

# Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Contemporary Inuit Drawing

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## Abstract

The importance of the artist's voice in art historical scholarship is essential as we emerge from post-colonial and feminist cultural theory and its impact on curation, art history, and visual culture. Inuit art has moved from its origins as an art representing an imaginary Canadian identity and a yearning for a romantic pristine North to a practice that presents Inuit identity in their new reality. This socially conscious contemporary work that touches on the environment, religion, pop culture, and alcoholism proves that Inuit artists can respond and are responding to the changing realities in the North. On the other side of the coin, the categories that have held Inuit art to its origins must be reconsidered and integrated into the categories of contemporary art, Indigenous or otherwise, in museums that consider work produced in the past twenty years to be contemporary as such. Holding Inuit artists to a not-so-distant past is limiting for the artists producing art today and locks them in a history that may or may not affect their work directly.

This dissertation examines this critical shift in contemporary Inuit art, specifically drawing, over the past twenty years, known as the contemporary period. The second chapter is a review of the community of Kinngait and the role of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative in the dissemination of arts and crafts. Chapter three is a review of the literature in the field in of writing on Inuit art and exposes the dearth of material in this area of study. Chapters four and five are each Case Studies on two prominent female artists from Kinngait. Numerous key drawings of two third-generation Kinngait women, Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook, form the basis of each case study from which examples, analyses, and observations are based on the drawings and first

person interviews. These women are critical in bringing the medium of drawing and contemporary renewed content to a larger audience. These two artists were chosen for in-depth analysis because their work has most dramatically bridged the solitudes of Inuit art and internationally recognized contemporary art. By focusing on these artists from Kinngait, I underscore the unbroken lineage between Ashoona and Pootoogook's ground-breaking contributions to what is known as the "Dorset experiment," which first linked the market economy in the North to avant-garde art practice over fifty years ago. Chapter Six is an overview of the exhibition, criticism and dissemination of contemporary Inuit art, focusing on the period beginning in 1990. This chapter proposes a variety of scholarly voices in the field of exhibition and criticism, both Inuit, Indigenous and other. Conclusions are drawn in the final chapter that encourages the addition of Inuit voices to the discussion, rather than relegate the artists to the role of silent partners in a complicated trade agreement between the co-operative system, dealers, and middlemen.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Inuit art has a uniquely controversial position in Canadian art history. This is because many historians and art historians, anthropologists, academics, curators and even museum directors have failed to legitimate it as authentic art practice, opting to define it instead as a successful exercise in craft for the souvenir market. Because of the origins of Inuit art produced for markets in the South, it continues to be understood as a self-contained genre, segregated from mainstream contemporary art and treated like a craft, or alternatively, as an accidental repository of Inuit cultural expression fuelling contemporary efforts for Indigenous sovereignty. When viewed within these opposing critical frameworks the contributions of Inuit artists are excluded from critical recognition within global contemporary art practices.

As a result of the limited frameworks of appreciation for Inuit art, Canadian museums — with rare exception — have allocated secondary areas within their buildings, often in basements, for displays and exhibitions of Inuit art. These galleries are usually separated from other work, including other Indigenous art, whether historical or contemporary. Only recently, in the last ten years, have curators and scholars who have embraced methodologies that challenge the segregation of Inuit artists in museums and history books by re-examining the sociopolitical context of the emergence of contemporary Inuit art.

In the art history and museum communities, contemporary art is art created anywhere from 20 to 25 years ago to the present, therefore the category “contemporary” is fluid and time-dependent. The Art Gallery of Ontario, for example, considers works less than 20 years old to be

contemporary. Traditional categories of Inuit art seem to follow a different system: the early contemporary or contemporary period for this work begins after World War II (1949) when Inuit artists began making fine art items in addition to arts and crafts items such as dolls, clothing and small sculptures. *Modern* is used interchangeably with *contemporary* in reference to Inuit art produced after 1949. This labelling can lead to confusion when art by living Inuit created in the past twenty years is integrated into the mainstream contemporary art world causing it to be seen as work of a modern past.

A move toward such integration is exemplified by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, whose director, Marc Mayer, has announced a plan for the integration of Indigenous work, including Inuit, in their exhibitions of contemporary art. This has been seen in their last two biennales of contemporary art, *Shine a Light*, 2014, and *Builders*, 2012. These exhibitions highlight recent acquisitions to the contemporary collection at the National Gallery of Canada. *Shine a Light* and *Builders* marked a shift in the presentation of contemporary Inuit art in Canada. First, Inuit art was included in the presentation as contemporary art produced in the past twenty years. Second, Inuit art was included as an Indigenous voice among other contemporary Indigenous voices in the exhibition. The gallery's acknowledgement of the Indigenous cultural value of Inuit art stands to raise the art's status within a contemporary international art world that currently favours diversity and liminality, and therefore indigeneity.

This dissertation is the result of ten years of tracking the development of drawing in Nunavut, extensive interviews and correspondence with artists and cultural workers in Kinngait (Cape Dorset) and at the Kinngait Studios (the "art" arm of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative), and my curation of numerous exhibitions of Inuit artists from this community through a contemporary curatorial lens.

My interest in Inuit drawing — as opposed to sculpture or the preparatory drawings for the annual Cape Dorset print run — was sparked during my first curatorial post at the Art Gallery of Guelph (1992–98). That museum has a collecting focus on contemporary Inuit drawings, particularly from Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake). My work involved a research trip in 1993 to Qamani'tuaq, where I was astounded by the unexpected content of some of the work I found there. Drawings, in particular, were riddled with references to contemporary urban (and non-Inuit) culture. I recall drawings by Ruth Annaqtuusi Tulurialik (b. 1934) that included figures such as Santa Claus, the children's character Barney, and the Inuit superhero Super Shamou. Ten years later, while working at the Power Plant Art Gallery in Toronto (2003–2006), I was introduced to the drawings of emerging artists Annie Pootoogook and Shuvina Ashoona, two among the many artists, such as Kananginak Pootoogook, Ohotaq Mikkigak, Kenojuak Ashevak, Papiara Tukiki, and Mayoreak Ashoona, who, at that time all worked diligently in Kinngait Studios. These curatorial visits greatly impacted me on a personal, professional and aesthetic level.

As with any area of deep research this dissertation took many twists and turns. The core of my curatorial work has always required deep involvement with each artist and their work. This dissertation, throughout its many permutations, has consistently hinged on my fascination with the drawings of two first cousins from Kinngait, Shuvina Ashoona and the late Annie Pootoogook. Their work is the foundation of this paper, from which examples, analyses, and observations are based. These two artists were chosen for in-depth analysis through a chronological examination of a series of key drawings by each artist, interviews, comprehensive biographies, and exhibition histories, because I feel their work has most dramatically bridged the solitudes of Inuit art and internationally recognized contemporary art. The interviewing process

involved spending much time with each artist. Most of the interviews were conducted with Annie prior to her move to Ottawa in 2008 until it became impossible to reach her after her complicated and sad separation from her art community. I have visited Shuvinai Ashoona for ten years and with her trust and the support and education from my colleagues both in Toronto and Cape Dorset have managed to find ways to deal with her deep issues with communication and sometimes incoherent use of language to allow her to effectively interpret her drawings in her own words.

Thus, this dissertation examines the critical shift in contemporary Inuit art, specifically drawing, over the past twenty years, the contemporary period, and its effects on the trajectory of the production, distribution, promotion and understanding of art of the Inuit. Numerous key drawings by Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook form the basis of a case study from which examples, analyses, and conclusions are based. These women are critical in bringing the medium of drawing and renewed contemporary content to a larger audience. By focusing on these artists from Kinngait, I underscore the unbroken lineage between Ashoona and Pootoogook's groundbreaking contributions and what is known as the "Dorset experiment," which first linked the market economy in the North to avant-garde art practice over fifty years ago.

As a result of the two case studies that profile Annie and Shuvinai this paper in turn expanded to an examination of the cultural entanglements of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative and the critical shift in contemporary Inuit art, specifically drawing, over the past twenty years. In order to contextualize the unique circumstances of the hamlet of Kinngait Chapter 2 presents an overview of the community of Kinngait and the role of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative in the dissemination of arts and crafts focusing on the prolific output and

experimental nature of drawing and printmaking in the studios established by James Houston and further developed by Terry Ryan, Jimmy Manning and William Ritchie, over the past fifty years.

Cape Dorset, now referred to by its Inuktitut name, Kinngait,<sup>1</sup> boasts more artists per capita than any other city in Canada: one quarter of its labour force is employed in the visual arts.<sup>2</sup> It is world renowned for its production of fine art prints, which have been produced annually since 1959. The artistic productivity can be attributed to the success of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, also founded in 1959, which has earned an international reputation for the exquisite stone cut prints, etchings, lithographs, drawings, and carvings by its Inuit artist-members. Compared to other Nunavut and Nunavik communities,<sup>3</sup> Kinngait has the strongest and longest tradition of co-operative art-making in the North.<sup>4</sup> Co-operative art-making has gone on in many of the northern communities whose economies are based on a strong co-operative system of commerce.

It is essential to understand the concept of a shared economy that is the basis of the development of the co-operative system that has operated over the past fifty years in various communities at various times throughout the North. The Arctic co-operative history records a basic outline in this regard that includes the Inuit, Dene, and Métis people the Arctic co-ops serve. Arctic Co-operatives Limited's website states that:

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<sup>1</sup>Cape Dorset will be referred to by its Inuktitut name, Kinngait, except for historical references, from this point on.

<sup>2</sup> Nunavut Tourism, "Cape Dorset," <http://nunavuttourism.com/regions-communities/cape-dorset>.

<sup>3</sup> "Nunavik" refers to Quebec's Arctic region.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of the co-operative system and the changing economy in the North see Chris Southcott, ed., *Northern Communities Working Together: The Social Economy of Canada's North* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); or Marybelle Mitchell, *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism Among Canadian Inuit* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

The first limited contact the aboriginal people of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut had with other cultures took place more than 300 years ago when European explorers ventured into the Canadian Arctic. This first contact was very limited but it was the start of major changes in the way of life of Northerners. Over the next 250 years, our contact increased with explorers, whalers and later, with traders and missionaries.

[After 1949] things began to change very quickly for the Inuit, Dene and Metis people of the Arctic. Health and education services were started in many areas. With these new services and the interest in education, communities began to develop. People that had lived a nomadic life style for thousands of years started to move to the locations where services were available.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s legal businesses were formed and community-owned co-operatives became the first locally owned and controlled business enterprises in our communities. In 2009 the Co-op System celebrated 50 years since the first incorporation of a co-operative. The co-operative principles and structure that we adopted in our new businesses were very close to that of our sharing culture.

Our members did not want people from outside their communities coming in and establishing businesses to provide services; we wanted to develop the services ourselves. We also wanted to keep the profits from our businesses and use those them to develop new and better services for our members and provide employment within our communities. The Co-operative Model was the best way for us to meet these goals.

Our traditional way of life was often the basis of starting our co-operatives. Arts and craft production, fur harvesting and commercial fisheries are examples of the traditional activities that were the basis of the early co-operatives.

Later, our co-operatives expanded into retail stores to meet the consumer needs of our member/owners. We became involved in operating hotels to create employment for community members and to retain control over the tourism sector. Co-operatives also

became involved in operating post offices, freight hauling operations, airline agencies and coffee shops. Co-operatives became involved in residential and commercial real estate ventures. In recent years, co-operatives have become involved in providing cable television services in many communities in the Arctic.<sup>5</sup>

Art-making initiatives or arts-and-crafts initiatives are money-making ventures that operate under the umbrella of the co-operatives. Cape Dorset, Holman Island, Cape Pangnirtung, Povungnituk, and Baker Lake all had government-sponsored arts and crafts programs intended to encourage community economic development. The trajectory of the development of carving and printmaking activities in these communities was uneven.<sup>6</sup> Some attribute the relative strength of the West Baffin Co-operative in Cape Dorset to persistent and effective management and the continued support of the development of a solid arts sector within the structure by the Co-op's board of directors. The history of the Sanavik Co-operative of Baker Lake, for example, is quite different. A formal arts program was instituted in Baker Lake in 1963, yet Sanavik was not incorporated until 1971. "From 1961 to 1971, eleven different government-sponsored crafts officers worked in Baker Lake, each for a short period of time."<sup>7</sup> Challenges such as a sustainable workforce, interest by the community, weather, meeting basic needs, and lack of facilities plague the North.

The continuous nurturing of talent allowed the artists of Cape Dorset to be prodigious. In addition, the long-standing community support for the West Baffin Co-operative Association was an essential element of the Co-op's success. Currently, the West Baffin Co-operative:

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<sup>5</sup> Arctic Co-operatives Ltd., "Our Story," <http://www.arcticco-op.com/about-acl-history.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Alsop, "The History of Baker Lake (Sanavik) Co-operative," working paper (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2010), <http://www.learningcentre.coop/resource/history-baker-lake-sanavik-co-operative#artsandcrafts>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Offers retail, Yamaha sales, property and other rentals, and some contracting. The arts and crafts sector of the West Baffin Co-operative remains a strong and vital segment of the local economy. In 1978, after several years of jointly managing a marketing agency with a number of other Co-ops in the system, the West Baffin Co-operative ventured out on its own, and established its own marketing division, known as *Dorset Fine Arts* in Toronto. Sales of graphics and sculpture are now facilitated to participating galleries through this southern office. Cape Dorset art is world-renowned and easily identifiable.<sup>8</sup>

The formation of Dorset Fine Arts in 1978 connected the artists of Kinngait to galleries and museums. The tireless work of art dealers such as Budd and Patricia Feheley at Feheley Fine Arts, Marion Scott, Judy Kardosh and Robert Kardosh at Marion Scott Gallery, and Avrom Isaacs at the Inuit Gallery in Canada committed to exhibiting and selling Inuit art to a broader public and museum collections has helped secure many of the careers of artists from Kinngait, most notably Kenojuak Ashevak.

Due to the stability and longevity of the management of the Co-op, now referred to as Kinngait Studios, four generations of Inuit artists have been able to develop, hone, and sell their art in Canada and around the world. At Kinngait Studios artists are often referred to by their generation. The first generation are those who spent their formative years on the land and were members of the core group of artists who were involved in establishing the Co-operative. The second generation are those artists who were born on the land but lived in the community most of their lives; these are often relatives of artists of the first generation. The third generation consists of artists who have lived their entire lives in the community, and there is an emerging fourth generation of artists who have lived their lives with television and access (albeit limited)

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative see Jennifer Alsop's working paper at <http://www.learningcentre.coop/resource/history-cape-dorset-and-west-baffin-co-operative>.

to the internet that has only recently networked their community with the rest of the North and the world. Some families, such as the Pootoogooks, Ashoonas, and Ashevaks, are represented in every generation of artists in Kinngait.

Rather than scripting a history of the development of Inuit art or the contribution of the co-operative system to art-making in North, which has already been done by a number of other scholars and curators (e.g., Crandall, Mitchell, or Hessel),<sup>9</sup> I focus my exploration on the unique and specific circumstances of the community of Kinngait and how these circumstances have shaped and changed the landscape of contemporary Inuit art.<sup>10</sup> In Chapter 3 I review the literature on the topic, which reveals the dearth of scholarship on contemporary Inuit art.

Chapter 4 is an overview and synthesis of the history of exhibition, criticism and dissemination of contemporary Inuit art, focusing on the period beginning in 1990. This chapter proposes multiple scholarly voices in the field of exhibition and criticism, both Inuit, Indigenous and other. I outline the history of the inclusion of Inuit art in Canadian and global art exhibitions and evaluate what that inclusion means for the longevity and future of contemporary Inuit art in Canada.

Chapters 5 and 6 each consist of a case study that reveals the artistic evolution of my chosen individual artists who shattered colonial expectations of indigeneity within the so-called “Southern” market. Artists Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook have expanded the place of Inuit art in Canadian contemporary art history. Through a chronological examination of a series of key works by each artist, comprehensive biographies, and exhibition histories, I explore the

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<sup>9</sup> Richard C. Crandall, *Inuit Art: A History*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland, 2000); Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1998); Mitchell, *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite*.

<sup>10</sup> The term “contemporary Inuit art” here refers to art from the 1990s on.

effect of their work on the mainstream international contemporary art world. Conclusions are drawn in the final chapter that encourages the addition of Inuit voices to the discussion, rather than relegate the artists to the role of silent partners in a complicated trade agreement between the co-operative system, dealers, and middlemen.

Before examining the contemporary moment in art-making in Kinngait, as I do in my case studies of Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook, it is essential to address a settler-colonial art-historical insistence on the individual production of Inuit artists. In the past a particular cultural hegemony was implied by the understanding of Inuit art as a collective activity rather than an endeavour of individuals who, today, are participating in an avant-garde art practice. My approach is to examine the work of Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona as individuals rather than as part of a collective phenomenon of “Inuit drawing.”<sup>11</sup> This is in resistance to the study of Inuit art that continues to interpret Inuit artists as a homogenous group rooted in a not-so-distant past rather than the present. Because this investigation is grounded in the specificity of Kinngait and the drawings of Shuvinai and Annie, the influences of the past, the conditions of the present, and possibilities of the future must be discussed within the context of the fluid and changing categories of contemporary international art.

As will be seen, an in-depth investigation into the work of Shuvinai and Annie brings to light many factors related to the evolution of the art industry in Kinngait. As noted, these two women have effectively bridged the solitudes of Inuit art and contemporary international art. They succeeded, in part, because they live in a time of increasing connectivity between the North and the South. Images, people, and information are more accessible than before offering

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<sup>11</sup> These artists will be referred to by their first names in this dissertation as there are many artists in the Ashoona and Pootoogook clans that share their surnames.

increased opportunities for exposure of the work. These artists have embraced the time in which they live and have produced a body of work that is original, conceptually challenging, and timely. They have also had the opportunity and the courage to work in the larger formats that are now available at the Kinngait Studios, formats larger than the manageable and transportable domestic size of 51 x 66 cm that was commonly used prior to the late 1980s. In so doing Annie and Shuvinai accommodate the growing interest of museums and international art fairs and biennales in exhibiting monumental contemporary drawing. Their large works sit comfortably in museum and gallery exhibitions and among other large format works by contemporary artists from all over the world.

I consider how Shuvinai and Annie's drawings have been curated, facilitated, selected, purchased, and exhibited and documented historiographically. I explore how and why they are on the fringes of most discussions of Inuit art yet are generally heralded within international circles of contemporary art and global indigeneity. Both artists respect and have studied the work of their Elders and yet have upset the status quo by portraying content that is immediately recognizable as "Inuit" and narrative while being part of the contemporary moment marking them as unique in the community. Opportunities for Inuit voices in advanced in-depth appreciation of Inuit art from within the culture are slowly developing and will, in time, be an essential contribution to the literature on Inuit art. In tandem with this observation and aspiration for the opportunity for engagement with Inuit scholars, cultural workers, and advocates I also believe that scholarship from other positions is vital to opening up spaces of self-definition, embracing historical possibilities, and creating conversations both within and without the specific context of Inuit art. The continued production and circulation of Inuit art, or any art, can

only benefit from consideration within a pluralist aesthetic domain. The conversation must be inclusive and not restrictive and expansive and not exclusionary.

## Chapter 2

### Kinngait and the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative

Dorset Island is a part of the Foxe Peninsula and lies in close proximity to the south-west shore of Baffin Island. The Foxe Peninsula was named in 1631 after Captain Luke Foxe, an English explorer in search of the Northwest Passage. Cape Dorset was named after one of Foxe's financial sponsors, Edward Sackville, Earl of Dorset. Dorset Island is beautiful with rolling hills and a 243-metre high mountain, or “cape,” that is part of the Kinngait range. “*Kinngait*” means “high mountain” in Inuktitut.<sup>12</sup>

It was not until the mid-19th century that whalers and missionaries began to visit the area. In 1913 the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) set up a trading post in Cape Dorset and small outpost camps slowly began to grow around it because of the lure of the southern goods that were being distributed. Between 1938 and 1953, Anglican and Roman Catholic missions were constructed in Kinngait along with a school and a number of permanent homes.

The modern period, understood as the period after 1948 until 2000, marks the beginning of the Canadian government's efforts to move Inuit people from life in small nomadic family groups of up to about thirty people to permanent settlement in communities such as Kinngait. A government report outlines some of the reasons for the development of communities in the Arctic:

The collapse of the fur trade in the 1930s and consequent lack of employment for Inuit; the low numbers of available caribou, and difficulties experienced in obtaining sufficient

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<sup>12</sup> Bill Gilbert, “Kananginak: Eskimo Audubon,” *Audubon*, 80 (July 1978): 73–87.

food and winter clothing; as well as the lack of government administration in the Arctic and the lack of long-term policy planning for Inuit. Overhunting by European whalers and traders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, combined with the Inuit orientation to commercial trading, resulted in much starvation in Inuit camps when fur prices collapsed in the 1930s, and hunting and trapping failed to provide sufficient resource yields. There were not enough caribou to eat or furs to trade for food at the HBC posts, and what furs Inuit could trap were not worth as much as they had been ten years earlier.<sup>13</sup>

Inuit art, as we know it today, was a colonial solution to this grave environmental and colonial reality. The arts and crafts industry was created as an economic engine for Inuit people, organized by White people, known as *Qallunaat*, who vetted the work produced and sold it to a White audience in the South. To this end:

In 1948 the Canadian Guild of Crafts, based in Montreal, commissioned the young artist James Houston to investigate craft production in Arctic Quebec. He returned with exquisite examples of small scale sculpture which immediately attracted attention in the South. However, the success of Inuit art depended on having reliable distribution to buyers in the South. One of the important factors making this possible at this early date was the existence of the network of Hudson's Bay Company trading posts across the vast Canadian Arctic. While the Guild laid the groundwork and held the first public exhibitions for Inuit small scale sculpture, the Hudson's Bay Company gradually supplemented its mainstay fur trade with the purchase of carvings for resale. This provided the foundation of an Arctic-wide distribution system that would eventually be bolstered by the development of local artist co-operatives.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sarah Bonesteel, "Canada's Relationship with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development," working paper (Ottawa: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016900/1100100016908#chp3>).

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Feheley, "A Perfect Storm: 1948–1953 The Genesis of the Modern Inuit Art Market," *Inuit Art Quarterly*, 27.3 (Fall 2014): 20–21

Inuit art quickly became a national and international phenomenon. As pointed out by anthropologist Nelson Graburn, the “explosion” of art objects from the Arctic since 1950 triggered “one of the ‘cultural miracles’ of the 20th century.”<sup>15</sup> Inuit art was both raw and exquisite to the Western audience. By the early 1950s Inuit art-making was flourishing: distribution was assured; national and international demand was established; and the federal government supported its growth. The market for Inuit art was established just before the onslaught of the vast social and economic changes that would be seen in the next decade as a result of the construction of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, which began in 1954. The DEW Line not only heralded a new era of international communication, but also kick-started the growth of permanent settlements across the Arctic.

In a fortuitous confluence of circumstances, a student who had visited many parts of the North as a young artist, author, and filmmaker named James Houston (1921–2005) played a critical role in the recognition of Inuit art around the world and particularly the introduction of Japanese printmaking techniques to Kinngait. After some years of travelling in the far North, James Houston was posted to Kinngait as a federal service officer in 1954. Once there Houston got to work developing his arts and crafts program. He actively encouraged Inuit to make carvings (sculptures in stone, bone, and ivory) and introduced them to graphic prints. Although his teaching techniques and acts of persuasion, as evidenced by his Eskimo handicrafts instructional booklet, *Sanajuqsag: Eskimo Handicraft Guide Book for Carvers*, are a subject for

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<sup>15</sup> Nelson Graburn, quoted in Kathy M’Closkey and Kevin Manuel, “Commodifying North American Aboriginal Culture: A Canada–US Comparison,” in Julia Harrison and Regina Darnell, eds., *Historicizing Canadian Anthropology* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011): 226.

debate,<sup>16</sup> it remains that Houston was adored and respected by the Inuit artists who came to see him and learn from him. This was due in part to his commanding yet kind manner with Inuit people as well as his ability, though limited, to speak Inuktitut. Houston was also an early proponent of the co-op concept, defined as a “democratically controlled group of co-operative businesses that operate on the values of fairness, equality, self-responsibility and mutual self-help.”<sup>17</sup> Houston maintained that it was essential to establish an arts and crafts studio that could ultimately be managed and operated by Inuit themselves. The co-operative system has been critical to the success and legacy of the artists in Kinngait. Houston lived in Kinngait with his wife Alma and his two sons, Samuel and John, until 1962 when the couple divorced and he moved to New York City where he continued to advocate for Inuit artists. He died in New London, Connecticut, in 2005, at the age of 83.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Co-operative System Realized**

The history of the formation of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative has been thoroughly documented by researcher Jennifer Alsop in 2010. She writes:

In 1958, discussions around the development of a co-operative in Kinngait began in earnest after the printmaking shop began to take off. The “project approach” to co-operative development adopted by the Department of Natural Resources and Northern Development involved presenting project plans to the community after the area economic surveys had been completed, and allowing the community to “accept” or “reject” the

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<sup>16</sup>Heather L. Igloliorte, “Influence and Instruction: James Houston, Sunuyuksuk: Eskimo Handicrafts, and the Formative Years of Contemporary Inuit Art” (MA thesis, Carleton University, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Arctic Co-operatives Ltd. (2007), <http://www.arcticco-op.com/about-acl-mission.htm>. See also Marybelle Mitchell, *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite*, for a detailed analysis.

<sup>18</sup>Heather Igloliorte, “Influence and Instruction: James Houston, Sunuyuksuk: Eskimo Handicrafts, and the Formative Years of Contemporary Inuit Art,” (MA thesis, Carleton University, 2006).

idea. Once approval was given by the community co-op members had to decide upon what aspects of co-operative business to pursue. They decided on a two-fold program. On the one hand, they wanted to encourage community members to participate directly in the economic development of their communities through co-operative ownership. On the other, they sought to build skills development and system sustainability through educational programming for co-operative membership, management and executive.<sup>19</sup>

Board member and artist Kanaginak Pootoogook presented a solution to the problem of managing the growing print program: the co-operative model. He writes:

Our carvings were increasing and there was a collection of prints gathered down south, so with Joanasi Solomoni as interpreter, we learnt more and more about co-ops. I began to think that a co-op would be better than the traders, and as I heard more and more about it I decided that if we could have a co-op we could have two stores here and that would be better, for the prices of things would be lower. A co-op however would help the people even more than the B.T.C [Baffin Trading Company] for now the people were no longer poor and could help themselves through the co-op with carvings and prints.<sup>20</sup>

The Co-op at Kinngait was first incorporated in 1959 as the West Baffin Sports Fishing Co-operative in the hope that sports fishing and tourism would help drive the local economy.

However, the remoteness of Kinngait and the lack of any transportation infrastructure was an impediment to future adventurers. In a twist of fate, the original incorporation documents of the West Baffin Sports Fishing Co-operative were lost somewhere between Ottawa and Kinngait. In

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<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Alsop, “History of Cape Dorset and the West Baffin Co-operative” (working paper, Victoria: University of Victoria, 2010), <http://www.learningcentre.coop/resource/history-cape-dorset-and-west-baffin-co-operative#houston>.

<sup>20</sup> Kanaginak Pootoogook, quoted in Jennifer Alsop, “History of Cape Dorset and the West Baffin Co-operative.”

1961, when the Co-op was reincorporated, it was given a new name: West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Limited (WBEC).

James Houston was already ensconced in the fledgling printmaking studios established in Kinngait and artists were slowly starting to participate in the activities of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op such as drawing and basic printing using sealskin to make stencils and stone-cut. In 1960 another young art student, Terry Ryan, began working at the West Baffin Co-op on a temporary contract as an arts advisor. The 1960s were productive years at the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative for artists who were curious about and interested in participating in the print program. With the support of the Co-op and the opportunity to experiment, the artists from Kinngait seemed to explode onto the Canadian art scene making their art and their vision part of the Canadian consciousness. The year 1967, in particular, was a critical moment when Inuit art caught the imaginations of Canadians. It was the centennial year for Canada. To mark the 100th anniversary of the Confederation the Canadian government began the Order of Canada and Kinngait artist Kenojuak Ashevak was made a member. In the 1967 Cape Dorset Print Collection there were 84 prints by 24 artists (21 of the prints were by Kenojuak Ashevak). The same year the National Gallery of Canada presented an exhibition entitled *Cape Dorset: A Decade of Eskimo Prints and Recent Sculpture* using works from the Department of Indian and Northern Development's (DIAND) collection. The first showing was at the National Gallery and the second in the Canadian pavilion at Expo, where it was accompanied by artists working on sculptures on site.<sup>21</sup> The timing was perfect. The bold graphics, intricate carvings, and artistic

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<sup>21</sup> Richard C. Crandall, *Inuit Art: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 1999), 174–75.

vision of Inuit art in a range of styles coincided neatly with Expo '67 and the celebration of an enriched Canadian identity.

Terry Ryan ended up living in Kinngait for close to thirty years as the Co-op's general manager before moving to Toronto to run the marketing and distribution arm of Dorset Fine Arts in 1983. With the support of his first wife Pat Ryan and later his second wife Leslie Boyd, Ryan worked tirelessly to set up an infrastructure to help Kinngait artists produce and sell their prints, drawings, and sculptures as well as meet visiting artists and cultural workers. Kinngait Studios sourced stone for carvings and managed the complex production of the Cape Dorset Annual Print Release and catalogue that started with the inaugural production of 39 lithographs, stone cut, and copper plate prints in 1959.<sup>22</sup> The WBEC also developed a network of dealers across North America and established Dorset Fine Arts in Toronto as an intermediary between the Co-op and the dealers; and the Co-operative helped organize community visits for artists from the South travelling in the North, and fine arts programs for the benefit of Cape Dorset printmakers, carvers, and other artists.

### **Notes on the Annual Cape Dorset Print Collection**

The Cape Dorset Print Release has annually catalogued collections of between 30 and 60 images as well as numerous commissions and special releases every year since 1959. It has the reputation of being the longest continuously running print studio in Canada.<sup>23</sup> Despite these impressive origins and prolific print output, studio production is slowly changing to allow artists

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<sup>22</sup> To see the images included in the inaugural 1959 Cape Dorset Print Release go to:  
[http://www.waddingtons.ca/uploads/File/pdf/2013/05-06-2013-1959\\_Cape\\_Dorset\\_Prints\\_Catalogue.pdf](http://www.waddingtons.ca/uploads/File/pdf/2013/05-06-2013-1959_Cape_Dorset_Prints_Catalogue.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Dorset Fine Arts, <http://www.dorsetfinearts.com/printmaking/>.

to create and sell drawings as art objects in their own right. The Annual Print Collection is still the main thrust at the studios, which train, mentor, and employ master printers who work for many years with original drawings made by artists in the Co-operative. As Co-operative member-artists, Annie and Shuvinai have been included in many collections, however prints made from their drawings have been less commercially successful as a result of their often unconventional content, content that does not always include stereotypical images of the North, and the fact that many collectors prefer to purchase the original drawings by these artists. The primary market for Inuit prints in Canada and abroad remains highly conservative.

To date, five prints by Annie Pootoogook, beginning in 2005, and twenty prints based on drawings by Shuvinai Ashoona, beginning in 1993, have been included in the Annual Cape Dorset Print Release (see Appendices D and E). In most cases their drawings have been translated into stone cut prints, a method mastered by the print studio in Cape Dorset, in which the master printmakers redraw the print drawing, carve the stone, select the colours, and pull the prints. The artists also work in lithography and intaglio, in which, as the current studio manager William Ritchie explains, “The artist always draws the key images on plates, stones, or mylars, which is the beauty of the medium.”<sup>24</sup>

## **Kinngait Studios Today**

Kinngait Studios serves as a testament to the benefits of consistency for the development of a vital and dynamic environment for art-making. The consistent release of the Cape Dorset Print Collection since 1959 shows the commitment of the studios to maintaining high quality

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<sup>24</sup> William Ritchie, email correspondence with the author, February 23, 2016.

production and nurturing a secure and committed collector base for the collection. Artists from Kinngait have continued to dominate the Inuit art market and there continues to be an active fostering of talent. The co-operative system and strategic planning at the senior management level of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative has certainly contributed to the success of the endeavour. In addition to James Houston, another manager was critical to the stability of the organization: Terry Ryan, who served for thirty years as the general manager of the WBEC, and also had a solid background in the arts, did much to help support the development of the arts sector while maintaining a strong and vibrant co-op.<sup>25</sup> Under Ryan's leadership, between the years 1960 and 1988 as manager and later as distributor, the arts flourished and much emphasis was put on developing and expanding the artists' techniques and visual vocabulary. Following Ryan, Newfoundland artist, printmaker, and photographer William Ritchie, who began his tenure in 1988, has also been a consistent presence for twenty-five years as studio manager and has provided nurturing and support to artists and encouraged emerging artists to spend time and experiment in the Studios. The West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative contributes to the local economy by selling artwork through its art marketing arm, Dorset Fine Arts, in Toronto.

The Inuit art market is slowly changing in response to demands of museums and Kinngait Studios is trying to adapt to meet the changing desires of collectors. Many of the senior collectors are passing away and their art often turns up in the secondary market as auction house collector's lots for sale. New collectors seem to favour drawings over limited edition prints. Large sculptures are often too expensive for private collectors and museum budgets for

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

acquisition of Inuit art are being reduced in many Canadian museums, forcing curators to rely on donations for major purchases.

Another recent change to the Kinngait Studios has been the slow introduction of new artists to the studios. This does not always mean younger artists, as many artists come to the studio during their retirement or to provide extra income to their families once they are no longer working in the home. There is new sense of apathy, however, on the part of young people in Kinngait who, when presented with the opportunity to make art at the Kinngait Studios as a vocation, choose a career that is more stable and provides a regular paycheque instead. Kinngait Studios only purchases finished art on buying days and does not, typically, pay artists a stipend or weekly amount. Changing employment opportunities in the community and increased access to education have opened new work opportunities for residents outside the Studios. Many young adults, a majority of whom are women, are now completing high school and studying with universities or colleges to become teachers, senior care workers, and nurse's aides in the community, which leaves little time between work, child-rearing, housekeeping, and community work to make art. Many carvers seem to be rushing production to coincide with paydays or tourist arrivals and are slowly losing some of the finesse of the Elder carvers who insist that the amount of time spent on a carving is quickly evident. There are few left with the skill level necessary to produce museum quality carvings.

## **Independent Vision**

Deborah Root, Toronto-based critic and writer who teaches art history at the University of Guelph, sums up the present day sentiment in regards to the new vocabulary of imagery coming out of Kinngait Studios. She writes that:

Authenticity is a floating category, able to migrate and legitimize or de-legitimize certain kinds of images. If some consider Inuit art inauthentic when it includes recognizably Southern elements, others have suggested that the art is itself inauthentic because it is a constructed tradition. No art market existed in the North prior to James Houston's efforts to create one in the 1950s and 60s. The argument can be reduced to something like this: white impresario travels North with a plan; the work is marketed in the south as “authentic,” even if there was no pre-contact tradition of large-scale sculpture or printmaking. The work is purchased primarily by those seeking an idealized representation of First Nations experience. Meanwhile, colonialist structures and institutions remain, masked by images of a pristine past. Of course, what is missing from this formulation is the work itself. In this view, Inuit art cannot be an “authentic” expression of an artist's aesthetic vision because it is market-created (unlike the New York art world, one assumes). It is bad enough that a concept of inauthenticity is sometimes used to de-legitimate Northern art practices. At times the authentic is used to denote a traditional way of life or quality than someone thinks should be retained, and at other times it is used to suggest a gritty contemporary quality. The question always remains of who is deciding what is genuine.<sup>26</sup>

Root's sentiments can be directly applied to the drawings of first cousins Annie Pootoogook and Shuvina Ashoona, who are the subjects of the case studies that form the core of this dissertation. Both of these women have broken through the limiting expectations put on Inuit artists by their practice of self-representation. In so doing they respond to, and provide commentary on, the complicated effects of a century of colonial influence in the Arctic. Recent Indigenous art criticism and curatorial writing that identifies artwork as “sites of resistance,” informs Inuk art historian Heather Igloliorte's description of contemporary Inuit art as an

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<sup>26</sup> Deborah Root, “Inuit Art and the Limits of Authenticity,” in *Annie Pootoogook* (Toronto: The Power Plant, 2006).

expression of resilience. Survivance, a term coined by Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor,<sup>27</sup> is “an act of Indigenous self-expression in any medium that tells a story about our active presence in the world now.”<sup>28</sup> In the art of the Canadian Inuit we can see an expression of this resilience as fortifying the culture from within, rather than as a reaction to outside forces. I support this view with the idea that the Canadian Arctic is a place of fluid cultural hybridity and cultural strength and tradition. Certainly there is a pride in the legacy of Inuit flexibility and responsiveness to context that continues to affect Inuit lives and the art that is produced. Artists such as Shuvinaï and Annie, while occasionally referencing their everyday lives, are adapting to the rigorous aesthetic scrutiny of the international contemporary markets by making ambitious drawings that can be highly personal and critically engaged, and make commentary on the world outside their immediate environment, engaging the viewer in a conversation that moves beyond the persistent idealized understanding of the Canadian North.

The legacy of modern Inuit art as representations of a romanticized indigeneity continues to be a stumbling block for Inuit artists primarily because it supports the notion of a collective Inuit identity promoted during the 1950s. The mid-twentieth century anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, who is perhaps best known for his pronouncement that Inuit had no sense of individualism, fostered the idea of a static Inuit identity. Looking at art purely through an anthropological or ethnographic lens can encourage ethnocentrism, isolationism, and provincialism and often illegitimately primitivizes the work, which Carpenter did, in spite of his regard for the Inuit worldview. It is not surprising that Carpenter opposed the application of

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<sup>27</sup>Gerald Vizenor, “The Aesthetics of Survivance,” in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, Gerald Vizenor, ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>28</sup>*Acts of Survivance*, <http://survivance.org/acts-of-survivance/>.

Western fine art concepts of individuality and creativity to Inuit art and artists given his views about Inuit as a people. Unlike his rival George Swinton (1917-2002), an artist, scholar and collector of Inuit art, he believed the promotion of individual Inuit artists to be a violation of Native tradition and claimed anonymity was the natural state of the artists. Swinton remained an advocate of the individuality and talent of Inuit artists throughout his life. Carpenter, on the other hand, was a critic of the system of production introduced to the North by eager governments and advocates such as James Houston. As Carpenter argues:

Its roots are Western; so is its audience. Some carvers have been directly trained by Houston; others follow a Government manual.... That Eskimo artists have the desire and confidence to improvise is a happy situation. I regret, however, that the new ideas and materials they employ are supplied by us, not selected by them. We let the Eskimos know what we like, and then congratulate them on their successful imitation of us.<sup>29</sup>

In a 1992 *Inuit Annual Quarterly* article George Swinton observes that it took time for individual styles and regional characteristics of Inuit artists to emerge. Inuit art, he writes, has matured to the point where Inuit artists, he feels, can be seen as individuals, and, like any artist, can be evaluated accordingly.<sup>30</sup>

Also in opposition to Carpenter, James Houston, who was manager at the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative in Cape Dorset and worked alongside many Inuit artists as an agent and also a mentor, asserted as early as 1952 that Inuit art is produced by individual artists, not a collective. Houston's first-hand experience working with many artists revealed differences in style and

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<sup>29</sup> Edmund Carpenter, *Eskimo Realities* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 195–96.

<sup>30</sup> George Swinton, "Inuit Art Exhibitions at the Winnipeg Art Gallery," *IAQ*, Vol.7, No.4 (1992): 16.

technique, even if they were subtle, as well as differences in preferences in content and composition.

Art historian Janet Berlo writes, in *Inuit Art Quarterly*, a succinct summary of the remarkable drawings produced in Kinngait. She states that the drawings are:

Unmediated by the printmaking process, and uncensored by well-meaning consultants and councils, they reveal images of Inuit artists' representational concerns that are more various, more highly nuanced, and more sophisticated in outlook than most of the prints produced each year in the Arctic (which might be seen as the “official” or canonical oeuvre). In much of the “new art history,” there is a sense that studying the work of an individual artist is a rather old-fashioned art-historical practice. Yet, the pronouncements about art and culture by those of us who study ethnographic arts have all too often been based on normative statements about the group, about tradition, about a collective aesthetic, instead of what is specific and individual. This sort of scholarship leaves the impression that individual agency is somehow of less importance in small-scale societies. A blindness to individuality and creativity under conditions different from our own has been one of the fictions of western culture and western scholarship.<sup>31</sup>

I often reread and consider Berlo's quotation, although now almost twenty-five years old, as a point of departure and reflection when looking at contemporary drawings in the North such as the ones by Annie Pootoogook and Shuvina Ashoona presented in this paper. Although I was a graduate student in the period of the “new art history,” today it would be deemed negligent to not consider, listen to and include the voice of the artist in any curatorial project using current curatorial methodology. Prior to 1990 many Inuit art exhibitions, although all well-intentioned, were collections of work assembled by collectors of Inuit art based on their areas of interest, or

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<sup>31</sup>Janet Berlo, “Autobiographical Impulses and Female Identity in the Work of Napachie Pootoogook,” *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Vol.8 No.4 (Winter 1993):5–6.

exhibitions that were assembled based on an anthropological fascination with objects and the people who made them. In line with Berlo, my detailed case studies of key works in the artistic practices of Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook consider each as the work of an individual exploring the development of a personal aesthetic. The drawings of Shuvinai and Annie thus challenge long-standing traditional expectations of Inuit art to meet with success in the international contemporary art world. Their careers map the globalizing influence of contemporary international art as they open local perspectives to an increasingly broad and interconnected world.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

I argue that Inuit art has a unique and controversial history within Canadian art because many historians, anthropologists, academics, and even museum directors and curators have failed to legitimate it as authentic art practice. Until very recently, the work of Inuit artists has remained outside the trajectory of Canadian art history and been relegated to its own category in museums and history books. There is a sociopolitical context for this exclusion; until the resettlement period, beginning in the late 1940s, the Inuit were largely nomadic and relatively isolated from Southern and urban Canadian culture. Some art objects were traded and purchased in Southern markets, but it was not until the 1950s that Inuit art was acknowledged in any significant way.<sup>32</sup>

There are differing views on the origins of modern Inuit art. Authors Richard C. Crandall and his daughter Susan Royce Crandall's *An Annotated Bibliography of Inuit Art* outlines different perspectives on the evolution of contemporary Inuit art.<sup>33</sup> This book analyzes the origins of Inuit art chronologically beginning in the prehistoric period, then the historic period and finally the modern period, up to 1997, in a thorough and annotated way. Beginning with a deep historical background of Inuit culture and art-making, they carefully outline the modern period with detailed summaries of the different developments of the Inuit art market as it has become known today. The categories, listed below, give an accurate timeline from which to

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy Campbell, *Inuit Trilogy: Noise Ghost and Other Stories* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Richard C. Crandall and Susan Royce Crandall, *An Annotated Bibliography of Inuit Art* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2007).

identify shifts in the recent development of Inuit art practice. As this chronology stops in 1997 the recent contemporary period is absent. I define that period as the last twenty-five years. This contemporary period is fluid and characterized by shifts in perspective and advancements in scholarship that involve the artists who are currently living and making art.

Crandall's outline is as follows:

1. The Historic Period of Inuit Art
2. Contemporary Inuit Art: An Introduction
3. The Early Years of Contemporary Inuit Art: August 1948 to December 1950
4. The Development of Inuit Art: 1951–1953
5. The Expansion and Legitimization of Inuit Art: 1954–1956
6. Expanding the Base: 1957–1961
7. Continuous Expansion: 1962–1969
8. A Decade of Exhibitions, Part I: 1970–1974
9. A Decade of Exhibitions, Part II: 1975–1979
10. The Plateau: 1980–1984
11. Change, Part I: 1985–1987
12. Change, Part II: 1988–1989
13. Evolution, Part I: 1990–1993
14. Evolution, Part II: 1994–1997

In addition to Crandall's *An Annotated Bibliography of Inuit Art*, his companion text, *Inuit Art: A History*, provides a valuable bibliography of the history of writing about the history

of Inuit art. Crandall references the original research that was the basis for subsequent scholarship. The final section outlines significant publications, exhibitions, organizational shifts and additions, and significant awards for Inuit artists.

Crandall introduces the issue of authenticity in the section of the book entitled, “The Early Years of Contemporary Inuit Art: August 1948 to December 1950.” Three positions regarding the origin or authenticity of Inuit art practice are summarized in this chapter by art historian and professor Charles Martijin.<sup>34</sup> The first asserts that Inuit art has its roots firmly in the past and experienced a revival of the Thule period around 1948. The second perspective is that the art is a product of acculturation. In 1960, Danish academic Jorgen Melgaard (1927–2007) stated that “the line between aboriginal art and acculturated art is drawn by asking if the art was made to play a traditional cultural role or if it was made to meet the demand from outside.”<sup>35</sup> This perspective takes into account the production of a “new art” that is very different from the past, but sees it as a new form of an old activity. The last position Martijin describes, according to Crandall, is the view that Inuit art is an invented art form. In 1960, archeologist Edmund Carpenter boldly stated that both the roots and the audience of contemporary Inuit art are Western and that the art is not an Indigenous art form. It is art but not Inuit.<sup>36</sup> All of these positions remain prevalent today: authenticity and a connection to the pre-contact Inuit past are still a mainstream fascination, one that leads to the exoticization of modern and contemporary Indigenous artists. This colonial desire to position Inuit art within a past of the colonial imagination inhibits the viewing of the work of contemporary Inuit artists as part of the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54–55. See also Charles A. Martjin, “Canadian Eskimo Carving in Historical Perspective,” *Anthropos* 59 (1964): 546–596.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 55. See also L. Melgaard, *Eskimo Sculpture* (London: Methuen and Co., 1960).

<sup>36</sup> E. Carpenter, “Review of Eskimo-Plastik,” *American Anthropologist* 62 (1960): 346–348.

contemporary art world. Cultural anthropologist Deborah Root reminds us of the limits of the concept of authenticity and its ability to migrate and legitimize or de-legitimize certain kinds of images depending on the sentiments of the viewer. Many consider Inuit art that does not contain typical Northern iconography, such as polar bears or sea ice, to be inauthentic, while some, as seen above, consider the whole practice to be inauthentic due to its origin.<sup>37</sup> This referencing of traditional images is often encouraged from within as well because art based on them sells well for the Co-operative. Mnjikaning First Nation curator William Kingfisher warns that work containing any sign of contemporary life may be deemed by the conservative critic to be inauthentic, that is, not of the authentic “past.”<sup>38</sup> This sentimental desire to see Inuit art reflecting an ideal or preserved way of life does not apply to contemporary art in the South, but seems to be held tightly by many collectors of Northern art to this day. The study and exhibition of contemporary Inuit drawings today must reject the debate about what is “authentic” whether in terms of content, origin, or medium, and instead engage with the work as that of individuals and in the way that the work of other, non-Indigenous artists is considered.

To ground my examination of the drawings of Annie Pootoogook and Shuvina Ashoona as contemporary art, I found it prudent to examine the cultural entanglements created since 1950 that have contributed to the development of certain dominant practices in Kinngait. Most of the literature that has been produced about artists working for the Kinngait Studios is found in exhibition catalogues documenting collections or in monographic surveys of individual artists. Until the early 1990s most scholarship was centred on the mediums of sculpture and

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<sup>37</sup> Deborah Root, “Inuit Art and Limits of Authenticity,” in Nancy Campbell, *Annie Pootoogook* (Calgary: Alberta College of Art and Design, 2007): 22–26.

<sup>38</sup> William Kingfisher, “The Discourse of Authenticity in Canadian Aboriginal Art” (PhD thesis, Carlton University, 2004).

printmaking. There has also been some focus on the presentation of works from private and public collections of Inuit art in the form of accompanying texts by collectors and curators that fulfill different agendas. But the phenomenon, history, and subsequent domination of what I call “drawing culture” in the North, with its locus in the community of Kinngait, has never been explored in depth. Ingo Hessel’s publication *Inuit Art: An Introduction*, which has become the textbook, so to speak, for the field, provides a comprehensive overview of Inuit art and a historical examination of the developments in different communities since the late 1940s; but he only examines drawing as an artistic activity in a minor way.<sup>39</sup> A recent addition to the scholarship is an exhibition catalogue produced by the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2011, titled *Inuit Modern*, curated by Gerald McMaster (former Fredrik S. Eaton Curator, Canadian Art) and co-curated by academic and author Ingo Hessel. As stated in the text:

*Inuit Modern* draws from multiple communities and periods to embrace voices both traditional and contemporary in its consideration of the history and future of Inuit art, and closely examines how the Inuit have coped with and responded to the swift transition from a traditional lifestyle to one marked by the disturbing complexities of globalization and climate change.<sup>40</sup>

The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection that is the focus of *Inuit Modern* and housed at the Art Gallery of Ontario is the second most comprehensive collection of Inuit art in the world behind the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Leslie Boyd’s *Cape Dorset Prints, A Retrospective: Fifty Years of Printmaking at the Kinngait Studios* is the first book that traces the development of printmaking in Kinngait

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<sup>39</sup> Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Art Gallery of Ontario, *Inuit Modern*, <http://www.ago.net/inuit-modern>.

comprehensively. It also addresses drawing, but only in relation to print production at the Kinngait Studios. To date this book is the most valuable resource on the history of contemporary graphics in Kinngait.<sup>41</sup>

The *Inuit Art Quarterly*, founded in 1985, is a journal produced by the Inuit Art Foundation. The masthead reads that its mission is to promote Inuit arts and “connect Inuit Nunangat and readers around the world.”<sup>42</sup> It offers a space for scholarship in the field and provides a timeline of trends in Inuit art practice. Because of the significant artistic output of Kinngait relative to other communities in the North, the *Inuit Art Quarterly* has often featured articles on the artists of Kinngait. This has helped in the promotion and dissemination of research on this group. Many of the issues have been digitized and are accessible online providing a valuable resource for researchers.

A number of university presses, most notably McGill-Queen’s with their Northern Series and the University of Manitoba Press, have published academic work on a wide range of artistic practices in the North. *Pitseolak: Pictures out of My Life* is one of a number of exceptional books; it provides transcripts of first-person oral interviews with Kinngait artist Pitseolak Ashoona about her drawings and her life conducted by author Dorothy Harley Eber.<sup>43</sup> Monographs in exhibition catalogues on other significant graphic artists from the Kinngait community, including Napachie Pootoogook, Pitseolak Ashoona, Pitaloosie Saila, Kananginak Pootoogook, Parr, and Pudlo Pudlat, have been produced. But these publications centre on the

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<sup>41</sup>Leslie Boyd Ryan, *Cape Dorset Prints, A Retrospective: Fifty Years of Printmaking at the Kinngait Studios* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2007).

<sup>42</sup>*Inuit Art Quarterly*, <http://www.inuitartfoundation.org/inuit-art-quarterly/>.

<sup>43</sup>Dorothy Harley Eber, *Pitseolak: Pictures out of My Life*, 2nd. ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1971).

individual artist's drawings in isolation from other artistic production, either in Kinngait or beyond, and they focus on biographical narrative.

Of particular relevance to this dissertation is the production of two exhibition catalogues: one on the work of Annie Pootoogook, curated by myself for contemporary art galleries such as the Power Plant and then the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at the Alberta College of Art;<sup>44</sup> and the other a survey of early drawings of Shuvinai Ashoona curated by Sandra Dyck.<sup>45</sup> My approach in *Annie Pootoogook* was to employ, as Dorothy Eber did, the artist's voice.

Site Media, a film production company based in Toronto, has produced two films that help demystify Kinngait. The first, *Riding Light into the World*, was directed by Annette Mangaard and documents the studio and print production in Kinngait. The second film, titled *Annie Pootoogook* (2006), directed by Marcia Connolly, premiered at the Reel Artists Film Festival in Toronto and has had many showings since.<sup>46</sup> Marcia Connolly independently produced and directed a documentary on Shuvinai Ashoona, entitled *Ghost Noise* (2010), that has found new international audiences.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Nancy Campbell, ed., *Annie Pootoogook* (Calgary: Alberta College of Art and Design, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Sandra Dyck, *Shuvinai Ashoona: Drawings* (Ottawa: University of Carleton Art Gallery, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> Marcia Connolly, dir., *Annie Pootoogook* (Siteline Media, 2006, <http://siteline.ca/films/annie-pootoogook/>).

<sup>47</sup> Marcia Connolly, dir., *Ghost Noise* (Siteline Media, 2010).

## Chapter 4

### Exhibition and Criticism

It is the intent of this chapter to synthesize the information presented thus far in order to describe the current state of Inuit art writing to contextualize my methodology for the case studies presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

As a point of departure I look to the *Inuit Art Quarterly*, a journal that has been published by the Inuit Art Foundation since 1986, which is a valuable resource for scholars of Inuit art. A review of its archive offers insight into the trends and developments and changes in the recent history of Inuit art. The archive also reminds us that initiatives, concerns, and developments in the field have advanced subtly in the last thirty years. The language has changed, writers and editors have come and gone, but the belief in the strength of the art and the talent of the artists, and the aim to have the art of Inuit taken seriously in the contemporary art market has not changed. A seminal issue of the *Inuit Art Quarterly*, titled *Inuit Art World*, was released in the fall of 1990 as a special issue. In that issue the late editor Marybelle Mitchell writes:

*Inuit Art World* is an idea whose time has come. Those involved in the field have been aware for some time of a great deal of worldwide activity in various sectors—commercial, cultural and academic—but a composite picture has never been drawn. This, then, was the goal of *Inuit Art World*, to present an international, multisector perspective on the state of the art. Although it represents hundreds of hours of research and related work, what we present here is only the tip of the iceberg. We think we have succeeded in

distilling some of the major trends, but the hives of activity we uncovered will fuel research activity for years to come.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, the issue does successfully cover the trends of the day and does provide a base from which to frame the current state of Inuit art. As this study focuses on two individual artists, Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona, I found particular interest in the conviction at that time of the value of first-person interviews and the importance of the voice of the artist in the discussion of their work, discussion more critical than biographical. At the time of the publication of *Inuit Art World* in 1990, a large retrospective of the drawings of Kinngait artist Pudlo Pudlat (1916–1992) had just opened at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) titled, *Pudlo Pudlat: Thirty Years of Drawing*, curated by the then curator of Inuit Art at the NGC Marie Routledge. This exhibition was accompanied by a comprehensive, trilingual catalogue (English, French, and Inuktitut), which was a turning point in the dissemination of Inuit art scholarship and marked a concerted effort on behalf of the museum community to make content accessible to Inuit audiences. Routledge’s exhibition was fuelled by her relationship with Pudlo Pudlat and many hours of interviews with the artist. In a review of this exhibition in *Inuit Art World*, curator Dorothy Speak prophetically writes that “in view of the recent success of this kind of marrying of aesthetic analysis with oral history, it is difficult to conceive of any researcher in the future attempting a serious study of an individual Inuit artist without such a two-pronged approach.”<sup>49</sup> This has always been my point of departure.

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<sup>48</sup>Marybelle Mitchell, “North/South: Issues Facing Museums,” *Inuit Art World, Inuit Art Quarterly* (Fall 1990).

<sup>49</sup>Dorothy Speak, “Pudlo Pudlat: Thirty Years of Drawing,” *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No.4 (Fall/Winter, 1990/1991): 82.

Today, it would be deemed colonial scholarship to neglect the voice of the artist in a curatorial project of living Inuit artists using current curatorial methodology. Prior to 1990 many Inuit art exhibitions, although all well-intentioned, were collections of work assembled by collectors of Inuit art based on their areas of interest, or exhibitions that were assembled based on an anthropological fascination with objects and the people who made them. It is essential to note here the forerunner in the first-person narrative of Inuit art, the art historian Dorothy Eber, the primary source of inspiration for this dissertation and for many researchers in Inuit art. Although not conceptualized as an exhibition, Dorothy Eber published the first oral history transcribed from tape and translated from Inuktitut, of the life and work of an Inuk artist, Pitseolak Ashoona. The approach used in the making of *Pitseolak: Pictures out of My Life* (1971) inspired other writers and researchers to involve Inuit artists directly in the illumination of their work. This book focuses on the drawings of the artist as opposed to focusing on prints or sculptures, which was the trend at the time. As a result it foreshadowed the emergence of drawing as a critical artistic medium in Inuit art and for this dissertation.

Dorothy Eber's publication was a game changer, especially in 1971 when the North was primarily unilingual and travel was much more arduous for researchers. Jumping forward to 1989, we see the influence of Eber's work in writing about Inuit art. Darlene Wight, Winnipeg Art Gallery's curator of Inuit art, presented *Out of Tradition: Abraham Anghik and David Ruben Piqtoukun*, which I consider a milestone exhibition as it was the first to recontextualize Inuit art by showcasing two innovative second-generation artists whose work, urban lifestyles, and individual approaches fell outside the then established framework and vocabulary of Inuit artists.

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Abraham Anghik Ruben (b. 1951) and David Ruben Piqtoukun (b. 1950) continue to produce art and to exhibit today. Also critical to this exhibition are the catalogue essays written by the artists thus reflecting an emerging trend among museums and researchers to allow Inuit artists to speak for themselves, and a new demand by artists to play a larger role in the interpretation of their work. Following on the heels of *Out of Tradition* we see *Pudlo: Thirty Years of Drawing*, 1990. Again, a milestone exhibition, the first major retrospective of the drawings of one Inuk artist, solidly based on extensive research and interviews with the artist.

These methodologies and curatorial approaches are widely adopted today and there have been a number of exhibitions that use the voice of the artist as the springboard for the presentation of work. In 1994 the University of Guelph Art Museum, formally the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, organized an exhibition of contemporary drawings from their collection, titled *Qamani'tuaq: Where the River Widens*, that included first-generation artist Jessie Oonark and four of her children: Janet Kigusiuq, Victoria Mamnguqsualuk, Nancy Pukingnak, and William Noah among others. In a landmark step, the exhibition opened in Baker Lake, for which I was present. This special presentation provided the participating artists the opportunity to see their work exhibited in their home community for the first time. The exhibition was co-curated by Judith Nasby, Director of the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, artist William Noah, and chair of Art and Art History at Wayne State University (Detroit) Marion Jackson.

The opening of *Qamani'tuaq: Where the River Widens* in Baker Lake was a pivotal moment in the exhibition of Inuit art. Historically exhibitions were held in commercial galleries for the purpose of sale or in large museums in a section designated for the exhibition of Inuit or Indigenous art. The positioning of art exhibitions has import in contextualizing the art exhibited. The strategy used by the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre sent a clear message to the artists

participating and the public at large that the artist and Inuit were involved and important to the conversation being presented. Another noteworthy exhibition of an Inuk artist in which location played an essential role in the interpretation and reception of the work was *Annie Pootoogook*, which I curated in 2006 for The Power Plant in Toronto. This exhibition and catalogue followed the same two-pronged research approach outlined above that privileges the voice of the artist in the aesthetic discussion of the work. It was also consciously determined that the venue would be a contemporary art centre whose mandate is the exhibition of ground-breaking contemporary art. Positioning the drawings of Annie Pootoogook in this way was essential to expanding the conversation of Inuit art beyond its origins as a commercial art practice to one that is about a living culture and living artists who are contributing to the dialogue of contemporary art in Canada and the world. Murray Whyte of the *Toronto Star* wrote that “The Power Plant’s landmark 2006 show, of Annie Pootoogook’s frank drawings of contemporary northern life, marked the first time Canada’s pre-eminent contemporary art venue had held a major show by an Inuit.”<sup>50</sup>

Analyzing and tracking the landmark developments in curatorial methodology since 1990 reveals that the voice of the artist in the research and interpretation of content and aesthetics has been crucial to the field. It is also imperative to focus on the inclusion of Inuit in the conversation around indigeneity and the role of Indigenous artists and cultural workers leading the way for advanced scholarship in Inuit art. To again look to the special issue of the *Inuit Art Quarterly*, *Inuit Art World*, editor Marybelle Mitchell writes, “Although the call for greater Native involvement in the interpretation of aboriginal material came from Indians, there is

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<sup>50</sup>Murray Whyte, “Northern Art without Artifice: Artist depicts the pain and tedium of everyday life” (*Toronto Star*, June 25, 2006).

evidence of a spin-off to Inuit affairs.” As outlined earlier, she continues, “Curators are using a variety of approaches to improve communications and understanding.”<sup>51</sup> Rosa Ho of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology stresses the need to develop exhibitions representing the Inuit point of view. “We have to look at Inuit art less from a collections-based point of view and more from the artist's point of view,” she says.<sup>52</sup> I would add here that we need to include an Inuit point of view in the curation of exhibitions. This was certainly the sentiment of Marybelle Mitchell, although twenty-five years old and informed by systemic racism, who advocated for “Native” involvement in the interpretation coming from Indigenous curators. Exploring indigeneity from an Indigenous point of view was embraced and celebrated in the exhibition *Land Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* in 1992. This exhibition was co-curated by Diana Nemiroff at the National Gallery of Canada, Saulteaux First Nations artist Robert Houle, and art historian Charlotte Townsend-Gault. The inclusion of Houle on the curatorial team is important as a strategy as well as necessity for the curatorial objectives that are set out in the abstract of the catalogue. There it says that: “An effort to show that a recuperation and de-contextualization of Native art serves both nationalist and modernist discourse. This is before a dialogue based on authenticity, identity and cultural difference was established.”<sup>53</sup> *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives*, curated by Gerald McMaster, a Siksika First Nation member, for the Museum of Civilization also appeared in 1992. Organized to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, this exhibition

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<sup>51</sup>Marybelle Mitchell, “North/South: Issues Facing Museums.”

<sup>52</sup>Ibid. Rosa Ho.

<sup>53</sup>Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, Charlotte Townsend-Gault, and Jimmie Durham, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, James Lavadour, and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa, Ont.: Musée des beaux-arts du Canada / National Gallery of Canada, 1992).

was intended to counter the Eurocentric nature of these celebrations. Critic and curator Sarah Milroy later wrote in the *Globe and Mail*:

Looking back to the opening of the National Gallery of Canada's 1992 exhibition *Land, Spirit, Power*, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization's concurrent *Indigena*, I can remember a time when First Nations and Inuit art in Canada was still at the fringe. It's true that there were aboriginal artists in Canada who made a good living and who became public citizens of note – among them Bill Reid, Kenojuk Ashevak and, later, Carl Beam. But their art then was not integrated into the mainstream conversations of the art world.<sup>54</sup>

Numerous significant exhibitions of Indigenous and Inuit art have been mounted in Canada since *Land, Spirit, Power* and *Indigena*. For the arguments in this dissertation I refer to the exhibitions of Indigenous artists in Canada *Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years* (2010) and *Sakahana: International Indigenous Art* (2013). *Close Encounters* was organized by a curatorial collective that included Candice Hopkins, Steve Loft, Lee-Ann Martin, and Jenny Western for Plug In ICA in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This was a massive undertaking that included work by 34 Indigenous artists from around the globe in multiple venues around the city of Winnipeg. Among the artists included were two Inuit artists, Shuvinai Ashoona and Kavavaow Mannomee, both from Kinngait. This exhibition has been lauded as a ground-breaking exploration of global contemporary Indigenous art in which artists imagine the future within the context of their present experiences and past histories. Similarly, *Sakahana: International Indigenous Art* held at the National Gallery of Canada was promoted as the largest-ever global survey of contemporary Indigenous art. The curatorial team included Greg Hill, NGC Audain Curator of Indigenous Art; Christine Lalonde, NGC Associate Curator of Indigenous Art; and Candice Hopkins, NGC

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<sup>54</sup> Sarah Milroy, "Sakahana at the National Gallery: an Aboriginal Triumph," *Globe and Mail*, July 19, 2013.

Elizabeth Simonfay Guest Curator. *Sakahàn* featured 80 artists and among them many Canadian Inuit artists: Shuvinai Ashoona, Annie Pootoogook, Itee Pootoogook, Jutai Toonoo, Jimmy Manning, Jamasie Pitseolak, and Tim Pitsuilak all from Kinngait as well as William Noah from Qamani'tuaq. Contemporary Inuit art now sits comfortably with art from other Indigenous communities in large exhibitions such as *Close Encounters* and *Sakahàn*.<sup>55</sup> Writer and editor Bryne McLaughlin of *Canadian Art Magazine* wrote in regard to *Sakahàn* that:

There's been a notable shift in contemporary Indigenous art in Canada over the past decade, as a new generation of artists and curators moves from the margins of an "official" cultural narrative to now challenge the status quo of history and identity. The rise of those questioning voices and the surfacing of international connections between this new wave of Indigenous artists at home and abroad is what "Sakahàn" was all about.<sup>56</sup>

Through the leadership and implementation of the voices of Indigenous and Inuit artists combined with the strength of Indigenous curators, exhibition practice and interpretation have progressed significantly. The expansion of the category of Indigenous art in Canada to include Inuit art has allowed for a deeper understanding of the issues of colonization, racism, and patriarchy that are undercurrents in Indigenous cultures. "Similarly, while Indigenous exhibitions are part of the dominant art world they are not fully contained by it. The Indigenous art world is a third space, a current between and among Aboriginal and mainstream art worlds."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster, eds. *All Our Relations* (18th Biennale of Sydney, 2012); and Greg Hill, Candice Hopkins and Christine Lalonde, *Sakahàn* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Bryne McLaughlin, *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa May 17 to September 2, 2013), *Canadian Art Online*, Dec. 16, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> David Garneau, "Indigenous Criticism: The Ah Kee Paradox," *Artlink Indigenous*. vol 33 # 2 (2013), [www.artlink.com.au](http://www.artlink.com.au): 48.

David Garneau makes the intelligent observation that within the Indigenous avant-garde in Canada the players who have impacted the discourse are all:

International travelers, exhibitors and speakers. Nearly all are university-educated and most know of each other's work, have met or even worked together, compared experiences and strategies. They participate in an Indigenous discourse that includes their local Aboriginal cultures but is not confined by them.<sup>58</sup>

Presently Inuit curators and artists are not part of this circuit of savvy cultural players. Inuk art historian and curator Heather Igloliorte's exhibition, *Decolonize Me*, and the accompanying exhibition catalogue with essays by Brenda Croft, Igloliorte, and Steve Loft participate in the conversation presented in *Close Encounters* and *Sakahàn*, this time from an Inuit perspective and thus is a significant contribution to the field. Igloliorte, in an exhibition statement, writes that

*Decolonize Me:*

Seeks to make visible the history and legacies of our shared colonial past while highlighting the resilience of Aboriginal communities and acknowledging the politics of resistance that have sustained Indigenous cultures through to the present day. As such, it invites the visitor to consider the ways in which they are also implicated in this history, not as perpetrators or victims, but as active participants with agency and a shared responsibility, to borrow a phrase from First Nations philosophy, to "all our relations."<sup>59</sup>

These exhibitions, all curated by Indigenous scholars, are "manifestations of the growth of Indigenous consciousness and action."<sup>60</sup> The inclusion of an Inuk curator in this discourse is of particular import in the realization of implementing the Inuit voice in the discourse.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>59</sup> Heather Igloliorte, *Decolonize Me*, <http://www.ottawaartgallery.ca/content/decolonize-me>.

<sup>60</sup> Garneau, 46.

In relation to this discussion I outline a curatorial project of my own that has contributed to the scholarship, interpretation, and reception of Inuit art in Canada. With some trepidation I dipped my toe into the Indigenous art world from the position of a settler woman from the South. One of the challenges and pleasures of curating is making associations that provoke a new understanding of the work included in an exhibition. In my experience, the juxtaposition of work by different artists can redirect preconceived ideas about one artist or another. My study of the art of the Canadian Inuit has not only led me to see the work of living Inuit artists in a new context, but has also allowed me to recontextualize some of the contemporary art I encounter in the South. This was the point of departure for three individual exhibitions that loosely, although not intentionally, became a trilogy of juxtapositions of Kinngait artists with Southern counterparts. The curatorial methodology was my own: intuitive, visual, and improvisational, but it ultimately resulted in a provocative reconsideration of six Canadian artists whose work resonated with each other's in very evocative ways. The series of three exhibitions, all held at the JMB Gallery at Hart House at the University of Toronto, now the University of Toronto Art Museum, began with *Noise Ghost* (2009), which paired Shuvina Ashoona and Shary Boyle, followed by *Scream* (2010), featuring artists Samonie Toonoo and Ed Pien, and finally *Blue Cloud* (2012), featuring Ohtaq Mikkigaq and Jack Bush. These unexpected though precisely matched pairings not only defied curatorial and art-historical convention, but also reached across the northern hemisphere to dissolve former delineations of boundaries and categories. The quiet challenge of the trilogy is not only to link artists together but to engage the viewer as a participant in this meeting. We must assess our expectations of Inuit art and re-evaluate our concept of what contemporary art is — but also, more importantly, what it excludes. These three pairings of Inuit and non-Inuit Canadian contemporary works represent my attempt to bridge the

solitudes of Inuit and contemporary art within the still prevalent, linear conceptions of Canadian art history and of the category of the contemporary as such.

## **Scholarship**

Modern Inuit art has only been available commercially since 1959 marked by the first release of the Cape Dorset Print Collection, and has not had the benefit of the years of rigorous scholarship that has been established over the past hundred years by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinkers. Opportunities for Inuit voices in advanced in-depth appreciation of Inuit art from within the culture are slowly developing and will, in time, be an essential contribution to the literature on Inuit art. I believe scholarship from diverse positions is vital to opening up spaces of self-definition, embracing historical possibilities, and creating conversations both within and without the specific context of Inuit art. The continued production and circulation of Inuit art can only benefit from consideration within a pluralist aesthetic domain. But key to this, as my dissertation asserts, is the inclusion of Inuit art in international cultural dialogue within contemporary art.

Criticism is the dynamic force that develops, reinforces and plays a little with the dominant art system's hierarchy and circuits of meaning and value. There is virtually no such attention paid to Aboriginal art when it fails to engage mainstream discourse, or does so but in terms the dominant cannot recognize or prefers not to deal with (because it could challenge its internal hierarchy and networks of meaning).<sup>61</sup>

Relatively speaking, the inclusion of Inuit art in the mainstream contemporary art scene in Canada and internationally has only begun. Many of Canada's Indigenous artists have made significant breakthroughs in this arena, such as Gerald McMaster, Dana Claxton, Rebecca

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 51.

Belmore, Edward Poitras, Brian Jungen, Kent Monkman, Nadia Myre, and Maria Hupfield, and exhibit in numerous biennales, whether under the umbrella of Aboriginal or Indigenous or “other,” globally. Canada’s Inuit art has been slow to hit the radar of international curators in spite of the growing curatorial interest in Indigenous and World Art. Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook, and a small, sporadic inclusion of other third-generation Inuit whose work has cracked the glass ceiling of the art museum are gaining international profiles outside the traditional Inuit art market system. Recently we have seen the inclusion of Inuit art in large-scale international art enterprises including the 18th Sydney Biennale (2012), entitled *All Our Relations*, which presented the work of Shuvinai Ashoona and throat singer Tanya Tagaq; and the SITE Santa Fe: SITElines exhibition of 2014, *Unsettled Landscapes*, which also featured graphics by Shuvinai Ashoona and by Ohoq Mikkigak. *Oh, Canada*, the largest internationally curated exhibition of contemporary Canadian art to date, opened at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in May 2012. Curator Denise Markonish assembled works by artists from across Canada including the work of Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook. The reality that Inuit art was included in a survey exhibition of Canadian art, not only Canadian Indigenous art, marks significant growth in the critical consideration of Inuit work. Also relevant here is the inclusion of Shuvinai Ashoona in the most recent *Phaidon* publication, *Vitamin D2 New Perspectives in Drawing* (2015), which highlights a new generation of over 100 internationally critically recognized artists from around the globe who engage with drawing in innovative ways. The dissemination of ideas and context through film is also of import. Films about artists have long had power, offering a broader reach than the presentation of an exhibition that is limited by location. The recent production of films on Kinngait, Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona are important for their role in opening the window of the artist to the “other.” Site Media

produced the film *Annie Pootoogook*, directed by Marcia Connolly in 2006, that premiered at the Reel Artists Film Festival in Toronto and has had many showings since.<sup>62</sup> Site Media also produced *Kinngait: Riding Light into the World*, directed by Annette Mangaard in 2010, which provides a context from which to understand the artistic community of Kinngait. Marcia Connolly independently produced and directed a documentary on Shuvinai Ashoona, entitled *Ghost Noise* in 2010, that has found international audiences.<sup>63</sup> These three short films have been effective tools for reaching a broader audience by providing a behind-the-scenes look at the creative process.

## **Collaboration**

A strategy that offers many opportunities and linkages for artists and cultural workers is collaboration. Collaborations are particularly valuable when you live in an isolated community such as Kinngait where access to information, discussion, and new ideas is limited by geography. Through the leadership of Terry Ryan and many others in both the North and the South, Kinngait Studios has had a history of inviting artists from the South to visit the community to mentor and share their techniques with Inuit artists. These visits have exposed Inuit artists, once isolated in their communities, to the mainstream contemporary art world. Shuvinai Ashoona's two major collaborations with Southern artists have had a significant effect on the visibility of her work. Her collaboration with Saskatchewan artist John Noesthaden in 2008 was initiated by Wayne Baerwaldt, a curator with great international reach. This project resulted in the exhibition of the

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<sup>62</sup> Marcia Connolly, dir., *Annie Pootoogook* (Siteline Media, 2006, <http://sitemedia.ca/films/annie-pootoogook/>).

<sup>63</sup> Marcia Connolly, dir., *Ghost Noise* (Siteline Media, 2010).

40-metre banner, *Earth and Sky*, for the *Stadthimmel (CitySky)* project curated by Klaus Littmann, with assistance from Edek Bartz, an event at the Basel Art Fair in downtown Basel, Switzerland in 2008. The *Earth and Sky* banner was also exhibited in Australia as part of the prestigious exhibition *All Our Relations: the 18th Biennale of Sydney* (2012), curated by Gerald McMaster and Catherine de Zegher (both formerly curators at the Art Gallery of Ontario). The National Gallery of Canada also included *Earth and Sky* in *Sakàhan: International Indigenous Art* in 2013. Shuvinai Ashoona's ongoing collaborations and exhibitions with Toronto artist Shary Boyle have also increased her profile and made her work available in contemporary contexts, contexts in which the inclusion of the work of Inuit artists had not previously been considered. Boyle was the Canadian representative at the Venice Biennale in 2013 and as a result of this exposure has international reach and influence.

## **World Art Studies**

To place Inuit artists, particularly Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona, within a global, not purely Indigenous, context it is important to outline the development of a growing scholarship in art, exhibition, and dissemination that is discussed under the term *world art studies*. As a concept and approach, world art studies began formally in 1992, just prior to the exhibition of *Land Spirit Power and Indigena* in Canada, when art historian John Onians adopted the name for his art history program at the University of East Anglia. World art studies is an approach that should be considered in the literature when discussing Inuit art. Onians' intention, discussed in his book *Atlas of World Art* (2004), was to study art from a global perspective in a way that transcends chronology and geography to allow for new viewpoints, ranging from visual culture, cultural

studies, and anthropology to neuroscience and philosophy.<sup>64</sup> American art historian and professor James Elkins' seminal publication *Is Art History Global?* is also a proponent of this optimistic reading of the discipline of art history as world art history and questions the traditional Eurocentric focus on the Western canons of art history put in place during colonial times.<sup>65</sup> As seen in the analysis above, the last twenty years have seen a rapid globalization of the art world that has resulted in geographic decentralization and a shift away from a primarily Western perspective. Roland Robertson, a sociologist and theorist of globalization who lectures at the University of Aberdeen in the United Kingdom, is also an advocate of this art-historical approach. According to Robertson, "Interpretation of globalization... focuses on the way in which participants in the process become conscious of and give meaning to living in the world as a single place." In this account, globalization "refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" In other words, "it covers the acceleration in concrete global interdependence and in consciousness of the global whole".<sup>66</sup>

This opening up of the Western art historical canon to become more inclusive of other worldviews has been helpful in facilitating the exposure of "ethnic" arts into the mainstream. Based on this interpretation one would agree with writer David Garneau that it would be beneficial to "combine the best of 'Western' critical approaches and Aboriginal worldviews to produce an Indigenous criticism that is ready and willing to contribute and add to the work of Indigenous artists and curators."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> John Onians, *Atlas of World Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1992), 8.

<sup>67</sup> Garneau, 51.

One can look to an early example of this exercise in Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta 11* of 2002. This is considered a "paradigm-shifting exhibition that was an early example of what he later called 'a shift in curatorial language from one whose reference systems belonged to an early twentieth century modernity to one more attuned to the tendencies of the twenty-first century.'"<sup>68</sup> Notable was the inclusion of Inuk Zacharias Kunuks' film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*.<sup>69</sup> Co-curators Roger Breugal and Ruth Novack's *Documenta 12* echoed the global scope of Okwui Enwezor's effort, most notably for the discussion here, by the inclusion of Annie Pootoogook. Holland Cotter, a critic and journalist for the *New York Times*, considered that the diverse selection of artists, many of whom were unknown, was the most interesting feature of *Documenta 12*:

By being almost perversely esoteric, at least by Western market standards, it takes the usual "international" roundup in another direction, away from the New York-London-Berlin trade route. In the process it delivers something approximating a truly global array.<sup>70</sup>

Art historian Thomas McEvelley and curator Peter Weibel write extensively on world art history and globalism reflecting on the proliferation of biennales to Sao Paulo, Shanghai, and Istanbul to name a few. Recent curatorial attempts to promote newness, multiplicity, and diversity are wrought with contradictions and run the risk of the production of hegemonic biennales that promote the same artists repeatedly or reinforce hegemonic categories of otherness by featuring artists from the margins as a group. Curator Enwezor eloquently "identified 'nearness' (as

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<sup>68</sup> Kimberly Bradley, "Has Biennial Culture Gentrified the Art World?" *Hyperallergic*, June 2014, <http://hyperallergic.com/130040/has-biennial-culture-gentrified-the-art-world/>.

<sup>69</sup> Zacharias Kunuk, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Isuma Productions, 2001).

<sup>70</sup> Holland Cotter, "Asking Serious Questions in a Very Quiet Voice", *New York Times*, June 22, 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/22/arts/design/22docu.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/22/arts/design/22docu.html?_r=0).

opposed to otherness) as the predominant way to understand the current condition of globalization, even going so far as to state that ‘the post-colonial today is a world of proximities. A world of nearness, not an elsewhere.’<sup>71</sup>

Contemporary Inuit art has now found a place of nearness, in the words of Enwezor, in the global art world. No longer, are the margins of the other distant and incomprehensible but rather reflective of the conflicted times we live in. Inuit art can be a player in the contemporary art world that now includes an array of voices and points of view, unique examples of how we see the world and how we intend to live in it. Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona have managed, through a team of supporters and advocates, to present their talent to the art world at large.

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<sup>71</sup> Anna Maria Guasch, “Globalization and Contemporary Art” (Third Text), <http://www.thirdtext.org/globalization-and-contemporary-art>.

## Chapter 5

### Annie Pootoogook



Figure 5.1 *Annie Pootoogook*, Photograph by Nancy Campbell.

Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) is the first case study, of two, presented in this analysis of Inuit drawing produced in Kinngait since the late 1990s. I employ a two-pronged research approach, using the drawings as the core source of study along with artist interviews and research into each artist's family and social conditions to frame the circumstances of each artist's work.

#### *Early Life*

Annie Pootoogook was born in Kinngait (Cape Dorset), an isolated island on the rocky coast of Baffin Island in 1969, and is a third-generation artist from this artistic community. Sadly, when the writing of this dissertation was in its final stages, she tragically passed away in Ottawa on September 19, 2016. She was the daughter of the late artist Napachie Pootoogook (1938–2002)

and carver and printmaker Eegyvudlu Pootoogook (b. 1931). She remains an integral part of the artistic legacy that includes her grandmother the renowned artist Pitseolak Ashoona (1908–1983), uncle, Kananginak Pootoogook (1935–2010) and cousin, Shuvinai Ashoona (b. 1961). Annie comes from a large family of ten children, and numerous nieces and nephews. She also has two sons and a daughter.

Her brother Goo Pootoogook, an artist himself, is the eldest child in the Pootoogook clan. Then came Sukualuk, who was adopted out to Latcholassie, followed by Paulousie, who was adopted out to Joanasie Igiu, then Elisapee was born. Annie had two older siblings, See and Annie, who died tragically in a house fire in 1968, the year before she was born. Annie shares the same name as one of her deceased siblings as is Inuit custom because “the souls of the deceased are embodied again in the living by the act of giving the newborn the name of the recently departed regardless of gender.”<sup>72</sup> Following this tradition the next child born after the accident was named See, also spelled “Cee,” who is also an artist and printer at Kinngait Studios. Another daughter, Kudluakjuk, drowned in 1972 as a young child. She was playing on the shore and was swept away when the tide came in. Annie’s youngest sibling is Nujaliak. Annie Pootoogook had two sons as a young woman. Her eldest son, Salamonie, was adopted out to Kiuga Ashoona (1933–2014). Her second son, Appa, was raised in Iqaluit by relatives. Annie had a third child, Napachie, born in Ottawa in 2014 and also adopted out. Despite the tragic events of the fire and the drowning, family members recall a relatively happy childhood featuring trips to the land for clam digging and berry picking. Annie attended primary school in

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<sup>72</sup> Janet Mancini Billson and Kyra Mancini, *Inuit Women: Their Powerful Spirit in a Century of Change* (UK: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2007): 87.

Kinngait and was a bright student.<sup>73</sup> Then she was sent to Iqaluit for four years of high school but it is uncertain whether she graduated. It was in Iqaluit that Annie developed a dependency on drugs and embarked on a series of dysfunctional and often dangerous relationships. She returned to Kinngait in 1990.

### ***Earning a Living***

Annie honed her drawing skills by working alongside her Elders in the Studios at the West Baffin Co-operative. In this classic apprenticeship system, one learns by observation. There is a back and forth among the less experienced artists, who watch and imitate one another and the more experienced artists. Annie was encouraged by the Elder women in the community, including her grandmother, Pitseolak, and mother, Napachie, to pick up paper from the Co-op and try to make drawings at home. Annie saw drawing as a way to provide an income for herself. She began coming to the Co-op Studios to work in 1990. William Ritchie the manager of Kinngait Studios, a job he has held for twenty-five years, manages and supervises the print studio and the printers as well as encouraging graphic artists to make work and push themselves. He writes:

It took a while for Annie to tune in to the Co-op situation but like the others it didn't take long for her to figure things out. At times she was uninterested and at other times she was keen. She learned to listen to advice, grew with praise and cash incentives, took on the large paper challenge that everyone goes through. She knew we were all trying to help her out. She took advantage like everyone else, acted out like everyone does, called me

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<sup>73</sup>Goo Pootoogook, telephone interview with the author, December 10, 2015.

every name in the book and then some. She flirted, pushed and challenged but in the end she put pencil to paper and that's what mattered, she committed.<sup>74</sup>

Annie began drawing seriously in 1997 with the gentle encouragement and support of William Ritchie and the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. The Kinngait Studios serve as a distributor for the artists in the community, buying their work, providing them with studio space and materials, and promoting their work in the South. The arts advisor and studio manager, who has been William Ritchie since 1995, plays an integral role with the artists. He writes, "The big question from all the artists is what should I draw and it is often up to me which way to push them."<sup>75</sup> The main job of Kinngait Studios is to facilitate artists and provide a supportive environment in which they can work and sell their drawings weekly, thus permitting them to be self-sufficient but not burdened with the business of selling their own art. Once outside the protective umbrella of the Co-op, the artist is left to negotiate the art world alone. Because of this many artists elect to stay within the Co-operative system or leave for short periods of time only to return.

The drawings of Annie, although stylistically in line with those of her predecessors, challenge conventional assumptions about the subject matter of Inuit art. Like her grandmother Pitseolak Ashoona and mother Napachie Pootoogook, Annie is a chronicler, and her drawings of domestic interiors and modern outpost camps reflect the difficult social, economic, and physical realities of today's North. Annie is not the first artist to reveal the gender inequality. The later drawings of her mother, Napachie, contain candid examinations of rape and suicide as well as

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<sup>74</sup> William Ritchie, email correspondence with the author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

her own struggles with domestic violence and abuse. Pitseolak's work primarily records memories of her life on the land while Napachie's drawings, particularly her few autobiographical drawings, document the transition period of the 1960s and the Inuit's adjustment to life in government-built settlements.

The adoption of a cash economy in the Canadian Arctic allowed women, for the first time, to make a living and support their families independently. This was an important development for women in Kinngait, such as Pitseolak Ashoona, Kenojuak Ashevak, Napachie Pootoogook, Shuvinai Ashoona, and Annie Pootoogook, whose provocative work has been validated in significant galleries and publications in the South. Their art provided them and their families with a decent livelihood.



Figure 5.2. Annie Pootoogook, *Pitseolak Drawing with Two Girls on the Bed*, 2006, Pencil crayon and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, private collection, Toronto.

Annie's drawing *Pitseolak Drawing with Two Girls on the Bed* shows the closeness of the three generations of women and the practice of learning by watching, the apprenticeship model of education that remains in practice today. Pitseolak was bedridden during the last years of her life, and Annie remembers that she and her mother would often visit while she worked in

her bed. Annie describes her memories of making this drawing in an interview that reflects this apprenticeship model of learning.

I used to go and watch my grandma drawing because I wanted to learn and she was my grandma. Nobody used to watch her. I don't know why. I wanted to learn so I had to watch her. She used to talk to me and say, "I'm drawing because my grandchildren have to eat." But she drew a true story, too, about her life. And she used to tell me you should try this when you grow up, if you can.<sup>76</sup>

These sage words have become the premise from which Annie approaches each drawing. The trademark glasses appear in many of Annie's drawings as a symbol of her grandmother. Her *Glasses, Pencil and Eraser* combines the glasses with the tools of the trade, a pencil and eraser.



Figure 5.3. Annie Pootoogook, *Glasses, Pen, Pencil and Eraser*, 2006, 51 x 66 cm, print drawing, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, Kinngait.

This is a representation of Pitseolak as an artist. The choice to select a key object from the subject was a popular trope with Annie during 2006 and 2007, when the manager of Kinngait Studios, William Ritchie, encouraged Annie to extract significant or symbolic objects and isolate them in a drawing. Similarly, *Composition (Drawing My Grandmother's Glasses)* is a large

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<sup>76</sup> Nancy Campbell et al., *Annie Pootoogook*: 13.

format oil stick drawing that again singles out the spectacles, but in this pivotal piece Annie inserts herself as an artist as well, showing her hand drawing Pitseolak's eye glasses, hence melding the generations.

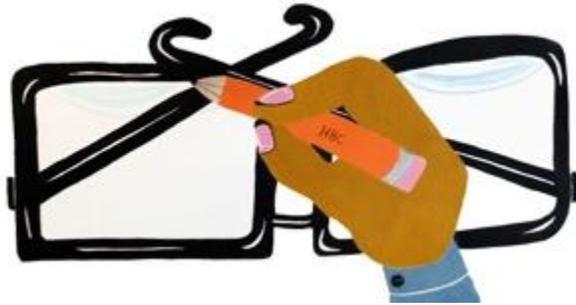


Figure 5.4. Annie Pootoogook, *Composition (Drawing My Grandmother's Glasses)*, 2007 Oil stick on paper. 127 x 249 cm, Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Annie Pootoogook's drawings record the details of her life in the contemporary Arctic community that include camping, interiors, and day-to-day life such as preparing and eating meals, watching television or socializing. Annie, being third generation, was raised with access to television and she references people such as Jerry Springer, Charlie Chaplin, Bugs Bunny, Peter Mansbridge, and Saddam Hussein on the television screens that appear in her drawings. Some of her more controversial drawings boldly reveal the cycles of addiction and abuse in her life and her community. The images that represent alcoholism, domestic violence, and drug abuse are raw and straightforward. In their directness they challenge both the Southern viewers' and her fellow artists' expectations of what pictures of the North should look like. In Annie's work, as with much contemporary art, we see how the local and the global have been enfolded, adapted, and adopted in her lived experience. The challenge for the viewer "is to keep up with

the proliferation of new subjects, scenes and artistic energies, as well as with the information that explodes from all sides and forces us to open our eyes, ears and minds.”<sup>77</sup>

### ***Rapid Trajectory***

In 2006, Annie Pootoogook came to Toronto for the opening of her exhibition of recent drawings at the Power Plant, a major Canadian contemporary art gallery that exhibits national and international work. It was the first solo exhibition devoted to a contemporary Inuit artist at the gallery. Subsequently she continued to excel artistically. That same year she won the prestigious Sobey Award, presented annually to an outstanding Canadian artist under forty. She was the first Inuit artist to be nominated for this award, which comes with a substantial cash prize. Annie was quoted in an article in the *Nunatsiaq News*: “‘I was excited,’ Pootoogook said about the award. ‘They like my work, so I was happy.’”<sup>78</sup> Annie had broken many significant barriers long entrenched in the Canadian art world that were keeping Inuit art outside the contemporary mainstream. Her delight at her drawings being liked does not take into account the shift in art history that her being considered for and subsequently winning the Sobey Award represents. Prior to Annie’s winning of the award there was no geographical division for artists from Nunavut in the competition. Quickly, the Sobey team added a category, *Prairies and the North*, to allow for her inclusion. The irony is that no one on the awards committee had even imagined a submission from Nunavut would be considered for the Canadian contemporary art prize. Wayne

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<sup>77</sup>Anna Maria Guasch, *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, <http://www.thirdtext.org/globalization-and-contemporary-art> online.

<sup>78</sup> Jane George, “Cape Dorset’s Annie Pootoogook wins prestigious art award: Honor for outstanding new artist comes with \$50,000 in cash,” November 17, 2006, [http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/61117/news/nunavut/61117\\_05.html](http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/61117/news/nunavut/61117_05.html).

Baerwaldt, former director and curator of the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at the Alberta College of Art and Design, was on the jury that eventually awarded the 2006 Sobey Art Award to contemporary Inuit artist Annie Pootoogook. He remembers that:

There were so many people on the jury at that time who were resistant to Annie winning. They said because she was from the North that she wasn't "informed" enough, hadn't been exposed to modernism and hadn't had formal training at art college like other artists did. For me, that was like listening to some 19th century discourse.

I think there was also this long-standing perception that, because of its history, that "Inuit art" is a commercial form of cultural production and therefore "artificial" while contemporary art from the south comes purely from the spirit of the artist and is therefore "authentic." But who can say what motivates any individual artist, no matter where they come from?<sup>79</sup>

But as issues such as Arctic sovereignty and climate change increasingly push Northern issues onto newscasts and into headlines, some think the Southern arts community is slowly waking up to contemporary work from the Arctic.

Annie's work, which gently rests at an important historical juncture, melding an economical drawing style using coloured pencil with depictions of contemporary life, had caught the world's attention. This was further attested to with her inclusion in *Documenta 12* in Kassel, Germany. She was one of two Canadians selected for this important exhibition. This amount of critical attention is a lot for any young contemporary artist to process. Because of the recognition and professional opportunities she had received, Annie decided to remain in the South, initially

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<sup>79</sup>Wayne Baerwaldt, quoted in Eilís Quinn, "THE NEW RAW – Contemporary Inuit Art," *Eye on the Arctic*, September 30, 2010, <http://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2010/09/30/the-new-raw/>.

living in Montreal and then residing in Ottawa. The decision to stay in the South is not unheard of for Inuit artists who find the stimulation and relative freedom a welcome change from the small community of Kinngait. However, with this relocation, artists lose the opportunity to work with Kinngait Studios and have their drawings or sculptures purchased on a weekly basis and marketed to Southern dealers through Dorset Fine Arts. Annie's decision not to return to Kinngait or remain a Co-operative artist had a negative effect both on her life and her art production. James Adams, a journalist from the *Globe and Mail*, wrote an article in 2012 reflecting on the realities of Annie's life in Ottawa: she was unable to produce or market enough drawings to maintain the career she started. Adams states that:

Unfortunately, [her] drawings are being sold by their creator, for reportedly as little as \$25, \$30 or \$40 to passersby near a Shoppers Drug Mart on Rideau Street – a far cry from the \$2,000 to \$2,500 that veteran Toronto art dealer Patricia Feheley could command for Pootoogook's best work as few as five years ago.<sup>80</sup>

The article continues quoting myself and Patricia Feheley who try to give context to this difficult reality.

Annie Pootoogook “doesn't want to go back north,” according to Nancy Campbell, then the associate curator of special projects at the Art Gallery of Ontario and, in 2006, curator of the much-lauded Toronto solo show. “It's problematic up there as well, of course. But at least up north [the West Baffin Island Co-operative, which since 1959 has been one of the major supporters and suppliers of Inuit art] would manage her, take care of her. But she is suspicious of all that now.”

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<sup>80</sup>James Adams, “A revolutionary Inuit artist's life imitates her art, darkly,” *Globe and Mail*, August 15, 2012, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/arevolutionary-inuit-artists-life-imitates-her-art-darkly/article4483381/>.

“Going south wasn’t the only factor that has led to her life [being] this way,” Campbell added. “Annie’s not the only Inuk to want to go down south and live an easier life but isn’t really emotionally prepared to do that,” or has only the most “rudimentary understanding of career building. You can’t blame her for wanting to try but sometimes it does end up in a dead-end situation.”

Until very recently both Campbell and Feheley believed Pootoogook could come back and hoped for her personal welfare that she would return to Cape Dorset. Unfortunately, her untimely death is the sad resolution of this tragic life that was complicated by systemic social issues, mental un-wellness and abuse. Pootoogook’s contribution to Canadian art history, “to Inuit art history is significant,” Campbell noted. “Even if Annie never makes another drawing, I think she will certainly stand as one of the most significant artists of this generation.”<sup>81</sup>

Dr. Norman Vorano, assistant professor and Queen's National Scholar, points to an essential way of reading the work presently coming out the North. He states that:

Appreciating modern Inuit art helps us move beyond the old colonial lens, when Inuit were seen as belonging to a distant past, living outside the present. . . . Acknowledging the vitality, relevance and importance of modern Inuit art is also a tacit acknowledgement that both Inuit and non-Inuit live in a shared world, experiencing a shared present, occupying a shared globe.<sup>82</sup>

That Annie came South from Kinngait and in a relatively short time was exposed to the mainstream art world, the media, travel, and the relative comforts of the city needs to be understood as a tremendous cultural leap that left her vulnerable. The raw substance of her

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Norman Vorano, quoted in Eilís Quinn, “THE NEW RAW – Contemporary Inuit Art,” *Eye on the Arctic*, September 30, 2010, <http://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2010/09/30/the-new-raw/>.

drawings, which is always present, continues to shock and intrigue viewers whose knowledge of the Canadian Arctic is minimal. This is perhaps because her commentary is so honest that it affronts mainstream ignorance of Inuit peoples. The reality is that she suffered from sporadic, severe states of mental anguish in Kinngait, which included periodic substance abuse and problems with addiction, and continued to struggle with them in her new circumstances. The issues that always made her work so compelling are still present in the sporadic work she had done since moving to the South; however, the drawings completed in Montreal, drawings that depict the same struggles seen in her work completed in Kinngait, are not as striking to Southern eyes, which is profoundly sad. Such is the restrictive colonial appetite for Inuit art.

Inuit communities have navigated Southern influences for a long time and it is clear that the North has changed and will continue to change especially as it becomes more accessible. The idyllic images of hunting and other traditional activities that were depicted in the earliest Inuit artworks available in the South represented a way of life that has given way under the increasing pressures of urbanization. Non-Inuit viewers often look at the art of Inuit with nostalgia, seeking in it a last glimpse of the disappearing natural world. Annie's work commemorates and chronicles this loss, and Annie also lost herself.

## Key Works

### *Early Work*

Annie Pootoogook was first introduced to drawing in the late 1990s. The earliest complete drawings she produced at the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op in Kinngait date from 2001. Two of these drawings, *Eating Seal at Home* and *Playing Cards*, both dated 2001, are typical of her domestic scenes: families sitting together at home engaged in activities that combine Inuit traditions with contemporary reality.



Figure 5.5. Annie Pootoogook, *Eating Seal at Home*, 2001, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Collection of John and Joyce Price, Seattle, WA.

The early drawings are simple, showing little or no understanding of linear perspective, but reveal a clear attempt, on her part, to master it to create her interiors with the illusion of three dimensions. The floor is a flat brick pattern with depth being signified by the placement of objects, such as a television or a couch, in the foreground, middle ground, and background.

However, Annie's typical iconography is evident in the early work. She includes a television, a

clock, light switches, and shoes at the door. These objects are repeated throughout Annie's oeuvre. Despite these contemporary elements, Annie points to the resilience of a tradition of gathering to eat or play in a circle on the floor, one that remains centred on sharing and socializing. In both *Playing Cards* and *Eating Seal at Home* the group is sitting together on the floor despite the furniture seen in the background.



Figure 5.6. Annie Pootoogook, *Playing Cards*, 2001, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Collection of John and Joyce Price, Seattle WA.

Inuit today still employ the traditional practice of eating “country food,” such as whale or seal, on the floor, reserving the table and chairs for Western fare. Similarly, card playing can be linked to the tradition of game playing that took place in small ice houses or tents in the past.

A later example of these activities is seen in *Man on the Radio*, done in 2006. Here we see the development of Annie's drawing skills in her ongoing commitment to documenting the day-to-day. In the rendering of the floor tile there is a crude attempt at linear perspective and the domestic interior is spatially more sophisticated than her earlier works. In the foreground the man of the house is sitting at the table talking on the radio and beside him is a woman preparing country food on the floor with her daughter. In the background we see a bedroom with a boy peeking around the corner and through the window we see outside to the snow banks beyond creating a much more developed sense of depth than in her earlier works. The clock, a common element in Annie's works, marks the time of the scene.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Patricia Feheley, "Modern Language: The Art of Annie Pootoogook," *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Vol. 19. No. 2: 10–15.



Figure 5.7. Annie Pootoogook, *Man on the Radio*, 2006, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

***Social Commentary***

As stated previously, Annie most often draws the daily occurrences of contemporary life in her community. This narrative is often personal, not based exclusively on observation or accurate reproduction of details. Elder Jimmy Manning states:

Annie's work is very different. Annie's work is, like, today and yesterday . . . daily happenings, shopping, music, the feast. Sometimes she will draw very hurting feelings from her heart which she's not afraid to say on paper.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Jimmy Manning, telephone interview with author, May 2005.

Prophetically, Maria von Finckenstein wrote, in 1998 in the *Inuit Art Quarterly* that, “it will be interesting to see if scenes of spousal abuse and the effects of alcohol and erotic imagery begin showing up in Inuit graphic arts.”<sup>85</sup> Beginning in late 2001, Annie Pootoogook began to reveal some of the social problems that plague both her life and her community, such as alcohol abuse and domestic violence. These drawings are unsentimental and direct. Like all of her work they tell a story from her daily life. Initially Annie was very reluctant to acknowledge that some of these works represented her own experience, choosing to say vaguely that these events happened to someone else. Later, when discussing *Man Abusing his Partner*, she spoke openly about her own experience of domestic violence.

She [my sister] told me to get out of that house before he broke my bone. So my sister was in shock because I was going crazy. And I wasn't normal anymore. But I had to charge him because what he did to me in that house, I had to charge him 'cause he used too much weapons on me and my life was lost.<sup>86</sup>



Figure 5.8. Annie Pootoogook, *Man Abusing his Partner*, 2001–02, Coloured pencil and Fineliner, 51 x 66 cm, Collection of John and Joyce Price, Seattle.

<sup>85</sup> Maria Finklestein, “Printmaking: A Survey,” Vol. 13 No. 2, *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Summer 1998: 4.

<sup>86</sup> Nancy Campbell, *Annie Pootoogook* (Calgary: Illingworth Kerr Gallery, 2007), 13.

*Memory of My Life: Breaking Bottles* documents her frustration with alcoholism in community.



Figure 5.9. Annie Pootoogook, *My Life: Breaking Bottles*, 2001/02, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Private Collection.

After much conversation she admitted to me that she was the young woman in the image.

One time I drew when I broke bottles 'cause I got tired of drinking people every day. So I had to broke . . . break their bottles on the rock so they won't drink tomorrow. I think I did a good job.<sup>87</sup>

Gallerist Patricia Fehleley writes in her article “Modern Language: The Art of Annie Pootoogook” in the *Inuit Art Quarterly* that “Annie's narrative tendencies, meticulous draftsmanship and contemporary subject matter stand out against a half-century of graphics

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 13.

preoccupied primarily with issues of design and colour.”<sup>88</sup> Annie’s use of narrative realism has its roots in drawings done by Annie’s predecessors, particularly her grandmother Pitseolak and mother Napachie, who also employed this style. Inuit drawings often record memories of lived lives and daily activities. Often these are idealized or imagined scenarios describing the way that things used to be. However, toward the end of her life, Annie’s mother Napachie Pootoogook (1938-2002) began a ground-breaking autobiographical series of about 300 drawings that dealt with difficult themes.

Some drawings featured happy moments from camp life such as dancing, playing games and eating meals, whereas others were much darker, introducing imagery related to spousal abuse and arranged marriage. There are drawings that depict infanticide as well as people in the community suffering from mental illness. Napachie also drew elders, leaders and shamans and recorded their stories in her work. These are narrative drawings that included syllabic text, to further elaborate on the illustrated representations.<sup>89</sup>

No doubt Annie was affected by her mother’s struggles with mental health and abuse and influenced by seeing her making drawings about these difficult experiences. In *Man Abusing his Partner* and *Breaking Bottles* Annie deals with her experiences head on. These works were not embraced by many of her fellow artists in the Co-op; I was present on one occasion when she was told by fellow artists that such work would never sell. Experimenting with new subject matter or materials meant artists risked the income that they needed to support their families

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<sup>88</sup> Patricia Feheley, “Modern Language: the Art of Annie Pootoogook,” *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Vol. 19. No. 2, Summer 2004: 3.

<sup>89</sup> There are approximately 300 drawings in the autobiographical series by Napachie Pootoogook, the bulk of which is owned by the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. In 2000, Leslie Boyd Ryan, formerly with Dorset Fine Arts (Toronto), received a grant from the Canada Council Program Grants for Aboriginal Writers, Storytellers and Publishers to conduct interviews with Napachie Pootoogook and translate the Inuktitut inscriptions on her drawings. See [http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/973594/3/Tomaszewska\\_MA\\_S2012.pdf](http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/973594/3/Tomaszewska_MA_S2012.pdf).

while sticking to “tradition” meant denying themselves as artists the freedom to experiment and grow.<sup>90</sup> Annie had gone against the tradition of using imagery that was deemed suitable by the Co-operative and the Inuit art market by drawing the new realities of her North. Inuit art historian Heather Igloliorte notes the irony of the Inuit art-making situation: “While all around them their culture was being debased, devalued, and actively oppressed by the dual forces of colonialism and Christianity, these same values were revered, celebrated, and voraciously collected in their arts.”<sup>91</sup>

Napachie and then Annie drew from personal experience and represented some of the cultural anguish that plagued the community in which they lived. The work of Napachie was seldom seen outside of the Studio. During her career sanctioned prints were the vehicle by which most collectors and curators came to know the work of an artist. However, the exhibition and reception of the drawings of Annie Pootoogook that make social commentary have led to a new understanding of life in Nunavut. And they mark a change in Inuit art and the perceptions of those who collect it.

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<sup>90</sup> Amy Prouty, The Traditional and the Contemporary: Annie Pootoogook, *Sanasimajuq*, August 22, 2015, <https://sanasimajuq.wordpress.com/2015/08/22/the-traditional-and-the-contemporary-annie-pootoogook/>.

<sup>91</sup> Heather Igloliorte, “Inuit Artistic Expression as Cultural Resilience,” in *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Journey*, ed. Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 12 (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009): 130.

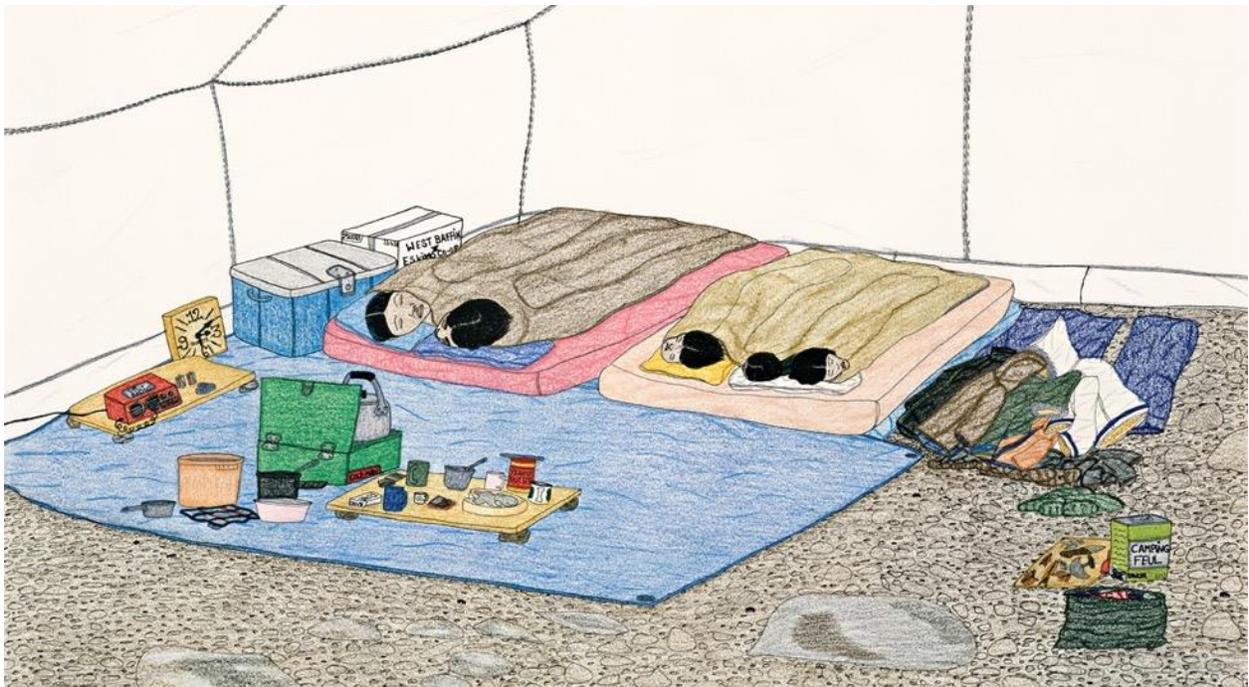


Figure 5.10. Annie Pootoogook, *Summer in the Camp Tent*, 2002, Pencil, pencil crayon, and ink on paper 51 x 66 cm, Collection of John and Joyce Price, Seattle, WA.

### ***On the Land***

Camping in the North remains a tradition and delight for those who live there. Tent rings can be found that date back hundreds of years. In the short summer months families return to old camps where they hunt, fish, and gather berries. Some in Kinngait have summer tents or small cabins within sight of their homes because they enjoy the fresh breezes off the harbour and life on the land. Many Inuit artists have drawn camping scenes and Annie is no exception. Her love of camping is seen in the peaceful drawings of camp life. As typical of her style the drawings of tent interiors are descriptive. In *Summer in the Camp Tent*, we see a family asleep on their sleeping platforms. The accessories of camping are illustrated in the scene, the Coleman stove, coolers, tea pot and dishes, as well as a radio and a clock. Parkas and clothing shed for sleeping are lying on the floor. The floor of the tent is rocky with the exception of the camping sheet

where the cooking and sleeping take place. Here Annie documents what an Inuit camp is like today as opposed to in the past when families only had a *quilliq*, or seal oil lamp, for light and heat.

Annie would have seen her mother's and grandmother's drawings of camp life when she was a child. Her mother Napachie also drew scenes of camping. One drawing of hers, *Napachie Drawing in her Tent*, shows the artist working on a drawing in her summer camp tent. A child watches the artist work.



Figure 5.11. Napachie Pootoogook, *Napachie Drawing in Her Tent*, 1984-85, 51 x 66 cm, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-Operative Ltd., on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

The tent scene displays the accessories of camping as well; a Coleman stove, kettle, food items and a traditional *ulu* (knife). This drawing is also descriptive, however, in it the artist looks directly at the viewer in an engaging way seldom seen in Annie's work.

A related work of Annie's, *Coleman Stove*, is also a representation of camping.



Figure 5.12 Annie Pootoogook, *Coleman Stove with Robin Hood Flour and Tenderflake*, 2004, 76 x 113 cm, Ink and coloured pencil on paper, Private collection, Vancouver, BC.

This drawing is done on larger format paper and depicts only the objects necessary for making bannock in graphic isolation from the larger camp scene. The large, green Coleman stove is central to the image, surrounded by Robin Hood flour, salt, Tenderflake lard, and Magic Baking Powder. This strategy of representing an activity by isolating the objects rather than depicting the activity itself is a more graphic art-making practice. It is also seen in her Uncle

Kananginak Pootoogook's (1935–2010) work. Kananginak's images range from seal oil lamps to kerosene tanks:

All delivered in what could be described as a folk realist style, one that gives equal weight to every form and detail, although often with characterful distortions of scale. His graphic art manifests an ethnographic fondness for visual inventories of material objects, each of his drawings inscribed by hand in Inuktitut syllabics with explanations such as “What we use for hunting nowadays in the North.”<sup>92</sup>

A late work by Kananginak, *Untitled*, depicts the gear required to go camping. The cooler, Coleman stove, kettle, and radio are presented in an inventory format along with a tent, boat, motor, gasoline, and fishing rod. This drawing, like Annie's *Coleman Stove*, which could be called, “What we use for making bannock nowadays in the North,” does not romanticize Arctic camping but presents it as a current and evolving tradition in the lives of the Inuit.

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<sup>92</sup> Robin Laurence, “Such a Long Journey: Kananginak Pootoogook” *Canadian Art* online. January 5, 2012, [http://canadianart.ca/reviews/kananginak\\_pootoogook/](http://canadianart.ca/reviews/kananginak_pootoogook/).



Figure 5.13. Kananginak Pootoogook, *Untitled*, 2006, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Private collection.

### ***Popular Culture***

Gallerist Patricia Feheley, of Feheley Fine Arts in Toronto, gives her perspective on the presence of global references in contemporary Inuit art in an article in the *Inuit Art Quarterly* as early as 2004. She states:

It is not unprecedented for contemporary Inuit artists, particularly those of the younger generation, to create images inspired by current global events. Oviloo Tunnillie (1949-2014) has created sculptures of praying or grieving women as a stated response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City. Other artists, including Kavavoaw Mannomee, have responded with graphics depicting planes crashing into buildings. Annie was not immune to the impact of this seminal moment, and has revisited the theme in her own recent drawings. She explains that Cape Dorset was inundated with news on the radio and television leading up to and during the war, and the subject came to dominate local conversation and daily life in the North, as elsewhere. As startling as it is to see Saddam Hussein's face rise from the surface of an Inuit drawing, in many ways

Annie's images of the TV news footage of the war are most poignant as they reveal the literal “window on the world” created in contemporary Inuit homes by modern media.<sup>93</sup>

Annie’s drawings, in addition to including name brand products from the South, from food stuffs to electronics, almost always have a television in a position of prominence, which can be interpreted as her “window on the world.” Southern broadcasting in the North — broadcasting that began in 1972, when Annie was three years old, with the Canadian government’s launch of the Anik A1 satellite — has had a profound influence. The Anik A1 satellite continues to generate criticism for its corrosive effects on Inuit culture although global infiltration of mass culture into this remote community could not have been avoided. There is little broadband connectivity in the North but more than 90 percent of Arctic households now have satellite television and this has had a significant influence on how Annie’s generation see the world. This fact inspired Isuma Igloodik Productions, for example, to launch Inuktitut language programming by and for Inuit. Their *Our Land* series was the most successful. Annie does not editorialize, though her drawings are relatively unusual in their repeated, almost mesmeric acknowledgement of the situation of two cultures colliding and melding — and in their clever invitation to Southerners to watch Northerners watching Southerners.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Patrica Feheley, “Modern Language: The Art of Annie Pootoogook,” *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Vol. 19. No. 2, Summer 2004: 15.

<sup>94</sup> David Balzer, “Culture Clash: Annie Pootoogook Captures Canada’s North–South Divide” (June 27, 2006), <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/photoessay/pootoogook/index4.html>.



Figure 5.14. Annie Pootoogook, *The National*, 2003, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Collection of the Confederation Art Centre, Charlottetown, PEI.

In her work Annie frequently includes familiar television personalities such as Jerry Springer, or programs such as the *Simpsons*, and world leaders such as Saddam Hussein and George Bush. In *The National*, we are presented with one of her most detailed interiors. An adolescent in cargo pants is walking from room to room wearing his iPod and a baseball cap turned sideways. A female figure is looking at a calendar on the wall. The wall is covered with items that are seen in many of Annie's drawings: a clock, a light, snowmobile keys, and a Jesus sign. On the table is Southern food and on the television on the left side of the drawing is Peter Mansbridge, anchor of the CBC news program, *The National*. The news is a constant source of

information and connection in the North, both the national news on CBC, and the local news broadcast from Iqaluit or on the community radio. Seldom does one enter a house or workplace without the background noise of the radio or the television.

Gaming is also a popular subject in Annie's drawing, as seen, for example in *Playing Super Nintendo*. The young boy is absorbed by the game, and has his back to the viewer. The scene might be found in any living room in Canada.



Figure 5.15. Annie Pootoogook, *Playing Super Nintendo*, 2004, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Private Collection.

But the most compelling images involving television are perhaps those of Inuit watching Isuma Igloolik programs<sup>95</sup> or traditional practices such as seal or caribou hunting or making bannock on stations such as APTN. Images such as these highlight recent efforts to produce original

<sup>95</sup> For more on Isuma Productions see: [www.isuma.ca/](http://www.isuma.ca/).

Indigenous programming and suggest that future generations will rely on mediated instruction in traditional practices rather than instruction from their Elders. In *Watching the Seal Hunt on Television*, Annie shows a young child wrapped in a blanket with a Coke and a snack watching a kill that could be happening simultaneously in Kinngait. This image captures issues of the survival of culture and of traditional hunting practices, and the attempts, such as the formation of Nunavut in 1999 and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, to retain and reinforce traditional knowledge.<sup>96</sup>

The goals of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, that embraces all aspects of traditional Inuit culture, including values, world-view, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions and expectations with the expectation that over time, it will help restore Inuit pride and increase individual self-esteem. By increasing young Inuit self-esteem, some of today's social problems such as substance abuse and even suicide.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>For more information about *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* see:  
<http://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/files/Inuit%20Qaujimajatuqangit%20ENG.pdf>.

<sup>97</sup><http://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/files/Inuit%20Qaujimajatuqangit%20-%20EducationFramework.pdf>.



Figure 5.16. Annie Pootoogook, *Watching the Seal Hunt on Television*, 2003/4, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Private collection.

### ***Monsters***

The arts advisor at the Co-op — at the time of this writing William Ritchie — plays an important role in nurturing the artists in Kinngait and encouraging them to explore new avenues of inquiry.

This interface between the artist and advisor has been in play since the days of James Houston and Terry Ryan. William Ritchie states in an email to the author:

The big question from all the artists is what should I draw and it is often up to me which way to push them.<sup>98</sup>

This encouragement by the arts advisor is seen as useful by the artists and often opens up new areas of inquiry. Annie, like other artists in the studios, often struggled to find ideas and was encouraged to draw what she felt or saw. Annie said, “It seems like I throw that shit out of mind and start drawing. Well, drawing makes me feel better....better a lot than before.”<sup>99</sup> One cannot deny the cathartic effect drawing can have on an artist. This group of drawings differ from her interiors and landscapes. The images are more surreal, featuring monsters, torment, and anguish. In our interviews Annie was initially reluctant to talk about these drawings, preferring to let the work speak for itself. These, what I would term “the psychological drawings,” are, again, highly personal, focusing on her struggles with mental health and addiction as well as the social problems of her community.

Annie’s personal struggles are represented in a number of images that are more symbolic. Typically, these drawings have a central figure or scene that, for example, radiates yellow and red dots, symbolizing happiness and sadness. The dots and zig-zag lines are also found surrounding an area of concern such as in *Dreaming of Marijuana*.

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<sup>98</sup> William Ritchie, email correspondence with the author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>99</sup> Marcia Connolly, dir., *Annie Pootoogook* (Siteline Media Inc., 23.50 min., 2006).



Figure 5.17. Annie Pootoogook, *Dreaming of Marijuana*, 2005, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Private collection, Toronto.

The joints, ashtray, and hashish are surrounded by a bubble from which lines radiate. A man watching television with his hands over his head appears to be in distress, perhaps desperate for the drugs.

In *Woman with the Devil*, we see a woman on all fours being choked by a demon creature. The woman, perhaps Annie herself “is saying *taqapaa* in syllabics that means, exhausted or stressed out while the evil figure that is trying to take her life, is saying *piapiga*, meaning mine. I’m thinking that the evil is trying over take her life.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Juumi (Joemie) Tapaungai, email correspondence with the author, February 1, 2016.



Figure 5.18. Annie Pootoogook, *Woman with the Devil*, 2004, 51 x 66 cm, Ink and coloured pencil on paper, Private collection, Toronto.

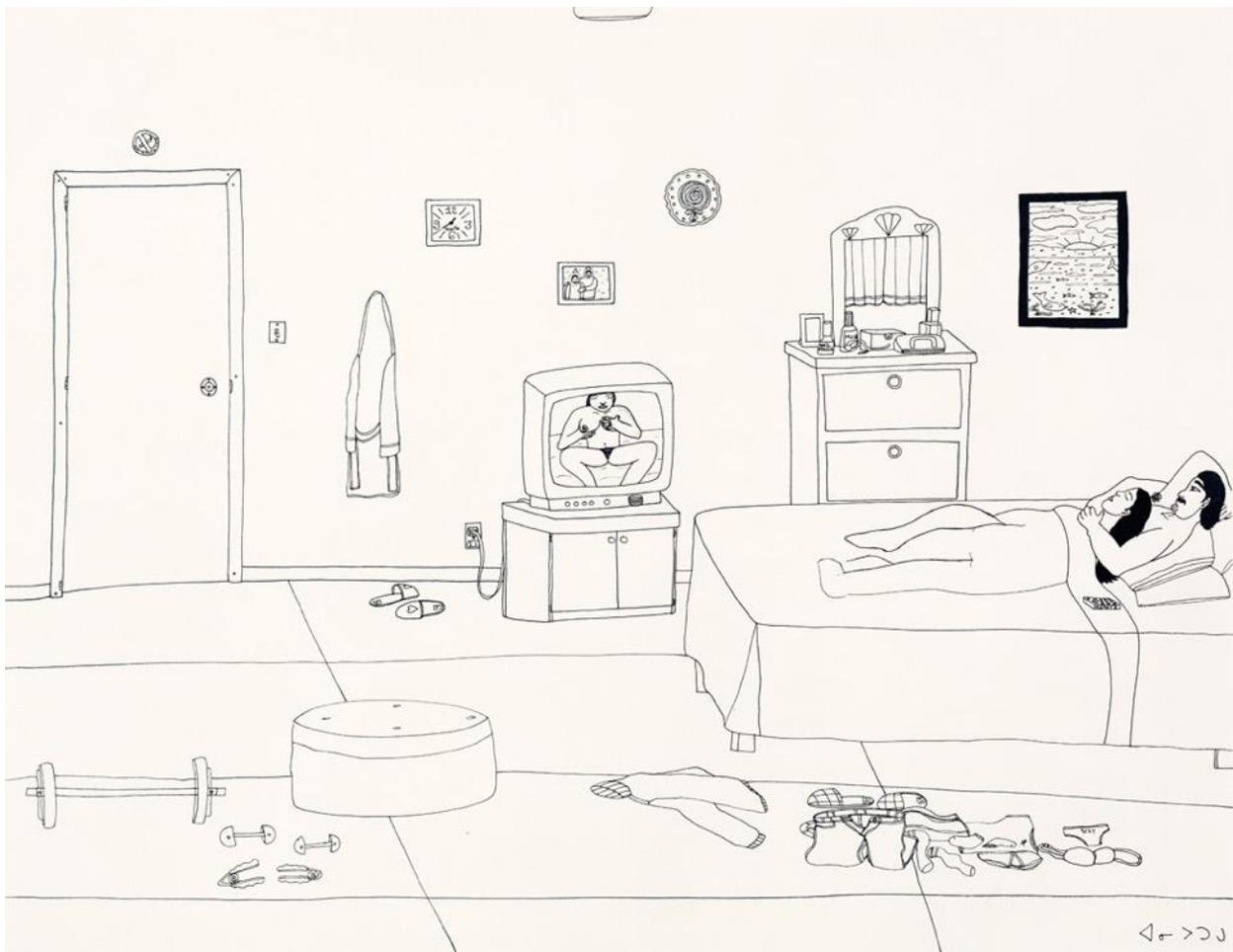


Figure 5.19. Annie Pootoogook, *Watching an Erotic Film*, 2004, Fineliner on paper 51 x 66 cm, Private collection, Toronto.

### ***Sexuality***

Some of the most compelling drawings done by Annie are those that address sexuality. In the history of Inuit drawings there were no representations of lust, desire, sex, or intimacy on paper and only rarely in carvings before Annie's even though sexuality is represented in traditional Inuit story telling. The drawings, like Annie's other works, are neither sentimental nor romantic. Her narrative realism is as evident here as it is in her other depictions of daily life. In *Watching an Erotic Film*, we see a couple embracing in bed, under the covers, watching a pornographic movie.

Her domestic interior is filled with details of the individuals' daily lives. There are clothes strewn on the floor, a set of weights sits neglected in the corner, pictures hang on the wall, a purse on a hook, and the dresser is littered with makeup. The television, centred on the paper, is the focus of the drawing and the pornographic image on the screen is a surprise to the viewer in this otherwise non-erotic setting. Again, the viewers' assumptions about Inuit art and life are challenged. What are these people doing when they are supposed to be out on the land hunting or preparing food? The clarity with which the artist has drawn the scene, in black Fineliner pen, is striking. The scene suggests direct correlation with life in the South where many homes are lit by television screens until the wee hours of the morning.

An earlier work, *Composition (Erotic Scene – Four Figures)* also contains sexual content, however, this drawing is more active. Again the interior is detailed. There is a television set, a stereo system, a lamp, a plant, and a window draped with an open curtain. The four people in the centre of the composition are in the throes of a group sexual encounter. However, despite the less conventional nature of the sexual activity, Annie presents the scene with the same directness seen in her other work. There has never been any acknowledgement by the artist that the scene is biographical, but it does highlight current community struggles around what is deemed to be acceptable behaviour, especially by the Anglican Church that colonized the Canadian Arctic.

In interviews Annie has been hesitant to identify herself as a person within the picture, and only after repeated conversations did she feel comfortable talking about herself as part of the narrative of the picture. The narrative realism of her work does not depend on her being a participant; she is a chronicler of events that have occurred in her community.



Figure 5.20. Annie Pootoogook, *Composition (Erotic Scene - Four Figures)*, 2001, Coloured pencil and Fineliner, 51 x 66 cm, Collection of John and Joyce Price, Seattle, WA.

It would not be surprising if she is one of the participants, but what is surprising is that the scene depicts four Inuit, nude, and having sex in defiance of the long-standing colonial, Christianized construction of Inuit as non-sexual.

A final work that is interesting in the context of this conversation is *Red Bra*. This is another example where Annie draws isolated objects, rather than scenes, to represent aspects of her life, as seen in *Coleman Stove*.



Figure 5.21. Annie Pootoogook, *Red Bra*, 2006, Coloured pencil on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative (print drawing).

*Red Bra*, complete with a tag indicating Annie's bra size, is an autobiographical drawing. Annie said in an interview that she "had a red bra and liked it."<sup>101</sup> The drawing was subsequently made into a print for the 2006 Annual Cape Dorset Print Release. It was a controversial inclusion in the normally traditional collection and marked an attempt on the part of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op to shake up expectations of collectors of Inuit art, which had limited success. *Red Bra* has connotations of an adventurous sexuality seldom associated with Inuit.



Figure 5.22. Annie Pootoogook working on a lithographic print.

Annie's work documents the new North and she is not afraid to put it onto paper. Scholar Deborah Root writes that Inuit prints and drawings have:

Quickly exceeded the bare fact of their origins, and became conduits through which Northern artists could express aesthetic and social concerns in new and meaningful ways. The constructed traditional became real, through the lived experiences and aesthetic

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<sup>101</sup> Annie Pootoogook, telephone interview with the author, May 2005.

practices of the artists. And because Northern society exists in the present, some Northern artists make images of contemporary realities. ... But the reception of Inuit art in the South has been slower to transform.<sup>102</sup>

### ***Museum Scale Drawing and its Effect***

The phenomenon of large-scale drawings coming out of the community of Kinngait has attracted much interest by collectors and museums in the past ten years and marked a significant change in production at the Kinngait Studios. Annie Pootoogook was at the forefront of this sea change with the production of her first large format drawing, *Cape Dorset Freezer*, 2006, which was exhibited at The Power Plant in Toronto and immediately purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario.

The drawing is a descriptive narrative of daily shopping at the store that depicts the contents of the freezer and the offering of the variety of packaged frozen foods available in Kinngait. The glass doors delicately reveal reflections of the shoppers and children admiring the contents, showing her mastery of coloured pencil. There is a shopper with an *amauti*, a parka with a large hood in which mothers carry their babies, and another shopper is pushing a grocery cart and perusing the offerings that include, among many things, Hungry Man dinners. This scene subtly reveals the collision of tradition and modern convenience that typifies communities across the North.

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<sup>102</sup> Deborah Root, "Limits of Authenticity," in *Annie Pootoogook* (Calgary: Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Alberta College of Art and Design, 2007): 23.



Figure 5.23. Annie Pootoogook, *Cape Dorset Freezer*, 2006, Pencil, coloured pencil, and Fineliner on paper, 122x 244 cm, Collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

The positive response from art museums to this larger format work is one of the reasons that some artists have adopted it for their drawings. The other is economic. The process for payment within the Co-op system is somewhat different for the artists making large drawings. It can take an artist a number of days to complete a big drawing. In this scenario the Co-op may pay artists a daily rate rather than a final lump payment, which allows them to work on bigger, more time-consuming projects. William Ritchie, manager at Kinngait Studios, believes the artists like the challenge and economic reward of the larger format. The drawing *Cape Dorset Freezer* is very ambitious. Annie's bold attempt to use reflection in the glass to show the activity in the store pushes her drawing skills to new limits to immense effect.

Since the inception of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op in 1959, drawings were typically done on paper that was 51 x 66 centimetres. This size was easily adapted to the domestic environments of collectors but eventually made some of the artists feel constricted, and the drawings were diminutive compared to many contemporary drawings created by artists in the South. The offering of large format paper to the artists of Kinngait has been relatively recent.

William Ritchie, an artist and printmaker himself, first introduced large format paper in the mid-nineties when he returned to Kinngait to manage the print studio. Terry Ryan, former head of Dorset Fine Arts, had encouraged Ritchie, and the many other artists from the South who visited the community, to mentor artists and share new practices and techniques. With this in mind, Ritchie brought a number of heavy rolls of Arches 330 gr. water colour paper up North. He soaked the paper in garbage bags over night then stretched it on specially prepared 3/4" backers with cross members on the back to stop the boards from torquing under the stress exerted by the drying of the heavy paper. The first artist to use this large format paper and watercolour technique was Arnaqu Ashevak (1956–2009). In 2002, Arnaqu painted his hands with seal oil running between his fingers using water colour paint on paper that was 152 centimetres square. Later, pioneer first-generation artist Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013) used the same technique although she preferred to use coloured pencil rather than watercolour paint. The watercolour experiment did not take off at the Kinngait Studios, but the large paper remained intriguing to some of the artists.

In 2005, as curator of her solo exhibition at the Power Plant, I asked Annie to try to produce a drawing 122 by 244 centimetres for the exhibition. This was the first time Annie had worked at this scale and she was helped by the Co-op to do so. According to Bill Ritchie, Annie found working at this scale difficult and grew tired of the other artists gathering around to watch her, so he transported the large panel to her apartment and set it up for her to work on at home. The result is the drawing of the new wall freezer at the local Co-op store.

Thus, Annie confirms that the art of Inuit is slowly changing and adapting. William Ritchie also confirms that drawing has come of age as an important and lucrative practice at Kinngait Studios. The studio has historically focused on lithography, etching, and stonecut, but

now drawing is also seen as an economic driver. The studio now routinely orders thousands of Derwent pencils, reams of paper in every colour, and they have adapted the studio so the artists can comfortably work on large-scale drawings. In the past drawings were primarily a source for images for the Annual Print Release. Now collectors and museums are attracted to the drawings that reveal the changes in the Arctic North.<sup>103</sup>

### ***The Sobey Award***

Part of Annie's contribution to shifting perceptions of Inuit art and its place in the contemporary Canadian art world came from the opportunities she had to travel outside of Kinngait to many international destinations as an artist. After travelling to Toronto for her solo exhibition at the Power Plant, Annie headed to Montreal to exhibit her work and to accept the \$50,000 Sobey Art Prize for 2006 at the Musée des beaux-arts.



Figure 5.24. Annie Pootoogook, *Annie at the Sobey Awards*, 2006, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Collection of Paul Desmarais III, Montreal.

<sup>103</sup> William Ritchie, email interview with the author, May 19, 2011.

Afterwards she was asked to participate in the Glen Fiddich Artist Residency in Dufftown, in the Moray district of Scotland. This three-month residency gave Annie the opportunity to meet other artists from around the world and spend time drawing. In yet another prestigious turn of events that year, Annie was selected to participate in *Documenta 12*, 2007 in Kassel, Germany, co-curated by German curators Ruth Noack and Roger Buerger. In this exhibition her work was positioned among that of major artists from across the globe.

While in Scotland Annie struggled with the freedom she had, as she was independent of



Figure 5.25. Annie Pootoogook, *Balvenie Castle*, 2006, 76 x 113 cm, Ink and coloured pencil on paper, Collection of Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, NS.

the 9 to 5 hours of the Co-op. The largest and most detailed of the few drawings she completed in Dufftown is *Balvenie Castle*, a drawing of a decaying castle near the artists' residence.

Annie's version of the castle is richly coloured and alive. The grass surrounding the castle is a pure bright green straight from the pencil crayon box. The stones that make up the castle are brightly coloured unlike the greyish brown of the castle itself. The stones are red, blue, orange, yellow, grey, and white, each outlined in black Fineliner pen and stacked to form walls that bear a striking resemblance to the stacked blocks of multi-coloured snow of a snow house, something that was part of Annie's life in Kinngait. The castle is foreign to Annie's visual vocabulary, which she solved by combining colours and visual elements to create a hybrid structure that reflects the Scottish landscape.

### ***Montreal***

*Drinking Beer in Montreal* is a significant drawing by Annie Pootoogook because the content of the piece marks her transition from being an artist of Kinngait to an artist who lives in the South. Although this work sits stylistically and compositionally with her drawings of daily life in the north it does not feature any of the notable exotic differences seen in her settings of Kinngait. Would such works have the same resonance with collectors? After winning the prestigious Sobey Art Prize in 2006 for contemporary artists under forty years of age, Annie decided not to return to Kinngait but to live in Montreal. This was in part due to the large cash prize she received as part of the award and in part to her desire to keep the momentum and accolades her drawings had inspired top of mind, which she believed that she could do without the support of the Kinngait Studios and her home community. Although Kinngait Studios has high expectations of the artist-members and is always trying to push their artistic practices, there is always

financial support for each artist in the form of payment for completed drawings, and it offers a safe place to work and enjoy the camaraderie of others.

Despite the personal and professional difficulties Annie had once she left the security of Kinngait and the Studios, she had already changed art history. Annie had reconstructed expectations of Inuit and contemporary art by winning this notable prize. The jury's decision to award Annie the prize changed Canadian art history. It is interesting to note that when Annie was nominated the Sobey prize categories were West, Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic. In 2006 the North was still not officially considered to be a contender for the contemporary art award. After Annie's nomination the categories were changed to include the Yukon and Northern territories marking a shift in the Canadian conception of Inuit art. Annie's small, direct, and honest coloured pencil drawings were timely in that they sat comfortably within the cultural zeitgeist of the moment in contemporary art by looking at the global through a very local lens. Annie's local lens was not that of the "North," with all of its intrinsic fascinations, when she drew *Drinking Beer in Montreal*.



Figure 5.26. Annie Pootoogook, *Drinking Beer in Montreal*, 2006, Coloured pencil and Fineliner on paper, 30.5 x 44 cm, Collection of John and Joyce Price, Seattle WA.

The local in this drawing is Montreal. The subject matter in this drawing is typical Annie, showing a domestic interior, with a clock, although askew, shoes at the door, coat on a hook, a light switch, and a case of beer. Behind the two drunk men at the table drinking beer is a window. The view from the window is not a snowscape but a tree, street, and recycling bin. This drawing also demonstrates Annie's advancing technical skill with her inclusion of shadows on the floor, something that is not seen in her earlier works. It is another example of the narrative realism that Annie had practiced for years in the North, but for most collectors and curators, lacks the seduction of Annie's exotic local within the global. Montreal is not a remote enough, or a mysterious enough setting to inspire a conversation about the local being enfolded into the global to shocking effect. This drawing is just sad, but so real for so many Southerners and urban Inuit living in the South. Although Annie is now making drawings independently from the

Kinngait Studios while living in Ottawa, she has completed very few. She sells them on the streets of Ottawa to buyers who know her work and want to get a “deal” or to tourists for prices far lower than she would receive as a Co-op artist. Not only does this devalue her work, but it also provides her with quick cash to buy drugs or share with others. One problem artists have when they leave the security of the Co-operative is they do not get paid for every drawing that they produce, which can be frustrating. The culture of the co-operative system remains entirely cash-based and there is little effort given to career building. The pressure on artists to build a career rather than just make drawings to sell is foreign to Kinngait Studios. Career building in the context of contemporary art is a skill many Inuit artists still need to learn (in addition to decolonizing expectations of Inuitness); placing one’s work in suitable galleries, exhibitions, and publications ultimately helps an artist’s reputation and sales. Kinngait Studios attempts to facilitate this process but has, to date, had little success.

One of the last complete drawings done by Annie Pootoogook is *Kenojuak and Annie with Governor General Michäelle Jean*, which was purchased by the National Gallery of Canada. This drawing shows the two artists standing in the office of Michäelle Jean. Kenojuak Ashevak is in her Baffin parka and printed skirt while Annie wears a business suit. The exchange is happy and all the players are smiling. The office is formally decorated with a patterned carpet, long drapes pulled back with a sash, and sconces on the wall. Through the window you can see a tree, indicating the Southern locale. This drawing is significant in that it shows two notable Inuit women meeting the Governor General because of their significant contributions to the arts in Canada. The Governor General Award for the Visual Arts, unlike many national arts awards, has honoured an Inuit artist: Kenojuak Ashevak received the award in 2008.



Figure 5.27. Annie Pootoogook *Untitled* (Kenojuak and Annie with Governor General Michaëlle Jean), 2010, Coloured pencil on wove paper, 51 x 66 cm, National Gallery of Canada (no. 43064).

## Chapter 6 Shuvinai Ashoona



Figure 6.1 *Shuvinai working*, Photograph by Nancy Campbell.

Shuvinai Ashoona (b. 1961) is the second case study presented in this analysis of Inuit drawing that has been produced in Kinngait since the late 1990s. I employ a two-pronged research approach, using the drawings as the core source of study along with artist interviews and

research into each artist's family and social conditions to frame the circumstances of each artist's work.

Shuvinai Ashoona (b. 1961) is a contemporary artist whose poignant yet enigmatic drawings stand out from those of her peers at the Kinngait Studios. Her world is influenced by the drastic changes in the North but is also enriched by her access to popular culture. Since 1993, when she began making art, Shuvinai has been constantly working to hone her drawing skills. Although she continues to live in the North, her work has been included in national and international biennales and she is widely recognized for her collaborative work with Canadian contemporary artists.

### *Early Years*

Shuvinai Ashoona is a third-generation artist in Kinngait. She is the granddaughter of graphic artist Pitseolak Ashoona (c. 1904–1983), who was known for recording her memories of life on the land. Pitseolak, who had seventeen children (six of whom lived to adulthood), is an aunt and grandmother to many artists and was a matriarch to many in the Studios. She has left a significant artistic inheritance herself in the form of the thousands of drawings and prints she contributed to the Kinngait Studios that are held in the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinberg, Ontario.

Shuvinai was born in 1961 at the nursing station in Kinngait. Her father, hunter and carver Kiugak Ashoona (1933–2014), was the youngest son of the great first-generation Inuit artist Pitseolak Ashoona (c. 1904–1983). Shuvinai's mother was Kiugak's second wife, Sorosilutu Ashoona (b. 1941). Although Shuvinai was their first child, she was not adopted out,

as is Inuit custom, but stayed with her parents.<sup>104</sup> She is the eldest of fourteen children, including three infants who died at birth. Her sisters Inuquq, Odluriaq, Mary, and Goota Ashoona followed. The family adopted six other children: Shuvinai's brothers, Salomonie, Inutsiak, Cii, and Napachie Ashoona; and her sisters Haiga and Leevee. As the eldest, Shuvinai helped to care for her younger brothers and sisters.

Shuvinai's daughter Mary was also adopted by Kiugak and Sorosilutu in 1977. The family lived in Kinngait where Shuvinai attended primary school. Shuvinai does not recall wanting to make art as a child, but she enjoyed classroom activities and stories. She fondly remembers time spent out on the land in the milder months, particularly "clamming" with her siblings and boating and camping.

With the encouragement of two of her teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Hohne, and the support of her parents, Shuvinai was one of a very few students who planned to go on to high school in Iqaluit. This was a significant move for Shuvinai who had never lived away from her family. Her high school education did not last long. Shuvinai recalls being given a room in the dormitory but has no memory of actually staying there; she returned home a short time later. She recalls being frightened to be so far away from home and was happy to return to Cape Dorset. In 1977, when she was 16, Shuvinai became pregnant by Joe Ottokie and gave birth to their daughter, Mary. Mary was adopted by Shuvinai's parents, but Shuvinai remained with her family and took care of her.

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<sup>104</sup> Inuit adoption customs are complex and intrinsically linked to Inuit culture and kinship systems, ultimately lending resilience to communities. For an overview see <https://www.bcadoption.com/resources/articles/perspectives-inuit-custom-adoption>.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s it was uncommon for families to follow a traditional way of life on the land. The Ashoona clan was remarkable in that they, including Shuvinai and young Mary, spent years living independently in outpost camps at Luna Bay and Kangiqsujaq, only returning to the Kinngait area for holidays or the arrival of the sealift, a crane-bearing cargo ship that makes an annual delivery of supplies to remote Arctic communities.

The time she spent living the traditional Inuit way of life can be credited with Shuvinai's familiarity with the land and respect for it. No matter how fantastical her subject matter became, Shuvinai always drew a background that reflects the landscape she grew up in — it is in a very real sense the “foundation” for her artwork.

### *A Family of Artists*

Shuvinai is part of the artistic dynasty of the Ashoona clan, which has had a constant presence in Kinngait Studios for four generations. Her grandmother, Pitseolak Ashoona, produced a large extended family of artists that have been a constant presence in Kinngait Studios. Other artists in this legacy include Napachie Pootoogook, Qaqaq Ashoona (“Kaka”), Kumwartok Ashoona, Napachie Ashoona, and her first cousins, Annie and Cee, and Ohito. Both her parents and some of her siblings, such as Goota and Ohitok, were artists. Shuvinai, however, initially resisted joining the Co-op.

In the late 1980s, with the encouragement of her younger sister Goota, who was keen to introduce Shuvinai to art-making as a means of making an independent living, Shuvinai reluctantly visited the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. There she had access to paper and felt-tip pens and pencils, which she took home to experiment with. Shuvinai's first drawings, dated

1993, are small-scale, delicately rendered illustrations of camp life. These detailed pen drawings demonstrate her intimate knowledge of the land. This early group of drawings includes some unusual subject matter, such as a flayed Christ and perplexing, surreal landscapes, offering intimations of later developments in her work. Her drawings have been part of the annual Cape Dorset Print Collection sporadically since 1997.

In the early 2000s, Shuvinai's artwork revealed a new dynamism as she began to explore her imagination and develop a distinctly personal iconography. William Ritchie, manager of the Kinngait Studios, encouraged Shuvinai to expand her subject matter, drawing on her imaginings and stories she heard as a child about her family and culture, Christian iconography, and popular culture. Her hybrid creatures and evocative human figures are often set against a highly detailed northern landscape. The evolution in her style points to a highly developed and arduously practiced artistic sensibility.

Not all graphic artists choose to work in the Studios at Kinngait. Many prefer the flexibility and solitude of working from home. Although initially Shuvinai made her drawings at home, she soon became a regular at the Co-op Studios, enjoying the structure the studio could provide her. As she is prolific in her production of drawings and works daily, she quickly became the key earner for her extended family who, still today, rely on Shuvinai's tremendous generosity. Shuvinai has been working at the Co-op for more than twenty-five years now. She continues to go to the Co-op every day and works quietly and diligently.

### ***Magical Thinking***

Shuvinai Ashoona's large family moved back to Kinngait in the early 1980s and settled in the town. Shuvinai initially shared a house with two of her sisters. Her daughter Mary lived with

another sister, Olduriak, who subsequently adopted Mary's daughter, Nallie. The transition from living on the land to community life was difficult for the family, particularly for Shuvinaï, who was beginning to show signs of mental illness and experiences of altered states of reality. She was finding it increasingly difficult to follow a train of thought or speak coherently.

Her daughter Mary said, in a 2015 interview, that her mother suffered greatly at that time.<sup>105</sup> She recalls one incident of being called to her mother's side only to find her with her neck and back muscles so tight with tension that her head was thrown back and her mouth stretched open. From Mary's description of her mother's symptoms it sounds like she was having a seizure, but Shuvinaï was convinced she was possessed by demons. During this dark period Shuvinaï shot herself in the stomach in an attempt to rid her body of demons. Mary also stated in the same interview that Shuvinaï's mother Sorosilutu's sister suffered in much the same way, as does one of Shuvinaï's sisters and a nephew.

Although Shuvinaï is not a patient of Dr. Allison Crawford, a psychiatrist at CAMH who visits Kinngait regularly, Dr. Crawford knows her fairly well. Her observations are that:

She [Shuvinaï] has magical thinking. I would probably describe her thought process as tangential with a loosening of associations. Overall, her personality could be described as odd or eccentric (we usually classify these under Cluster A personality disorders—schizotypal disorder) . . . but already that is becoming stigmatizing. She probably would meet criteria for schizophrenia but not quite since it does not cause significant impairment to her social or occupational functioning. It is hard to say whether this preserved functioning is due to protective factors of being employed and living in a small

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<sup>105</sup> Mary Ashoona, telephone interview with the author, October 2015.

community that is somewhat more tolerant of “illness”; however, having said that [one] must be aware of how vulnerable she is and can be taken advantage of.<sup>106</sup>

Shuvinai elects not to seek treatment or take medication and is of no danger to herself or others. She is able to work as an artist with the help of her family and the staff at Kinngait Studios. Dr. Crawford expands on Shuvinai’s creative impulse:

One can easily see how these . . . quirks in her thinking are also positive contributions to her art-making and to underlying processes such as divergent thinking necessary for creativity. I find her stories . . . compelling; she can playfully laugh at some of the magical thinking and phantasmic creations, yet I am not convinced this means she doesn’t believe in them (i.e., her reality testing is likely impaired).<sup>107</sup>

### ***International Artist***

Notable in Shuvinai’s artistic development is a landmark exhibition in 2009 at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto entitled *Noise Ghost*. The exhibition paired her work with that of contemporary non-Inuit artist Shary Boyle and won the Ontario Association of Art Galleries Award for the best exhibition of 2009. Simultaneously Marcia Connolly produced and directed a film on the artist called *Ghost Noise*. This exhibition not only brought the work of Shuvinai Ashoona to new audiences but forged a collegial friendship between her and Shary Boyle. Inspired by the experience, Shary Boyle travelled to Kinngait for three weeks in February 2011 to work at the Studios and forge a relationship with Shuvinai, which resulted in the 2015 exhibition *Universal Cobra: Shuvinai Ashoona and Shary Boyle*. The exhibition comprised both

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<sup>106</sup> Dr. Allison Crawford, email correspondence with the author, November 11, 2015. Dr. Crawford is the director of the Northern Psychiatric Outreach Program at CAMH in Toronto.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

individual works and a number of sensational collaborative drawings. Shuvinai's repertoire includes monsters and hybrid wildlife, women giving birth to planets, hunters, and massive icebergs. Images of the land around her have effectively seeded her subconscious where her insightful, playful mind turns logic on its head.

Like her cousin Annie Pootoogook and dear friend and fellow artist Tim Pitsiulak (b. 1967), Shuvinai has enjoyed great success with her drawings. She has exhibited since 1999. Her work is sought after by museums across Canada. In recent years her work has been selected for international exhibitions of contemporary art, including *Oh, Canada: Contemporary Art from North America* in 2013 at MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art), *Unsettled Landscapes* in 2014–15 at SITE Santa Fe, and *Earth and Sky*, a piece she created with Saskatchewan-based contemporary artist John Noestheden (b. 1945) for the 18th Sydney Biennale. With these large-scale, often collaborative drawings, she has overturned assumptions about what Inuit art should look like — images of animals, birds or fish, or figures of hunters and mothers. She is a pioneer of the contemporary drawing practice currently overtaking Kinngait Studios and a critical voice for Inuit in the contemporary art scene in Canada.

## **Key Works**

### ***Early Works***

Shuvinai Ashoona's introduction to Kinngait Studios was gradual. Her first works date to 1993 — delicate, small-scale drawings produced when she was in her early thirties. Like the two generations of Inuit artists before her, Shuvinai received no formal training but certainly had ample opportunity to learn from her Elders by watching them at work. Like many artists she

initially drew at home, and these first drawings produced in pencil and Fineliner pen are wispy sketches of places she knew well, such as the town of Kinngait where she lived. In *Community*, 1993, she draws the bay in the centre of the composition with fishing boats anchored, summer tents, and prefab buildings. Although it is by no means a comprehensive rendering of the town, it includes details such as a flagpole and laundry drying on a line. Sketches of camping and hunting



Figure 6.2. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Community*, 1993–94, Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, location unknown.

or fishing sites appear often in her early work.

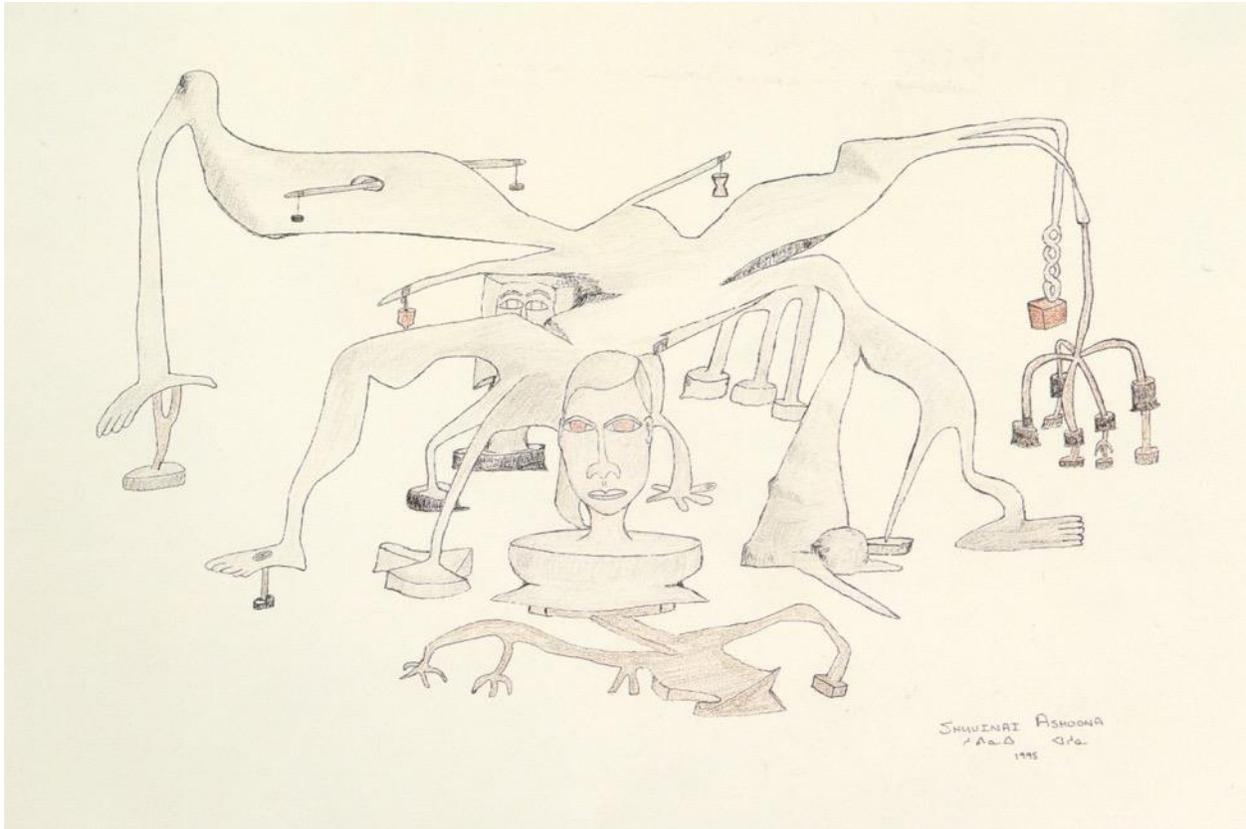


Figure 6.3. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Discombobulated Woman*, 1995–96, Pencil and coloured pencil on paper, whereabouts unknown.

Shuvinai's work from this period also includes drawings that signal the development of a personal iconography. *Discombobulated Woman* is one of the first examples of the many disembodied figures in landscapes that would follow — the likes of which had not been seen in drawings coming out of Kinngait before. In this drawing a woman's head, punctuated by two red eyes, emanates from a rock base. The gigantic limbs extending from the back of the woman's head can also be seen as part of the rocky landscape or a series of winding bridges. Hands and feet dangle from some of the outstretched limbs, while others appear to be more like tree trunks. Weights hang from fulcrums that pierce the limbs. This enigmatic drawing is a clear precursor to her later, highly imaginative work.

### ***Bird's Eye View***

*Composition (Overlooking Cape Dorset)* is an amazing anomaly among drawings produced in Kinngait. Shuvinai began her aerial composition of her community in 2003 and continually added pieces of paper to the existing drawings to expand the site and include more details. Her landscape though anchored in some truth is also fictive and imaginary. The availability of large format paper to the artists of Kinngait, as discussed in relation to Annie, has been relatively recent; Shuvinai's *Composition (Overlooking Cape Dorset)* predates the phenomenon of the release of large-scale drawings by Kinngait Studios that has attracted much interest from collectors and museums. Shuvinai's patchwork drawing is composed of twelve pieces of paper and depicts a bird's-eye view of Cape Dorset.

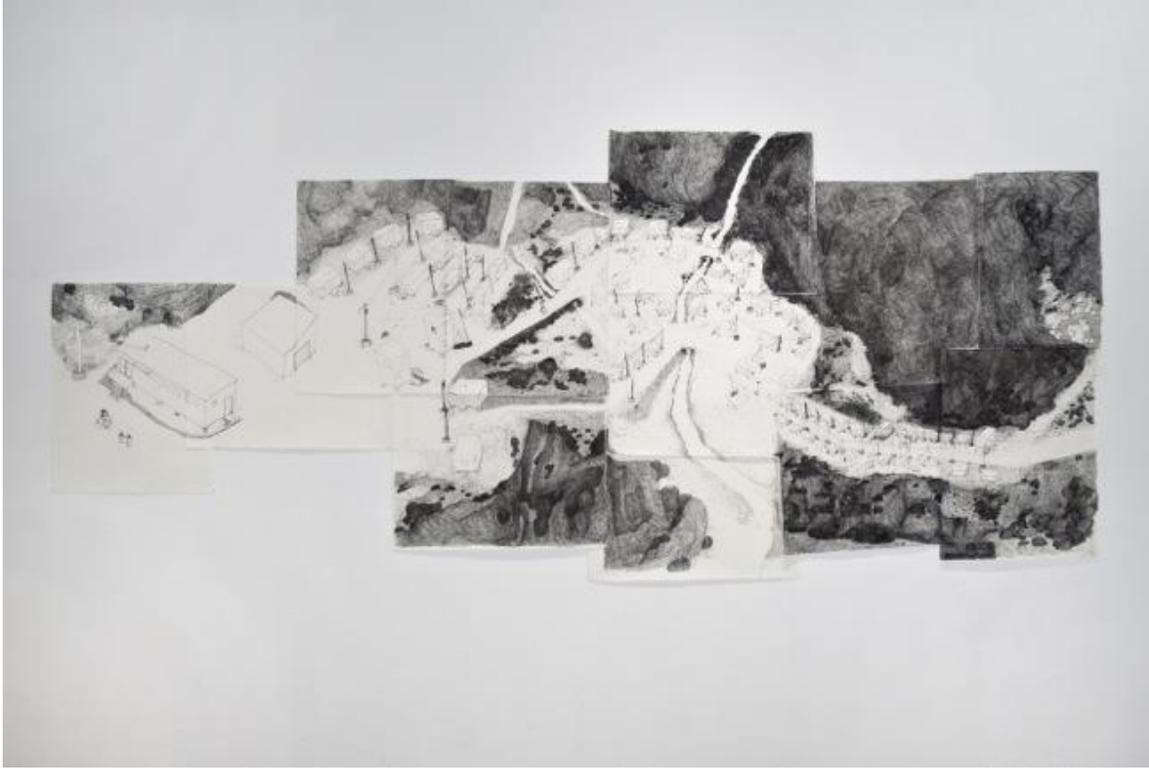


Figure 6.4. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Composition (Overlooking Cape Dorset)*, 2003, Ink on 12 separate sheets of paper, 139 x 328 cm, Private collection, Toronto.

This piece, unlike most other contemporary Inuit drawings, has been shown in venues showing mainstream contemporary art, not group exhibitions of Inuit art. *Composition (Overlooking Cape Dorset)* was first exhibited at Western Front Gallery in Vancouver through September and October 2008, in a group show featuring the work of Shuvinai Ashoona, Nadia Myre, Allan Packer, and Tania Willard, titled *Never Let the Facts Get in the Way of the Truth*. This exhibition was curated by Canadian Indigenous curator Candice Hopkins, and dealt with issues of mapping and memory and Indigenous ways of being in the world, as opposed to non-Indigenous mapping and place naming. Recently this landmark work has been exhibited in the 5th Edition of the Moscow Biennale, 2013, curated by Belgian curator, art historian, and critic Catherine de Zegher, followed quickly by its inclusion in SITE Santa Fe: *SITELines: Unsettled*

*Landscapes*, which ran from July 17, 2014 until January 31, 2015. Shuvinai is one of the few artists from Kinngait to have successfully straddled the worlds of contemporary art and Inuit art and is gradually and capably gaining international recognition for her drawings.

*Life on the Land*



Figure 6.5. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Family in Tent*, 2003, Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery. Acquired with funds from the Winnipeg Rh Foundation Inc., 2004–7.

*Family in Tent, 2003* is one of the many drawings of summer camping that Shuvinai completed early in her career. Her depictions of life on the land are often aerial perspectives on

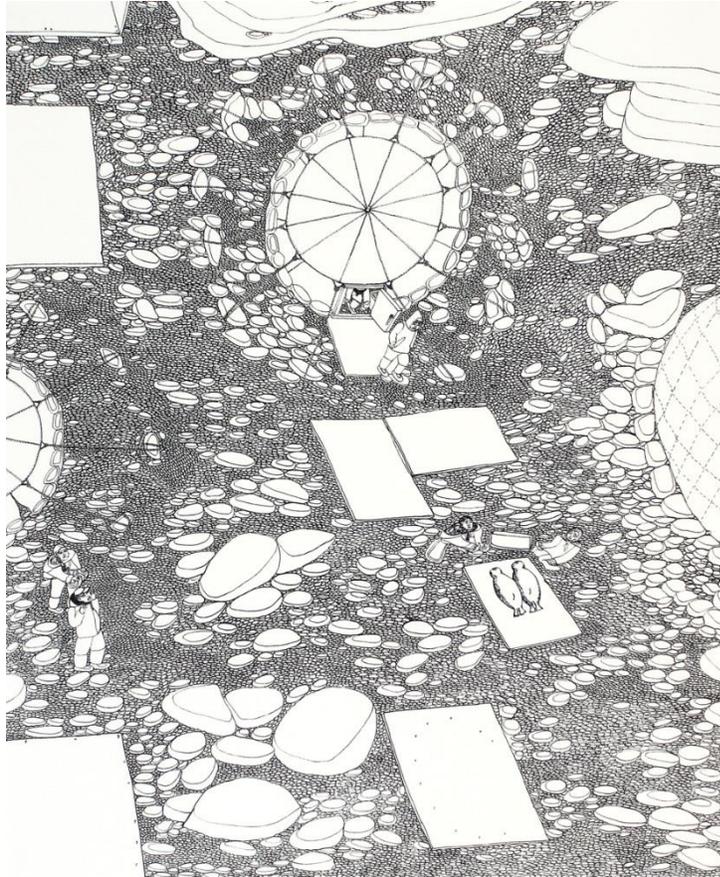


Figure 6.6. An example of Shuvinai's drawings from an aerial perspective.

the outlines of tent stone circles left by previous generations of campers on the tundra or the bone frames for tents or the sealskin domes in a rocky landscape. *Family in Tent* is a rare interior view of camp life with the mother cooking, the father sipping tea, and children sleeping.

Shuvinai spent a decade living on the land with her family in the 1980s, so camp life was familiar and dear to her. The scene depicts an array of supplies necessary for life on the land. Prominent are a box of Red Rose tea, sugar, a *qulliq* (oil lamp) used for cooking and light, as

well as dishes and boxes. The family is in the midst of finishing a meal of “country food”— food they have hunted or foraged — including a skinned seal and bags of clams. On the mother’s back there is a baby in the hood of her *amauti* (parka) and there are two children lying in bed. The floor of the tent is very rocky, diligently drawn by the artist in great detail. With the exception of the Red Rose box the scene could be from any time, reflecting the simplicity of life camping on the tundra.

The print *Arctic Evening* was also produced in 2003 and has many of the features of *Family in Tent*. Indeed, *Family in Tent* could very well have been the inspiration for this print release. The composition has many similarities. We see the same characters inhabiting the scene. The man is sipping tea while the woman, with a baby on her back, is tending to the *qulliq*. Country food of clams and fish are in the foreground. Two children sleep soundly with an empty can of Crush at the head of the bed. Supplies are lined up in the background: Red Rose tea, a carton of cigarettes, flour, sugar, salt, baking powder, Pilot biscuits, and toilet paper. In contrast to the drawing, the print is rich in colour: warm yellow, black, grey blue and orange predominate. The colour applied by the printer alters the image significantly, giving it a warm hue, perhaps from the light of the setting sun or the dim light from the *qulliq*.



Figure 6.7. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Arctic Evening*, 2003, Lithograph 24/50, 58 x 77 cm.

To date, twenty prints based on drawings by Shuvinai Ashoona have been included in the annual Cape Dorset Print Collection (see Appendix E). She works primarily in lithography. In stonecut printing, another common method used by artists in Cape Dorset, the printmakers redraw everything, but with lithography the artist's hand is preserved. As William Ritchie explains, "The artist always draws the key images on plates, stones, or mylars, which is the beauty of the medium."<sup>108</sup>

Twenty prints in the annual release of Cape Dorset prints is a small number compared to the significant input of many artists in the collection including Kenojuak Ashevak, Kananginak Pootoogook and Ning Teevee, whose contributions are in the hundreds. Perhaps this is because Shuvinai's drawings tend to be highly detailed rather than graphic or iconic as the most successful prints are. Shuvinai often fills an entire sheet of paper with complex details that are hard to translate to stonecut or lithography. Her non-traditional subject matter is also not very

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<sup>108</sup> William Ritchie, email correspondence with the author, February 23, 2016.

popular with collectors of Inuit prints. Ritchie explains, “I think there is a different market for her drawings, [her collectors] are more adventurous and not looking for stereotypes.”<sup>109</sup>

### *Three Cousins*

*Three Cousins* was the title work in *Ashoona: Third Wave*, a 2006 exhibition at the Edmonton Art Gallery, now the Art Gallery of Alberta. The exhibition showcased new talent from Kinngait while highlighting the strong familial connections and influences among generations of artists in the small community. The three artists featured in the exhibition—Shuvina Ashoona, Siassie Kenneally, and Annie Pootoogook — are first cousins and granddaughters of Pitseolak Ashoona and have come to be known as third-generation Cape Dorset artists.



Figure 6.8. Shuvina Ashoona, *Three Cousins*, 2005, Fineliner and coloured pencil on paper, 66 x 102 cm, Private Collection, Toronto.

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

At the time this work was produced, the three cousins were working side by side in the Kinngait Studios. They were part of an emerging group of graphic artists who came together at Kinngait Studios and began experimenting, producing a fresh new vision through drawing. They each adopted elements from earlier generations of Inuit artists, in particular a narrative element from their grandmother, Pitseolak, but each developed a personal style that combined personal representation creatively with the influences of the world that they lived in.

In *Three Cousins*, Shuvinai uses a recurring construction in Inuit art: artists holding up their drawings for a buyer. This subject appears in work by Inuit artists of earlier generations, such as Pitseolak Ashoona and Napachie Ashoona. Shuvinai would have seen these drawings in the Studios. Here she depicts each woman holding one of her own drawings in front of her. On the left, Shuvinai holds a drawing of a woman with her outsider blue eyes also holding up a drawing. The middle figure is identified as Siassie Kenneally, holding a drawing of a fish head. Siassie's work often includes animal and fish parts, the ingredients for soup or a meal. On the right, Annie Pootoogook is holding up her work *Scissors*, created during a period when she was isolating objects from her everyday life and depicting them on a white ground (for example, a red bra, a Coleman stove, a bottle of Tylenol).

*Three Cousins* is one of the first drawings in which Shuvinai employs limited colour pencil on the primarily black and white drawing. The colour is used only in the drawings held by each cousin, creating a marked contrast to the face above. It is the authorship of the drawings being held that identifies and dates the artists within the picture. *Three Cousins* cleverly stops time, documenting not only Shuvinai's life and work but also that of her peers, and successfully captures the enthusiasm of the artists working at the Studios in 2005.

### *Egg as Motif*

For a number of years the image of a duck egg (“sea duck” is “*pitseolak*” in Inuktitut) frequently appeared in Shuvinai’s work. Some academics claim that there is a connection between Shuvinai’s grandmother Pitseolak and the drawings of eggs that feature prominently in many of Shuvinai’s landscapes in the early 2000s. Curator Sandra Dyck writes in her exhibition catalogue that, “when asked about her affinity for eggs, the artist (Shuvinai) explained that her grandmother’s name, Pitseolak, is Inuktitut for sea pigeon.”<sup>110</sup> Eggs certainly would be something that Shuvinai would find on the land and are a delicacy, however, her eggs appear to be messengers often appearing with text, syllabics or symbols written on the eggshell itself. Her drawing *Composition (Egg in Landscape)* presents two eggs nestled among long grass in the rocky terrain of the tundra drawn in Fineliner and heavily rendered and decorated with syllabics and words.

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<sup>110</sup> Sandra Dyck, *Shuvinai Ashoona: Drawings* (Carleton University Art Gallery, 2009), 31.

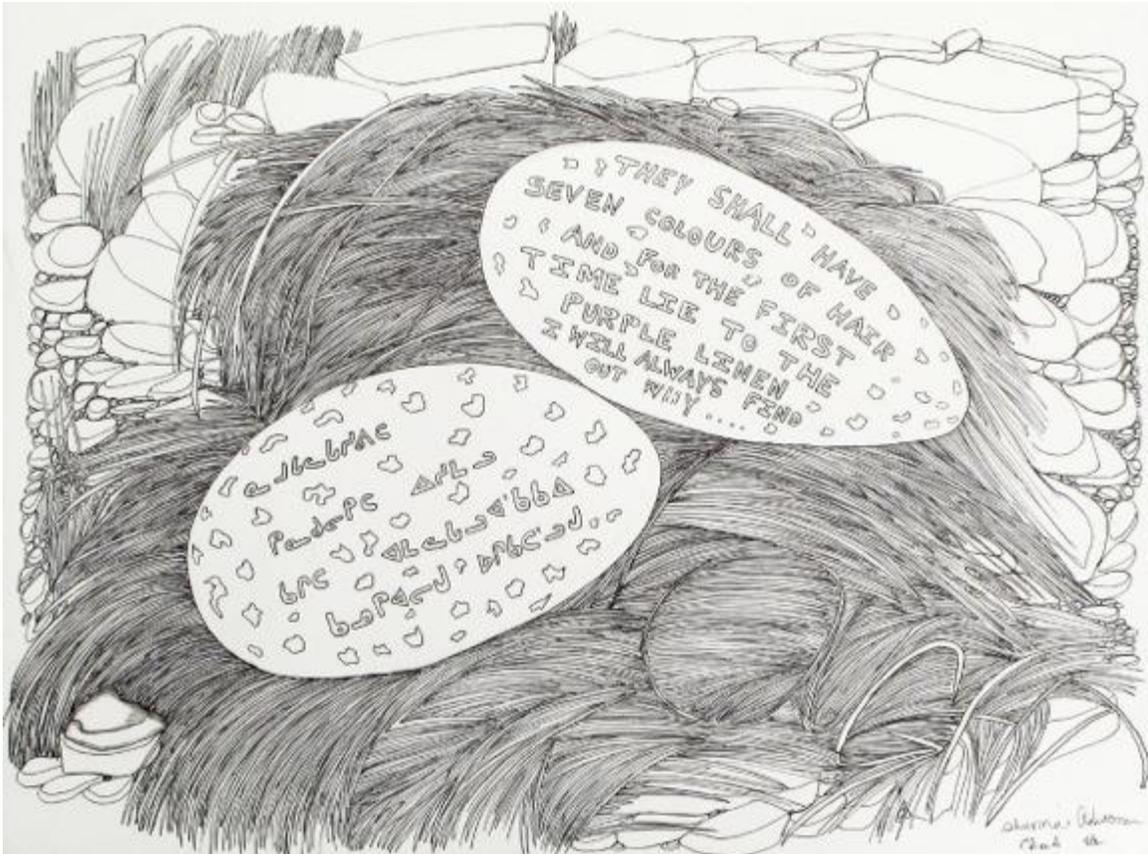


Figure 6.9. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Composition (Egg in Landscape)*, 2006, Fineliner on paper, 51 x 66 cm, Private collection.

Here, the two eggs appear to be messengers, with English text, Inuktitut syllabics, and symbols drawn on the surface of the eggs. The text is poetic but cryptic: “They shall have seven colours of hair and for the first time lie to the purple linen. I will always find out why.” The syllabics on the other egg translate as “Where are we going, who are we? Thoughts? Brain. Wondering if it’s going to open. How to spit?”<sup>111</sup> The text that reads like a series of non-sequiturs is indicative of Shuvinai’s magical thinking. Her words always roll beautifully off the tongue. The intention or meaning, however, is difficult to determine. In this drawing the words could be said to have something to do with fertility and new life. The egg, itself, certainly

<sup>111</sup> Translation by Joemie Tapaungai, email correspondence with the author, November 25, 2015.

represents fertility in Western art and literature. The risk with engaging in such meanderings when interpreting Shuvinai's thoughts, writings, and drawings is in trying to pinpoint or prescribe answers. Her words are reminiscent of the Beat poets of the 1950s with their free-form, rhythmic writing, surrealist influences, and highly expressive individualism.

*Egg* is one of the few prints by Shuvinai Ashoona included in the 2006 annual release of Cape Dorset prints. A single dark-green egg is placed tip up in the centre of the page. It is not the light greenish blue of an eider duck egg but a much bolder green. The egg is marked with a repeating pattern made up of tools, ulu knives — usually considered a woman's knife — other knives, and axes that connect to create a pattern of things manufactured locally on its surface. The tools are perhaps simply there to help the egg crack open and bring new life into the world.



Figure 6.10 Shuvinai Ashoona, *Egg*, 2006, Lithograph, 26/50, 61 x 43 cm.

### *Circle of Life*

Indigenous cultures share a deep respect for the circle of life. *Inuit qaujimagajuqangit*, a concept used to describe the traditional knowledge and values passed down through generations of Inuit, rests on a belief in the interconnectedness of life that is the foundation of the Inuit worldview.

This way of thinking is reflected in *Composition (People, Animals, and the World Holding Hands)*, an expressive, disquieting circular composition drawn from Shuvinai's mind. In this



Figure 6.11. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Composition (People, Animals, and the World Holding Hands)*, 2007, Ink and coloured pencil, 66 x 102 cm, Edward J. Guarino Collection, New York.

drawing, groups of figures, hand in hand, form a ring around a central image. The human figures in the composition are primarily Inuit presented in both traditional and Southern dress. On the right, a half-White, half-Inuit nursing mother is held by an Elder who sits across from a kneeling figure with two children in the hood of her *amauti*. Interspersed among them is a winged dragon

with one flipper and one hand, a Sedna mermaid figure wearing one *kamik* (boot), and the planet Earth (with arms and hands) completing the circle. In the centre of the circle is a brown bear, overlaid by a polar bear, overlaid by a seal, and finally a char on top. Shuvinai remarks on the composition:

I was thinking that they were having a meeting, a world meeting about the seals, polar bears . . . rethinking what the world would be for the animals. I started thinking that all of these animals would be friends, even some of the dangerous animals I have seen in the movies are there.<sup>112</sup>

Such a story alludes to global issues on a grand scale that effect the arctic climes. Her thoughts conjure up associations of global warming, Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations and Inuit beliefs about the natural world. Certainly Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit can be looped in with her story as well.

New York-based collector Edward J. Guarino also refers to the circle of life when asked why he chose to purchase this drawing:

Although Shuvinai Ashoona's *Composition (People, Animals and the World Holding Hands)* expresses a desire for harmony among all living beings, I was initially attracted to the work because of its bold colours and idiosyncratic symbolism. I was also drawn to the piece because the artist once again creates a world unlike any that exists. It is at once strange, whimsical, and profound.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Shuvinai Ashoona, interview with the author, May 15, 2015.

<sup>113</sup> Edward Guarino, email correspondence with the author, October 30, 2015.

### ***Hybrid Creatures***

*Composition (Two Men and a Spider)* was first exhibited in *Noise Ghost*, a 2009 show at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto, featuring the work of Toronto artist Shary Boyle and Shuvinai Ashoona. *Noise Ghost* intentionally paired the two Canadian artists on an equal playing field rather than distinguishing between an Inuit and a contemporary artist. This approach challenged preconceptions that Inuit art is not contemporary art, including the traditional and conservative assumption that Inuit imagery is drawn from a not-so-distant past when Inuit were still living on the land. Here, Shuvinai displays a strong individual or personal imagination.



Figure 6.12. Shuvina Ashoona, *Composition (Two Men and a Spider)*, 2007–8, Fineliner and coloured pencil, 56 x 76 cm, Private collection.

This particular drawing marks a dramatic shift in Shuvina's subject matter — from her northern surroundings to her imaginings. When asked about *Two Men and a Spider*, Shuvina said:

There are these kind of movies, and so I started putting in some of the animals that we got up here, up north, and then that movie we saw did not look the same at all. His arms were on fire and the white-headed man had beaming eyes. Boy, were they ever different. It was fun rethinking them a little bit.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Shuvina Ashoona, interview with the author, May 11, 2015.

*Composition (Two Men and a Spider)* was purchased by Toronto-based artist Shary Boyle at the time of the exhibition. The synchronicity between the artists' work was palpable and is reflected in a short piece in *Canadian Art* in which Shary Boyle writes poetically about her interaction with Shuvinai's work:

The moment I encountered this image I felt an instant connection with it. My response was intense and euphoric, a deep rush of excited bewilderment. The confusion produced by the disfigurement of the characters' faces made me feel like keening. Simultaneously, I wanted to laugh my head off. What is going on?! Look at the pencil-crayon marks, the vertical scratchiness—and the faded, complementary colours. Look at the three points of black. Then step back and see the overall composition: the figures making a pretzel of their arms, entwining fingers, crossing legs—while the tree, beheaded and with spread-eagled roots, wraps an arm protectively around the strugglers. Now lean in closer. Check out those whiskers!! My god. Any communication between the anemone and the walrus is bound to be a mangled, physical thing. But what really pushes it over the edge for me are the two silent players: the perching tarantula and the stiff green fruit.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Shary Boyle, "Shuvinai Ashoona," *Canadian Art* (Fall 2009): 176.



Figure 6.13. Shary Boyle, *Scotch Bonnet*, 2007, Ink and gouache on paper, 41 x 61 cm, Hartman Collection.

### ***The Nascopie and other Disasters***

Shuvinai Ashoona was not yet born when the *Nascopie* sank in 1947, but she would have heard the story from the Elders. The RMS *Nascopie* served for many years as a supply ship to the Hudson's Bay Company's northern outposts, delivering food, clothing, and other supplies to remote communities. On July 21, 1947, the ship struck an uncharted reef off Beacon Island at the entrance to Cape Dorset Harbour. The local Inuit attempted to salvage any goods that they could from the frigid waters. In the end the ship was ripped from the reef by a storm on September 25, broke in half, and the bow slid beneath the water. The stern, still clinging to the reef, was swept off by another storm less than a month later. The sinking of the *Nascopie* figures in the work of many artists from the region.

*Titanic, Nascopie and Noah's Ark* is one of the artist's many renderings of the ship. In this large drawing — 122 x 241centimetres — the bow of the *Nascopie* appears on the left. On the ship's side the artist has written the names *Titanic*, *Nascopie*, and *Noah's Ark*. The ship is pursuing a large squid, which in turn is pursuing four small fishing boats that are exiting on the right. In the background, a highly detailed rocky landscape is rich with the colours of the Arctic summer. In the centre of the landscape is a cave with a winged polar bear emerging from it, growling at the passing squid, protecting the three young scampering out of the cave behind her.



Figure 6.14. Shuvina Ashoona, *Titanic, Nascopie, and Noah's Ark*, 2008, Ink and coloured pencil, 122 x 241 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

The scene combines the everyday with fantasy, leaving the viewer to ponder the meaning of the picture. Herein lies the brilliance of Shuvina's approach and her refusal of systematic meaning-making. What is the significance of the giant squid? Is the ship in pursuit of the squid? Of particular interest for me is the ship itself: each of the three ships denotes an epic journey

and a fateful end. Shuvinai's reference to these three ships, adapted from movies she has seen and stories she has heard, implies an apocalyptic event.

Similarly, *Sinking Titanic* is the artist's interpretation of the most famous sinking, which took place a hundred years earlier. People fall from the sinking ship, screaming, with arms outstretched. This, no doubt, is Shuvinai's interpretation of James Cameron's 1997 movie, one of her favourites. Perhaps because the sinking of the *Nascopie* has a very real history in Kinngait, ship disasters have great relevance for the artist, and are used to convey a sense of loss.



Figure 6.15. Shuvina Ashoona, *Sinking Titanic*, 2012, Graphite, coloured pencil, and Fineliner on paper, 124.5 x 122 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg.



Figure 6.16. Shuvinai Ashoona, with John Noesthaden, *Earth and Sky*, 2008, Pen and black ink, coloured pencil, graphite, collage, and adhered glass crystals on wove paper, 34.3 x 485 cm.

### *Collaboration*

In 2008, Alberta-based curator Wayne Baerwaldt invited John Noesthaden from Regina and Shuvinai Ashoona from Kinngait to meet in Calgary to collaborate on a five-metre vertical drawing that would be made into a 40-metre banner for the *Stadthimmel(CitySky)* project curated by Klauss Littmann, with assistance from Edek Bartz, an event to be held at the Basel Art Fair in Switzerland.

The original drawing for the banner was produced by Shuvinai Ashoona and John Noesthaden while they were in residence at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at the Alberta College of Art + Design. The creative process entailed Shuvinai attacking the

paper directly with her Fineliner pen, rarely lifting it off the page, while John Noesthaden watched closely and made comments. Noesthaden “drew” with the photocopier, placing dozens of cut-out stars and glass crystals on the paper. They negotiated where Shuvinai would stop the earth and John would start the heavens and where some of John’s stars would find themselves in

both realms. Shuvinai developed five horizons and decided that stars could exist between those multiple horizons. Shuvinai also saw the stars as snowflakes and requested that they be placed on her stone outcroppings. Ambiguity, experimentation, daring, and playfulness all had a role in this highly collaborative effort.<sup>116</sup>

The result was *Earth and Sky*, a mixed-media drawing that combines Arctic landscapes and astronomical bodies. The drawing was then commercially transferred to a 40-metre-long outdoor banner that spanned the streetscape in Basel, introducing the pedestrians below to a world of stars and Arctic wildlife. A second 50-metre banner was produced for Toronto's *Nuit Blanche* later that year.



Figure 6.17. Shuvinai Ashoona and John Noestheden, *Earth and Sky*, Basel, 2008, Digital print on polyester, 298 x 5184 cm, Dorset Fine Arts and John Noestheden.

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<sup>116</sup> Wayne Baerwaldt, email correspondence with the author, November 16, 2015.

The *Earth and Sky* banner continued on its international journey to Australia, where it was included in the 2012 Sydney Biennale, *All Our Relations*, curated by Gerald McMaster and Catherine de Zegher (both former curators at the Art Gallery of Ontario). The National Gallery of Canada, which acquired the original drawing for its permanent collection, also presented *Earth and Sky* in *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* in 2013. The banner ran the entire length of the colonnade at the main entrance. *Sakahàn* was a landmark exhibition of international scope, bringing together more than 150 works by more than eighty Indigenous artists from sixteen countries reflecting on what it means to be Indigenous today.

### ***Social Commentary***

As in most Indigenous communities, the suicide rate in Nunavut is ten times the national average and suicide is most prevalent among youth.<sup>117</sup> This tragedy is well known in the small community of Kinngait. Many there have chosen to end their own lives, some as young as ten years old. Although Shuvinai rarely offers social commentary in her artwork, she has produced a few drawings that reflect on this phenomenon. In *Carrying Suicidal People*, we see two men, each apparently carrying a young woman who has killed herself. One man has his back to us and carries the deceased draped in his arms with her long red hair flowing down. He is walking toward a second man, also carrying a body in his arms. This drawing does not refer to a specific event: we do not know who the people are. Shuvinai simply presents the sad, quiet image without comment.

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<sup>117</sup> Laura Eggertson, "Nunavut should declare state of emergency over suicide crisis," CBC, September 27, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nunavut-suicide-1.3245844>.

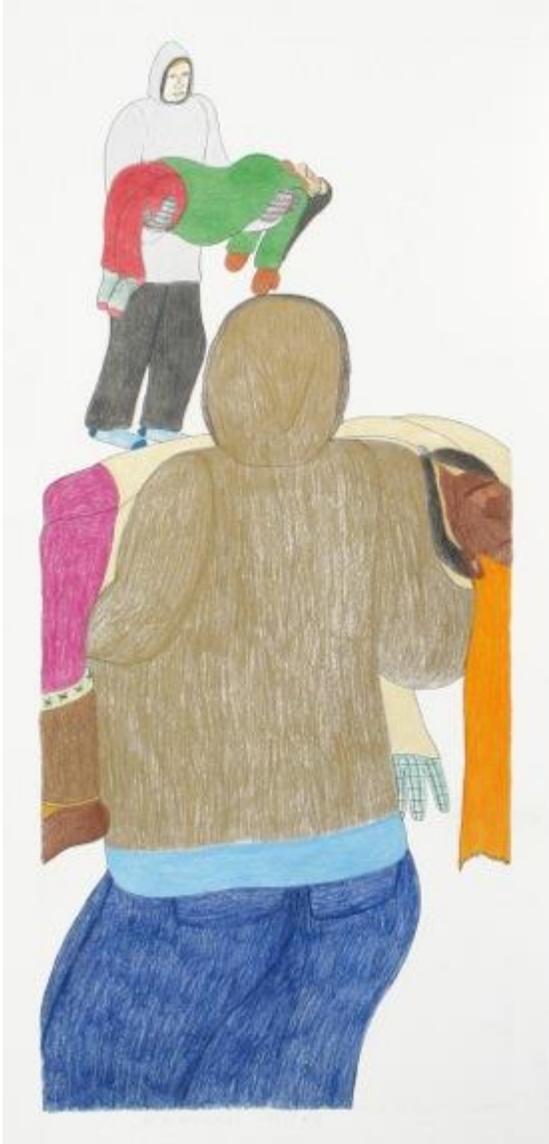


Figure 6.18. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Carrying Suicidal People*, 2011, Ink and coloured pencil, 127 x 61 cm, Collection of John Price, Seattle.

*Oh My Goodness* is another vertical drawing that conveys the tragic death of a young person. A large, otherworldly figure carries what appears to be a child's body. The central figure could be a monster or a shaman and has teeth that seem to include a small antler and a tusk. Its eyes are globes; a motif we see repeated in Shuvinai's work after 2011.



Figure 6.19. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Oh My Goodness*, 2012, Ink and coloured pencil, 62 x 26.5 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

The text in the drawing alludes to the 2011 tsunami in Japan. Shuvinai has spoken about this event and certainly would have seen coverage on television. Ritchie, manager at the Studio reports:

The tsunami really stuck in her head. The Inuktitut *sumanii* means “what else,” so she mixes the two with both English and Inuktitut spelling. Joemie says on the chest patch it reads: “Look at this, The wave did it, Going back and forth.” On the kid’s parka pocket pouch it says: “Sleep well.”

The wordplay of tsunami and *sumanii* refers to the cycles of tragedy. The prefab dwelling in the background indicates the setting is Kinngait. Like *Carrying Suicidal People*, *Oh My Goodness* is about tragedy and trauma, loss and grief.

### ***Recent Experimentation***

*Earth Transformations* is one of many works completed by Shuvinai Ashoona between 2011 and 2014 that feature the planet. In these works, the planet appears in many combinations, including piles of globes, globes linked together by harpoons or lightning bolts, and faces and body parts made of globes. A large selection of these works were grouped together for a 2012 exhibition under the title *Shuvinai's World(s)* at Feheley Fine Arts in Toronto.

*Earth Transformations* is a stunning example from *Shuvinai's World(s)*. This large drawing (approximately 1.2 x 1.2 metres) was made on black paper, a practice not uncommon at Kinngait Studios and one that provides a dramatic alternative to white paper. The image is first outlined in white pastel contrasting dramatically to the black ground, and later filled in with coloured pencil, pastel, Conté crayon, or any combination of these. Studio manager William Ritchie says, "When you look at this body of work, her [Shuvinai's] remarkable sense of colour becomes very apparent, particularly when she is working on black paper. She uses rich, saturated colours that resonate together."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>William Ritchie, quoted in Bruce Hunter, *Shuvinai's World(s): Drawings by Shuvinai Ashoona* (Toronto: Feheley Fine Arts, 2012), 6.



Figure 6.20. Shuvina Ashoona, *Earth Transformations*, 2012, Coloured pencil and Conte crayon on black paper, 123 x 124.5 cm, Collection of Mary Dailey Desmarais and Paul Desmarais III, Montreal.

Many of the motifs that Shuvina used during this period can be seen in *Earth Transformations*. The large globe in the upper left displays an aerial view of her community, complete with wildlife: a walrus, a caribou and a lemming are running about. The globe seems to grow out of two human legs, complete with sky-blue polish on the toenails. Circling the legs are

the tentacles of an octopus — dark purple with blue undersides, complete with suction cups — stretching through the lower half of the picture plane. The arms of the figure are made of strings of globes ending in clawed hands that seem to be reaching for something.

On the far right an Inuk dressed in a traditional parka and *kamik* (boots) is holding up a drawing (again, a motif Shuvinai has used before). One of his arms is made of globes with a clawed hand, matching the shamanic figure of the earth on the left. The inset drawing shows a hunter holding a rifle. He is kneeling behind a stretched canvas, perhaps using it as a blind. Shuvinai has thus created two levels of inset images: the man on the right holding a canvas and the hunter in that image, holding a canvas, presumably of the same Kinngait landscape pictured in the first inset.

I do not draw simply the surface of the landscape. I feel I am capturing the breath and soul of the earth.<sup>119</sup>

### ***Life Force***

*Birth Scene* is one of Shuvinai Ashoona's more perplexing drawings because while it is tempting to interpret the birth scene as a personal reflection on childbirth, the artist does not acknowledge this. The drawing's focus is a labouring blond-haired woman lying sprawled in the arms of a prehistoric bird, between her legs a crowning baby whose head is encircled in globes. Shuvinai states, "I was thinking that the [yellow] hair was in shape of a circle as same as the circle of the world from up above. That was the only thought that I was trying to work on."<sup>120</sup> Using this as an entry point to the work one could speculate that this scene might be a birth scene from the underworld.

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<sup>119</sup> Shuvinai Ashoona, from the film *Ghost Noise*, Directed by Marcia Connolly, 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Shuvinai Ashoona, email correspondence with the author, January 8, 2016.

Strangely the pregnant woman portrays none of the anguish or pain one might expect her to feel in the midst of her birthing process. In fact, her blue-eyed smiling face seems genuinely happy despite the large claws that morph from her left wrist and grip her pregnant belly.



Figure 6.21. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Happy Mother*, 2013, Coloured pencil on paper, 127 x 71 cm, Musee d'art Contemporain de Montréal, Montreal.

Similarly the woman's right leg resembles that of an animal, perhaps a caribou? The midwife in this case is a large, angular bird with a colourful head and beak. The bird's orange and light blue

wings wrap delicately around the woman from behind, gently holding her breasts while its clawed feet seem to grip the land for leverage. Traditional Inuit births did involve a midwife in the birthing process who typically was a woman except in cases where the supernatural was expected to intervene, in which case a shaman would also attend.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps the bird is acting as the shaman here? The crowning infant that is being pulled from the womb by the delicate hand of the birthing mother is human but has six small planet earths dancing atop its head. In any event this birth is otherworldly and mystical, one could even speculate that it is supernatural.

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<sup>121</sup> Beverley O'Brien, ed., *Birth on the Land: Memories of the Inuit Elders and Traditional Midwives* (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2012).

***Reflecting on the Work***

*Composition (Hands Drawing)* embodies many of the motifs that have appeared in Shuvinai Ashoona's work since 2005. The graphic centre of this composition is a large white hand holding



Figure 6.22. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Composition (Hands Drawing)*, 2014, Pencil crayon on paper, 120 x 108.5 cm, Collection of Martha Burns and Paul Gross, Toronto.

a blue pencil. This hand is, in turn, circled by multiple arms and hands of varying skin colours.

Shuvinai often draws people with different skin tones and hair and eye colours, sometimes referring to a specific person but more often to humanity in general — a humanity she has seen.

The many hands seem to spin around the picture while the industrious pencils work away. Each hand in the drawing grasps a pencil and each is working on a different drawing, creating a collage effect on the page. Pencils, representative of the livelihood of the artist, are littered throughout the composition, waiting to be picked up and used. The pencils work on green and blue globes, mandala-like stars, and doodles. The globes — or as they have come to be known, “Shuvinai’s world(s)” — are a familiar motif for the artist. Notable also is the presence of the large heart, spade, club, and diamond from a deck of cards in the far right corner of the drawing. Shuvinai is obsessed with cards and often carries a pack in her pocket or purse. Images of the four suits in a standard deck of cards appear in many works by the artist. We also see the inclusion of Inuktitut syllabics, another strategy often employed by the artist.

The artist has referenced the Garden of Eden in a number of previous works; stories from the Bible resonate with her. Here she includes two green apples and one red apple at the very top of the page. Shuvinai remarks, “I had a book about Adam. I started rethinking about that book and put it with some of the things from the Bible. Lizards and snakes, maybe the snake of Adam and Eve. Temptation.”<sup>122</sup>

Six faces peer from behind the pieces of paper in the drawing, partly obscured by the drawing hands. These faces have stubble instead of hair and appear sickly. Who these onlookers are is a mystery, but like those holding the pencils, their skin tones and eye colours vary. This

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<sup>122</sup> Shuvinai Ashoona, interview with the author, May 18, 2015.

work is perplexing and unsettling, yet it effectively represents the fascinations and fears of the artist in a beautiful, playful composition.

### ***Celebrating the Monstrous***

*Composition (Attack of the Tentacle Monsters)* is a major work in the evolution of Shuvinai Ashoona's practice. It was first exhibited in 2015 in a collaborative two-person show at Feheley Fine Arts in Toronto and Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain in Montreal. Titled *Universal Cobra: Shuvinai Ashoona and Shary Boyle*, this ground-breaking show included work by each artist plus a number of exquisite collaborative drawings. Shuvinai Ashoona and Shary Boyle first exhibited together in *Noise Ghost*, 2009, where their collaboration began. Both artists create drawings that are simultaneously personal and dream-like, suggesting altered states of mind and shifting perceptions.

In Shuvinai's work from the second decade of the twenty-first century, surreal elements, such as are evident in *Noise Ghost*, reveal an increasing freedom in imagery that juxtaposes fantastical monsters, sea creatures, people, and popular culture in rich colour. *Composition (Attack of the Tentacle Monsters)* is at once violent and humorously absurd. Two large octopi stand on legs. One bright orange octopus stands on the hairy legs of a wolf-like beast with large red claws. Oddly shaped eyes circle the head, peering in all directions. This octopus joins arms with a grey octopus that stands on the white legs of a human. Instead of eyes, a ring of faces circles its head; these faces have the different skin tones and hair colours typical of Shuvinai's representations of humankind. A white, blond-haired man in a bright green parka stands in the centre of the picture. The man's arms are raised and his mouth open in alarm. The background is a detailed rocky outcrop typical of the artist's landscapes. A photographer, crouched beneath the

large paw of one of the monsters, seems oblivious to the drama that is unfolding above him, focusing his lens instead on the small dancing creatures before him. At the left side of the picture we see the arm of a person attempting to pull the orange monster away. There are seldom explanations for Shuvinai's imaginings; rather, they appear as dramatic stories that delight the artist.



Figure 6.23. Shuvinai Ashoona, *Composition (Attack of the Tentacle Monsters)*, 2013, Ink and coloured pencil on paper, 96.5 x 123 cm, Private collection.

In the *Universal Cobra* exhibition, Shuvinai Ashoona and Shary Boyle literally shared the paper in five of the works. The collaborative process involved Boyle beginning the drawing, leaving ample space for Shuvinai to come to the work and expand on the image. The results are compelling and speak to the artistic synchronicity between these two artists. *Inagododavida* is a

spectacular composition that brings together themes and motifs used by both artists. This fanciful yet disturbing work features a green octopus in the top left corner whose tentacles reach out to a birthing beast. Instead of a baby, a large eyeball appears between the legs of the mother. In the bottom left a photographer appears to be taking pictures of the birthing scene.



Figure 6.24. Shuvina Ashoona, and Shary Boyle, *Inagododavida*, 2015, Ink and coloured pencil on paper, 123 x 218 cm., Fehleley Fine Arts.

The fluid brushwork of Shary Boyle sets up a surreal stage for Shuvina's very real images; the ripple of the water Boyle paints merges seamlessly with the colourful rocky outcropping Shuvina adds to the background. On the right the composition only gets richer with Shuvina's imagery. The birthing monster morphs into a large hand (drawn by Shary Boyle) with alarmed faces at the end of each finger, screaming as the hand reaches toward a bright red planet.

Both *Composition (Attack of the Tentacle Monsters)* and *Inagododavida* showcase Shuvina's progression and her mastery of artistic vocabulary. Hers has become a world of her imaginings or stories in connection to the land and its forces. It is embedded in her Inuit

upbringing and environs but is singularly hers. Like the Surrealists before her, Shuvinai uses magical thinking and free association to produce surprising, unexpected images. Putting Shuvinai's work within a Western art-historical framework such as Surrealism, with its embrace of other cultures and rejection of the primacy of Western order, reveals a moment in Western art history where there is possible overlap between her work and that of contemporary artists.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

The explorations in this dissertation contribute to the recent shifts in scholarship in studies of Inuit art. As explained earlier, there is a dearth of scholarship and curatorial work in the area, which has contributed to certain assumptions being made about this art. Barbara Fischer, the director of the University of Toronto Art Museums, writes in her introduction to the exhibition catalogue for *Noise Ghost and Other Stories*:

While there has recently been much critical analysis and transformation of the way in which Indigenous artists have been represented in museum exhibitions and permanent collections in Canada, Inuit culture continues to occupy a circumscribed and marginal place in the national story, and in the global contemporary. Within this context, Toronto-based writer and curator Nancy Campbell has made a sustained effort of loosening the traditional frameworks for staging contemporary Inuit artists' work. Questioning the historical segregation, she began presenting Inuit artists within mainstream public galleries as early as 2005, and developed new ways of introducing artists such as Annie Pootogook and Shuvinai Ashoona into the context of contemporary art. Her trilogy of exhibitions produced at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery embarked on a yet more daring approach. Each of the three exhibitions — *Noise Ghost* (2009), *Scream* (2010), and *Blue Cloud* (2012) — offered a poignant and deeply resonant pairing of an Inuit and Southern artist to imagine a different geography of cultural relationships. Foregrounding two individual artists, in equal balance, these exhibitions deftly broke with the longstanding mutual exclusiveness of contemporary Canadian and Inuit art. Organized around

particular areas of artistic and formal interest, each exhibition pursued common threads in both approach and subject matter in service of visual storytelling related to the present moment. This manifested, for instance, as the recollection of historical and lived trauma in the work of Shuvinai Ashoona and Shary Boyle in *Noise Ghost* and the work of Ed Pien and Samonie Toonoo in *Scream*, and the impactful visual experience of expansive landscapes in the work of Ohotaq Mikkigak and Jack Bush in *Blue Cloud* — even if a generation apart.<sup>123</sup>

Part of the curatorial strategy is to add the voices of Inuit artists to the discussion, rather than relegate them to the role of silent partners in a complicated trade agreement between the cooperative system, dealers, and middlemen. This intention seems straightforward and pedantic on first reading and thus reflects the relative infancy of the field of Inuit art studies. Certainly the importance of the artist's voice in scholarship appears obvious in 2016 as we emerge from post-colonial and feminist cultural theory and its impact on curation, art history, and visual culture. With the exception of Dorothy Eber's seminal work with Pitseolak Ashoona in 1977, the voice of the Inuit artist has been, for the most part, absent in the scholarship on Inuit art. Establishing the intent of researchers since 1990 to use this as an essential tool when presenting the work of Inuit artists marks a shift in viewing the art of the North. The in-depth case studies in this dissertation of the drawings of Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona were compiled after many research trips to the North over a ten-year period. Having the opportunity to forge relationships in the community of Kinngait and the privilege to see first-hand how fascinating yet complex the North is remains essential to my research. The insistence on privileging the voice of

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<sup>123</sup> Barbara Fischer, in Nancy Campbell, *Noise Ghost and Other Stories* (University of Toronto, 2016), 6.

the artist in the aesthetic discussion of the work is an essential strategy when writing or curating the work of any artist.

As described in Chapter 2, the success of the Kinngait Studios has had a huge influence on the artists and art that comes out of this small hamlet. The co-operative system has worked very well for artists in this remote community. Not only do the artists have a personal investment in the business and its success, but the Co-op also provides them with an income, guidance, supplies, and a place to work when supplies and space are difficult to come by. As the Co-op has grown and generations of artists have passed away Kinngait Studios is having to evolve to accommodate the changes. New marketing practices and opportunities for artists to move easily from one community to another or one country to another are a growing priority. Fewer artists are taking up the vocation of art-maker in the communities as other full-time job opportunities (albeit still rare), such as Hamlet employee, Co-op employee, teacher, social worker, and home care worker, have become available to Inuit residents. More young people are attending school and the growing number of secondary programs available in the North allow more residents to complete their secondary education close to home.

The transition from art-making out of necessity to pursuing it as a chosen vocation is a new concept in Kinngait. The Kinngait Studios and the artists must consider the importance of career building as part of the artistic practice in addition to the economics of art-making. An example of this is seen in the promising work of Saimaiyu Akesuk (b. 1988) who is a primary school teacher in Kinngait and only an occasional visitor to the Studios. Akesuk has a steady income from her teaching practice and does not wish to rely on the whims of the art market. Today, the Studios are quiet as few new people are showing an interest in drawing despite the financial and international success of Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook.

Inuit art will continue to be made as long as there is a market for it. Two streams of art production are important to the North. The large market for small carvings, handicrafts, and tourist items that are sold collectively as Inuit art at airports and “Canadiana” shops under the Igloo Tag umbrella throughout Canada and the world is an important part of the economy in the North. There is also a small and separate market for contemporary fine art, in which Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona participate, that distributes works through galleries in the South and directs drawings, sculpture, and prints to collectors and museums. Within this market, where there is a more critical consideration of the work, it is essential to address the settler-colonial concern with the collective versus individual nature of Inuit art as well as seeing “Inuitness” as part of the global contemporary art appetite for diversity. There is a prevalent post-colonial impulse attached to the desire to view Inuit art as a collective activity. This projection of Western definitions of self, other, and society stands in the way of the enrichment of knowledge and scholarship. This detailed examination of the drawings of Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook is an examination of the work of two individuals that is part of the human conversation, part of the story of being in the world. As artists they engage with their immediate environment, personal history, Inuit identity, and the future.

The exhibition and curation of Inuit art has also made strides since 1990 as outlined, however, the last ten years have had the greatest effect. The positioning of Inuit art within the mainstream of contemporary art in Canada and beyond is relatively recent and still contested. Not only has Inuit art seldom been seen as part of the contemporary canon in Canadian and international museums, but it has also been separated from other Indigenous art in Canadian museums. In Canada, Inuit art has notably been excluded from discussions of First Nations art. Indigenous art exhibitions in Canada now include work by Inuit artists and slowly Inuit artists

are being considered in the once restricted group of contemporary Indigenous artists from the South. The presence of Inuit art in prevailing contemporary art discourse internationally remains spotty, possibly because the beginnings of Inuit art are misunderstood and because of the geographical isolation of most Inuit artists and their limited access to media. The conversation surrounding global indigeneity in academia is slowly coming to include Inuit, but this is very recent.

As previously discussed, *Inuit Quajimajatuqangit (IQ)* is a multi-pronged system of traditional knowledge as it applies to people, the environment, health, culture and language. *IQ* has both practical and epistemological aspects that branch out from the fundamental principle that human beings are learning, rational beings with an infinite potential for problem-solving within the dictates of nature and technology. *IQ* can certainly apply to the visual art being produced in Kinngait and promises to provide guidance in the traditional ways for generations to come. It promises to ensure traditional arts such as sewing, basketry, and carving will be sustained. *IQ* has been in play in Kinngait for many years. The Elders continue to lead by example and people learn from them. In the graphic work I write about by artists Annie Pootoogook and Shuvinai Ashoona there is a place for *IQ*, however, their unique drawings are the result of a complex group of influences; cultural, personal, and intellectual. Certainly the strength and legacy of traditional Inuit ways continues to impact the production of work. However, many contemporary artists are slowly adapting to the rigorous scrutiny of the aesthetic considerations of the mainstream art world. Their work is personal, conceptually rich, large, and informed and engages the viewer in a conversation that expands the idealized understanding of the Canadian North.

What is apparent today is that Inuit art has moved from its origins as an art representing an imaginary Canadian identity and a yearning for a romantic pristine North to a practice that presents Inuit identity in their new reality. These contemporary artists provide inspiration and demonstrate, through the depiction of *IQ*, how art-making, whether drawing or sculpture, can be used to preserve and fortify Inuit traditions.<sup>124</sup> This socially conscious contemporary work that touches on the environment, religion, pop culture, and alcoholism proves that the Inuit can respond and are responding to the changing realities in the North. On the other side of the coin, the categories that have held Inuit art to its origins must be reconsidered and integrated into the categories of contemporary art, Indigenous or otherwise, in museums that consider work produced in the past twenty years to be contemporary as such. Holding Inuit artists to a not-so-distant past is limiting for the artists producing art today and locks them in a history that may or may not affect their work directly.

Discussion of Inuit art practices and advanced study of the work are slowly developing and will, in time, produce an essential contribution to the literature on Inuit art. I believe scholarship from diverse positions is vital. It provides the opportunity to open up spaces of self-definition, embrace historical possibilities, and create conversations both inside and outside of the specific context of Inuit art. The continued production and circulation of Inuit art can only benefit from consideration within a larger aesthetic domain. Globalization, as a concept, refers “both to the compression of the world and the intensification of the world as a whole.”<sup>125</sup> In that

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<sup>124</sup> Igloliarte, “Inuit Artistic Expression,” 46.

<sup>125</sup> Roland Robertson, quoted in Anna Maria Guasch, “Globalization and Contemporary Art,” <http://www.thirdtext.org/globalization-and-contemporary-art>.

context, the importance of the principle of conversation is that it suggests that we open our “selves” to “others” in an imaginative engagement rather than as an act of assimilation.

In summary, there is much to celebrate when looking at the potential and possibility for a new conversation that includes Inuit art in new ways in Canada and the world. Through a systematic review of selected drawings by Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook this dissertation not only speaks to the strength of their individual works and their contemporaneity but also to the mechanics of how they have been curated, facilitated, selected, purchased, and exhibited to new outcomes. There is a growing group of artists, curators, cultural workers, dealers, scholars and teachers who advocate for Inuit art from different positions, both in the North and the South, who are slowly expanding the conversation around contemporary art and the absence and presence of Inuit art in that important conversation. Dr. Heather Igloliorte wrote a tribute in *Canadian Art Magazine* in response to the tragic death of Annie Pootoogook last September. She comments that Annie permanently transformed the landscape of Inuit art by breaking through the “ethnic art” glass ceiling and firmly establishing contemporary Inuit art in the mainstream.... She continues..... “with her smart, unpretentious drawings, she captured the attention of the international art world and held it for several years, keeping the door open for other Inuit artists to also enter in the process.”<sup>126</sup> It is my aspiration that we keep that door open using strategies outlined in this dissertation and by continuing to work collaboratively and critically.

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<sup>126</sup> Heather Igloliorte, “Annie Pootoogook: 1969–2016,” *Canadian Art*, September 27, 2016, <https://canadianart.ca/features/annie-pootoogook-1969-2016/>.

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*American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1990): 71–73

## Appendix A Artists in the Family

### **Ashoona, Goota (b. 1967)**

A third-generation artist from Cape Dorset, Goota Ashoona is a carver of traditional Inuit whalebone and stone sculptures. In 2008 the family studio held the exhibition *The Gift from Haida Gwaii*, which included a six-foot-high piece collaboratively carved from a single whale's rib.

### **Ashoona, Mayureak (b. 1946)**

A graphic artist and master carver whose mother was the pioneering graphic artist Sheouak Parr. After the death of her husband, the carver Qaqaq Ashoona, Mayureak moved from their camp on southern Baffin Island to Kinngait. Her work has been exhibited in Germany and Japan as well as across Canada.

### **Ashoona, Napachie (b. 1974)**

A carver from Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island, Napachie Ashoona is the son of the artists Sorosilutu and Kiugak Ashoona. His figurative sculptures are carved from serpentine, a stone indigenous to Baffin Island, and explore movement and traditional themes including hunting, drum dancing, and familial bonds.

**Ashoona, Ohito (b. 1952)**

An acclaimed carver and expert hunter from Cape Dorset, Ohito Ashoona is the son of the artist Qaaq Ashoona. In 2002 he was awarded a National Aboriginal Achievement Award for his accomplishments in the visual arts.

**Ashoona, Kiugak (1933–2014)**

A master carver of traditional Inuit sculpture, Kiugak Ashoona received the Order of Canada in 2000 and is among the most significant figures in contemporary northern art. A second-generation Inuit artist, he was one of Pitseolak Ashoona's sons. A retrospective exhibition of his decades-long career was held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 2010.

**Ashoona, Sorosilutu (b. 1941)**

A prominent Cape Dorset artist who was encouraged as a young woman by her mother-in-law, Pitseolak Ashoona. Early on, Sorosilutu Ashoona was drawn to the colours that can be achieved through printmaking techniques. Her lithographs, stone-cuts, and stencils often refer to Inuit stories familiar from her youth.

**Pootoogook, Cee (b. 1967)**

A carver since about 1990, Cee Pootoogook turned to drawing and stonecut printmaking in 2009. His work depicts both contemporary and traditional subjects: scenes of daily Cape Dorset life as well as Arctic wildlife and Inuit spirits. A third-generation artist, he is the brother of the renowned artist Annie Pootoogook.

**Pootoogook, Napachie (1938–2002)**

Napachie Pootoogook, mother of Annie Pootoogook, was born in Sako, a camp on the southwest coast of Baffin Island, and took up drawing in the late 1950s alongside her mother, Pitseolak Ashoona. While her earliest prints and drawings largely depict the Inuit spirit world, from the 1970s she concentrated on more earth-bound subjects, including historical events and traditional life and customs.

## Appendix B

### Exhibitions: Annie Pootoogook

#### Solo Exhibitions

##### 2003

May–June. *Moving Forward: Works on Paper by Annie Pootoogook*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

##### 2006

June. *Annie Pootoogook – Reflections*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

June 24–September 04. *Annie Pootoogook*. Power Plant. Toronto, Ontario.

January 11–March 28. *Annie Pootoogook*. Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Alberta College of Art and Design. Calgary, Alberta.

#### Group Exhibitions

##### 2002

May–June. *The Unexpected*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

##### 2005

November. *Unique Visions*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

June–July. *Windows on Kinngait: The Drawings of Napachie Pootoogook and Annie Pootoogook*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

##### 2006–2007

December 9, 2006–February 9, 2007. *Ashoona: Third Wave: Shuvinai Ashoona, Siassie Kenneally, and Annie Pootoogook*. Art Gallery of Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta.

October 17, 2006–January 7, 2007. *Sobey Art Prize*, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. Montréal, Québec.

##### 2007

February 23–April 8. *Burning Cold: Contemporary Canadian Artists under 40*. Yukon Arts Centre. Whitehorse, Yukon.

May 10–July 8. La Biennale De Montréal. Montréal, Québec.

June 2–July 28. *Three Cousins: Annie Pootoogook, Shuvinai Ashoona, Siassie Kenneally*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

June 16–September 23. Documenta 12. Kassel, Germany.

**2009**

July 11–August 29. *Contemporary Traditions: Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook*. Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain. Montreal, Québec.

**2011**

April 2–August 21. *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*. Art Gallery of Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

August 27–December 11. *Annie Pootoogook: Compositions*. Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University. Kingston, Ontario.

**2012–13**

May 26, 2012–April 1, 2013. *Oh, Canada: Contemporary Art from North America*. Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA). North Adams, Massachusetts.

**2015**

August 21–October 10. *Bing Bang*. Saw Gallery. Ottawa, ON.

## Appendix C

### Exhibitions: Shivunai Ashoona

#### Solo Exhibitions

##### 2006

November 4–25. *Shuvinaï Ashoona: Time Interrupted*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

##### 2007

October 13–November 27. *Shuvinaï Ashoona: Drawings 1993–2007*. Marion Scott Gallery. Vancouver, British Columbia.

##### 2009

April 27–June 14. *Shuvinaï Ashoona Drawings*. Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario.

##### 2012

September 15–October 10. *Shuvinaï's World(s)*. Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto, Ontario.

##### 2014

September 20–October 11, 2014. *Shuvinaï Ashoona: Woven Thoughts*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

#### Group Exhibitions

##### 1999

May 14–August 31. *Three Women, Three Generations: Drawings by Pitseolak Ashoona, Napatchie Pootoogook and Shuvinaï Ashoona*. McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Kleinberg, Ontario.

##### 2006

May 4–June 18. *Landscape: Contemporary Inuit Drawings*. Marion Scott Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia.

##### 2006–2007

December 9 2006–February 19, 2007. *Ashoona: Third Wave: Shuvinaï Ashoona, Siassie Kenneally, and Annie Pootoogook*. Art Gallery of Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta.

June 2–July 28, 2007. *Three Cousins: Annie Pootoogook, Shuvinaï Ashoona, Siassie Kenneally*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

##### 2008

September 20–October 11. *Citysky: Shuvinai Ashoona and John Noestheden*. Basel, Switzerland.

## **2009**

May 28–August 23. *Noise Ghost: Shuvinai Ashoona and Shary Boyle*. Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto. Toronto, Ontario.

July 11–August 29. *Contemporary Traditions: Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook*. Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain. Montréal, Québec.

July 18–August 30. *Extreme Drawing*. Marion Scott Gallery. Vancouver, British Columbia.

## **2009–10**

October 10, 2009–January 17, 2010. *Nunannguaq: In the Likeness of the Earth*. McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Kleinburg, Ontario.

October 16, 2009–January 17, 2010. *Uuturautiit: Cape Dorset Celebrates 50 Years of Printmaking*. National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

July 17–August 7, 2010. *The Drawing Room*. Pendulum Gallery. West Vancouver, British Columbia.

February 5–May 8, 2010. *Monster*. West Vancouver Museum. West Vancouver, British Columbia.

## **2010–11**

November 5, 2010–January 23, 2011. *It Is What It Is: Recent Acquisitions of New Canadian Art*, Canadian Biennial. National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

## **2011**

April 2–August 21. *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*. Art Gallery of Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

October 14–November 20, 2011. *Surreal: Eight Artists in the Fantastical Tradition*. Marion Scott Gallery. Vancouver, British Columbia.

## **2012**

February 10–March 18. *Sky Ecchymosis*. Women of the Arctic series, La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse. Montréal, Québec.

February 24–March 24. *Dorset Now*. Feheley Fine Arts. Toronto, Ontario.

March 22–May 19. *Sleep of Reason*. Yukon Arts Centre. Whitehorse, Yukon.

June 27–September 16. *John Noestheden: Sky and Shuvinai Ashoona: Earth*, 18th Biennale of Sydney. Sydney, Australia.

## **2012–13**

May 26, 2012–April 1, 2013. *Oh, Canada: Contemporary Art from North North America*. Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA). North Adams, Massachusetts.

**2013**

May 17–September 2. *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art*. National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

June 29–September 2. *Takujaksait (Something to See)*. Nunatta Sunakkutaangit Museum. Iqaluit, Nunavut.

**2014–15**

July 20, 2014–January 11, 2015. *Unsettled Landscapes: SITElines: New Perspectives on Art of the Americas*. Santa Fe, New Mexico.

October 17, 2014–March 8. *Shine a Light: Canadian Biennial*. National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

**2015**

November 7–December 19. *Universal Cobra: Shuvinai Ashoona and Shary Boyle*. Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain (Montréal, Québec) with Feheley Fine Arts (Toronto, Ontario).

## Appendix D

### Prints: Annie Pootoogook

03-Commission	<i>Interior &amp; Exterior</i> , Etching & Aquatint, Printer: (Studio PM)
05-01	<i>Brief Case</i> , Lithograph, Printer: Niviaksie Quvianaqtuliaq
06-01	<i>Windy Day</i> , Lithograph, Printer: Pitseolak Niviaqsi
06-02	<i>The Homecoming</i> , Etching & Aquatint, Printer: (Studio PM)
06-Commission	'35/36', Collagraph, Printer: (Sylvia Bendzsa)
06-Commission	<i>Pitseolak's Glasses</i> , Collagraph, Printer: (Sylvia Bendzsa)
07-01	<i>Kijjautiik (Scissors)</i> , Lithograph, Printer: Niviaksie Quvianaqtuliaq
08-01	<i>A Friend Visits</i> , Lithograph, Printer: Niviaksie Quvianaqtuliaq

Appendix E  
Prints: Shuvinai Ashoona

97-33 *Interior*, 1997  
97-34 *Settlement*, 1997  
00S-18 *Little Landscape*, 2000  
01-32 *Summer Tent*, 2001  
03-29 *Arctic Evening*, 2003  
03-30 *Low Tide*, 2003  
03-31 *Stone Qulliq*, 2003  
03-32 *Summer Sealift*, 2003  
06-33 *Egg*, 2006  
06-34 *Scary Dream*, 2006  
07-30 *Hatched*, 2007  
07-31 *Tide Pool*, 2007  
08S-01 *Angel in Town*, 2008  
08S-06 *String of Pearls*, 2008  
08-31 *Moored*, 2008  
08-32 *Camp Site*, 2008  
08-33 *Pipe Dream*, 2008  
09-33 *Aujaqsiut Tupiq (Summer Tent)*, 2009  
09-34 *Quilt of Dreams*, 2009  
10S-04 *Tribute*, 2010  
10S-05 *Exotic Woman*, 2010  
10S-07 *One Penny*, 2010  
10-33 *Handstand*, 2010  
11-30 *World View*, 2011  
11-31 *Sea Shell*, 2011  
12-27 *Story Boots*, 2012  
14-32 *Inner Worlds*, 2014  
14-33 *Head Pull*, 2014  
15-15 *Global Currents*, 2015