermaid's uneasy predicament.

The style of Inuit sculpture varies more, perhaps, than does the subject matter. Each community has its own history of involvement with the Guild and a different pattern of stylistic development; Arviat sculpture tends to be more abstract, Lake Harbour pieces are known for their highly polished surfaces, and Cape Dorset artists are more concerned with formal problems. Of course, there is substantial variation within and between these communities' styles; as in most contemporary art, individual style is an important concern in Inuit art. Nonetheless, certain common characteristics can be identified, justifying the claim that this art represents some kind of Inuit identity. Perhaps the most pronounced shared quality is the feel for the material evidenced in most of these pieces: Inuit carvers spend much time contemplating each piece before carving, deciding on the proper subject for each particular stone. The results are clear in the final products, as can be seen in the sweeping stripes that pull the eye along the curve of the wing in Paul Kavik's Bird. A second common trait is the use of rounded, bulky masses to create form, seen in examples as varied as George Arlook's abstract Man and Barnabus Arnasungaq's Musk Ox. A third commonality is the inclusion of several forms in one piece, animal forms mingled and fused in a, at times, confusing mass, as in the Composition of Johnny Lee Judea and Lypa Pitsoolak's Scene. What then do these three common characteristics say



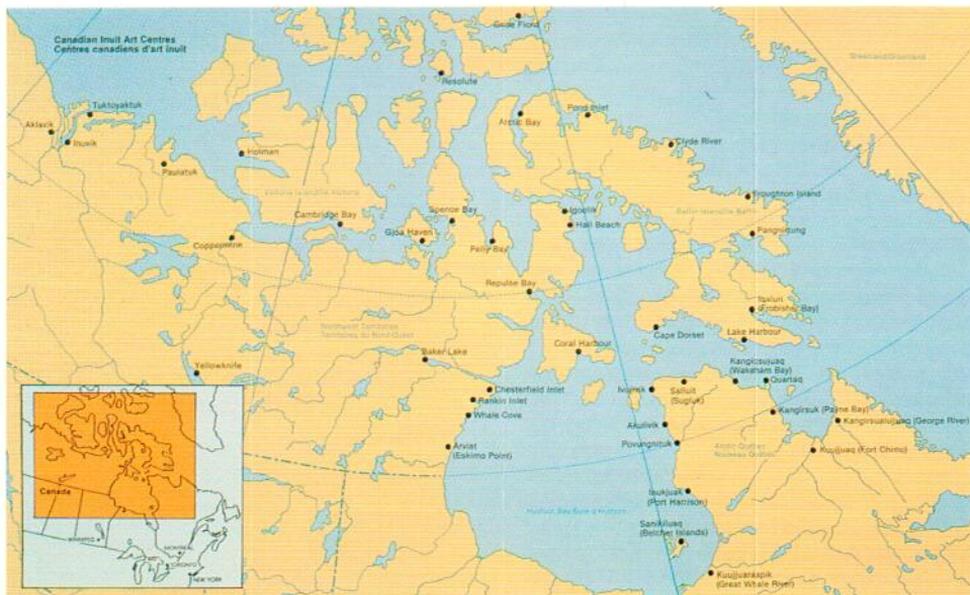
3. Nugaleak Qimirpik  
Drummer, 16 x 12"  
Lake Harbour



4. Barnabus Arnasungaq  
Musk Ox, 8 x 11"  
Baker Lake

*We wish to thank Jim Foubister and JoAnne Antonishy of Arctic Co-operatives Limited for their assistance and support with this catalogue.*

All works are of soapstone from various areas of the Northwest territories.



about Inuit art overall? They reveal an understanding of nature which is all-inclusive, in which humans and animals co-exist by inevitable nature rather than by accommodation and competition and in which no one element is more important than the others. *Bear on Heads* visually acknowledges the connections between human and animals, their forms linked in a surreal reflection.

As are all artistic traditions, contemporary Inuit sculpture is a varied and multi-faceted enterprise, ranging from casually produced souvenirs to deeply felt artistic expression. At its best, Inuit sculpture uses the traditions of Eskimo culture to comment both on its Western viewers and the Inuit heritage. The values of the Inuit people are preserved, unified and restated in their art as they reinvent their traditions and identity for the late twentieth century.

- P.M.F.

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Arctic Co-operatives Limited (ACL) is an aboriginal organization owned and controlled by the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories, Canada.

The production and sale of fine Northern arts and crafts was pioneered in the Northwest Territories by the Co-operative movement through the development of producer Co-operatives over thirty years ago.

Design, Donna Bodell Editor, Jill K. Richardson



6. Ben Porter Jr.  
*Man*, 19 x 18"  
Gjoa Haven



7. Judas Ullulaq  
*Man*, 15 x 13"  
Gjoa Haven



8. Julie Kutsig  
*Polar Bear*, 9 1/2 x 7 1/2"  
Igloolik

10. Simeonie Killicktree  
*Whale and Seal*, 8 1/2 x 3"  
Lake Harbour

9. Qarpik Pudlar  
*Man*, 15 x 14"  
Cape Dorset

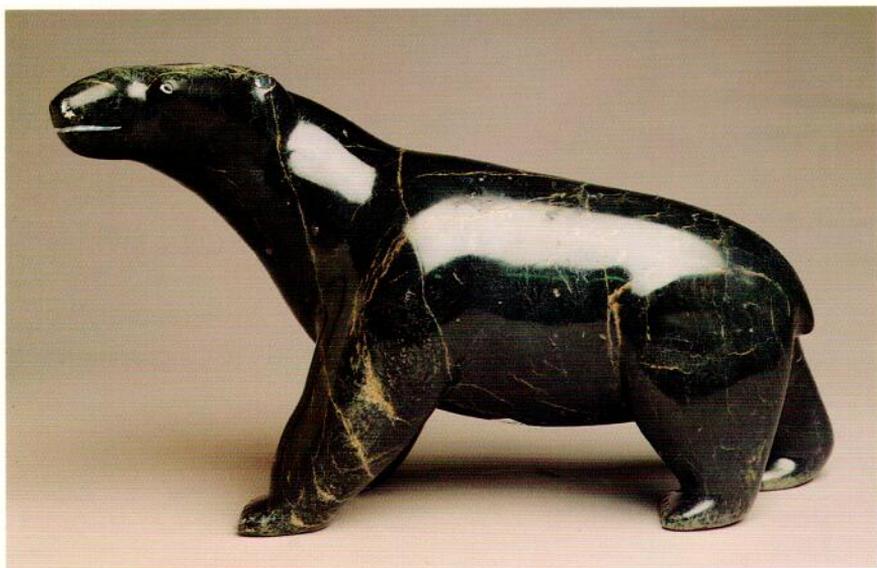
11. Tim Pitsiulak  
*Sedna*, 7 x 5 1/2"  
Lake Harbour

5.

12. Kiponik Arlooktoo  
*Bird*, 13 x 7 1/2"  
Lake Harbour



13. Simeonie Killicktree  
*Bear*, 8 x 7"  
Lake Harbour





14. George Arlook  
*Man*, 16 x 21"  
Arviat



15. Joe Killoonik  
*Bear/Man/Seal*, 16 x 16"  
Taloyoak



16. Johnny Lee Judea  
*Muskox*, 9 x 15"  
Lake Harbour

17. Iola Ikkidluak  
*Musk Ox*, 10 x 16"  
Lake Harbour

18. Simeonie Kavik  
*Bear*, 9 x 17"  
Sanikiluaq



The Northwest Territories occupies approximately one third of Canada's land mass (3,376,689 square km), and 9.2% of the world's fresh water. It encompasses four time zones of clean air and open space. The area varies from forested and mountainous zones in the southwest through sub-arctic tundra to the stark beauty of the high arctic. Of a total population of 55,000, 20,000 make up the Inuit living in the arctic region of the NWT. Forty percent of the population is under 17 years of age. The Northwest Territories at present is the only Canadian jurisdiction in which people of aboriginal descent form the majority of the population.



19. Paul Kavik  
*Polar Bear*, 12 X 5"  
Sanikiluaq

20. Marius Kayotak  
*Drum Dancer*,  
9 x 5 1/2"  
Iglolik

21. Iola Ikkidluak  
*Bear*, 11 x 20"  
Lake Harbour





22. Pea Michael  
*Composition*, 8 x 7"  
Lake Harbour

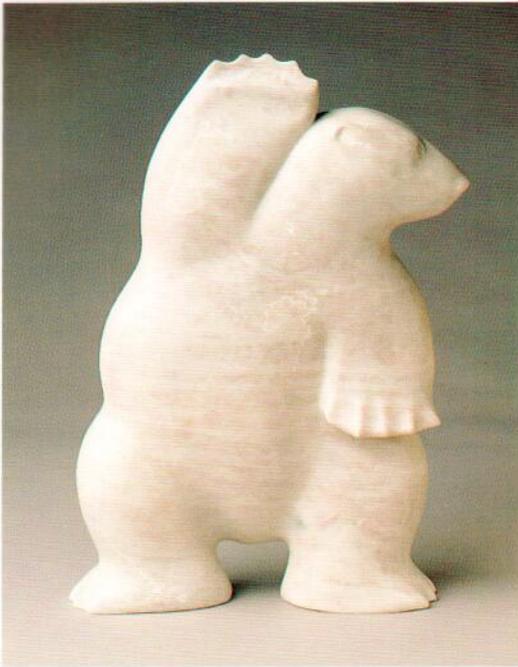
23. Johnny Lee Judea  
*Composition*, 15 x 10"  
Lake Harbour

24. Palaya Qiarsuq  
*Walrus*, 16 x 15"  
Cape Dorset

25. Lypa Pitsiulak  
*Scene*, 12 x 21"  
Pangnirtung



Arctic climate has an average daily temperature not exceeding 10 C during the warmest month of the year. Freezing temperatures can occur in any month, but on average for the inhabited portions of the Arctic, the first free period ranges from 40 to 60 days. Spring comes late and suddenly, because of the slow melting of ice. In the Arctic, snow covers the ground for eight months of the year with the greatest snowfall occurring in October and November. Precipitation is less than 75 cm annually.



26. Moses Koonark  
*Polar Bear*, 14 1/2 X 8 1/2 "  
Pond Inlet

27. Simon Tokoome  
*Bear on Heads*, 12 x 9 1/2 "  
Baker Lake



28. Annie Sewoee  
*Inuk with Beads*, 10 x 6"  
Arviat





29. Pitsiulak Michael  
*Bird Spirit*, 16 x 13"  
Lake Harbour

## Inuit Art

Inuit Identity  
Recent Carvings

January 7 - February 10, 1995

### RECEPTION

Saturday  
January 7, 1995  
3:00-6:00 p.m.

#### Honorary Patron

Don Cameron  
Consul General  
Canadian Consulate, Boston

The public is invited to attend.  
**The artists will be present.**



Paul Kavik  
*Bird*, 8 1/2 x 9"  
Sanikiluaq

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