

JULIA LUM

## Iqqaipaa / I Remember: Spatial and Temporal Constructions of Identity in the Museum

On April 1, 1999, as Canada's political map was altered to include its newest member territory, Nunavut, the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) opened a major Inuit art exhibition to the public. The exhibition, entitled *Iqqaipaa* – or, 'I remember' in Inuktitut – included more than 150 artworks covering the years of Inuit artistic production between 1948 and 1970. Several events celebrating the creation of Nunavut took place in the CMC's exhibit spaces during the first week of April, including drum dances, throat singing, traditional ayaya performances, a flag and map unveiling, and a telecast of the official inauguration of Nunavut in the territory's capital, Iqaluit – all in honour of "the Great Canadian North."<sup>1</sup> On the evening of March 30<sup>th</sup>, the Museum's Grand Hall played 'Southern host'<sup>2</sup> to the Nunavut inaugural ceremonies, and also introduced the exhibition, its curator, Maria Von Finckenstein, and its special advisor, James Houston.

Nunavut is comprised of an Inuit majority, but despite a de-facto self-government, the Inuit population's governance over the territory remains highly mediated by Federal policies. This issue extends into the cultural realm, where Inuit leaders have been vocal about the need for greater control of the discourses surrounding their cultural production. The CMC was forum to this message

---

1 "Event Programme," Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds, Iqqaipaa Exhibition, Box I-293, Institutional Archives, CMC Library, Archives and Documentation.

2 Welcome speech by Sylvie Morel - *Iqqaipaa* opening ceremonies, March 30, 1999, Canadian Museum of Civilization web site, web cast, 47:00 <http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/theatre/iqqaip1e.html> (accessed October 30, 2006). Sylvie Morel, Public Programs Director introduced the evening as a celebration of Nunavut's creation. Canadian Museum of Civilization (hereafter cited as CMC).

seven years prior to *Iqqaiᓅaa*, as the organizing institution of the groundbreaking Aboriginal-curated exhibition *INDIGENA*, which was a direct response to another 'celebration' – the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing and the 125th anniversary of Canadian confederation. The goals of that exhibition, curated by Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, included the prominence of "Aboriginal values and philosophies within their own framework, without the need for validation from Canadians of European ancestry."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the curators stressed that "self-determination and sovereignty include human, political, land, religious, artistic and moral rights. Taking ownership of these stories involves a claim to Aboriginal title over images, culture and stories."<sup>4</sup> In the *INDIGENA* catalogue, writer and artist Alootook Ipellie repeats the sentiments of Inuit leaders at the Coppermine conference of 1970, who asserted: "We must control our own future if we are to survive as Inuit."<sup>5</sup> The celebration of Nunavut, with the attendant political rhetoric that accompanied its presentation in the public arena, was accompanied by an exhibition and opening ceremonies that failed to provide a platform for Inuit-led discussions about the future of their territory and cultural production.

James Houston is credited throughout the exhibition and opening ceremonies as the individual responsible for initiating the first large-scale sale of Inuit art on the Southern market. Yet his prominence as the touted 'discoverer' of this art goes unproblematic within the museum, instead lending force to the mythologizing narratives surrounding Inuit art production, such as its ties to an 'authentic' timeless past and its associations with a rugged yet majestic landscape that has become a central motif in the representation of Canada. By positioning Houston's voice at the forefront, the exhibition formulates Inuit art production as a function of Western knowledge and subjectivity.

As art historian Donald Preziosi has observed, "one simply cannot today *be* a

---

3 Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, "Introduction," *INDIGENA: contemporary native perspectives* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992), 15.

4 Ibid, 17.

5 Alootook Ipellie, "The Colonization of the Arctic," *INDIGENA*, 54.

nation-state, an ethnicity, or a race without a proper and corresponding art, with its own distinctive history or trajectory which “reflects” or models the broader historical evolution of that identity – which bodies forth its “soul.”<sup>6</sup> This paper will critically examine the construction of collective and national identity through specific mechanisms of spatial and temporal framing within the museum. In doing so, I will uncover the dissonance between the aims of the exhibition and the ways that it functioned within the larger context of the celebration of Nunavut. While the exhibition explicitly communicated the role of art in the creation of identity, there emerged contradictory impulses between the historic and regional framing of the exhibition on the one hand and the concept of contemporary self-determination on the other.

The noted absence of collaborative modes of discourse (between Inuit and non-Inuit individuals) further highlights this tension. In recent decades, museums have increasingly adopted collaborative models, which involve extensive consultation processes with source communities, inviting individuals from these communities to have a prominent hand in the curation, development and display of exhibitions.<sup>7</sup> Although not without their pitfalls, these collaborations often result in multiple discursive channels, giving prominence not only to community voices, but to specific Aboriginal value-systems and cosmologies.

As I will reveal, *Iqqaipaa* adopted some of these strategies, however the exhibition’s overarching narrative and the ceremony’s dominant themes were oriented from a historic and Southern viewpoint. *Iqqaipaa* foregrounded key events and artworks in the history of Inuit art’s economic and aesthetic deployment within the symbolic order of a liberal nationalism. Overall, the exhibition and its reliance on Euro-Canadian criteria for the validation of Inuit fell short of projecting the achievements and concerns of the contemporary Inuit inhabitants of Nunavut.

---

6 Donald Preziosi, “Collecting / Museums,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1996), 290.

7 See Laura Peers and Alison Brown, *Museums and Source Communities*, (New York: Routledge, 2000).

### CELEBRATING INUIT ART ON A NATIONAL SCALE

In 1999, the CMC developed and launched three exhibitions tied to the general theme of 'the Great Canadian North.' The largest of these was *Iqqaipaa*, which celebrated both the creation of Nunavut and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first commercial sale of Inuit art.<sup>8</sup> Archival materials indicate that *Iqqaipaa* was considered "high profile," and that the museum sought major sponsorship from the initial planning stages.<sup>9</sup> The projected attendance was estimated at almost half a million people for the exhibition's 8-month life span.<sup>10</sup> For such a large-scale project, the works were selected for the utmost 'quality,' a term I will unpack in a subsequent section;<sup>11</sup> "I went for the best," curator Maria von Finckenstein explained in a press interview.<sup>12</sup> James Houston donated twenty pieces of his personal collection to the show.<sup>13</sup> The remaining works were drawn from the CMC's collection – the largest of its kind in the world – with forty-six works once part of the "significant *Department of Indian and Northern Affairs collection* that was divided in 1989."<sup>14</sup> This substantial government contribution reveals the importance of *Iqqaipaa* as a cultural extension

8 CMC, "General Information: About the Exhibition," *Iqqaipaa* online exhibition, CMC <http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/gen-e.html> (accessed October 30, 2006).

9 "The exhibit is rated "high" in its strategic priority and as such will be combined with an opening event." "Request for Proposal," Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds; "In response to a perceived decline in the sale of Inuit carvings, Deputy Premier of the Government of the Northwest Territories and legislative member for Baffin South, Goo Arlooktoo, called a meeting for October 19-21 (1999) in Cape Dorset... Meeting participants came up with 15 recommendations to help put the industry on its feet. They included the promotion of Nunavut art at high profile celebrations, such as those marking the establishment of the new territory and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Inuit art's introduction to the South." "A meeting on the Nunavut Carving Industry," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 54.

10 "Request for Proposal," Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds.

11 As I am showing in this paper, there are competing demands behind cultural exhibits and the roles that they play. Therefore, terms such as 'quality' need to come under scrutiny in consideration of these contingent factors.

12 Jane George, "The beginnings of commercial carving on display in Ottawa," [http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/nunavut90329/nvt90305\\_10.html](http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/nunavut90329/nvt90305_10.html) *Nunatsiaq News*, March 5, 1999, (accessed October 30, 2006).

13 CMC, "General Information: About the Exhibition," *Iqqaipaa* online exhibition, CMC <http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/gen-e.html> (accessed October 30, 2006).

14 *Ibid.*

of the creation of Nunavut, further articulating the exhibition's ties to political stakeholders.<sup>15</sup>

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and other officials gathered in Iqaluit – Nunavut's capital – for the swearing-in ceremonies. Due to limited capacity in Iqaluit, it was decided that the CMC would become the Southern site of the inauguration of Nunavut in order to accommodate other government officials.<sup>16</sup> The media and international attention surrounding the week-long events, which included a live CBC feed from the official ceremonies, was expected to draw increased attention to the exhibition. *Iqqaipaa* claimed the creation of Nunavut as its *raison d'être*:<sup>17</sup> “To mark this memorable occasion, *Iqqaipaa* celebrates Inuit creativity as reflected in early contemporary Inuit art”<sup>18</sup>

Accommodating approximately 600 - 1000 guests, the opening event was held in the Grand Hall, the largest space in the museum, containing full-sized totem poles and the reconstruction of Northwest Coast housefronts. 10,000 invitations were distributed to various government officials, museum trustees, Aboriginal groups, libraries and universities and invitees selected by exhibition staff and official sponsors.<sup>19</sup> The evening featured four major speakers: Public Programs Director Sylvie Morel, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, Duncan McEwan (CEO of the exhibition's sponsor, Cancom) and James Houston. There were a handful of Inuit individuals present on stage for the evening. Elder Mary Peter provided a symbolic

---

15 “The NA-collection is of unique historical value because it was collected by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (NA stands for Northern Affairs) when the ministry was actively involved in the development and marketing of Inuit arts and handicrafts. In 1989 a portion of this collection was transferred to the CMC and the exhibition will allow the CMC to acknowledge this important gift.” “An Exhibition Proposal,” March 1998, Sylvie Morel Fonds.

16 “Executive Summary,” Sylvie Morel Fonds.

17 “It is expected that the international community will observe this event with interest as will media from around the world. The knock-on effect should attract many people to the three Nunavut-related exhibitions.” “Executive Summary,” Sylvie Morel Fonds.

18 CMC, “General Information: About the Exhibition,” *Iqqaipaa* online exhibition, CMC <http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/gen-e.html> (accessed October 30, 2006).

19 Louis Robillard, “*Iqqaipaa*: General Information, March 30, 1999,” Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds.

presence by lighting a qulliq, a soapstone seal-oil lamp representing light and family/community warmth.<sup>20</sup> There were also performances by Malachi Kiguktaq and Sophie McRae, who performed Inuit ayaya and children's songs.

These proceedings were all captured via webcast feed, allowing the museum to connect with national and international audiences. A media release for the event emphasizes that this accessibility creates "a unique opportunity for the Museum to connect with residents of the new territory, where the Internet is in wide use... It is fitting that a national institution such as the CMC should be a trail-blazer in using new broadcast distribution technologies to extend across Canada and around the world cultural and political events of major significance to our country."<sup>21</sup> As the museum took part in new advances in communications technology, *Iqqaipaa* was set within the greater context of unity and celebration on a national scale.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE 'UNKNOWABLE' NORTH: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NATIONAL SYMBOLISM

The 'North' figures as a thematic trope of 'Canadianness' in countless literary works, film and popular imagery. During the *Iqqaipaa* opening ceremonies, Adrienne Clarkson's speech touched on the notion of a Canadian consciousness in relation to this phenomenon:

It is often said that the most enduring relationship Canadians have with anything is their relationship with the land. A land which is vast, often empty enough...

---

20 Rachel Attitug Qitsualik, "Living with Change," Nunavut'99, <http://www.nunavut.com/nunavut99/english/change.html> (accessed December 20, 2006).

21 "First Canadian museum to Webcast live exhibition opening," Media Release, Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds.

22 The exhibit also featured a virtual reality component, which became the impetus for the creation of an online virtual exhibition project: "The theme for Inuit 3D evolved from a nine-minute 3D Virtualized Reality theatre production on Inuit art CMC presented during the exhibition *Iqqaipaa: Celebrating Inuit Art, 1948-1970* in 1999. This program was presented in CMC's 25-seat 3D VR Theatre. It featured high-resolution 3D images of a selection of Inuit sculpture from the Palaeo-Eskimo (700 BC) period up to the 1970's projected in stereo on a 10' x 15' screen. It also included background arctic visuals and narration on Inuit art and arctic history." Frank Corcoran et al., "Inuit 3D: An Interactive Virtual 3D Web Exhibition," *Museums and the Web*, (conference), National Research Council of Canada, April 2002, <https://iit-iti.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/iit-publications-iti/docs/NRC-44903.pdf> (accessed December 20, 2006).

And perhaps because of that, there's a certain mystery, a kind of feeling that it is unknowable. And it's because of that, probably, that Inuit Art makes us have that *frisson*, that feeling that it responds to something in us as Canadians... There is no other Canadian Art which so characterizes the lonely wilderness and hardness of spirit which spells Canada to people around the world and to Canadians now themselves<sup>23</sup>

Here, the 'North' is not conceived as a coherent political unit or geographic location, but as a spiritual entity. By this logic, Inuit cultural production plays an important role in Canadian self-identification – regardless of ethnic or cultural background and geographic location, Canadians connect with the 'hardiness of spirit' which it signifies. Inuit art is therefore absorbed into the national collectivity and becomes a vital link that associates Canadians to the land, to each other and to the greater nation.

In his influential text, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines nationhood as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign... ‘Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist.’”<sup>24</sup> The museum is an important ideological component within the greater invention of nationalism. For Anderson, it functions concomitantly with the census and the map to create artificial boundaries, regional surveillance and a means by which a unified image may be presented back to the general populace. Museums also represent the individual subject and his or her place within a greater totality; Preziosi notes that “the museum is in fact a theater for the adequation of an I/eye confronting the world-as-object, with an I/eye confronting itself as an object among objects in that world.”<sup>25</sup> This “mirror-stage formation of the modern subject” shows the institutional power

---

23 Welcome speech by Adrienne Clarkson - Iqqaipaa opening ceremonies, March 30, 1999, CMC web site, web cast, 47:00, [http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/theatre/iqqaipaa/iqarch\\_1e.html#30](http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/theatre/iqqaipaa/iqarch_1e.html#30) (accessed October 30, 2006).

24 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983), 5-6.

25 Preziosi, 288.

inherent in museum exhibitions such as *Iqqaiᓅaa*.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Inuit art – which has long been a vehicle for the expression of both regional and national interests – was once again brought centre-stage to highlight the celebration of national and collective identities.

Building on the definition of nationhood, historian Ian McKay proposes that Canada governs through liberal philosophies – defining liberalism as the political form of capitalist modernity.<sup>27</sup> He suggests that “one way of visualizing post-Confederation Canadian history is as the rise of a liberal empire centred in the Valley of the St. Lawrence, extending its geographical range and intensifying its ideological hold from 1867 to the present by digesting, rearranging, or eliminating alternative ways of ordering society and culture.”<sup>28</sup> Indigenous ways of life were included in these ‘alternative’ societies, leveled with charges of communism because of their ties to land and collective identifications. The rule of liberalism is closely tied to the Gramscian concept of *hegemony* – or, a system of domination not necessarily instigated through force, but by way of the governing classes’ manufacture of *consent* amongst the controlled masses.<sup>29</sup> The legitimacy of the hegemonic class is thus established as a normative “true voice of the people.”<sup>30</sup> Those who cannot be easily assimilated into this order are “contained, through such devices as negotiating with cultural brokers... or even the celebration of difference.”<sup>31</sup> In the absence of what McKay calls the “unifying definition of ‘Canada’” institutions of liberal rule such as museums often operate in the promotion of a totality, despite

---

26 see Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums and the Phantasms of Modernity*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2003).

27 Ian McKay, “Introduction,” *The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post-Confederation Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1992), xi; see also Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005).

28 *Ibid.*, xi – xii.

29 *Ibid.*, xiv.

30 *Ibid.*, xv.

31 *Ibid.*, xv.

any complications that multiple identities within the vast geographic boundaries of Canada might present.<sup>32</sup>

Canada as a former colonial nation is presented with a particular challenge: how to distinguish itself from the U.S. and Britain whilst maintaining a cohesive image.<sup>33</sup> Nelson Graburn argues that, in facing this challenge, "the domain with the greatest potential was the natural landscape, and the native peoples."<sup>34</sup> Inuit art filled a vacuum left by the disbanding of the Group of Seven, whose works were hailed as "truly Canadian" art.<sup>35</sup> As illustrated by Clarkson's foreward for the exhibition's catalogue, which once again proclaims that Inuit art "evokes the spiritual essence of a country like Canada," associations with a northern landscape and a survivalist mentality answered the call for 'state art' in the decades following World War II.<sup>36</sup> As I will explore further, the production of Inuit art is inextricably tied to Southern, and hence *liberal*, market demands. At the moment of Nunavut's creation within the Canadian geo-political map, it is no coincidence that mid-20th century Inuit art was again marshalled in the service of national identity-formation.

If Inuit art is the means by which Canada may define its spiritual consciousness, where does that relegate its Inuit producers? In his seminal text, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, Johannes Fabian describes how Time is used to structure relations between the West and non-Western or 'primitive' cultures in the discipline of anthropology. His critiques of foundational anthropological literature reveal the divisions between the anthropologist, who exists in the *here and now*, and the objects of his or her study, which are in the *there and then*. Under the premise of cultural relativism, structuralist thought denies the historical diachronous unfolding of cultural change, relegating 'primitive' cultures

---

32 Ibid., xviii.

33 Nelson Graburn, "Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism: Why Eskimos? Why Canada?" *Inuit Art Quarterly* 1:3 (Fall 1986), 5.

34 Ibid., 5.

35 Ibid., 5.

36 Ibid., 5.

to a static, unchanging past.<sup>37</sup> This thinking is inherited from Enlightenment principles of taxonomy, which anthropology has adapted in order to structure cultural difference, reducing Time to plotted points on a grid of synchronous space.<sup>38</sup> This is relevant to *Iqqaiipaa's* project, which employs elements of this epistemology, most notably in its temporal and spatial distancing of Inuit art – its bracketing off of contemporary art practice from 1948-1970 and its construction of regional and cultural difference as relational to Euro-Canadian interests.

#### NEGOTIATING SPATIAL BOUNDARIES: TERRITORIAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN THE MUSEUM

In 1999, the newly formed territory of Nunavut was still in the midst of the fledgling processes of identity-formation. Its cultural and spatial limits were brought into resolve for the first time in the public eye—for a larger Canadian citizenry and the citizens of the new territory itself. The name 'Nunavut' denotes a sense of newfound ownership; in Inuktitut, it is a composite of "nuna" (land) and "vut" (our).<sup>39</sup> After twenty years of negotiations, the Nunavut agreement was ratified by the Inuit majority of the proposed regions in 1992, and signed in Iqualit on May 25, 1993.<sup>40</sup>

The Nunavut agreement granted principle rights in exchange for common law Aboriginal rights. These principle rights include the following: title to 350,000 square kilometres of land, priority rights to the harvesting of wildlife, equal memberships with the Federal government on the establishment of new institutions for resource management, capital transfer payments, a 5% share of royalties from government natural resource development, and the establishment of an official

---

37 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (NY: Columbia U P, 1983), 57.

38 *Ibid.*, 54.

39 Jose Kusugak, "The Tide Has Shifted: Nunavut Works For Us, and It Offers a Lesson to the Broader Global Community," in *Nunavut: Inuit Regain Control of Their Lands and Their Lives*, ed. Jens Dahl, Jack Hicks and Peter Jull (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2000), 20. Kusugak is the former president of **Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami**.

40 *Ibid.*, 20.

territory out of eastern and central segments of the Northwest Territories.<sup>41</sup> Jose Kusugak, an Inuk politician who had been involved in negotiations from the earliest stages, argues the new political unit will “be in a position to shape public life and public services in ways that are more compatible with our unique social and cultural characteristics.”<sup>42</sup> As roughly 85% of Nunavut’s population are Inuit,<sup>43</sup> the agreement theoretically allowed for a system of self-government better catering to the needs of the cultural majority.

The establishment of Nunavut has not ended the struggle towards political autonomy for its inhabitants. As Natalia Loukacheva claims, “even though the Nunavut system of public governance was created with active Inuit participation, it is not clear yet whether it is going to develop towards any form of self-governance for all residents of Nunavut or towards Inuit autonomy, or if Nunavut will eventually become a province of Canada.”<sup>44</sup> The very definition of rights and autonomy is complicated by the fact that these concepts are not inherent to Inuit traditional knowledge and further fraught by the history of colonization which has eroded Inuit systems of self-governance. Despite the accommodation of Inuit values within this new system, Nunavut lacks its own constitution, rendering the territory “ultimately subject to federal jurisdiction.”<sup>45</sup> While the current political state of Nunavut warrants a much more nuanced examination, it should be noted that the Canadian system is not always able to meet the specific needs or interests of the Inuit population.<sup>46</sup> As extensions of state rule – and operating from within Euro-Canadian

---

41 Ibid., 20.

42 Ibid., 26.

43 Jack Hicks and Graham White, “Nunavut: Inuit Self-Determination Through a Land Claim and Public Government?” in *Nunavut: Inuit Regain Control of Their Lands and Their Lives*, ed. Jens Dahl, Jack Hicks and Peter Jull (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2000), 34.

44 Natalia Loukacheva, *The Arctic Promise: Legal and Political Autonomy of Greenland and Nunavut* (Toronto: U of T P, 2007), 32.

45 Ibid., 40.

46 Ibid., 149.

cultural and linguistic paradigms – museums routinely reinscribe these prevailing power structures.

According to Anderson, the museum's preservation of 'traditional' cultural heritage allows the state to "appear as the guardian of a generalized, but also local, tradition. The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony."<sup>47</sup> In this instance, Inuit cultural products are brought to rest within the overall political provenance of Canadian heritage while remaining firmly distanced from the historical conditions of its Southern consumers. As a new map of Canada was revealed, the CMC was actively participating in the 'logoization' of regional boundaries; "The proliferation of logo-maps depicting the geopolitical boundaries of a region bring to people a new self-consciousness about the land, a new sensitivity to the territorial shape of the region" notes Anderson.<sup>48</sup> The act of mapping involves the branding or spatial demarcations of ownership, creating a cohesive image out of invisible territorial divisions. According to Fabian, maps are also "devices to classify data. Like tables and diagrams they are taxonomic ways of ordering cultural isolates with the help of categories of contrast and opposition: source vs. variant, center vs. periphery, pure form vs. mixed variant, displaying criteria of quality vs. those of quantity, or whatever else diffusionists use to map the traits of cultures."<sup>49</sup> Their taxonomic organization of space is synchronic, "packing chronological Time into a spatial matrix" in the service of anthropological study, and furthering the relegation of 'primitive' cultures to a spatial and historical location other than that occupied by the West.<sup>50</sup>

The territory of present-day Nunavut was determined in the 1993 settlement "in which Inuit agreed to surrender significant Aboriginal rights in exchange for

---

47 Anderson, 181.

48 Ibid., 181.

49 Fabian, 55.

50 Fabian, 58-59.

establishment of their long sought-after homeland.”<sup>51</sup> In 1974, the ITC (now ITK)<sup>52</sup> conducted a ‘land use and occupancy’ study, which roughly outlined the territory that Inuit hunters had ranged for over 4000 years.<sup>53</sup> According to Jack Hicks and Graham White, the results of the Nunavut agreement reveal the compromises evident in the political process of territory re-shaping:

Nunavut does not include all the lands traditionally used by the people we can now call Nunavut Inuit, which extended into northern Manitoba and beyond Nunavut’s Western boundary. Secondly, the Nunavut project is about enhancing the political autonomy of the Inuit in the eastern and central parts of the Northwest territories, so that the substantial numbers of Inuit in Nunavik (northern Quebec) and Labrador, many of whom share close ties with Nunavut Inuit, are excluded by virtue of turn-of-the century judicial and political decisions.<sup>54</sup>

While it was not explicitly stated, *Iqqaiipaa’s* selection of regional focal points revealed this territorial exclusion. The exhibition was designed to feature four major regions of Inuit art production. The curatorial arrangement of modules followed a sequence that correlates strongly to the order in which regions were introduced to materials and art-making practices by outside influences and intervention, presenting Inuit art as relational to its Southern market. The first region that visitors encountered in the exhibit space was the Nunavik region of Arctic Quebec. It is

---

51 Hicks and White, 33.

52 ITC stands for “Inuit Tapirisat of Canada,” (now Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami). “Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) has represented the interests of the Inuit of Canada at the national level since its incorporation in 1972. Working primarily as an advocacy organization, ITK has been actively involved in a wide range of issues some of which have proven to be of critical importance in enabling Inuit to pursue their aspirations and take control of their destinies. A key example of such an issue was the initial planning and strategizing of Inuit land claims that took place within ITK during the early years of its existence.” Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami web site <http://www.itk.ca/corporate/policies.php> (accessed January 26, 2008).

53 Légaré, 73.

54 Hicks and White, 33-34.

here, according to the online exhibit text,<sup>55</sup> that the “story of Contemporary Inuit art started.”<sup>56</sup> Carvings from Inukjuak and Povungnituk (now call Puvirnituk) and their surrounds were collected by James Houston and brought back to Montreal, to be included in the first commercial sale of Inuit art in 1949.<sup>57</sup> Communities within the major regions are described in terms of the stylistic preferences of artists in that region and the nature and availability of materials: “Salluit artists, many of them women, developed a style of archaic, simplified forms. Using a coarse grey local stone, they showed people engaged in daily tasks.”<sup>58</sup>

The next exhibit module encountered by the visitor was the *Qikiqtaaluk* (Baffin) region. Here, the stylistic diversity of the region was revealed – in *Kimmirut*, artists perfected the technique of ‘scrimshaw’ (engraving on ivory), while in *Pangnirtung*, artists used old whalebone to create unique carvings.<sup>59</sup> It was also noted that Cape Dorset developed into a successful art community/cooperative due to James Houston’s involvement from 1951-1962: “Under Houston’s guidance, the first prints were produced in Cape Dorset” notes the exhibition brief<sup>60</sup> The *Kivalliq* *Keewatin* region was distinguished for its “sparse minimal” style, in reference to the types of sculptural forms and rock in three communities: *Arviat*, *Rankin Inlet* and *Baker Lake*.<sup>61</sup> In the *Kitikmeot* and *Inuvialuit* (Central and Western Arctic) regions section, it is noted that art production began later, when in 1967, the federal government supplied whalebone to the region and provided the catalyst for an initiation of carving programs.<sup>62</sup> In the community of *Taloyoak*, artists

---

55 pared down from the original exhibit didactic text

56 CMC, “The Exhibition in Brief,” CMC <http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/gen-e.html> (accessed October 30, 2006).

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

created "whimsical" spirit figures in the style of artist Karoo Ashevak. Local priests influenced art-making in the communities of Pelly Bay and Holman, the latter a site of a printmaking cooperative modeled on Cape Dorset.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, 46 out of 121 sculptures and 19 out of 30 prints on display were created in the Nunavik region, representing roughly 43% of the art on display.<sup>64</sup> The Nunavik region and portions of the Western Arctic region (ie. Holman) were excluded from the new territory of Nunavut, and yet they are featured in the exhibition as important centres of Inuit art. The organizers of *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑦ* displayed regions in accordance with the museum's collection highlights and the exhibition theme. However, it appears that the regional emphasis draws attention to the cultural exclusions of land allocation in the Nunavut agreement. The difference in border delineation points to greater issues of space and cultural definition. André Légaré argues that borders should be understood as "the spatial outcomes of various societal processes, where the production of geopolitical boundaries becomes a form of constructing and reinterpreting cultural space... boundaries do not already exist and are not clearly demarcated."<sup>65</sup> For Inuit populations, cultural territory is not clearly delineated, differing distinctly from Euro-Canadian territorial markers. Inuit territories are determined by a number of factors, such as large tracts of land once ranged by hunters, old camp sites, burial grounds, Inuktitut place names, and cairns.<sup>66</sup> As the above discussion reveals, the selection of highlighted geographic regions in *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑦ* were specific to the introduction of non-Inuit influences within select regions and the stylistic variants that resulted.

In addition to territorial boundaries, we should focus our attention on the ways that cultural objects and symbols were represented inside the museum building. The

---

63 Ibid.

64 Christine Klees, "An exploration of the Curation and Exhibition of Contemporary Inuit Art at Two National Institutions," (master's thesis, University of Ottawa, 2000).

65 Légaré, 72.

66 Légaré, 73.

opening ceremonies for *Iqqaiᑭaa* took place in the Grand Hall, the largest and most impressive space in the museum's interior. In 1989, the Grand Hall was envisioned by then-CMC director, George Macdonald as a "cathedral-like space,"<sup>67</sup> designed to serve multiple functions:

The spaciousness of the Grand Hall, of which only one side is occupied by exhibits, and its conspicuous location make it an ideal assembly area... The Grand Hall can also serve for stand-up receptions, sit-down banquets, or as a staging-area for theatrical events; for all these the village diorama provides a dramatic backdrop.<sup>68</sup>

The large windows on the non-exhibit side look out onto the majestic view of the Ottawa river and parliament buildings, bringing cultural monuments of power and grandeur into dialogue. Douglas Cardinal's architectural composition is a complex intersection of bisecting and interactive lines of vision that emphasize this dialogic process: "One straight axis is also a line of sight down the centre of the Grand Hall, through the six-storey bay window at the river end of the hall, and across to Parliament's Peace Tower."<sup>69</sup> Stephen Inglis, Director-General, Research and Collections at the CMC claims that the Grand Hall has become a "national space," proving its capacity as "more than a dead or static false front for disappeared cultures."<sup>70</sup> From across the river, the Hall may be perceived as a giant 'display case'<sup>71</sup> to showcase the reconstructed Northwest Coast housefronts and interior events.

Staging, lighting and props were used to maintain a separation between the Northwest Coast setting and the Inuit-focus of the event. On the evening of the opening, a plain black backdrop, upon which a rear-projection screen was attached,

---

67 George Macdonald, *A museum for the global village*, ed. R.A.J. Phillips (Hull: The Museum, 1989), 78.

68 Macdonald, 79.

69 CMC, "Written in Stone: an architectural tour of the Canadian Museum of Civilization," <http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/architecture/indexe.html> (accessed October 30, 2006).

70 Stephen Inglis, Carleton University ARTH 5010 guest lecture, 26 October 2006, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

71 Ibid.

served as a backdrop on the Grand Hall stage. The screen projected a “northern lights” video for ten minutes during the arrival of guests and the lighting of the qulliq.<sup>72</sup> For the remainder of the evening, the backdrop was centrally lit. The stage décor consisted of a CMC lectern, two large floral arrangements, a framed Kenojuak print on an easel, a mounted exhibition poster on another easel, and an Inuksuit, the traditional marker of territories.<sup>73</sup> While these elements appear prominent in the webcast, which frames the stage such that the housefronts and totem poles are barely visible, photographs from the event show that the Northwest Coast objects remained overpowering presences in the space. The signifiers of these cultures threatened to commingle within the spatial constraints of the hall.

By facilitating the simultaneous display of Northwest Coast and Inuit cultures, the event’s organizers relied on the presumed neutrality of the exhibition space and its contents. This was predicated on an assumption that distinct cultures would not become entangled, alluding to the broader issue of cultural appropriation for nationalistic aims. Kenojuak’s art and the Inuksuit have become instantly recognizable signs of a commercially commodifiable Inuit culture in the South. And yet these elements, along with the Northwest Coast artifacts and reproductions, functioned as divisible backdrops in the Grand Hall, and nationally appropriated components of a Canadian image. The space ceased to function as a representational space, wherein objects are explored for deeper meanings and inherent values, and was thus transformed into a precariously divisible spectacle — a panorama of Aboriginal iconography.

There are many issues that arise in the consideration of spatial ordering in the museum. The boundaries shift between the conception of Nunavut as a unified whole and the exhibition’s regional considerations that reveal unspoken exclusions. Moreover, the Grand Hall was made to figuratively ‘occupy’ two broad geographic regions, the North and the Northwest Coast, while it literally occupied traditionally-

---

72 Louis Robillard, “Iqqaipaa: General Information, March 30 1999,” Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds.

73 Ibid.

owned Algonquin land, upon which the parliament served as reminder of national/governmental control. With many geographic reference-points, and numerous cultures coexisting in one space, how did visitors make sense of this display of cultural representation? By shifting the focus to issues of time, I will further explore the complex intersections of culture and identity in the museum.

#### NEGOTIATING TEMPORAL BOUNDARIES: THE 'GOLDEN AGE' OF INUIT ART

*Iqqaiᖃaa* covered the years of art production between 1948-1970, a period of great transition for Inuit adapting to a new way of life. In an early exhibition rationale, curator Maria von Finckenstein notes that the year 1999 not only celebrates the beginning of Nunavut as a territory, but “marks the fifty years since the first commercial sale of contemporary Inuit art which is considered the beginning of this period in Inuit art.”<sup>74</sup> She comments: “It seems appropriate to revisit this era, show the art and present the artists’ experiences.”<sup>75</sup>

These dates are also inextricably tied to Houston’s involvement in the Inuit art market. The Toronto artist first arrived in Inujuak in 1948 on an emergency medical flight. There, he was introduced to the talents of the Inuit peoples when Naomialuk, a local hunter, gave him a tiny stone carving of a caribou. In the exhibition catalogue, Houston recalls his first thoughts on the potential market for Inuit art: “A light went on for me. Could this mean that these people, roughly equipped with crude tools, dressed in shabby clothing and living in ragged tents, could this mean that they already possessed a better way of providing for themselves?”<sup>76</sup>

Houston’s ambition to facilitate an Inuit art market became a reality in the

---

74 “Request for Proposal,” Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds.

75 Ibid. She also remarks in the exhibit catalogue: “If we want to appreciate Inuit art from this period, 1948 to 1970, we need to be conscious of its context. Here was a group of people displaced and dispossessed, out of their element... was it any wonder that people grabbed with such fervour the opportunity to make a living through carving. This was their way out of humiliating dependence.” Maria Von Finckenstein, “Introduction,” *Celebrating Inuit Art 1948-1970* (Ottawa: Key Porter, 1999), 12.

76 James Houston, “Fifty Years of Thinking It Over,” *Celebrating Inuit Art 1948-1970* (Ottawa: Key Porter, 1999), 21.

following decades. He has been historically recognized as “the man who first saw the potential for expanding the informal barter trade into a larger industry.”<sup>77</sup> Art making became a viable opportunity for the Inuit to regain economic self-sufficiency after devastating hardship and periodic starvation, as Von Finckenstein outlines in the exhibition’s catalogue. The price of fox pelts, the main trading commodity, had plummeted in price in the years prior to Houston’s first visit. The Canadian government had also begun to intervene in the lives of the Inuit, granting them the same rights to health, welfare, and education as ‘Status Indians’<sup>78</sup> in 1939.<sup>79</sup> The Inuit were required to move into communities with schools, away from their nomadic lifestyles. Houston gathered a selection of carvings and brought them to the Canadian Guild of Crafts in Montreal. In partnership, the Guild, the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Federal government set up a distribution system to assist the new industry. “The carvings not only brought in extra cash to families but also taught skills and kept the culture alive and meaningful” writes Ann Meekitjuk Hanson for the *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑦ* catalogue<sup>80</sup>. “Many artworks originate in legend,” relates Hanson: “Talilajuq [or Taleelajuq], the mermaid, drum dances, dancing bears, shamanistic pieces, masks and countless animals, birds and fish.”<sup>81</sup> Carving and printmaking gave back to many individuals not only a means of economic support, but also a tie to their traditional culture and way of life. Houston has been largely credited in exhibitions such as *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑦ* with the vision to facilitate such endeavors.

Although Houston has been a foundational figure, many scholars have been critical of his role in the Inuit art industry. Before Houston’s involvement,

---

77 “Request for Proposal,” Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds.

78 “A person who is registered as an Indian under the Indian Act. The act sets out the requirements for determining who is an Indian for the purposes of the Indian Act.” “Terminology,” Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, posted July 2003, [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/info/tln\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/info/tln_e.html) (accessed October 30, 2006).

79 Maria Von Finckenstein, “Introduction,” *Celebrating Inuit Art 1948-1970* (Ottawa: Key Porter, 1999), 11.

80 Ann Meekitjuk Hanson, “Celebrating with George Pitseolak,” *Celebrating Inuit Art 1948-1970*, (Ottawa: Key Porter, 1999), 17.

81 Ibid.

the Canadian Handicrafts guild had long sought after handicraft ventures in the Arctic.<sup>82</sup> As early as 1916, "the *Edmonton Journal* reported on 'an extremely interesting exhibition and sale of handmade toys by Canadian men and women' at the... Guild" notes Darlene Coward Wight in "The Handicrafts Experiment, 1949-53."<sup>83</sup> In regions such as Chesterfield Inlet, Houston did not expect to see such an established and active handicrafts industry, and "must have felt he would be wasting his time if he stayed on" according to a Hudson's Bay Company Clerk. Although there was material culture production preceding Houston's activities, his influence largely resulted in a shift from a utilitarian to aesthetic focus. On his first test purchase in 1949, he was given funds by the Guild to purchase a variety of objects, however he exceeded the quota in purchases of non-functional items such as carvings.<sup>84</sup> Evidence also suggests that Houston largely dictated the subject matter and style of artists during this period. The Department of Northern Affairs published and distributed an instructional booklet entitled *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts*, which contained drawings by Houston showing examples of carvings that would sell on the Southern market.<sup>85</sup> These included standardized, curio objects such as the 'Inuit totem pole' and the ivory cribbage board, many examples of which are now preserved in museum collections.<sup>86</sup> Heather Igloliorte argues in her essay "Sanajatsarq: Reactions, Productions, and the Transformation of Promotional Practice" that despite the quick withdrawal of the publication by the mid-50's, the booklet was in fact an important catalyst in the shift from craft to fine art production. The category of 'craft' is itself constituted along historically entrenched lines, which have, along with a de-valuing of utilitarian objects, promoted 'fine art' by its

---

82 Nelson Graburn, "The Discovery of Inuit Art: James A. Houston – Animateur," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 2, no. 2, (Spring 1987): 3.

83 Darlene C. Wight, "The Handicrafts Experiment," in *The First Passionate Collector: The Ian Lindsay Collection of Inuit Art* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1990), 47.

84 Wight, 59.

85 Wight 54.

86 Ibid.

supposed autonomous, non-functional aesthetic. Through its failure to generate works of appeal on the art market, *Sanajatsarq* facilitated an opposite reaction – an “increase in scale, the heightened importance of stone carving, and the new focus on promoting and fostering the talents of individual artists,” all of which have come to define post mid-twentieth century Inuit production as ‘fine art.’<sup>87</sup>

The dates 1948-1970 not only correspond to the ‘birth’ of contemporary Inuit art, but also bookend the height of production within the modernist tropes eventually championed by Houston. As a modernist artist himself, his interest in the Group of Seven and the arts of Indigenous peoples meant he was “extremely receptive to the precepts of mid-century modernist primitivism.”<sup>88</sup> The so-called ‘affinities’ between the European avante-garde and ‘primitive’ or ‘tribal’ arts have been critically examined by James Clifford and other scholars, particularly in the wake of controversial exhibitions such as “Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern” held in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>89</sup> While such exhibitions celebrated the moment so-called primitive cultures were elevated into the circle of ‘high art,’ they have been roundly critiqued for reducing cultural products to their formal elements and neglecting cultural contexts and specificities. While Houston also sought to elevate the status of Inuit art, scholars such as Charles Martijn concluded as early as 1964 that “almost unconsciously, Houston ended up imposing his Euro-Canadian art concepts on the acquiescent Eskimo carvers who benefited from his hints and advice by making their handiwork as acceptable as possible to southern buyers.”<sup>90</sup> Decades later, *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑦ* presents artworks from a

---

87 Heather Igloliorte, “*Sanajatsarq*: Reactions, Productions, and the Transformation of Promotional Practice,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 22:4 (Winter 2007), 17.

88 Igloliorte, 23.

89 See James Clifford, “Histories of the Tribal and Modern,” *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Boston: Harvard U P, 1988); Hal Foster, “The Primitive Unconscious of Modern Art” *October* 34 (Autumn, 1985): 45-70; Thomas McEvilley, “Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief: “Primitivism” in Twentieth Century Art at the Museum of Modern Art. *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston: McPherson & Co., 1992).

90 Charles Martijn, “Canadian Eskimo Carving in Historical Perspective,” *Anthropos* 59: 577.

time period that intentionally singles out Houston's role within the Inuit art market, while obfuscating any underlying intentions of this historic framing at the moment of Nunavut's inauguration.

Returning to the notion of 'quality,' it is also important to consider those factors that contributed to the taste for a particular style of Inuit art in the mid-twentieth century. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that taste is predicated on an individual's personal store of a "stratum of secondary meanings" beyond the immediately sensible, the development of which are contingent on social factors such as education and class.<sup>91</sup> Bourdieu explains: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed."<sup>92</sup> If we are to follow Bourdieu's logic, 'quality' is in fact determined by a set of socially-determined criteria.

In the case of *Iqqaiipaa*, the transformation of Inuit craft to art is commemorated with a large selection of works done in stone. The attraction of stone carvings to Southern buyers has been attributed to their associations with an essentialized "Eskimo-ness" and a modernist aesthetic – the round, reduced forms shared commonalities with European avante-garde sculpture while confirming romantic notions of 'primitive' cultures.<sup>93</sup> Soapstone was not a material traditionally used by Inuit communities other than for seal-oil lamps or cooking pots, however Houston anticipated that the material would be a cheaper alternative to ivory, which was becoming increasingly scarce.<sup>94</sup> Stone also facilitated the production of larger-scale carvings, which further contributed to the legitimation of Inuit art as 'fine art'

---

91 Pierre Bourdieu, "Introduction," *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1984), 2-3.

92 Bourdieu, 6.

93 Ibid., 19

94 Igloliorte, 20.

in the South.<sup>95</sup> Houston's 'discovery' of the caribou carving by Naomialuk in the exhibition and catalogue essay neatly establishes an early precedent of stone carving. As Nelson Graburn argues in an article for *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Houston kept close control over the information circulating about the Inuit art market: "There was little opportunity or inclination to rebut some of the more romanticized tales in which Houston carefully wrapped the presentation of Inuit arts to the world."<sup>96</sup> Such tales construct the story of Inuit art within notions of 'authenticity' while passing over the aesthetic factors that determined market values in the 1950s and 60s. This era saw the demand for art objects with a perceived 'primitive' naïveté that reinforced the notion of a people tied to a de-historicized landscape and nature, all the while lamenting their 'disappearance' from that very way of life.

Moreover, the time period represented in *Iqqaiipaa* is uncritically praised as the 'Golden Age' of Inuit art, associated with a modernist primitivism that catered to an elite Southern audience. The subject matter of the period 1948-1970 is characterized by recurrent themes of hunting, ties to the land and traditional knowledge. Why, then, was it so appealing to Southern collectors? An executive summary for the exhibition explains: "The Golden Age of contemporary Inuit art stems from the period between 1950 – 1970. The art produced in these "early" years shows a beguiling innocence and evocative power. It reflects the Inuit's simple centuries-old way of life in seasonal hunting and fishing camps, before they had been touched by outside cultural forces which would change their lives forever."<sup>97</sup> While this statement was never made public, it reveals residual evidence of the 'salvage paradigm,' theorized by Marcia Crosby:

When a culture is represented as going through *fatal* changes, the natural thing to do is save or salvage it. Predicated on the concept of a dead or dying people whose culture needs to be "saved," those doing the saving choose what fragments

---

95 Ibid.

96 Graburn, "Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism," 5.

97 "Executive Summary," Sylvie Morel Fonds.

of a culture they will salvage. Having done this, they become both the owners and interpreters of the artifacts or goods that have survived from that dying culture, artifacts that become rare and therefore valuable.<sup>98</sup>

Labels such as 'Golden Age' must be viewed in light of this Western construction, which generalizes Inuit peoples as 'child-like' and 'innocent' as opposed to a rational, more civilized Euro-Canadian authority. Evidence of 'authentic' expressions of traditional culture, such as the "simple centuries-old way of life" are prized for their location in a timeless past, which simultaneously speaks of the Inuit from the rhetorical strategy of the "ethnographic present."<sup>99</sup> Placing a critical distance between the contemporary viewer and Inuit artists, *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑦ* recalls these primitivist tropes without question, reinforcing them into the fabric of national consciousness.

*Iqqaiᑭᑭᑦ* perpetuates other mythologies, notably those relating to an essentialized Canadian spirit. As Adrienne Clarkson's speech so clearly articulates, Inuit art of this period began to represent, for many, a symbol of the nation. In many ways, the introduction of these art forms in Post-World War II-era Canada was strategic. Returning to the notion of Inuit art as 'state art,' Graburn also notes that "the Cold War was at that time heating up, and one sub-cabinet level discussion in Ottawa was ended positively by argument that with the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. encroaching on the Arctic, and with D.E.W.-line stations going up on Canadian soil, the promotion and visibility of this new and uniquely Canadian Inuit art would show the world that Canada was indeed a 'great Northern power.'"<sup>100</sup> Artists translated Inuit culture into an idiom that was accessible and distinctly 'Canadian'

---

98 Crosby, Marcia. "Construction of the Imaginary Indian," in *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture* (Calgary: U of Calgary P, 2001), 212.

99 "The ethnographic present is the practice of giving accounts of other cultures and societies in the present tense." Fabian, 80.

100 Graburn, "Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism," 6.

(in that they adapted easily to a modernist vocabulary), yet the art retained an element of 'mystique' to Southern audiences. This 'mystique' is called up again in *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑭᑭ*, now serving to focus a national pride and reinforce a binary construction of impoverished Inuit artists and Euro-Canadian forces of intervention.

While I am generally critical of *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑭᑭ*'s curatorial strategies, it should be noted that some aspects of the exhibition successfully demystified aspects of Inuit art production, as Shannon Bagg asserts in a review that compares the online and original exhibition.<sup>101</sup> Despite the prominence of stone carvings, the diversity within the overarching category of "Inuit Art" was revealed in the stylistic and regional variants presented in the text panels. Moreover, the use of artists' quotes and first-hand interviews might be considered – to quote Ruth Phillips' terminology – an effective "multivocal"<sup>102</sup> strategy that allowed for economic imperatives to surface. Henry Kudluk conducted interviews for the exhibition, during which he asked the carver, Thomas Sivuraq, what he thinks about when carving: "I think of how much this piece is going to get me.... I really enjoy carving, and it also helps out with buying food."<sup>103</sup> This candor is at odds with the Western concept of 'high art,' with its motivations supposedly deriving from a privileged source of creativity – in other words, the channeling of a collective *frisson*.

While quotes such as Sivuraq's dispel certain myths about 'the North' and Inuit artistic practice, the exhibition's focus remained mired in the past. The Inuit struggle for cultural and territorial rights took place in the formative years after 1970, a struggle that resulted in the creation of Nunavut. Incidentally, other major

---

101 Bagg argues that Von Finckenstein's initial intention was to address the economic incentives behind art-making, but that the online exhibition "fails to convey the strong curatorial message in the exhibition's catalogue." She also problematizes Houston's role in the exhibition, noting the ways in which his catalogue essay detracts from Von Finckenstein's focus, instead promoting romantic notions of universal "artistic struggle." Shannon Bagg, *Iqqaiᑭᑭᑭᑭ: Celebrating Inuit Art, 1948-1970*. An online exhibition of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, *Museum Anthropology Review* (October 14, 2008): 1-5, (accessed September 12, 2008), <https://scholarworks.iu.edu>

102 Ruth Phillips, "Introduction (Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Towards a dialogic paradigm)," in *Museums and Source Communities*, 163.

103 "Focus," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 27-28.

institutions took advantage of the landmark event to hold major exhibitions. The National Gallery of Canada featured “Carving an Identity: Inuit Sculpture from the Permanent Collection.” Curator Marie Routledge placed “the emphasis on the contemporary in her exhibition” in part because of *Iqqaipaa*’s focus on the past.<sup>104</sup> While *Iqqaipaa* devoted a small section to art since 1970, the perspective remained backward-looking in the exhibition’s closing text: “Where does Inuit art go from here? No one can answer this question. We only know that artists working between 1948 and 1970 have left their descendants an impressive legacy.”<sup>105</sup> How contemporaneous artists (and inhabitants of the soon to become Nunavut) had taken up this legacy remained to be explored in any depth.

### CONCLUSION

Exhibitions have been identified as important vehicles for the dissemination of knowledge, in turn producing constructions of nation-building, citizenship and identity. The CMC was a key public participant in the selective representation of Inuit culture at the moment when Nunavut was first emblazoned on the Canadian map. Through an analysis of *Iqqaipaa*’s definition of the cultural parameters and historic milieu of contemporary Inuit art production, one becomes aware of how the exhibition deviated from the purported political aims of Nunavut’s creation. It may be argued that this framing in fact maintained hegemonic structures in the service of a liberal nationalist agenda, in effect denying the coequality of Inuit peoples that it supposedly celebrated. This went relatively unexplored in the media coverage surrounding *Iqqaipaa*, perhaps reflective of the extent to which these agendas have become naturalized within public discourse.

*Iqqaipaa*’s temporal and spatial delineations reveal how the museum negotiated important lines of visibility. This brings us back to the vital questions:

---

104 Paul Gesell, “Inuit art, for art’s sake: Paul Gessell discovers a daring show by artists who just happen to be Inuit,” *The Ottawa Citizen* Nov 29, 1999. B.13.

105 “Inuit Art Since 1970,” Exhibit text panel, *Iqqaipaa*, Maria Von Finckenstein Fonds.

who is speaking? and who is being spoken to? And if the exhibition's title declares "I remember," who is doing the remembering? We might consider this response to *Iqqaiᕿaa* in *Maclean's* by a resident of Nunavut and son of one of the featured artists: "How long will Inuit artists and their art suffer at the claws of Western comparative thought? Why this insatiable need for Western culture to compare everything with its own standards and achievements?"<sup>106</sup>

Although contemporary Inuit artists took part in conducting interviews and were guides in the interactive module, there remains no evidence of collaboration with Inuit curators or artists on the planning and implementation of *Iqqaiᕿaa*, unlike other landmark CMC exhibitions such as *INDIGENA*. I feel it is fitting to conclude with a statement by *INDIGENA* curator, Gerald McMaster, which so poignantly provides an alternate approach to that of *Iqqaiᕿaa* and its conception of identity politics. In grappling with five hundred years of colonization and change, *INDIGENA* allowed for contemporary Aboriginal artists to seize the museum as a site for critique and reflection:

Such an understanding and reworking of beliefs and attitudes that underlie the celebrations can lead to a dynamic process of change. Native people have the history and vision to move effectively in the world events that so profoundly affect their lives, and especially their drive for self-determination.... "INDIGENA," therefore, should not be viewed as only battling with the past, for we are equally interested in seizing the future.<sup>107</sup>

---

**JULIA LUM** is an MA candidate in Art History at the School for Studies in Art and Culture, Carleton University. Her research interests include eighteenth and nineteenth-century visual culture, Canadian Aboriginal art and museum history.

---

106 David Serkoak, Letter to the Editor, *Maclean's* 112, iss. 20 (May 17, 1999): 4.

107 Gerald McMaster, "INDIGENA: A Native Curator's Perspective," *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 72.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

"A meeting on the Nunavut Carving Industry," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 54.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983.

Bagg, Shannon. "Iqqaipaa: Celebrating Inuit Art, 1948-1970. An online exhibition of the Canadian Museum of Civilization." *Museum Anthropology Review* (October 14, 2008): 1-5 (September 12, 2008) <https://scholarworks.iu.edu>

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1984.

Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC). "Written in Stone: an architectural tour of the Canadian Museum of Civilization," <http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/architecture/indexe.html> (October 30, 2006).

-- "Facility and Rental Services: Banquet and Reception Rooms." CMC web site <http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/rentals/rent10eng.html> (October 30, 2006).

-- "General Information: About the Exhibition." *Iqqaipaa* (online exhibition) <http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/home-e.htm> (October 30, 2006).

-- "Ouverture officielle – MCC – 21 janvier 1999." Box I-196. Institutional Archives. Canadian Museum of Civilization Library, Archives and Documentation.

-- *Iqqaipaa* opening ceremonies. Canadian Museum of Civilization web site. web cast. 47:00 [http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/theatre/iqqaipaa/iqarch\\_1e.html](http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/iqqaipaa/theatre/iqqaipaa/iqarch_1e.html) (October 30, 2006).

Clifford, James. "Histories of the Tribal and Modern," *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Boston: Harvard U P, 1988)

Corcoran, Frank, Jeffrey Demaine, Michel Picard, Louis-Guy Dicaire and John Taylor. "Inuit 3D: An Interactive Virtual 3D Web Exhibition." *Museums and the Web*. National Research Council of Canada. April 2002. <https://iit-iti.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/iit-publications-iti/docs/NRC-44903.pdf> (December 20, 2006).

Crosby, Marcia. "Construction of the Imaginary Indian." in *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture*. Calgary: U of Calgary P, 2001.

George, Jane. "The beginnings of commercial carving on display in Ottawa." *Nunatsiaq News*, March 5, 1999, [http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/nunavut90329/nvt90305\\_10.html](http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/nunavut90329/nvt90305_10.html) (October 30, 2006).

Gessel, Paul. "Inuit art, for art's sake: Paul Gessell discovers a daring show by artists who just happen to be Inuit," *Ottawa Citizen*, Nov 29, 1999.

Gopnik, Blake and Graham Fraser. "It's not primitive, it's not very old. Can it even be called art?" *Globe and Mail*, September 3, 1999.

Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. NY: Columbia U P, 1983.

"Focus" *Inuit Art Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1999).

Graburn, Nelson. "Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism: Why Eskimos? Why Canada?" *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Vol.1, No.3, (Winter 1986): 5-7.

---“The Discovery of Inuit Art: James A. Houston – Animateur.” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 2, no.2, (Spring 1987).

Hicks, Jack and Graham White. “Nunavut: Inuit Self-Determination Through a Land Claim and Public Government?” in *Nunavut: Inuit Regain Control of Their Lands and Their Lives*. ed. Jens Dahl, Jack Hicks and Peter Jull. Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2000.

Hobsbawm, Eric.J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Igloliorte, Heather. “Sanajatsarq: Reactions, Productions, and the Transformation of Promotional Practice,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 22:4, 14-25.

Ipellie, Alootok. “The Colonization of the Arctic,” *INDIGENA: contemporary native perspectives* Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992.

Inglis, Stephen. ARTH 5010 guest lecturer, 26 October 2006. Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Klees, Christine. “An Exploration of the Curation and Exhibition of Contemporary Inuit Art at Two National Institutions.” Master’s thesis, University of Ottawa, 2000.

Kusugak, Jose. “The Tide Has Shifted: Nunavut Works For Us, and It Offers a Lesson to the Broader Global Community,” in *Nunavut: Inuit Regain Control of Their Lands and Their Lives*. ed. Jens Dahl, Jack Hicks and Peter Jull. Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2000.

Légaré, André. "Nunavut: The Construction of a Regional Collective Identity in the Canadian Arctic." *Wicazo Sa Review* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 2002).

Macdonald, George. *A museum for the global village*, ed. R.A.J. Phillips, Hull: The Museum, 1989.

McMaster, Gerald. "INDIGENA: A Native Curator's Perspective." *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992).

McMaster, Gerald and Lee-Ann Martin, "Introduction," *INDIGENA: contemporary native perspectives*. Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992.

Morel, Sylvie, Fonds. Administrative Documents. Box I-367. Institutional Archives. Canadian Museum of Civilization Library, Archives and Documentation.

Neale, Stacey. "Rankin Inlet Ceramics Part One: A Study in Development and Influence." *Inuit Art Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1999).

Nemiroff, Diana. "Modernism, Nationalism, and Beyond: A Critical History of Exhibitions of First Nations Art." in *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*. ed. Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992.

Nunavut, Government of. "Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)."  
<http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/departments/HR/humanresources>  
(October 30, 2006).

Nunavut, Government of. "The Road to Nunavut: A Chronological History."  
<http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/about/road.shtml> (October 30, 2006).

Peers, Laura and Alison Brown. *Museums and Source Communities*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Preziosi, Donald. "Collecting / Museums." in *Critical Terms for Art History*. ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1996.

Qitsualik, Rachel Attituq. "Living with Change," *Nunavut'99*  
<http://www.nunavut.com/nunavut99/english/change.html> (December 20, 2006).

Ross, Val. "The rich pageant of Inuit art." *Globe and Mail*. April 1, 1999. C1.

Serkoak, David. Letter to the Editor. *Maclean's* 112, iss. 20 (May 17, 1999): 4.

"Terminology." Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. posted July 2003. [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/info/tln\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/info/tln_e.html) (October 30, 2006).

Von Finckenstein, Maria, Fonds. Iqqaipaa Exhibition. Box I-293. Institutional Archives. Canadian Museum of Civilization Library, Archives and Documentation.

Wight, Darlene Coward. "The Handicrafts Experiment." *The First Passionate Collector: The Ian Lindsay Collection of Inuit Art*. Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1990.