THE BERGER COLLECTION OF Inuit Art

In 2002, Dr. Heidi and Dr. Dieter Berger generously donated their impressive collection of contemporary Inuit sculpture and graphics to McIntosh Gallery. Over the last decade, it has been the subject of curatorial research and experiential learning opportunities for Western students. With this exhibition, comprised of most of the sculptures in the collection, we are pleased to present it to a wider audience.

Under the supervision of Professor Lisa Hodgetts of the Department of Anthropology, doctoral candidate Laura Elena Kelvin has curated this thematic selection with numerous cultural insights into the imagery. Her inclusion of reproduction objects, such as the harpoon and polar bear skull, offers additional dimension to her observations.

On behalf of McIntosh Gallery, I thank Laura Elena Kelvin and Dr. Hodgetts for their enthusiastic response to the project proposal; the Department of Anthropology for its generous loan of objects from the Zooarchaeology Collection; Laura Collishaw of Weldon Library for her gracious assistance; and especially Dr. Heidi and Dr. Dieter Berger for their donation of an outstanding collection of Inuit art.

Catherine Elliot Shaw
Curator
McIntosh Gallery
During the 1970s, many art critics labeled Inuit art as “invented” or “inauthentic” because Inuit carvings as we know them today did not really appear until the late 1940s when their production was encouraged by the Canadian government and southern art markets. Some critics felt that Inuit sculptures were not truly Inuit because they were made for a “white audience” and usually depicted a way of life that many southerners believed no longer existed (Crandall 2000: 54-55). It is obvious today that the Inuit have retained a unique lifestyle distinct from mainstream Canadian culture by negotiating which aspects of Canadian culture to adopt into their own. Inuit sculptures from the 1970s reflect this process, as they are a highly diverse negotiation between Inuit and European notions of carving, aesthetics, and art and depict themes that were and still are important aspects of Inuit culture. Just as the Berger Collection reveals many aspects of Inuit traditions and identity, it also reflects the collector’s perception of art and Inuit culture.

Bud Glunz, *Three Inuit Men Hunting Seal*, National Film Board of Canada, Library and Archives Canada Mikan no. 3842879
There is no Inuktut word meaning “art” but there is a long tradition of carving throughout Inuit history (Carpenter, Varley and Flaherty 1979). Traditionally the Inuit carved bone, antler, ivory and stone to make tools, amulets, toys and games (Crandall 2000: 55). After contact with Europeans, the Inuit also made small carvings, usually of animals, to trade to explorers, missionaries, and whalers. It was not until 1948 when James Houston, an artist from southern Ontario, brought back Inuit carvings from a trip to Inukjuak (Port Harrison) that Inuit carvings began to be appreciated by southerners as “art”. Soon after, the Government of Canada established art cooperatives in various Inuit communities to encourage production for southern markets (Crandall 2000). Inuit-carved tools, so expressive of their cultural identity, were replaced with ready-made European tools. Carving was transformed into art, an important connection to the past and to their contemporary identity.
Dr. Heidi Berger began collecting Inuit art in 1972 and she operated Galerie Berger, specializing in Canadian native art, from 1978 until 1981. The artworks in this collection were acquired during the 1970s and early 1980s. During this time, many large corporations were buying Inuit art to display in the workplace and to give as corporate gift items. Inuit art was seen as uniquely Canadian and therefore helped assert the Canadian corporate identity. Often positioned in lobbies and offices, larger artworks grew in demand. As a result small works became less prevalent (Schrager 1986). Some sculptures in the Berger Collection are quite representative of this period, but many are unique and reflect the interests of Dr. Berger, who favoured small artworks of exceptional craftsmanship and individuality. She was interested in themes pertaining to animals, shamanism, tools, people at work and play, and women.
Dr. Berger explains her interests in collecting:

“When I started collecting, I intended to honour this tradition and concentrate on miniatures only. I soon found that miniatures, which in the 70s were carved more for the artist’s personal satisfaction than monetary gain, had much more individuality and often craftsmanship than larger pieces carved for the commercial market. In dealing with the Eskimo art cooperatives in Ottawa and Montreal, I learned that the artist was often paid by the size and complexity of the piece, and that commercially, the small pieces were often undervalued and thus overlooked” (email to author, March 13, 2013).

The Inuit have kept their traditions by adapting them to an increasingly globalized world and these traditions have in turn continued to shape their contemporary identity. Carving has further shaped contemporary Inuit identity through the portrayal of important aspects of Inuit culture.

Laura Elena Kelvin
PhD Candidate
Department of Anthropology
References:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist/Maker</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist Unknown (Inuit)</td>
<td>Pannak (snow knife)</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Bone (caribou), 46.0 x 8.2 x 1.9 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artist Unknown (Inuit)</td>
<td>Pitikserak (bow drill)</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Bone, hide, 34.5 x 8.0 x 2.0 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artist Unknown (Inuit)</td>
<td>Stone Scraper</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Stone, 7.1 x 13.0 x 2.5 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artist Unknown (Inuit)</td>
<td>Ulu (women’s knife)</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Bone, copper, 6.6 x 9.5 x 1.6 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artist Unknown (Inuit)</td>
<td>Owl</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Steatite, 10.0 x 7.5 x 7.8 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist Unknown (Inuit)</td>
<td>Head Pendant</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Ivory, 3.7 x 1.8 x 1.0 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kovianituk Adamie (Inuit, born 1906)</td>
<td>Seal Head Ring</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Ivory, 2.5 cm diam.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kovianituk Adamie (Inuit, born 1906)</td>
<td>Seal Ring</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Ivory, 3.2 cm diam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia Akka (Inuit, 1934 - 1996)</td>
<td>Two Men Playing a Game</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Ivory, wood stone, 7.8 x 11.5 x 10.0 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Alayco (Inuit)</td>
<td>Bear Hunt</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Stone, 4.0 x 15.3 x 11.6 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Anautalik (Inuit, 1931 - 1987)</td>
<td>Head</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Stone, 10.0 x 8.0 x 6.4 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martina Pisuyui Anoee (Inuit, born 1933)</td>
<td>Parka Woman</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Stone, 8.5 x 5.4 x 2.0 cm</td>
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<td>Pauloosie Arnakak (Inuit, born 1921)</td>
<td>Bear Head</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Whale bone, 7.0 x 15.1 x 7.5 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>EttikAuivaluk (Inuit)</td>
<td>Walrus</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Stone, ivory, 4.5 x 8.8 x 6.0 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>John C-ann (Inuit)</td>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Caribou antler, 7.5 x 9.0 x 3.5 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juanasi Jakusi Itukalla (Joanassie Jack) (Inuit, born 1949)</td>
<td>Bear and Walrus</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Stone, 7.6 x 6.7 x 4.0 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seemee Kanayuk (Inuit, 1938-1981)</td>
<td>Two Heads</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Stone, hair, 4.7 x 14.0 x 6.7 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seemee Kanayuk (Inuit, born 1938)</td>
<td>Igloo with Three Figures</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Stone, 8.3 x 9.7 x 2.9 cm</td>
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<td>Jaypetee Karpik (Inuit, born 1949)</td>
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<td>Whale bone, 20.3 x 27.0 x 17.0 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lydia Kenuayook (Inuit)</td>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Stone, 2.8 x 4.8 x 2.4 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leah Aarlu Makittuq (Inuit, born 1940)</td>
<td>Singing Match</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>Ivory, whale bone, 7.0 x 8.1 x 6.6 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Napartuk (Inuit, 1932 - 1985)</td>
<td>Mother and Child</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Stone, 3.7 x 2.9 x 3.1 cm</td>
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</tbody>
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Sammy Nassak (Inuit, 1905 - 1988)
*Dog* 1979
Caribou antler, 4.8 x 7.8 x 3.0 cm

Rupee Natsiapik (Inuit, born 1933)
*Dancing Bear* no date
Whale bone, 40.0 x 16.2 x 8.0 cm

Annie Niviaxie (Inuit, 1930 - 1989)
*Woman* 1979
Stone, 8.0 x 5.5 x 3.1 cm

Markosee Joan Pitsiulak (Inuit, 1895 - 1980)
*Accordion Player* no date
Whale bone, 13.5 x 12.0 x 6.5 cm

Sinukis (Inuit)
*Legend* 1974
Stone, 6.0 x 11.0 x 2.5 cm

M. Suisanak (Inuit)
*Figure* 1980
Stone, 8.0 x 7.5 x 2.3 cm

Joe Talirunili (Inuit, 1908 - 1976)
*Crouching Hunter* 1979
Stone, 3.5 x 4.0 x 3.8 cm

Jimmy Udlayok (Inuit, born 1954)
*Seal Pendant* no date
Ivory, 4.6 x 1.2 x 1.0 cm

Eddy Weetalukektak (Inuit, 1932-2005)
*Bear and Cub* 1980
Stone, 10.2 x 31.4 x 20.0 cm

Reproductions:

- Courtesy of the Zooarchaeology Collection, Department of Anthropology, Western University
- Tim Rast: Reproduction Thule Inuit Harpoon Head
- Tim Rast: Reproduction Dorset Palaeoeskimo Knife
- Tim Rast: Reproduction Inuit Ulu
- Tim Rast: Reproduction Dorset Palaeoeskimo Harpoon
- Cast of Polar Bear Skull

Seemee Kanayuk, *Two Heads* 1980, stone, hair, Collection of Mclnosh Gallery, Gift of Dr. Heidi and Dr. Dieter Berger, 2002
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