



Inuit Carvings: A NEW STORY

Pucker Gallery | Boston

Inuit Carvings: A NEW STORY

IN CAPE DORSET ON SOUTH BAFFIN ISLAND, just as in ages past, bears, birds, walrus, and hunters emerge from rocks that line the coast. Men carve these animals from the stone they quarry by hand. They oil and polish the animals to shine, letting each burst of green show forth from the Baffin soapstone. Then the animals are released. They fly, they swim and hunt, they dance. The men sell the animals away to the south, away from their homeland. There they dance forever, a piece of the north living in the south. Inuit stone carvings tell the stories of their past.

The Inuit art of storytelling has endured since the prehistoric age. Every element and being in the Inuit world has its own story. Together, these stories tell how their chilly world came to be and explain how that Northern world works. If one looks long enough at the extraordinary volume of contemporary Inuit sculpture it begins to tell a legendary story of the past, and points towards the bright future. The particular story of Inuit sculpture is one that speaks of the history of the Inuit people; it is a new, visual form of storytelling. Today that story also suggests that sculpture carving is ever changing to adapt to new influences upon Inuit culture and society, and continually adapting to meet modern market influences.

The contemporary Inuit art movement began as a commercial venture. The sculpture market is an operation that spans the whole of Nunavut (formerly of the Northwest Territories), and trickles down toward the south via multiple channels. Thanks to the expanse of the Inuit art

network, these works exist in art collections all over our globe.

Today the stories Inuit carvings tell are not always the traditional legends of the prehistoric and historic Inuit ancestors. These ancestors were the Dorset and Thule people, who inhabited the northern territories of Canada, almost entirely isolated from the rest of the world, until the late 18th century. Inuit art of today tells of a nomadic hunting people who, since the 1950s, have been changed by the modernity of western society, they are settled in modern homes and villages, and are building their own identity in the context of a new way of life and a new territory—Nunavut.

Looking at Tommy Takpani's *Bear* (IN700) or Pootoogook Jaw's *Spirit Dancer* (IN654), it is easy to imagine an idealized Inuit experience. Memories of living on the land endure, yet the younger Inuit generations have known only a modern existence. They have never hunted on dogsleds, never built an igloo camp, never moved their home to follow the caribou herds in summer months. Inuit today are concerned with the issues of modern society: how to make a living, gain

access to healthcare and education, and overcome social issues such as domestic unrest and drug and alcohol addiction. Contemporary Inuit sculptors have different ways of grappling with two conflicting identities: one of the past, and one of the present within the context of an unknown future.

In the new contemporary sculpture, stone hunters hunt stone bears, walrus, caribou, and whales; stone mothers carry



Tommy Takpani (Cape Dorset)
BEAR | Soapstone
5 x 9 x 3" | IN700

“Back in the 1980s I was asking myself, ‘How will I make art?’ It didn’t make sense to me to carve scenes of traditional life because I was not there, so I began to carve from my own experiences—both happy and sad.”

— ARTIST OVILOO TUNNILLIE ¹

their children and work leather and tapestry; stone shamans communicate with other worlds. These images recall a past closely tied to the land and sea, independent of the trappings of southern culture. Artworks with these “traditional” subjects help to record the history of when the Inuit lived off the land, and in recent years these images have been inspiring a renewed pride and desire to preserve traditional Inuit culture. Contemporary sculpture also shows men on snowmobiles and ATVs, and illustrates the integration of southern society into the Inuit

identity with carved items such as desks, chairs, and guitars.

Art making in Nunavut is an occupation rarely idealized or romanticized as it is in the “South.” “Inuit existence has always been about survival.”ⁱⁱ Sculpture making started as a modern mode of survival. Carving art sculptures requires hard work and skill, and is rewarded with funds that allow artists to generate income. Artists can have homes, vehicles for transportation, buy supplies from the South like food and sculpting tools, and buy or quarry stone for continued production. Many artists, when asked about the artistic process or their inspiration to create sculpture, say that they carve stone as an alternative to hunting for food, or working the few jobs available in construction or mines.

The most famous and successful artist community in Nunavut is Cape Dorset, a small settlement on the southwestern tip of Baffin Island. Its sculptures are known for their exceptional craftsmanship, artistry, and style. Of the many art making communities in the Inuit territory, the confluence of Cape



**Tupilak
Whalebone
7 x 1 ½ x 1" | IN642**

**Tupilak
Whalebone
4 ½ x 1 ¼ x ½" | IN640**

**Tupilak
Whalebone
5 x 2 ¼ x 2" | IN641**

Dorset’s unique historical development and geographic situation prepared it for particular artistic excellence.

The art of carving is a longstanding tradition of the Cape Dorset region, practiced long before the Thule ancestors of today’s Inuit migrated from the West in 1000 CE. The prehistoric Dorset people, who hunted the eastern coasts of north Canada from roughly 500 BCE until around 1400 CE, practiced an early tradition of object carving, though it is suspected there was no word for or concept of “art” as we think of it today. Artifacts from this region reveal great attention to the craftsmanship of small hand

tools in ivory, bone, and sometimes stone. Among the small artifacts archaeologists have found are also small, figurative ivory carvings thought to have been used in religious or spiritual ceremonies by early shamans. These small masks and figurines show intricately carved humans, animals, and talismans. They may have looked similar to the tupilaks from Greenland in this exhibition (IN640, IN641, and IN642).

The carving tradition of the Inuit ancestors endured for hundreds of years, and when European explorers encountered Cape Dorset and its Inuit peoples in the 1770s, the Inuit traded small carved toys, knives, tools, and figurines with them. Early carving trade and market-style interaction with visitors to the Cape Dorset area continued through the mid-20th century, when small carvings were sold as tourist souvenirs.

The arrival of James Houston to Cape Dorset in 1949 heralded the beginning of contemporary Inuit sculpture as known today, and as exhibited in museums and galleries



Noah Jaw (Cape Dorset)
KAYAKER | Soapstone
4 x 15 x 5" | IN653

including Pucker Gallery. The influence of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, established in 1960, on the art community of Cape Dorset cannot be overstated. The Co-op's focus on art was first nurtured by Houston, and was further developed by its second director, Terry Ryan. These two southern artists encouraged the Inuit community to make carvings as art for sale, taught and developed a vibrant printmaking studio, and with the Co-op developed a market, and sales and distribution system that allowed Cape Dorset artists to make substantial livings. The Co-op's activity, led by Houston and Ryan, allowed artists to develop their own skills and styles in a supportive, enthusiastic, and encouraging community. Oftentimes only the Co-op's resources allowed artists access to raw stone material and tools needed for carving. This nurturing environment built primarily by Houston fostered the individual artists who would become the masters of modern Inuit sculpture, including Kenjouak Ashevak, Kiawak Ashoona, Osuitok Ipeelee, Nuna Parr (whose *Walrus*, IN643, can be seen in this exhibition), Paulassie Pootoogook, and Oviloo Tunnillie. Stories of and memorials to these legendary carvers have themselves been immortalized in stone on Baffin Island.

It is from these masters that the younger generation of artists learned their skills. Sculptors of Cape Dorset, and many Inuit regions, commonly learn the art from their parents and relatives. Noah Jaw (*Kayaker*, IN653), Ashevak Adla (*Walrus*, IN664), Ashoona Ashoona (*Bear*, IN690), Qiatsuq Pootoogook (*Transformation*, IN662), and others, are all children or relatives of great Cape Dorset carvers. Perhaps due to the unusually supportive and encouraging community, and distinct from other Inuit carving communities, Cape Dorset artists work independently and are often recognized for their individual carving accomplishments and unique styles. This is much more reminiscent of the "southern" figure of the exalted individual

artist. Individual sculpture styles can be recognized in everything from composition, to the type

of stone used, to subject matter, or even a sculpture's surface finish. All these elements vary widely in Cape Dorset sculpture because the stone resources available specifically to Cape Dorset artists are diverse and versatile, rare among Nunavut regions.

The geography of Baffin Island held large quantities of versatile stone which, while immensely difficult and treacherous to quarry, provided consistent supplies of stone relative to other Nunavut regions. Stone on Baffin Island is most often a soft soapstone, or serpentine, easily carved with hand tools. Serpentine is found in a wide variety of colors and textures, most often of green, gray, and black, and Cape Dorset serpentine is often distinctive for a particular shade of jade-green. White marble is also available on Baffin Island, and artists have begun to use it when they have the necessary power tools to properly carve this much harder stone. Cape Dorset artists use a highly polished and shiny finish on their works, created using oils, wax,



Ashoona Ashoona (Cape Dorset)
BEAR | Soapstone
5 x 4 1/2 x 10" | IN690

sandpapers, steel wool, or seal oil.

The specific block of stone dictates each sculpture's visual properties. Artists pay close attention to and respect the stone. They let the stone's particular characteristics dictate the form of the work by following mineral lines or veins, incorporating or using cracks to inform compositional decisions,

or allowing the elements of a sculpture to be thin or thick depending on the internal

structure and density of the stone. Baffin Island serpentine is of such a density as to be workable yet strong, a combination that Cape Dorset artists use to full advantage.

Versatile carving stone allows for versatile craftsmanship; therefore Cape Dorset sculpture is recognizable by a few distinct visual properties made possible by the stone. Complex compositions, like those made by Pudlalik Shaa (IN685) and Peter Kakee (IN665), allow walrus to dance and birds to take flight. Reduction, simplification, abstraction, and streamlining stone to create slender structures allows a greater use of negative space than in sculpture from Baker Lake, for example. Because of this, Cape Dorset artists can attempt more communicative poses to evoke humor, valor, and emotionally evocative scenes. The vast majority of Inuit sculpture is always "about" something; through their creative techniques Cape Dorset artists can adeptly tell stories and communicate complex ideas through their sculptures. Composition and content are never separate; form directly relates to a sculpture's meaning. Perhaps because of this, Cape Dorset artists practice a stylized realism and naturalism that is at once elegant and refined, yet also creative and innovative.

The Inuit form of naturalism treats "realism" as a flexible term, referring to realistic depiction as well as portrayals of events, people or supernatural elements as though they were real. To



Ashevak Adla (Cape Dorset)
WALRUS
 5 x 11 x 4" | IN664

look into an Inuit sculpture's eyes is to read an expression that directly communicates an animal's state of being, or a human's frame of mind at that carved instant, though each feather or eyelash are not individually delineated. Artist and Inuit scholar Ingo Hessel observes, "No matter what activity the carved figure is engaged in, something about it will be true."ⁱⁱⁱ

The revered reception Inuit sculpture consistently receives is a testament to its enduring legacy as cultural record and entrancing visual art. Cape Dorset served as the artistic birthplace for Inuit sculpture, and thanks to multiple factors, Cape Dorset has emerged as the artistic and economic center of the movement. Its environment nurtured its artistic community such that as time passes, Cape Dorset artists appear more and more like the artists of the South, with recognized names, styles, exhibitions, accolades, and markets. These artists defy curators and galleries who wrestle with how to approach contemporary Inuit art.

It might be argued that Inuit sculpture is in fact the most true contemporary art, one where creativity and commercial enterprise exist side by side, in open dialogue. Curators, galleries, and museums should pay close attention as artists from Cape Dorset continue to evolve, reacting to and sculpting their ever-changing way of life. Just as their relatives achieved remarkable innovation in sculpting, these artists may achieve

innovation in the methods of exhibition and export of their artworks. Inuit sculptors now have the opportunity to sculpt the next chapter in their collective story. —ZOE LITSIOS

Zoe Litsios, Pucker Gallery intern, received her Bachelor's degree in Art History and Italian Studies, with a concentration in Museum Studies, from Smith College and has been the Exhibitions Manager at the Portsmouth Museum of Art for two years.

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¹ Susan Gustavison, *Northern Rock* (Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1999) 68.

² Ingo Hessel, Dieter Hessel, and George Swinton, *Inuit Art: An Introduction* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003) 189.

³ Hessel, Hessel, and Swinton, *Inuit Art*, 77.

⁴ Hessel, Hessel, and Swinton, *Inuit Art*, 189.



Qiatuq Pootoogook (Cape Dorset)
TRANSFORMATION | Soapstone
9 ½ x 15 ½ x 9 ½" | IN662

“Since Inuit art is not a Western art form, it should be treated by different aesthetic and other criteria, but given today’s ideological minefields, curators choose a course at their peril. To discuss Inuit art in terms of Western concepts of style and art history is to be accused of ethnocentrism and cultural assimilation; yet to treat Inuit art separately from Canadian art is to be accused of ghettoizing it and pandering to political correctness. The issues are further complicated since Inuit art is more or less a contemporary art form and not a ‘traditional’ one, and since it is created almost purely for the consumption of the culture that studies it.”^{iv}



Davie Atchealak (Iqaluit)
DRUM DANCER | Soapstone
21 x 14 x 9" | IN644



Sukkaluk Akesuk (Cape Dorset)
NARWHAL | Soapstone
4 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 3" | IN661



Hicks
Whalebone
24 x 22 x 14" | IN639



Pitseolak Niviaksi (Cape Dorset)
WALRUS | Soapstone
9 1/2 x 5 x 15 1/2" | IN645



Noah Kelly (Cape Dorset)
WALKING BEAR | Soapstone
4 1/2 x 14 x 5" | IN648



Isaac Ohotuk (Cape Dorset)
WHALE FAMILY | Soapstone
 5 x 20 x 12" | IN705



Etidloie Petaulassie (Cape Dorset)
BIRD | Soapstone
 7 x 5 x 7" | IN681



Peter Sevoga (Baker Lake)
MOTHER AND CHILD | Basalt
 13 x 11 x 7" | IN670



Kelly Qimirpik (Cape Dorset)
DANCING WALRUS | Soapstone
 15 x 8 x 6" | IN660



Etulu Etidloie (Cape Dorset)
LOON | Soapstone
 9 x 4 1/2 x 16" | IN646



Etidloie Petaulassie (Cape Dorset)
LOON | Soapstone
 8 x 12 x 5" | IN651



Etidloie Petaulassie (Cape Dorset)
BIRD | Soapstone
 5 x 10 x 4 1/2" | IN652



Pitseoak Qimirpik (Cape Dorset)
MUSKOX | Soapstone
 4 x 3 x 6" | IN689



Bazil Hitaneq (Baker Lake)
MOTHER AND CHILD | Soapstone
 11 x 10 x 4" | IN669



Johnny Lee Pudlat (Cape Dorset)
TWO WALRUSES | Soapstone
 6 x 11 x 13" | IN668



Jutai Toonoo (Cape Dorset)
DEPRESSED MAN | Soapstone
 14 x 9 ½ x 7" | RP1



Joe Sugluk (Cape Dorset)
MAN WITH PIPE | Quartz
 9 ½ x 7 ½ x 4 ½" | IN663



Siutiapik Ragee (Cape Dorset)
PROWLING BEAR | Soapstone
 5 x 10 x 6" | IN649



EMBRACE | Soapstone
19 x 11 ½ x 7" | RP6



Pudlalik Shaa (Cape Dorset)
DANCING WALRUS | Soapstone
7 ½ x 6 ½ x 2" | IN685



Cape Dorset
DANCING BEAR | Soapstone
8 x 5 x 2" | IN692



Kelly Qimirpik (Cape Dorset)
WALRUS | Soapstone
 10 x 9 x 8" | IN667



Peter Kakee (Cape Dorset)
OWL
 9 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 3" | IN665



Sukkeluk Akesuk (Cape Dorset)
NARWHAL
 8 x 12 x 4" | IN666



Johnnysa Mathewsie (Cape Dorset)
OWL | Soapstone
 9 x 6 x 1 1/2" | IN647



Nujalia Tunnillie (Cape Dorset)
DANCING BEAR | Soapstone
 15 1/2 x 7 x 8 1/2" | IN659



Etulu Etidloie (Cape Dorset)
LOON | Soapstone
 6 x 12 x 3 1/2" | IN650



Pea Michael (Kimmirut)
HUNTER | Soapstone
16 ¾ x 4 ½ x 17 ¾" | RP9



Ashevak Tunnillie (Cape Dorset)
BEAR | Soapstone
7 ½ x 6 x 14" | RP7



Peter Sevoga (Baker Lake)
MAN | Basalt
 8 ½ x 8 ½ x 3 ½" | IN675



Simon Killiktee (Kimmirut)
MUSKOX | Soapstone
 5 x 10 x 3 ½" | IN682



Pitseolak Koperqualuq (Cape Dorset)
INUKSHUK | Soapstone
 13 ½ x 7 x 4" | IN671



A. Simeoni (Cape Dorset)
INUKSHUK | Soapstone
 13 x 9 x 2" | IN672



Ning Ashoona (Cape Dorset)
INUKSHUK | Soapstone
 15 x 7 x 7" | IN673



Noo Atsiq (Cape Dorset)
INUKSHUK | Soapstone
 12 x 8 1/2 x 4 1/2" | IN674



Ashevak Tunillie
(Cape Dorset)
BEAR | Soapstone
 8 x 6 x 17" | IN679



J. Adamie (Iqaluit)
CARIBOU | Soapstone
 8 x 14 ½ x 3" | IN699



Kaka Ashoona (Cape Dorset)
RECLINING WALRUS | Soapstone
 7 x 11 x 6" | IN687



Joanassie Manning (Cape Dorset)
CARIBOU | Soapstone
 6 ½ x 11 x 3 ½" | IN680



Etidloe Petaulassie (Cape Dorset)
LOON | Soapstone
 7 x 13 x 3 3/4" | IN678



Ilkoo Angutikjuak (Clyde River)
BEAR | Quartz
 12 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 4" | RP2



Peter Kakee (Cape Dorset)
LOON | Soapstone
 10 1/2 x 9 x 4 1/2" | IN691

Pudlalik Shaa (Cape Dorset)
TRANSFORMATION | Soapstone
 12 x 6 x 9" | IN697



Matt Tunnillie (Cape Dorset)
STANDING BEAR | Soapstone
 4 x 3 x 8" | IN684



Joohnny Lee Pudlat (Cape Dorset)
CARIBOU | Soapstone
 10 x 15 x 7" | IN658



Isaac Ohotuk (Cape Dorset)
BELUGA FAMILY | Soapstone
4 ½ x 9 x 10" | IN701



Isaac Ohotuk (Cape Dorset)
WHALE FAMILY | Soapstone
3 x 8 x 10 ½" | IN702



Egeechiak Ikkidluak (Kimmirut)
WALRUS | Soapstone
13 ½ x 11 x 6" | IN694



Egeesiak Shoo (Cape Dorset)
WALRUS | Soapstone
9 ½ x 5 ½ x 7 ¼" | IN696



Pitseolak Koperqualuq (Cape Dorset)
INUKSHUK | Soapstone
 13 x 10 x 3 1/4" | IN704



Pitseolak Koperqualuq (Cape Dorset)
INUKSHUK | Soapstone
 11 x 6 1/4 x 3" | IN703



Joanassie Manning (Cape Dorset)
MAN FISHING | Soapstone
 8 1/2 x 6 x 5" | IN693



HUNTER | Soapstone
 12 x 13 1/2 x 9" | RP10



MAN TUGGING ROPE | Soapstone
13 x 7 ½ x 4" | RP4



SPEAR FISHER | Bone marrow
11 ½ x 12 ½ x 8 ½" | RP5



Etuk Tikivik (Kimmirut)
MUSKOX | Soapstone
7 x 12 x 5" | IN695



Peter Parr (Cape Dorset)
WALRUS | Soapstone
8 ½ x 7 x 6" | IN698



WAITING BIRD | Bone
13 ½ x 13 x 12" | RP11



OWL | Browned bone
8 x 11 ¼ x 5 ¾" | RP3



TRANSFORMATION | Soapstone
12 x 11 x 6 ¼"
RP8



Archie Ishulutak (Iqaluit)
HUNTER | Soapstone
12 x 10 x 7" | IN656



ART. FRIENDSHIP. GRATITUDE.

SINCE 1974, WE HAVE EXHIBITED the art of the Inuit and are fortunate to have Theo Waddington as our colleague, mentor and guide. His admiration for and knowledge of Inuit carvings has enriched and blended with our own. Theo's family has been involved with fine art for several generations. George Waddington, Theo's uncle, opened Waddington Galleries in Montreal in 1959 and Theo took over the gallery in 1966. He later opened galleries in Toronto, New York, Boca Raton and Palm Beach and in 1976 moved to London to operate Waddington Galleries, which was founded by his grandfather. Since 2000, Theo has been working as a private dealer in England and Ireland and remains passionate about Inuit art. Theo is a remarkable friend and we are grateful to have worked together for nearly four decades. Ten exhibitions later, our commitment to sharing these important works of art continues. It has been and remains a great joy. Thank you.

—BERNIE AND SUE PUCKER

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Jaweie Akavak (Cape Dorset)
MOTHER AND CHILD | Soapstone
24 x 9 x 10" | IN657

PUCKER GALLERY

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Inuit Carvings: A NEW STORY

DATES:

8 September through 8 October 2012

OPENING RECEPTION:

8 September 2012

3:00 to 6:00 PM

The public is invited to attend.

The artists will not be present.

Nuna Parr (Cape Dorset)
WALRUS | Soapstone
15 ½ x 11 x 10" | IN643