

Hunters, Carvers and Collectors: The Chauncey C. Nash Collection of Inuit Art.* Maija M Lutz. Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, Harvard University, 2012. 128 pp. [Distributed by Harvard University Press.]

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Drawing from a collection of almost three hundred sculptures and prints brought together by Harvard University alumnus, Chauncey C. Nash (Class of 1907) and donated to the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in the late 1960s, *Hunters, Carvers and Collectors: The Chauncey C. Nash Collection of Inuit Art* provides a well-researched and finely illustrated introduction to the early years of contemporary Inuit art. The author, librarian, and ethnomusicologist, Maija M. Lutz brings this collection to light with a thoughtful discussion that interweaves the cultural history of Inuit art in Arctic Canada—particularly the early years of printmaking in Kinngait (Cape Dorset)—with the personal history of the collector and his close relationship with Harvard University and the Peabody Museum.

An amateur naturalist, hunter, and successful financier, Nash's interest in collecting Inuit art began with a fortuitous visit to the Eskimo Museum in Churchill, Manitoba, in 1957. Established with the stated purpose to “show the life of the Eskimo,” this Museum houses a remarkable collection of archaeological and ethnographic artifacts and contemporary Inuit sculpture brought together by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Catholic missionary order founded in France whose members have long served Inuit families living in nomadic camps and remote settlements across Arctic Canada (Brandson 1994). Educated and concerned observers, Oblate missionaries began to record the cultural practices, oral history and changing lives of Inuit across the North over a century ago.¹ Recognizing the poverty and economic need of the post-war era, Father André Steinmann, OMI, garnered the power of art and the creative ability of carvers in forming the Société des Sculpteurs de Povungnituk, an initiative that supported individual families and solidified the economic foundation of the Puvirnituk settlement throughout the 1960s and 1970s, a period of rapid social change across the Arctic (Winnipeg Art Gallery 1977; Graburn 2000). In the early 1960s, following the lead of the Cape Dorset (now Kinngait) printshop, Father Henri Tardy joined with community members to establish the Holman Eskimo Cooperative, which has served as a vital center of printmaking, craft production, and economic security in the community (Driscoll 1987; Wight 2001). The history of Inuit art—and the preservation of the cultural legacy of the North through the creative work of individual artists—owes much to the timely intercession of Frs. André Steinmann and Henri Tardy as well as to the dedication of Brother Jacques Volant, long-time curator of the Eskimo Museum, who was a personal friend and advisor to Chauncey Nash in developing his own collection of Inuit art.

As noted above, the author, Maija Lutz provides a rich description of the overlapping layers of collector, institution, artists, and Inuit art history, which gave shape to the Nash collection. In highlighting selected prints and sculptures from the collection, Lutz pairs individual artists and art works, providing biographical notes as well as commentary on style and subject matter. With a choice selection of studio photographs, the author visually recalls the early years of the

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Kinngait printshop, illustrating the collaborative model of artist/printmaker borrowed from the Japanese tradition and introduced to the Arctic by James Houston, founder and advisor to the Cape Dorset artshop. In transferring the artist's drawing to a stone relief or stencil image, the printmaker begins a series of technical and aesthetic decisions in terms of medium, line, shading, and color. The technical skill and personal judgment of Kinngait printmakers are therefore influential in determining the final appearance of the image. In the hands of accomplished printmakers, such as Iyola Kingwatsiak (1933-2000) and Lukta Qiatsuq (1928-2004), a somewhat timid drawing could be transformed into a more powerful, striking graphic image.² The early collection of Cape Dorset prints, a prominent strength of the Nash collection, is the featured focus of the publication. The pairing of the stone block reliefs and print-images by Kiakshuk (50-51) and Pitseolak Ashoona (54) demonstrates the author's commendable attention to detail while the Foreword by Leslie Boyd Ryan, former director of Dorset Fine Arts, provides a lively and informed "insider's" contribution.

In terms of the collection size, the majority of works in the Nash collection are sculptures from Inuit communities across Arctic Canada, including Puvirnituk and Inukjuak in Nunavik (Northern Québec); and Kinngait (Cape Dorset), Kimmirut (Lake Harbour), Naujat (Repulse Bay), Kugaaruk (Pelly Bay), Kangiqliniq (Rankin Inlet), and Qausuittuq (Resolute) in Nunavut. Although relatively few works from a collection of over two hundred sculptures are illustrated in the publication, those chosen presumably reflect the primary interests of the collector. These tend to be naturalistic images of animals, hunting scenes, and communal activities, such as drum dancing. Only a single sculpture of Nuliajuk, the sea goddess who protects the bounty of the sea and rewards the respectful hunter, appears in the publication. This solitary figure with flowing hair, half human and half sea mammal, by the Kinngait sculptor Johnniebo Ashevak makes a compelling contrast to the print image of Nuliajuk (also known as Sedna) by Saggiassie Ragee (Plate 11). Sometimes described as an angry or avenging spirit, the 1961 stonecut print shows Nuliajuk as a beneficent, maternal image nurturing twin offspring in a manner reminiscent of the classical myth of Romulus and Remus.

Several sculptors are yet unidentified, reminding the reader of the early years of Inuit art in which carvers often remained anonymous. However, the practice of artists inscribing their disc number (once assigned by the Canadian government for identification purposes) or name in syllabics on the base of the sculpture—a convention that allows curators and collectors to identify works more easily—also reflects the artist's intention to "own" or claim their work. Through his writing, fieldwork, and personal relationships with the artists, as well as in his lectures, organization of exhibitions, and training of future curators, art historian George Swinton has insisted that individual artists be recognized for their creative work. His has been a valiant and persistent effort that has moved Inuit art from the genre of ethnic folk art to an art form recognizing individual styles and personal creativity (Swinton 1965; [1972] 1992). Through research and publications, Darlene Wight of the Winnipeg Art Gallery has made important contributions in identifying the work of many formerly anonymous sculptors working in these early years, providing a useful resource for students and future curators (Wight 1990; 2006).

Clearly, an important aspect of the Nash collection is its location in a university setting. University courses in indigenous art history, area studies, and museology not only open the works of non-western artists to the curiosity and exploratory interests of undergraduate and

graduate students, academic courses (and their professors) provide a critical training ground for the next generation of leaders and decision makers—in art, science, education, technology, finance, resource development, and environmental conservation. Using Harvard’s Kennedy School model, Inuit art can provide a meaningful case study of the inexorable change affecting indigenous communities throughout the western hemisphere as remote regions—like Nunavut—experience overwhelming corporate pressure for energy and resource development in response to global demand. Building upon the foundation of the Nash collection, Harvard University and the Peabody Museum possess the opportunity to further develop this collection, acquiring additional works by contemporary Inuit artists to augment the now-historical work created almost fifty years ago. Exhibited on the university campus and incorporated into the coursework of various disciplines, Inuit artists provide a deeper understanding of the impact of political and corporate decision-making on indigenous communities around the world. In this way, Harvard University would join an expanding network of museums and academic institutions collecting and exhibiting Inuit art—institutions that have recognized the unique contributions of Inuit artists in providing a fuller understanding of the human experience, insightful reflections on issues affecting the Arctic from climate change to social, economic, and political development in a post-colonial world, and the determination to re-shape the imposed influence of western ideology by reinstating ancestral principles guiding social, cultural, and political practice (Engelstad 2010). In its focused and detailed discussion of the Nash collection, *Hunters, Carvers and Collectors* serves as a concise and well-annotated academic text, recounting the early years of Inuit art and underscoring its success in portraying and preserving the cultural imagination of a creative and resilient people.

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Notes

1. A short list of the published writings by Oblate missionaries begins with Émile Petitot, OMI who published on language and cultural practices among the Eskimo of Mackenzie Delta and Anderson River, beginning in 1876. His monograph, *Les Grands Esquimaux* (1887), remains a classic ethnography for the region. Other publications include *I, Nuligak*, an Inuvialuit autobiography edited by Father Maurice Metayer, OMI (Nuligak 1966); André Steinmann, OMI, *La Petite Barbe: J'ai vécu 40 ans dans le grand nord* (1977); and Guy Mary-Rousselière, OMI, *Qitdlarssuaq: l'Histoire d'une migration polaire* (1980, 1991); published in English, *Qitdlarssuaq: The History of a Polar Migration*, as well as the dictionaries and grammars of the Ungava region compiled by Lucien Schneider, OMI.

2. The comparison of drawings and prints remains a fruitful area of research in the development of Inuit art. See, for example, Driscoll and Butler (1982), Routledge (1990), and Ryan (2007).

Bernadette Driscoll Engelstad holds graduate degrees in Canadian Studies (with a specialty in Inuit art) from Carleton University and in Art and Anthropology from Johns Hopkins University. She is an independent curator focusing on Inuit art and cultural history, and she is a Research Collaborator at the Smithsonian Institution's Arctic Studies Center. She has organized many exhibitions of Inuit art, including Arctic Journeys, Ancient Memories: The Sculpture of Abraham Anghik Ruben (2012, National Museum of the American Indian) for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

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