

**Symbols of Authenticity:
Challenging the Static Imposition of Minority Identities
Through the Case Study of Contemporary Inuit Art**

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Angakoks or *angakkuq*: shaman

Angakkuuniq: shamanism

Inuit inunnirarnirijangat: ‘what is considered as being said by the Inuit themselves concerning the fact of being Inuit’

Inummariit: ‘true Inuit’

Sedna: Sea woman of traditional Inuit shamanism

Tuurngait: helping spirits

Qallunaat: non-Inuit

Qaumaniq: shamanic vision

Abstract

This thesis examines the use and promotion of shamanic themes in contemporary Canadian Inuit art, being the principle venue in which Inuit identity is presented to non-Inuit in Canada and internationally. The image of Inuit identity promoted through the arts since the mid-twentieth century is arguably the product of non-Inuit state authorities, but Inuit artists themselves are increasingly asserting their voice in their arts and crafts, thereby challenging the image of Inuit identity to non-Inuit. This project first problematizes the history of contemporary Inuit art, where the construction of Inuit identity was heavily prescribed, and then turns to the shifts occurring in Inuit art to highlight the process of identity construction and the agency of Inuit within it. In the process, this project challenges the static conceptualization of minority identities in diverse societies by both state authorities and majority populations. This dissertation contends that Inuit art and identity are fluid concepts and there must be an emphasis made to permit for their fluidity, to avoid affirming a static minority identity in a diverse society, whether in the public or state forums. Consequently, the effort to assert the authenticity of these intangible concepts is contrary to the ideals of diversity and equality promoted in Canada.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Inuit Art as a Symbol of Identity

The popular conception of ‘Inuit art’ embodies a particular set of images for non-Inuit Canadian and international audiences. Those images typically include carved or print mediums with expressions of Inuit primitivism—that is to say that the conceptualization of Inuit art and identity by non-Inuit is grounded in a vague understanding of Inuit society. So-called ‘primitive’ cultures are those that are believed to resemble humankind’s most primitive societies, characterized by small and localized populations, simple technologies, localized agriculture and hunting, and relatively low levels of economic, social, and political specialization.¹ Societies living on the fringe of contemporary Western civilization, such as Inuit, are often cast in this category. Imagery from traditional Inuit shamanism is central to this conceptualization of Inuit art and identity. The *Royal Trust Sedna* is a case in point (see figure 1). Unveiled in the lobby of Toronto’s HSBC Building in 1991, it is the largest Inuit sculpture created to date.² Commissioned by the Royal Trust Company, and located in Toronto’s financial district, this sculpture is a choice visual representation of Canada. The subject of that sculpture is *Sedna*, the mythological sea-woman of traditional Inuit shamanism. The commissioning of such a monumental art piece (an installation measuring six feet by ten feet and weighing 18,000 pounds³) signals a demand for the representation of traditional Inuit religion in Inuit art, both in Canada and in international art markets. The conception of

¹ Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 16.

² Whether or not a larger sculpture or sculpted installation has since been created by Inuit artists is not known.

³ Inuit Art Foundation, “The Royal Trust Sedna,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 6 (1991): 49.

Inuit art encompassing Inuit shamanism highlighted by the *Royal Trust Sedna* is the product of a specific historical narrative that has unfolded in Arctic Canada.

Inuit art is a symbol of Inuit identity in Canada to ‘Canadians’ and, paradoxically, of Inuit and Canadian identity on the international stage. More specifically Inuit art is the principle, if not exclusive, venue through which non-Inuit, or *qallunaat*,⁴ encounter Inuit identity. Bernadette Driscoll Engelstad has described the reliance on art as a means of inter-cultural communication between Inuit and *qallunaat*: “From the postwar period to the present, art has stood in the place of Inuit, serving to represent Inuit throughout southern Canada and around the world, even in their absence.”⁵ Inuit art is the embodiment of Inuit identity for an audience that, otherwise, has no access to it. Inevitably, this medium is laden with the assumptions of that audience. As in other crafts, the audience has held an important role in shaping Inuit art—both officially (through the organizations that promoted the genesis of that art) and unofficially (through the market demands fuelled by stereotyped assumptions of the primitive nature of Inuit identity, society and culture). In light of this, Inuit art audiences might then ask themselves: What constitutes Inuit art? Who defines Inuit art? Why is Inuit shamanism only visible in art? Why is Inuit shamanism such a central theme in Inuit art? Does this reflect the predominantly Christian society of Arctic Canada?⁶ What does the use of shamanic

⁴ *Qallunaat* is an Inuktituk term used as a reference for people who are non-Inuit. More specifically, and because of the trends in Northern colonization, it is colloquially a reference for White people.

⁵ Bernadette Driscoll Engelstad, “Inuit Art and the Creation of Nunavut,” in *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 38.

⁶ According to the 2001 Canadian Census, the population of Nunavut was 26,665 (of which 22,560 are Inuit). Of this population, 15,440 reported an Anglican faith, 6,205 reported a Roman Catholic faith, and 1,175 reported a Pentecostal faith while 25 reported Aboriginal spirituality. Certainly, there is a margin of error as well as historic reluctance to discuss Inuit shamanism with non-Inuit to consider, but these statistics speak to the (at least apparent) prominence of Christianity among Inuit.

themes signal about *lived religion* in the North?⁷ Do Inuit artists continue to express shamanism in their art because it is the only venue for them to discuss it in the wake of Christian colonization, because it sells, or both?

Contemporary Canadian Inuit art is presented to its audiences as something authentic—authentic in the sense that it is the product of a long artistic pedigree in Arctic Canada and uniquely representative of Inuit culture and identity. The nature of authenticity so closely tied (figuratively and literally, through the ‘Authentic Inuit Art’ brand provided by the Government of Canada, see figure 2) to Inuit art can be problematized by its recent history. Significantly, Inuit art is also the principle venue through which *qallunaat* encounter Inuit culture and identity. With that in mind, this research project questions what role *qallunaat* authorities have played in the evolution of Inuit identity by promoting shamanic themes (as part of a larger demand for primitivism) in Inuit art and, in turn, authenticating what constitutes Inuit art.

It is important to emphasize that this project does not seek to challenge the authenticity of Inuit art as an *Inuit* art form, but rather the non-Inuit perception or presumption of Inuit identity communicated through and assumed from that art. While Inuit art offers a rich case study of outsider influence shaping a craft, no cultural artefact is produced in a vacuum. The enduring use of shamanic imagery in Inuit art offers a case study on the construction of a minority identity developed in the dynamic relationship between an indigenous minority and a colonial authority. Inuit art nevertheless endures as

⁷ *Lived Religion* is a concept popularized by such authors as Robert Orsi and Meredith McGuire, though the term was originally introduced by historian David Hall in the late 1980s. This concept, as understood for this project, moves religion away from its institutional definition to the subjective experiences of practitioners, who individualize religion(s). See Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

a symbol of Inuit identity (and, paradoxically, of Canadian identity). As few non-Inuit travel to the North, Inuit art endures as the most accessible expression of that remote community. With that in mind, it is crucial to question the assumptions made about that identity marker. As identity is fluid, so should there be room for diversity within the expression of identity.

1.2. Defining Inuit Art

As this project seeks to question the role *qallunaat* authorities have played in the evolution of Inuit identity by promoting shamanic themes (as part of a larger demand for primitivism) in Inuit art and, in turn, authenticating what constitutes that art, it is important to define what is considered ‘Inuit art’ for this project. This definition could be exclusive, limiting consideration to sculptures and crafts with roots in the pre-colonial nomadic Inuit lifestyle.⁸ However, this project seeks to avoid freezing Inuit identity in the pre-contact era. This definition of Inuit art could be an imposed definition, relying on the labels and symbols of authenticity provided by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC, Government of Canada): the Igloo Tag (see figure 2). This symbol of authenticity is a legal trademark and is restricted to specific expressions of Inuit art that satisfy parameters introduced by a non-Inuit authority.

⁸ This example is particularly interesting within the context of the Supreme Court of Canada’s ‘Distinctive Culture Test’ (DCT). As Avigail Eisenberg shows, the DCT’s ‘pre-contact clause’ requires that Indigenous persons prove that a ‘cultural’ practice existed prior to colonial contact to be protected outside the existing Canadian legal system. Contemporary Inuit art is very much a product of colonial contact, yet receives official recognition of (cultural) authenticity from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. See Avigail Eisenberg, “The Public Assessment of Indigenous Identity,” in *The Plural States of Recognition*, ed. Michel Seymour and Martin Blanchard (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010); Avigail Eisenberg, “Reconciling About Identity: Canada’s Distinctive Culture Test,” in *Diversity and Equality: The Changing Framework of Freedom in Canada*, ed. Avigail Eisenberg (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); Avigail Eisenberg, “Reasoning about the Identity of Aboriginal People,” in *Accommodating Cultural Diversity*, ed. by Stephen Tierney (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

Identity, in any form, exists in a dynamic relationship with its environment. As this project frames Inuit art as a symbol of Inuit identity, something that is fluid, so must the understanding of that art be fluid and inclusive.

The definition of Inuit art applied in this project is one that reflects the broader interest of this project, to acknowledge the diversity and plurality of (the Inuit minority's) identity. As a marker of Inuit identity, Inuit art must be understood within variable or contextual parameters. As this project relies on the concept of *lived religion* to understand the so-called religious expressions engaged in this project, in which religion is moved away from its institutional definition to the subjective experience of practitioners who individualize religion(s), so must it account for the opinion of Inuit artists to define their art. Inuit art, for the purposes of this project, are the artefacts (sculpture, prints, films etc.) produced (whether or not with economic incentive) by self-identified Inuit artists who recognize their creation within artistic parameters. As Inuit art is gauged as art within that community, it is an authentic art of that community.

The question of diversity is made evident in the realm of Inuit art through the diversification of media utilized to express Inuit creativity. In its earliest form, Inuit art was sculpted. The event that marks the beginning of the contemporary period of Inuit art, a sale of some 300 small-sculpted objects at the Canadian Handcraft Guild (now the Canadian Guild of Crafts) in Montreal in 1949,⁹ showcases that heritage. The range of Inuit arts has since grown, but it is telling that in the struggle to protect Inuit art,

⁹ Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art*, 101; Richard C. Crandall, *Inuit Art: A History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000), 67-73; Nelson H. H. Graburn, "Authentic Inuit Art: Creation and Exclusion in the Canadian North," *Journal of Material Culture* 9 (2004): 146; Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 29-30; Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World: Modernism, Museums and the Popular Imaginary, 1949 – 1962* (PhD Dissertation. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2007), 9, 248; Virginia Watt, "The Beginning," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 14 (1999): 6-16.

identified forgeries (non-Inuit made, non-Arctic materials) are also sculptures.¹⁰ Sculptures are the foundation of the multi-million dollar industry of Inuit arts and crafts.¹¹ Moreover, it is the only art that is pan-Arctic in the sense that it is not primarily tied to one community or another. The Government's efforts to diversify the Arctic economy planted the seeds of different traditions in Inuit art that are town specific, though time is slowly changing that. The use of shamanic imagery nevertheless endures as Inuit art expands beyond its earliest medium.

After sculptures, the most recognized Inuit art is printmaking, especially those from Cape Dorset, Nunavut (NU).¹² One of the first Inuit art co-operatives was established in Cape Dorset, and remains today as an influential and successful marker of this industry (Cape Dorset being the self-titled capital of Inuit art). Other industries that have achieved some measure of artistic and economic success are the tapestries of Baker Lake, NU,¹³ the woven tapestries of Pangnirtung, NU,¹⁴ and the cinematography of

¹⁰ Melanie Scott, "Faking It: The Appropriation of a Culture," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 12 (1997): 18-22; Marc Denhez, *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art: Some Legislative Options in Light of International Developments* (Report Submitted to Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, 1983), 3; According to the *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts, Final Report*, submitted to the Government of Nunavut – Department of Economic Development & Transportation in June 2010, carvings account for 58% of end sales (see page 7).

¹¹ The *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts, Final Report* calculates that Nunavut's arts and crafts sector contributes \$33.4 million to the territory's annual gross domestic product (GDP) (see page 5). This analysis accounts for carvings, sewn products, jewellery, tapestries and prints (see page 7). In 2008, Ryan Oliver (Senior Advisor; Arts and Traditional Economy; Department of Economic Development and Transportation; Government of Nunavut) presented a strategy for growth in Nunavut's arts and crafts center. Known as *Sanaugait*, this strategy ambitiously aims to increase the value of the already monumental Northern industry to \$50 million by 2013.

¹² Jean Blogett, "We Could Do That: The History of Printmaking at Cape Dorset," in *In Cape Dorset We Do It This Way: Three Decades of Inuit Printmaking*, ed. Jean Blodgett (Kleinberg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1991), 23.

¹³ Marie Bouchard, *Marion Tuu'luq* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2002).

¹⁴ Beverly Goldfarb, "Artists, Weavers, Movers and Shakers," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 14 (1989): 14-18; Deborah Hickman, "Tapestry: A Northern Legacy," in *Nuvisavik: The Place Where we Weave*, ed. Maria Von Finckenstein (Montreal and Seattle: Canadian Museum of Civilization and University of Washington Press, 2002), 42-50.

Igloolik, NU.¹⁵ The prominence of shamanic themes remains strong in these other mediums: for example, there are numerous prints with shamanic themes and the film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* earned international praise in 2001 for its depiction of a life-threatening struggle between powerful natural and supernatural characters.¹⁶ The use of shamanic themes in Inuit film is particularly interesting as it was the first all-Inuit artistic production, and was not introduced by *qallunaat* to enable the participation of Inuit within a wage economy.¹⁷ The use of this theme in film suggests such imagery has some relevance to modern Inuit (at least those from Igloolik).

The Inuit arts and crafts industry is one that bears both artistic and economic importance for Inuit. Nunavut, as a territory with Inuit-focused policies, is particularly useful for understanding the meaning of Inuit art to Inuit today.¹⁸ The *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts*, a report submitted to the Government of Nunavut in June 2010 in an effort to better understand the growing Inuit art industry, estimates the number of artists in Nunavut to range between 2,500 and 3,000.¹⁹ The *Economic Impact Study* describes diverse driving principles between varied actors with varying interests. The creative sphere of the Inuit art world is crowded. The marriage of artistic expression and economic interests for the artists is an important interest to consider in this project

¹⁵ Michael Robert Evans, *Isuma: Inuit Video Art* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Director Zacharias Kunuk was awarded the prestigious Camera d'Or at Cannes in 2001 for *Atanarjuat*.

¹⁷ Michael Robert Evans, *Isuma: Inuit Video Art*, 11.

¹⁸ While Nunavut offers valuable insight into the policies of Inuit art, I must emphasize that it is not the sole center of Inuit art – even though it is often the focus of many researchers (including those of *Inuit Art Quarterly*). There are four geographic territories occupied by Inuit in Canada: (1) Inuvialuit/Western Arctic, (2) Nunavut/Eastern Arctic, (3) Nunavik/Northern Quebec, and (4) Labrador. As a result, this project has integrated research from all these spaces and conducted interviews with Inuvialuit carvers (David Ruben Piqtoukun and Bill Nasogaluak). Despite this diversity, the reality that they are conceived as a static group endures.

¹⁹ Nordicity Group and Uqsiq Communications, *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts, Final Report* (submitted to the Government of Nunavut – Department of Economic Development and Transportation, 2010), 7.

and the definition of Inuit art. So-called ‘non-artistic’ interests potentially carry heavy weight in the expression of Inuit creativity. Nevertheless, this marriage is not exclusive to an Inuit art and has not prevented the diversification and development of that art. The task of defining Inuit art endures as the responsibility of those who create it.

1.3. Previous Work in the Field

The driving question pushing this project demands an engagement with two fields of academic literature. The first is the role of religion in the history of Inuit art. This field is one that drives home the central interest of this project but also reveals a disconnect between the subjects of *art* and of *religion* in Inuit art scholarship. There is certainly a wealth of information, but the research is only now shedding significant light on the perplexing place of shamanic imagery in Inuit art. The second field is the construction of minority identities in Canada. This field provides a more general platform from which to approach the subject of religion in Inuit art, as the Inuit are themselves a minority group in Canada whose presentation of identity has been heavily influenced by that state. The agency of Inuit becomes centrally important in this regard as their evolving implication in their arts continues to shape the construction and presentation of Inuit identity in Canada.

1.3.1. The Role of Religion in the History of Inuit Art

There is a wealth of existing literature on contemporary Canadian Inuit art, yet this scholarship is largely silent on the question of the use and representation of religion/shamanism. This project investigates three streams in the literature to analyze the meaning of shamanic themes in Inuit art in relation to Inuit identity in Canada: (1) the

general and specific histories of Inuit art, (2) the texts addressing the criticisms made to the authenticity of Inuit art, and (3) the texts discussing the use of art in representing Inuit and/or Canadian identity. Parallel to this, the texts discussing the religious history of the Inuit have been consulted to better understand the religious experience of Inuit throughout the narrative of Inuit art history.

Standard histories of Inuit art provide an overview of the development of Inuit art to its contemporary form, highlighting the influence of *qallunaat* interaction in that development.²⁰ This is best represented in the way that each author categorizes the history they discuss – it is entirely framed in terms of the colonial (and Christian) interactions. This categorization is generally divided into three periods: the pre-contact, the historic, and the contemporary.²¹ The division of history along colonial parameters (from no interaction, to limited interaction, to deep and multi-layered involvement) highlights the importance of interaction with the colonial power to understanding Inuit art and identity, both the lived experience and the scholarship that emerged around it. By dividing the history of Inuit art in this manner, the authors emphasize the *qallunaat* impact on Inuit art production, standards and aesthetics alongside economic contexts.

There is a subsequent stream of scholarship on Inuit art that considers the question of authenticity more deeply—specifically with regards to the sincerity of

²⁰ See: Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit*; Richard C. Crandall, *Inuit Art: A History*; Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction*.

²¹ Christine Lalonde, the current curator of Inuit art at the National Gallery of Canada, problematized the labeling of the third period as ‘contemporary,’ citing that a 50-year timeframe risked the recognition of Inuit art as truly *contemporary art*. Lalonde went on to advocate that this period should be titled as modern, and the newer pieces and themes emerging today should be recognized as contemporary Inuit art within it. Conversely, Lalonde acknowledged that there is too little theoretical discussion in the Inuit art industry to effect such a change. It is nevertheless noted here as a possible change that will emerge in the industry and craft. This thesis will maintain the categories established in the literature, and frame the pieces within the contemporary period between those that are ‘traditional’ and those that are ‘modern.’ (Personal communication with Lalonde, 27 July 2011.)

‘authentic Inuit art’ in light of the impact of *qallunaat* influence on that art. Some scholars investigate the history that spawned the genesis of contemporary Inuit art to challenge the notion of its authenticity as an *Inuit* art form, whether directly or not.²² Edmund Carpenter offered an early challenge to the authenticity of Inuit art by claiming that Inuit art, as a commercial art form, was not authentic since the training and standard of quality was established by *qallunaat*.²³ Numerous authors have subsequently argued against this claim to promote an understanding of Inuit art as authentic within the *lived* contemporary Inuit culture and society, rather than the idealized ‘primitive’ representation of that culture.²⁴ This scholarship promotes an understanding of Inuit art from within the Inuit artistic community. Despite *qallunaat* artistic, political and economic influences on the genesis of Inuit art, these scholars point out the flexibility Inuit artists have demonstrated through regional diversity and the incorporation of new non-Arctic material and themes. Some remark that while most Inuit art is sent to southern markets, there is a value system in assessing the quality of art produced in the north.²⁵ As Christine Lalonde points out: “In contrast to the Western canon, the understanding of

²² Nelson H. H. Graburn, “The Discovery of Inuit Art: James A. Houston – Animateur,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 2 (1987): 3-5; Heather Igloliorte, “*Sanajatsarq*: Reactions, Productions, and the Transformation of Promotional Practice,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 22 (2007): 14-25; Kristin K. Potter, “James Houston, Armchair Tourism, and the Marketing of Inuit Art,” in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, meaning, histories*, ed. W. Jackson Rushing III (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

²³ Edmund Carpenter, *Eskimo Realities* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973): 194-195.

²⁴ Deborah Root, “Inuit Art and the Limits of Authenticity,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 23 (2008): 18-26. See also: Nelson H. H. Graburn, “Eskimo Art: The Eastern Canadian Arctic,” in *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, ed. Nelson H. H. Graburn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Los Angeles Press, 1976); Nelson H. H. Graburn, “Authentic Inuit Art: Creation and Exclusion in the Canadian North,” 141-159; Peter Millard, “On Quality in Art: Who Decides,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 7 (1992): 4-14; Marie Routledge and Ingo Hessel, “Regional Diversity in Contemporary Inuit Art,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 5 (1990): 11-23; Melanie Scott, “Faking It: The Appropriation of a Culture,” 18-22; George Swinton, *Touch and the Real: Contemporary Inuit Aesthetics, Theory, Usage and Relevance* (London: Duckworth, 1975); George Swinton, *Sculpture of the Inuit* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1999); Darlene Wight, “Inuit Traditions and Beyond: New Attitudes Toward Art-Making in the 1980s,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 6 (1991): 8-15.

²⁵ Deborah Root, “Inuit Art and the Limits of Authenticity,” 21.

Inuit art today in the Arctic is expansive enough to encompass sculpture, graphics and even newer media that southern audiences have yet to fully accept.”²⁶ Since Inuit gauge Inuit art as art, even if using a different standard than in the south, then it is an art form within that community and an authentic art of that community as such. As Root contends, authenticity is “...a floating category, able to migrate and legitimize or delegitimize certain kinds of images.”²⁷ Inevitably, if something is labelled authentic, something else must be inauthentic. This line of thought and practise fails to account for Inuit agency and the variety of contemporary Inuit experiences. Root emphasizes that artistic criteria must center on the subject of creation rather than the ethnicity of the artist.²⁸ There nevertheless remains an authority present – if only through market demand – in the Arctic art world that is non-Inuit. While Inuit art has grown beyond its role in the community as means for Inuit to engage capitalist economy, it continues to generate images of Canadian identity on the international stage.

This question of Canadian identity originated after World War II when the nation sought out an identity that distinguished it from its colonial roots.²⁹ Inuit art quickly became a part of that canon, being something uniquely of the Canadian territory and representing life on that land. There is stream of scholarship within the literature on Inuit art that investigates the use of art in representing Inuit and/or Canadian identity.³⁰ This

²⁶ Christine Lalonde, “Colonialism Changes Everything,” in *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, ed. Gerald McMaster (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 31.

²⁷ Deborah Root, “Inuit Art and the Limits of Authenticity,” 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁹ Nelson H. H. Graburn, “Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism: Why Eskimos? Why Canada?,” in *Inuit Art Quarterly* 1 (1986): 5-7; Nelson H. H. Graburn, “Authentic Inuit Art: Creation and Exclusion in the Canadian North,” 145; Leanne Stuart Puppeck, “True North: Inuit Art and the Canadian Imagination,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (2001): 191.

³⁰ Including: Nelson H. H. Graburn, “Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism: Why Eskimos? Why Canada?,” 5-7; Nelson H. H. Graburn, “Authentic Inuit Art: Creation and Exclusion in the Canadian North,” 141-

scholarship highlights that Inuit, as First Nations peoples within Canadian boundaries, represented the uniqueness of the Canadian experience. Canadian politicians and policy makers promoted the development of Inuit art as a discursive resource against the Old World. Inuit art, with a post-World War genesis, endures today as an iconic representation of Canada (consider the use of an *inukshuk* as the logo of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, Vancouver being in a non-Inuit geography, see figure 3). But this scholarship fails to account for the significance of shamanic themes in Inuit art, despite its unique importance in the constructed Inuit/Canadian identity.

The literature on the religious history of Arctic Canada adds depth to this discussion by investigating the roles shamanism and Christianity play and have played in the Inuit social landscape, and thus to the construction of Inuit identity. There are a number of valuable resources that will aid in this effort,³¹ but the works of Frederic B. Laugrand and Jarich G. Oosten's are most insightful. Their latest, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity* (2010), is particularly useful in describing the enduring and complex relationship between these two traditions in Arctic Canada, from the first colonial interactions to the growing Inuit Pentecostal and Evangelical movements. By examining both the religious history and experiences of the Inuit, this project will be able to contribute to the discourse on Inuit art by questioning the use of religious themes in a

159; Leanne Stuart Pupchek, "True North: Inuit Art and the Canadian Imagination," 191-208; Reissa Schrager, "Why Do They Buy It? Inuit Art Collecting in the Corporate World," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 1 (1986): 1-5; Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World: Modernism, Museums and the Popular Imaginary, 1949 – 1962*.

³¹ Including: Xavier Blaisel et al., "Shamans and Leaders: Parousial Movements among the Inuit of Northeastern Canada," *Numen* 46 (1999): 370-411; Jean Blodgett, "Christianity and Inuit Art," in *Inuit Art: An Anthology*, ed. Alma Houston (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing, 1988), 83-93; Frederic B. Laugrand and Jarich G. Oosten, *The Sea Woman: Sedna in Inuit Shamanism and Art in the Eastern Arctic* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2008); Andreas Lommel, *Shamanism: The Beginning of Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); Robin McGrath, "More Than Meets the Eye: The Clothing Motif in Inuit Legends and Art," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 8 (1993): 16-23; Harold Seidelman and James E Turner, *The Inuit Imagination: Arctic Myth and Sculpture* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993); George Swinton, *Sculpture of the Inuit*.

social context that it may or may not reflect. From these fields of scholarship, this thesis will show that the use of religious themes in art is essential to understanding Inuit identity, especially as a minority identity in Canada.

1.3.2. The Construction of Minority Identities in Canada

Inuit art rarely remains among the Inuit.³² The market for Inuit art is largely in southern Canada, or in the international art market (often as an icon of Canada). To be able to make the discussion of religious themes in Inuit art relevant to the discourse of minority identity claims in Canada this project will also consult that field of literature.³³

Within this field, the perspectives of three authors are particularly useful to understanding the experiences of Inuit as a minority in a diverse Canada. Avigail Eisenberg's work on the identity claims of various minorities – notably including religious and indigenous ones – sets the framework within which the negotiation of identity in Inuit art is discussed and understood throughout this thesis. Looking at the petitions made by minorities seeking specific rights and entitlements, the author outlines how *identity* is being used as a means to secure rights outside the standard parameters of

³² Jean Blodgett, "Christianity and Inuit Art," 92; Christine Lalonde suggested that this is changing in light of increased politicians in the North (in the wake of the creation of Nunavut). Moreover, and still according to Lalonde, Inuit communities in Arctic Canada are increasingly petitioning for space to display local art. Such a shift would highlight the increased recognition of Inuit art as a local product reflecting the community. (Personal communication with Lalonde, 27 July 2011.)

³³ Including: Lori G. Beaman, "Aboriginal Spirituality and the Legal Construction of Freedom of Religion," *Journal of Church and State* 44 (2002): 135-149; Lori G. Beaman, "Defining Religion: The Promise and the Peril of Legal Interpretation," in *Law and Religious Pluralism in Canada*, ed. Richard Moon (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 192-216; Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); William E. Connolly, "Pluralization (1995)," in *William E. Connolly: Democracy, Pluralism and Political Theory*, ed. Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver (New York: Routledge, 2008), 37-60; Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity: A Normative Guide to the Political and Legal Assessment of Identity Claims* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, *Finding Dahshaa: Self-Government, Social Suffering, and Aboriginal Policy in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009).

law. Accordingly, Eisenberg's work focuses on the public assessment of such identities and sheds light on the normative positions assumed by states and legislatures (and often by the majority or authoritative minority of those societies)—highlighting that decision makers assess minority identities without fully understanding them or their contexts. For the purpose of this project, Eisenberg's insight into identity claims outlines how such petitions of identity need be fully understood, respecting the diversity of minorities, while simultaneously recognizing the normative positions of authorities.

Subsequently, the work of Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox on aboriginal policy in Northern Canada provides further insight into the experiences of minorities in that part of the country. Her discussion is focused on the problematic premises on which aboriginal policy is approached in Canada, failing to do justice to the social suffering experienced by those minorities, both historically and presently. The author distinguishes between the existing efforts made at self-government among First Nations, which are problematic because they are established within a colonial framework and have since failed to address the problems at hand, and the need for self-determination as a source of authority derived within the indigenous context itself. This discussion offers valuable insight for this project on the experiences of First Nations in the Canadian context, pointing specifically to some of the most problematic assumptions and standards maintained in that negotiation.

Lastly, the work of Lori G. Beaman on the experiences of religious minorities in a diverse Canada reveals the Christian normative position maintained in the Canadian context. Beaman's work is beneficial to understanding the unquestioned backdrop that sets the standards of normalcy in this country. Religious minorities who do not satisfy

that standard are consequently pushed to a vague space in which they must negotiate between their minority identity and their place as Canadians—often having to make risks that are otherwise protected by the guaranteed rights of the state.

The experiences of minorities in Canada also impact the discussions on, and the drive for, pluralization. Since the Canadian state is so deeply involved in the genesis and development of Inuit art, being a principle marker of Inuit identity, the development of thematic variety in Inuit art is a significant marker of how diversity is managed and promoted in Canada.

1.4. Contested Terms: Framing Religion, Conceptualizing Shamanism

As this thesis considers specifically religious themes to question the construction and understanding of Inuit identity in Canada, it is worth explaining how that concept is to be understood throughout the project. There are two terms that must be considered: the first being ‘religion’ itself and the second is ‘shamanism.’

Religion is a concept that perpetually evades conclusive definitions, even within Religious Studies. It is nevertheless important to clarify what is understood to fall under the umbrella banner of religion when working within a space, such as within Inuit art, where the understanding of what is religious is vague (from both etic and emic perspectives). For the purpose of this project, the conceptualization of religion as a *lived* and dynamic tradition will be most relevant.³⁴ Institutional definitions of religion have

³⁴ It is worth emphasizing the *messiness* of religion and religiosity that is highlighted by the concept of *lived religion*. The approach to religion in this project is grounded in such an understanding of these concepts. While the history discussed in chapter two may suggest a clear progression of Inuit religious life, between shamanism and Christianities, the reality is anything but tidy. Individual religious lives vary from one another and the isolation of Arctic communities meant that each encountered forms of Christianity at different times and in different ways, without much contact between these communities. As a result, I have relied on as many sources as possible to understand the range of historical and

little meaning here. In what follows, religion will be understood within the *lived religion* framework.³⁵ The emphasis lies with the way people adapt their faith to the circumstances of their lives, rather than how they are told to do so or how other people and scholars presume them to do, and thus making religion uniquely real and relevant to their experiences.

While *lived religion* frames the general conceptualization of the religious with which this project was tackled, religion is an umbrella term for many other categories of the religious, including Christianity and shamanism. Christianity, while an institutionalized religion, assumes a distinct flavour in the North. As a result, the discussions of Christianity in this paper will rely on sources discussing it exclusively within the Arctic/Inuit context. Inuit Christianity in North-Eastern Canada is statistically deeply ingrained in the community. Interestingly, and as will be discussed in chapter 2, as Inuit have secured their socio-political environment through the creation of Nunavut, they have also increasingly turned from Catholicism and Protestantism to evangelicalism and Pentecostalism—two forms of Christianity that arguably permit for a stronger assertion of ‘Inuitness’ (and specifically shamanism) in their religious lives.

Shamanism is a term almost as elusive as religion itself. It is contested both in Religious Studies scholarship and among Inuit, who are only now asserting an Inuit perspective of Christianity through evangelical and Pentecostal movements (in which Inuit elders have perceived strong similarities with the ritual practices of their traditional

contemporary religious experiences in the North. Notably, there is a strong reliance on the works of Jarich Oosten and Frederic Laugrand throughout this project. It should be emphasized that their research relied on both historical ethnographic accounts as well as primary research with Inuit elders to frame the religious experiences discussed. As a result, their works help draw attention to the *messiness* of religion and religiosity that is crucial to the discussion of each concept in this project.

³⁵ See Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* and Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*.

shamanic cosmology).³⁶ While I am not the first Inuit art scholar to use it in reference to the sacred stories and practices of the Inuit, I understand that there exists a reluctance to define aspects of contemporary Inuit identity in terms of shamanism. I use it here as a term to designate what once constituted the Inuit cosmology, including the sacred stories and sacred practices of Inuit ancestors, but also the shape those stories and practices have assumed today in Inuit art. That being said, this project discusses religious expressions within art, rather than in the practices of people. As a result, the use of the term shamanism is a guide to understanding the representation of the Inuit cosmology in art rather than its expression in practice. Within the framework of *lived religion*, ethnographic work with artists becomes crucial in understanding the concept of shamanism as it is expressed in Inuit art. The artists consulted for this project orient their work that engages themes from the traditional Inuit cosmology through *shamanism*, as do those who actively reject that theme.

1.5. Methodology

This project proposes that *qallunaat*, especially state authorities, have played a central role in the genesis and development of contemporary Canadian Inuit art and, in consequence, the presentation of Inuit identity to non-Inuit. That being said, that role is changing and the agency of Inuit in this development cannot be ignored. Inuit art will always be authentically Inuit if Inuit freely produce it.

To answer the larger question driving this research and prove the proposed

³⁶ See Frederic B. Laugrand and Jarich G. Oosten, “Reconnecting People and Healing the Land: Inuit Pentecostal and Evangelical Movements,” in *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity: Transition and Transformation in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 342-371.

hypothesis this project combines a historical and an ethnographic approach, using both primary and secondary materials. The voices of three actors emerge from this approach in this project: (1) the *qallunaat* who originally shaped Inuit art into its popular form, (2) the audiences that consume Inuit art, and (3) the Inuit artists themselves.

The first voice, that of those who shaped Inuit art from the outside, is found in the primary and secondary materials in the literature on contemporary Inuit art. This literature provides a detailed historical narrative of the social, cultural, political, legal and economic currents that shaped Inuit art. However, this literature does not include a critical analysis of the role of religion in contemporary Inuit art or of the question of socio-cultural authenticity raised by the role of religion in contemporary Inuit art. This voice will also be accessed directly from policy reports prepared for and by the Government of Canada, notably AANDC, concerning the development of Inuit art as well as the protection of that art through the Igloo Tag. These primary sources reveal the policy interests of the government in this narrative. In particular, three reports were accessed through an Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) request made to AANDC and outline the place of the Igloo Tag in contemporary Canada.³⁷

The second voice, that of Inuit art audiences, can be accessed through both historical and ethnographic approaches. While preparing to write this project, I took the time to meet with several curators, managers and collectors of Inuit art to gain a general idea of the Inuit art market. Speaking with individuals at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the National Gallery of Canada, the Inuit Art Foundation and the attached Inuit Artists' Shop as well as the Canadian Guild of Crafts in Montreal contributed to better understanding the framework through which Inuit art is largely gauged and

³⁷ The file number for this ATIP request, submitted to AANDC, is A-2011-00103 / JL2.

distributed in Canada and to an international audience. To supplement this, there is a large discussion of the art market in the literature on contemporary Inuit art that was used more directly throughout this project. Certainly, individuals are the ones that consume art, but these institutions have played a role in shaping how that art is seen by such audience members through domestic and international exhibits that maintain a standard of Inuit art and sometimes even challenge that standard.

The third voice, that of Inuit artists, will be heard through two venues. The first are the mediated venues in which artists are discussed in Inuit art literature. There are a number of texts devoted to specific co-operatives, exhibitions, or specific artists that offer access to the perspectives of artists on certain subjects. These sources provide a wealth of material collected from interviews with the artists, offering insight into a variety of aspects of the Inuit art world. Moreover, organizations such as the Inuit Art Foundation work to provide access to artists' voices through such projects as Inuit Art Alive (available online) by creating a database of artists profiles, published articles, and general information about the North. It is important to note that this venue provides access to both artists who typically produced traditional forms of contemporary Inuit art (in which primitivism and shamanism are prominent) as well as a new generation of artists who are breaking the mould of what constitutes 'authentic Inuit art.' The Inuit Art Foundation has been an invaluable asset in this project as it provided access to two artists who were in turn interviewed directly for this thesis. David Ruben Piqtoukun and Bill Nasogaluak spoke as Inuit artists pushing the boundaries of their craft to the questions raised in this thesis. The interviews were semi-structured, permitting them to discuss previously selected art pieces openly (from as few questions as possible, seeking rather to hear the

artist discuss generally the [a] theme they intended to illustrate in the piece, [b] the inspiration for the piece, and [c] the reason(s) for its creation). In this discussion of authenticity in contemporary Inuit art, focused on the religious and shamanic themes within that art, it is necessary to provide a voice to those who produce that art and reproduce (or resist) those themes.

The three perspectives on Inuit art (that of *qallunaat*, Inuit art audiences, and Inuit artists) offer a comprehensive and contextually rich view of Inuit art. These discussions are analyzed using scholarship regarding the construction of minority identities and the claims for these identities in diverse societies, particularly Canada. This analysis is intended to show that the static delineation of minority identities, both by minority groups and normative authorities, fails to acknowledge the fluidity of identity—whether Inuit or other. It is particularly the case that attempting to ‘freeze’ representations of an Inuit shamanic tradition in the art of Inuit cannot succeed as the only expression of that identity. The lived experience of the Inuit artist, whether inclusive of the shamanic tradition or not, is paramount in assuring the ongoing authenticity of Inuit art.

1.6. Map of Thesis

The general aim of this project is twofold. The first is to expand the discussion of Inuit art and make room to consider the meaning of shamanic themes in that art and the second is to add depth to the discussion of diversity in Canada, particularly in regards to the unquestioned representation of minority identities within that context. To accomplish this, I will first turn to the (re)presentation of Inuit art itself. Chapter 2 will thus present and problematize the existing narrative of the history of Inuit art, questioning specifically

the role of religion and shamanism within it and the problems that this raises in regards to the issues socio-cultural *essentialization* and *authenticity*.³⁸ Within this, particular attention will be given to the efforts made by non-Inuit to assert the authenticity of an art whose genesis was so profoundly influenced by outsiders, who fundamentally essentialized that cultural and religious identity. This chapter will conclude by looking at how the religious landscape of the North is changing; whereas shamanism is readily apparent in Inuit art, Christianity has long been part of the religious identity Inuit put forward to non-Inuit. In the wake of socio-political change, namely the creation of Nunavut, there has been a rise in evangelical and Pentecostal movements in the North that raise interesting questions about the issues of *lived religion* and the way Inuit negotiate their shamanic and Christian religious heritages.

Chapter 3 will seek to de-stabilize that ‘traditional’ presentation of Inuit art and Inuit identity by showcasing new changes that are occurring within the Inuit art community, both in terms of the mediums and the themes in contemporary Inuit art. The shifting currents of Inuit art will be framed through an understanding of contemporary Inuit art history in which the individualization of artists and personalization of their art have meant the increasing diversity of that art. It is in this chapter that the voice of artists themselves will be most prominently featured, both from field research material as well as from the abundant material available in the literature on the subject. The purpose of this chapter is to emphasize Inuit agency in Inuit art and enable a discussion of, not only the diversity of Inuit art, but of Inuit identity in Canada as well.

Chapter 4 will turn to this last question directly. In this last chapter, the questions

³⁸ The understanding of the issues of homogenization, domestication and authenticity within this project stem from Avigail Eisenberg’s *Reasons of Identity* (2009).

of essentialization and authenticity will again be raised and challenged to make room for an Inuit authored definition of Inuit identity. That being said, and while some time will be spent looking at how that identity is shaping today, the emphasis will be on the need to recognize the diversity of minority identities. This chapter will conclude by expanding this discussion of the Inuit minority in Canada to ideals of diversity and the drives for pluralization within that broader socio-political context. Finally, this thesis will conclude in chapter 5 by emphasizing that art, as a medium of identity, is uniquely helpful in challenging the static delineation of identity and providing for the fluidity of identity.

1.7. Images



**Figure 1: *Royal Trust Sedna* in Toronto's HSBC Building, 70 York Street
(Source: Photo courtesy of John Wunderlich, 13 March 2011)**



Figure 2: Igloo Tag, introduced in 1959 by the Department of Northern Affairs (Government of Canada) to help identify "authentic" Inuit art, the boxed text was removed in 1991 (Source: Google Images)



Figure 3: The logo of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, showcasing an *inukshuk* (historically emblematic of Inuit; the singular of Inuit is inuk) (Source: Google Images)

Chapter 2
‘Authentic Inuit Art’:
Problematizing the Presentation of Inuit Art and Identity in Canada

2.1. The Union of Shamanism and Capitalism

There exists an oft-told narrative of contemporary Inuit art that is assuming near mythic proportions. It is the story of James Houston, a young man and artist eager to capture a new image of Canada in the post-war period, much like the *Group of Seven* had done in the 1920s, helping to promote a sense of nationalism in Canada through the arts.¹ Houston first travelled to Arctic-Quebec (*Nunavik*) in the summer of 1948 where he ‘discovered’ a ‘latent skill’ for carving among Inuit.² He purchased a half-dozen palm-sized soapstone and ivory carvings of caribous and seals that had captured his attention.³ Upon his return to Montreal, Houston brought his carvings to the Canadian Handicraft Guild (now known as the Canadian Guild of Crafts and hereafter referred to as the Guild). The Guild shared Houston’s interest in the Inuit craft tradition.⁴ It subsequently applied for and received a grant for the summer of 1949, permitting Houston to return north to make sample purchases and encourage the production of ‘Eskimo Handicrafts.’⁵ The sale of some 300 small-sculpted objects within three days in November 1949 was heralded as an economic success for Inuit, whose crafts were then unfamiliar to any

¹ This political understanding of art was re-asserted in the early period of contemporary Inuit art through the *Royal Commission on the National Development of Arts, Letters and Science*, more commonly known as the *Massey Report* after its author Vincent Massey and published in 1951, which promoted that art was the perfect vehicle to advance and express the values of Canada to the international community. (Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 363.)

² Graburn, Nelson H. H. "Authentic Inuit Art: Creation and Exclusion in the Canadian North," 150.

³ Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 8.

⁴ The Canadian Handicraft Guild exhibited ‘Eskimo Handicrafts’ as early as 1911. It was not until Houston’s willingness to go North on their behalf, that they experienced any measure of success in promoting an ‘Eskimo Handicraft.’ (See Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 64-65, 241, and Christine Lalonde, “Colonialism Changes Everything,” in *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, ed. Gerald McMaster (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 27.).

⁵ Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 8-9.

qallunaat who did not travel to the North.⁶

The events described in this narrative constitute the usual demarcation point between the historic and the contemporary periods of Inuit art.⁷ These events are, however, an incomplete explanation of the paradigm-shift that occurred in the mid-century for Inuit in regards to their arts and craft productions. An understanding of Inuit art must also account for the Inuit perspective. It is a cultural artefact that has become a symbol of identity and is dynamically created and re-created by Inuit and their environment.

2.1.1. Conceptualizing a History of Inuit Art

Inuit art was and is a phenomenon arising from cross-cultural and colonial interactions. Despite that, most histories of Inuit art use non-Inuit parameters to explain and understand the development of that art into its contemporary form. Specifically, these histories categorize the development of Inuit art into three distinct periods: the pre-contact, the historic, and the contemporary.⁸ The division of *qallunaat* histories of Inuit art history using colonial contact as markers highlights the influence of that outside authority in understanding Inuit art and identity, both the lived experience and the scholarship that has emerged around it. Michael Robert Evans recognizes the impact of colonization on Inuit art but emphasizes that, in the broader history of the tradition now identified as Inuit art, there are two encounters that have profoundly shaped that craft and the Inuit: the first is that between the Inuit and the natural world and the latter is between

⁶ Christine Lalonde, “Colonialism Changes Everything,” 29; Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 174.

⁷ Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 174; Virginia Watt, “The Beginning,” in *Canadian Guild of Crafts Quebec: The Permanent Collection Catalogue*, edited by Virginia Watt (Montreal: Canadian Guild of Crafts, 1980), 11.

⁸ See Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art: Aesthetic and History in and Beyond the Arctic*; Richard C. Crandall, *Inuit Art: A History*; Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction*.

the Inuit and *qallunaat*.⁹ Evans is keen to state that *qallunaat* are not the sole animators of Inuit art. Inuit also play a role in the history of Inuit art. While this project is focused on the so-called contemporary period of Inuit art, in which the influence of outsiders is most profound, the conceptualization of Inuit art that follows must account for the Inuit voice and its contribution to the art industry and history at hand.

The tradition that is now recognized as ‘Inuit art’ was not exclusively fabricated by cross-cultural interactions in the modern period. Those interactions were framed by a deep-rooted craft-making heritage among the Inuit, which was intimately tied to their shamanic heritage. Emily E. Auger comments on the traditions in Inuit culture which were developed into an ‘Inuit art’ in the twentieth century and emphasizes both the craft-making and shamanic heritages that were then re-conceptualized through interactions with *qallunaat* authorities in the mid-twentieth century to incite the genesis of contemporary Inuit art:

In terms of function, it is certain that Inuit art, like art everywhere, served to help individuals define reality. From today’s perspective, prehistoric and historic Inuit art often appears as beautification, particularly in its application to functional objects such as harpoon parts, perhaps in relation to the propitiations of spirits or self-definition; and as a form of illustration, insofar as more elaborate carvings seem to refer to known myths of cultural practices. The values and beliefs that informed this art are less easily reconstructed, but they are widely assumed to relate in some ways to shamanism.¹⁰

The craft and shamanic heritages of the Inuit are framed by Auger in terms of *beautification* and *illustration*. While, in some regard, this heritage survived through the historic period, it was completely re-conceptualized in the mid-century by *qallunaat* attempting to promote the production of handicrafts, which then became an art. Minnie

⁹ Michael Robert Evans, *Isuma: Inuit Video Art*, 3.

¹⁰ Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art*, 39.

Aodla Freeman comments further on the impact of *qallunaat* in the conceptualization of an ‘Inuit art’:

The word “art,” for example, did not exist in Inuktitut. That is not to say that Inuit art did not exist, but it was a serious matter in the old days. Traditionally, Inuit made amulets, decorations for the body or for hunting equipment, and replicas of everyday objects to attach to their clothing. A lot of traditional art was made for burial purposes. Those objects were taken seriously. To *Qallunaat* (White people), some Inuit use of charms may not sound very serious. A lot of traditional art was used to “shoo away” bad spirits, to bring good luck when an event took place, to encourage a young person to bravery, and also to escort the dead to the good spirits rather than have their spirits floating around nowhere. Very often a charm would be made for a new born child. Some charms were made to bond closer a very special relationship. Some of these uses are still common today, especially for the bonding of special relationships. It was only when *qallunaat* saw this traditional art that it became “art.”¹¹

Certainly, the impact of *qallunaat* on the genesis and development of contemporary Inuit art cannot be undervalued. It would be brash to maintain that Houston ‘discovered a latent skill’ among the Inuit. Certainly, he and those who followed in his footsteps redefined Inuit arts and crafts, but they did so by building on an existing heritage and marketing it in a very effective manner to non-Inuit audiences.

From the present perspective, it is certainly possible to distinguish an evolution and narrative of Inuit art history that acknowledges the profound influence of *qallunaat* authorities in shaping an Inuit art, especially its most modern (and internationally recognized) form. Yet, that division of history accounts only for the second interaction identified by Evans to shape the arts and craft history and heritage of the Inuit. Making room for the Inuit perspective itself, Gerald McMaster comments on the changes in perception from the Inuit community: “...today’s artists by and large create works for any and all publics. In the case of Inuit historic art, the dialogue was internal; in Inuit

¹¹ Minnie Aodla Freeman, “Introduction,” in *Inuit Women Artists: Voices From Cape Dorset*, ed. Minnie Aodla Freeman, Marion E. Jackson and Odette Leroux (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1994), 15.

contemporary art, the dialogue moves outward, with related dialogues that are aesthetic, political, moral and didactic.”¹² There are certainly important distinctions that mark the pre-contact, historic and contemporary periods from one another. Nevertheless, the enduring constant of Inuit art is Inuit themselves. As their identity and cultural heritage evolves, so does their arts and crafts tradition. There certainly is room for the *qallunaat*-centric interpretation of that history and tradition, but it is not an absolute.

2.1.2 *The Union of History and Modernity in Inuit Art*

The evolution of the Inuit community from the perspective of their aesthetic crafts and arts are marked, as Evans noted, by an early encounter with the natural world and a more recent encounter with *qallunaat*. These encounters are now expressed simultaneously in Inuit art, where the union of shamanism and capitalism blooms.

The division of Inuit art history between the pre-contact, historic and contemporary periods signals important expressions of the Inuit through time. The unitary understanding of the pre-contact period nevertheless fails to convey the complexity of the Inuit and their ancestors who moved from Siberia to Greenland and back again over a period of 5,000 years.¹³ It is in this earliest period that an encounter with nature, mediated through shamanism, is most vividly portrayed in the crafts of Inuit and their ancestors. As Robert McGhee notes, “The ancestors of northern peoples long ago realized an essential fact: that the wealth of the Arctic is in its animals.”¹⁴ Needless to say, the aesthetics and

¹² Gerald McMaster, “Inuit Modern: An Introduction,” in *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, ed. Gerald McMaster (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 3.

¹³ Robert McGhee, “Inuit History, Inuit Art,” in *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, ed. Gerald McMaster (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

crafts evolved and changed during this period. As Auger remarks, the source of art traced to this earlier period is interpreted as the *beautification* and *illustration* of practical resources in the community.¹⁵ McGhee remarks on the Old Bearing Sea (OBS) culture:

The most finely decorated pieces are hunting weapons: harpoon heads, sockets for harpoon shafts, butterfly-shaped counterweights mounted on harpoon shafts, and various toggles and handles for harpoon float equipment. This has suggested a magical function for much of OBS art, which was perhaps believed to increase the efficacy of weapons by harnessing the power of the creatures incorporated in their ornamentation.¹⁶

As the OBS culture developed in the first millennia of the Common Era, their aesthetic standards shifted—the adornment of objects became more utilitarian and less ornate, where “...straight lines replaced elegant curves, and engraved ovals were replaced by mechanically drilled dot-and-circle motifs.”¹⁷ McGhee suggests that increased efficiency in hunting practices and the consequent ease in acquiring food decreased the perceived need for spiritual assistance, previously sought through the ornamentation of hunting tools.¹⁸ The OBS culture evolved into the Thule, who then travelled east and continued the evolving tradition of ornamenting weapons and tools. Among the expanding Thule people, the application of aesthetics expanded to the objects of women, such as ivory combs and sewing tools, and the development of non-utilitarian craftwork introduced carved children’s dolls.¹⁹

Auger emphasized that the early development of artistic crafts in the Arctic can be traced to the shamanic tradition.²⁰ This is echoed in Andreas Lommel’s work on

¹⁵ Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art*, 39.

¹⁶ Robert McGhee, “Inuit History, Inuit Art,” 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art*, 39-40.

shamanism, in which he contends that it is a key source of early art traditions across the Arctic world.²¹ Auger identifies the skeletal motifs and joint marks of these early craft works as being the symptom of shamanic influence, where shamans created the objects for their own transitory use (as temporary objects intended for ritual use) rather than with concern for craftwork, aesthetic or permanence. These objects served religious functions, whether to memorialize encounters with the supernatural or to prepare for them (i.e. the use of ivory combs to appease the sea deity *Sedna* prior to a fishing expedition).

The pre-contact period of Inuit art is certainly not a unified or static (artistic) period. It is a period in which an encounter with the natural world and the negotiation of that encounter through shamanism profoundly influenced the aesthetics and craftworks. As the Inuit increasingly encountered European *qallunaat* in the 16th century and onwards, their perspectives shifted. Whereas the Inuit were once isolated in remote communities, and their interactions limited to the natural environment around them, Europeans exploration and colonization brought with it more players to acknowledge in the Arctic (artistic) landscape.²² As their encounter with the ‘other’ shifted from the natural world to the *qallunaat*, so did their aesthetic and craftworks shift the dialogue in their art. While shamanism dominated the aesthetics of pre-contact Inuit art, the introduction of capitalism by *qallunaat* shaped the production of historic and contemporary Inuit art—shamanism and shamanic themes nevertheless evolved with the Inuit community.

The historic period of Inuit art – when Inuit were increasingly in contact with *qallunaat* whalers, traders, explorers and eventually missionaries and Canadian state

²¹ Andreas Lommel, *Shamanism: The Beginning of Art*, 105-144.

²² Gerald McMaster, “Inuit Modern: An Introduction,” 3.

officials – is a period of both continuity and change according to Jean Blodgett.²³ Continuity was expressed in terms of tradition – where the religious, cultural and social traditions that would become remembered in art in the contemporary period were carried forward here – while transition was experienced in terms of materials, subjects, techniques and purpose. *Qallunaat* influence, whether direct or indirect, is largely responsible for that transition. Market interests already loomed large in the Inuit crafts tradition by the latter part of the historic period. The items that were produced were valued by trade criteria. The items produced, and understood within the framework of the history of Inuit art, were not the transitory religious objects of the pre-contact period, or even items of *beautification* and *illustration*. They were objects that *qallunaat* found use for while living in the North (i.e. ivory cribbage boards, see figure 4), that is to say southern product made with Arctic materials by Inuit.

Contemporary Inuit art is a product of the mid-twentieth century, when social problems plagued the Inuit and the Government of Canada chose to intervene. While the colonization of the North and of Inuit occurred much more slowly than it did for their southern neighbours (due mainly to the harsh Arctic climate), it nevertheless tangibly affected the Inuit. Like their southern neighbours, Inuit were crippled by the epidemics introduced by *qallunaat*. These epidemics, along with a growing dependence on southern products, devastated the traditional Inuit way of life.²⁴ The collapse of the traditional economy created a plight that the Government of Canada could, by the 1930s, no longer ignore. The welfare of Inuit had previously rested on regional authorities. Quebec, the

²³ Jean Blodgett, “The Historic Period in Canadian Eskimo Art” in *Inuit Art: An Anthology*, ed. Alma Houston (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing, 1988), 21-29.

²⁴ Sarah Bonesteel, principle author, *Canada’s Relation with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development*, edited by Erik Anderson (Ottawa: Prepared by Public History Inc. for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006), 5-8.

only province in which Inuit resided, challenged this expensive social and financial burden to the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC). In 1939, through the *Re Eskimo* verdict offered by the SCC, Inuit officially became wards of the Canadian state.²⁵ This subsequently created widespread dependence on welfare aid in the North. The Government of Canada then sought alternatives to welfare support through various programs. While today's 'authentic Inuit art' was not the sole effort to diversify the arctic economy, it endures as the most successful example of that policy.²⁶

This period of Inuit art is marked by fundamental changes in Inuit society. McMaster's discussion of modernity among the Inuit identifies this as 'fragmentation:'

For Inuit, modernity is the world experiences as fragmented, no longer an integrated world where social groups are based on real, biological kinship ties, and where social relations are stable and permanent. Modernity is changing this as communities are gradually getting larger and social relations are shifting rapidly.²⁷

The place of tradition and history nevertheless remains a vital question in the assessment of modernity for the Inuit. He continues: "The experience of modernity is to live in traditional ways and to repeat tradition in unrecognizable forms. [...] Artists continue to create works that suggest and reference spirituality and shamanistic practices."²⁸ Shamanism remains prominent (almost exclusively so) in the artistic landscape of the Inuit. The religio-cultural tradition that once planted the seeds of the contemporary artistic tradition, being then permeated in Inuit society, is now preserved in that new tradition.

The art that was promoted by Houston, along with the Guild and the Hudson's

²⁵ Sarah Bonesteel, *Canada's Relation with Inuit*, 5-8.

²⁶ Christine Lalonde, "Colonialism Changes Everything," 29.

²⁷ Gerald McMaster, "Inuit Modern: An Introduction," 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Bay Company (HBC) and later AANDC, built on the aesthetic traditions that long existed among Inuit. Nevertheless, when Houston ‘discovered’ Inuit art, he was unaware of the souvenir-arts-and-crafts production that had developed in the historic period.²⁹ Lalonde comments on this transitional period in Inuit art history and the impact of Houston and the Guild:

Although the Inuit had for decades been using ivory to make small-scale replicas (commonly called miniatures) of everyday objects and animals for occasional trade, the figurative stone sculpture encouraged first by Houston and the Guild was something else [...] Ivory pieces depicted life as it was then experienced, camp scenes as they existed and even elements of cross-cultural exchange, such as rifles, kerosene lamps, cribbage boards and boats [...] When working in stone, however, Inuit focused on a traditional way of life with little reference to the outside world. The somewhat idealized depictions of the past became the iconic images associated with Inuit culture.³⁰

This highlights that with Houston’s encouragement, Inuit started making art that was more Inuit-centric (at least the *qallunaat* understanding of what defines an Inuk, which emphasized their traditional culture and identity). This commodification of Inuit heritage focused an interest in understanding that (traditional) identity. Houston’s impact on the development of Inuit art, on the genesis of contemporary Inuit art, cannot be undervalued. While there was an effort to understand the Inuit through their arts and craft productions, there was also an imposed definition of what qualified to be in that production. The promotion of ‘Eskimo Handicrafts’ included thematic guidelines. These themes were supposedly ‘authentic’ expressions from ‘traditional’ Inuit and Arctic culture, such as animals, Inuit peoples and spirits—the last of which received high praise by Houston and

²⁹ Ingo Hessel, “The World Rediscovered ‘Eskimos’: A New Art is Born,” in *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, ed. Gerald McMaster (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 61.

³⁰ Christine Lalonde, “Colonialism Changes Everything,” 27.

other buyers who were also travelling north in his footsteps.³¹ Moreover, when describing the Northern crafts to Southern audiences, Houston never shied away from using a mythic and exotic image of the North to promote the ‘authentic’ appeal of Inuit arts.³² Kristin Potter presents these narratives as armchair tourism for *qallunaat*.³³ These themes and the theatrical narratives that supported their ‘authenticity’ inserted religion into Inuit art in a fundamental way. It imposed a representation of Inuit identity that focused exclusively on a specific part of their culture without acknowledging the broader social context—shamanism took center stage in the *qallunaat* imagination of Inuit, while Christianity was widely practiced, because of its ‘primitive’ appeal to an audience that romanticized the North.

Houston’s role in the history of contemporary Inuit art has been well documented and analyzed. Nevertheless, the influence he had in promoting shamanic themes and imagery lacks critical analysis. The prominence of *Sedna*, shamans (or *angakoks*) and other religious images, is overwhelming in any Inuit art gallery (see figures 5 and 6). This is interesting given the pre-dominantly Christian atmosphere of Northern Canada in the mid-century.³⁴ It is necessary to highlight Houston’s role, along with other buyers who travelled in his footsteps, in shaping (at least) the thematic tone of Inuit art, in which shamanism as a part of *qallunaat* perception of Inuit primitivism is central. It is through this narrative that shamanic themes were derived and commercialized for aesthetic (and market) value.

³¹ Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art*, 102.

³² Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 262.

³³ Kristin K. Potter, “James Houston, Armchair Tourism, and the Marketing of Inuit Art.”

³⁴ See Jean Blodgett, “Christianity and Inuit Art,” and Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*.

2.1.3. *The Paradox of Religion in the History of Inuit Art*

The religious history of the Inuit is particularly interesting when told within the context of Inuit art. When taken from the perspective of the art itself, it would appear that traditional Inuit shamanism thrives among contemporary Inuit. The sacred stories of the Inuit are among the most common creative pools for Inuit artists. Christianity is not evident in that popular conception. Yet, according to the 2001 Canadian Census, in which the population of Nunavut was recorded to be 26,665 (of which 22,560 are Inuit), 15,440 individuals reported an Anglican faith, 6,205 reported a Roman Catholic faith, and 1,175 reported a Pentecostal faith while only 25 reported Aboriginal spirituality. These statistics speak to the (at least apparent) prominence of Christianity among Inuit today, to the religious identity Inuit present of themselves. Significantly, while little Inuit art remains in the North, among the pieces that do stay are those expressing Christian themes.³⁵ The value in assessing art as a symbol of Inuit identity is made all the more interesting by the reality that there is another version of that symbol in the Inuit art world. The shift from the image presented in Inuit art to that suggested by the 2001 census did not occur after the genesis of contemporary Inuit art in 1949.

In their study of the relationship between Inuit shamanism and Christianity, Laugrand and Oosten remark that there is significant evidence of the decline of Inuit shamanism prior to the arrival of missionaries in the second half of the 19th century.³⁶ Conversely, the Catholic and Anglican missionary efforts in the North are often portrayed as having been quickly embraced by Inuit (ignoring trends in which some Inuit rejected Christianity in its entirety and attempted to re-assert the authority of their traditional

³⁵ Jean Blodgett, "Christianity and Inuit Art," 83-93.

³⁶ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 5.

shamanic beliefs).³⁷ This history is one written by those who colonized the North. The creation of Nunavut in 1999 has asserted the Inuit presence in Arctic Canada and consequently created a more comfortable socio-political space in which Inuit – especially Inuit elders in this case – have been more willing to discuss their perception of history and their religious beliefs.

Most interesting are the efforts to bridge the two religious traditions, and the resulting failure that further encouraged the embrace of Christianity in the North. The bridge or Parousial movements flourished in the first half of the 20th century in north-eastern Canada. These movements occurred largely in areas that were under the influence of Anglican missions, but beyond their direct control.³⁸ The Anglican missionary strategy aimed for the rapid and quantitative spread of information, while the Catholic strategy asserted the authority of the missionary as the conveyor of information (a more qualitative approach in comparison).³⁹ As the Christian bible and certain hymnbooks had been translated into *Inuktituk* syllabics, it was shared among Inuit beyond the reach of Anglican missionaries.⁴⁰ In an article on the subject, Xavier Blaisel along with Laugrand and Oosten present eleven case studies of Parousial movements from across the eastern arctic. The examples highlight that individual Inuit who had gained some knowledge of Christianity through their ability to read syllabics experienced moments of enlightenment or conversion—but Christianity was understood within a shamanic context in which these

³⁷ Charles Choque, *Joseph Buliard, pêcheur d'hommes: de la Franche-Comté au Grand Nord canadien: Joseph Buliard, oblat de Marie Immaculée, missionnaire des Inuit, 1914-1956* (Longueuil, Québec: Le Préambule, 1985), 117-118.

³⁸ Xavier Blaisel, Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, “Shamans and Leaders: Parousial Movements among the Inuit of Northeast Canada,” 402.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 401.

persons would claim to be (or to embody) Jesus Christ or the Christian god.⁴¹ As in traditional Inuit society, their religious authority was dependent on results. Missionaries adamantly opposed the movements when they encountered them. In the end, these movements lost momentum, often stopped by the Inuit themselves:

It appears that the ease with which the last movements were ended had much to do with the fact that the established churches had acquired firm roots in Inuit culture and that a combination of shamanism and Christianity was no longer considered as viable by most Inuit.⁴²

The agency of Inuit and their leaders in this religious history is vital to understanding their religious development.⁴³ The authority of any religious leader in Inuit society was dependent on their ability to reflect the interests of the wider group. As the missionary-led initiatives gained a foothold in that society, the leaders of Parousial movements were forced to confront them and assert the religious authority. As the Parousial movements proved unsuccessful in providing effective results, the viability of the Christian movements gained an ever-stronger foothold.

As demonstrated by the Parousial movements, the Inuit were quite creative in their efforts to understand the sacred texts of Christianity. Catholic missionaries often received requests to establish missions in communities that had already adopted some form of Christianity.⁴⁴ This coincided with the Government of Canada's effort to impose a policy of settling Inuit in permanent communities.⁴⁵ In these new permanent (and increasingly statistically Christian) communities, many policy-makers and academics came to believe that traditional Inuit shamanism belonged to the past. Because of this,

⁴¹ Xavier Blaisel, Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, "Shamans and Leaders: Parousial Movements among the Inuit of Northeast Canada," 405.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 406.

⁴³ Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Oblate missionaries collected recordings of Inuit myths and stories in order to preserve that culture in the early 20th century, which they assumed was quickly and naturally deteriorating.⁴⁶ Laugrand and Oosten note that the ethnographers charged with collecting the supposed remnants of that culture were not alone in their notions of a decline in Inuit culture. Rather, notions of decline appeared in the Inuit cosmology; these suggested a decline in population and religious practice. Nevertheless, the understanding of decline is crucially different for Inuit than it is for *qallunaat*. While that latter understood it as the natural result of contact with a ‘civilized’ society, the former understood it as part of an ideological framework that emphasizes the superiority of the ancestor as ‘true Inuit’ (*inumhariit*).⁴⁷ In this environment, the authority of shamanic traditions was continuously compromised. When confronted with the tactics of Christian missionaries, the ability of shamanic religious leaders to contest the new religion was equally compromised. In fact, there were aspects of Christianity that greatly appealed to some Inuit, such as the lifting of ritual injunctions for women regarding food and game.⁴⁸ The transition from pre-contact Inuit social, cultural and religious traditions were not rejected, nor were they wholly embraced in favour of Christianity. While the latter is (and was in the mid-century) statistically the religion of contemporary Inuit, the religio-cultural cosmology of the Inuit could not feasibly ignore that entire heritage.

The popular conception of Inuit art presents an image of Inuit identity in which shamanism plays a central role. Certainly, a population encountered through colonial

⁴⁶ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 7-8; Jarich Oosten, Frederic Laugrand and Cornelius Remie, “Perceptions of Decline: Inuit Shamanism in the Canadian Arctic,” *Ethnohistory* 53 (2006): 445-473.

⁴⁷ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity* 9-12; Anja Nicole Stuckenberger, *Community at Play: Social and Religious Dynamics in the Modern Inuit Community of Qikiqtarjuak* (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2005), 16.

⁴⁸ Xavier Blaisel, Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, “Shamans and Leaders: Parousial Movements among the Inuit of Northeast Canada,” 405.

venues and subsequently subjected to missionary tactics may not be eager to showcase their traditional cosmology. Shamanism unquestionably endures in contemporary Inuit society, if only through the arts. Art may in fact be the only venue in which to freely express that religious heritage. Some have suggested that it is a mutated faith, opening up the discussion for *lived religion* in the North.⁴⁹ The willingness of Inuit to discuss these expressions of Inuit shamanism and their contemporary meaning nevertheless remains compromised; as Laugrand and Oosten remark: “As modern Inuit they have no more wish to discuss their experiences or perceptions in detail than Christian elders have to discuss the question whether they are *angakkuit* or have been *angakkuit*.”⁵⁰ The dynamic between the two traditions is obviously not so polarized in the contemporary North—drawing a line between the two would be a superficial delineation of the Inuit religious landscape. Nevertheless, whatever the religious dynamic is for contemporary Inuit, the history of Inuit art highlights that non-Inuit were eager to see shamanic themes expressed in that art while the religious history of the Inuit shows that they were a largely Christian people by that time. Whether or not shamanism continued behind closed doors, Christianity was central to the image Inuit put forward of themselves in the mid-century (and continues to be, as shown in the 2001 census). It is essential to underline the paradox of religion in the history of Inuit art as art reflects that image and identity.

2.1.4. Shamanism and Survival in Inuit History

⁴⁹ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*, 12. See also Jennifer Gibson, *Christianity, Syncretism, and Inuit Art in the Central Canadian Arctic* (M.A. Thesis. Ottawa: Carleton University, 1998), for a discussion of the appropriation of Christian narratives into the Inuit frame of visual reference (including shamanism).

⁵⁰ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*, 13.

Inuit shamanism (Inuit *angakkuuniq*)⁵¹ is a religious tradition that speaks to the deeply dependent relationship of Inuit on their natural environment. The shaman (*angakkuq*)⁵² negotiates that relationship in numerous ways, ranging from healing the sick to ensuring a successful hunting/fishing expedition.⁵³ The role of the shaman was centrally important, and to a certain extent exclusive, in Inuit society: “The *angakkuit* [shamans] acquired their special abilities through an initiation. The pattern of initiation varied widely. The main result of the initiation were that a person acquired *qaumaniq*, shamanic vision, and the assistance of *tuurngait*, helping spirits.”⁵⁴ Inuit shamanism was based on the animistic concept that a spirit resided in every being and thing—that is to say animate and inanimate objects were understood to be characters of the Northern social landscape and spiritual reality.⁵⁵ Within this cosmology, deeply ingrained rules of respect dictated the relationship of Inuit towards their environment.⁵⁶ Inuit shamanism thus fit into a wider cultural cosmology that reflected their need for survival in a harsh natural environment. As Marybelle Mitchell-Myers states: “Their lifestyle was geared to survival of the most basic sort: to eat and to be protected from the elements. The main resource was the wild animal...”⁵⁷ As a means of negotiating survival, Inuit shamanism focused on the practices key to survival in the Arctic:

The hunt was also the focus of their religion which consisted of rituals and taboos governing the relationship of man and beast. The wild creatures must be treated with respect; for Inuit did not consider themselves to be masters of nature but rather, lived in a state of constant fear lest they

⁵¹ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, xvii.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁵⁴ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*, 1.

⁵⁵ Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art*, 40.

⁵⁶ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, xvii.

⁵⁷ Marybelle Mitchell-Myers, “Eskimo Art: A Social Reality,” in *Canadian Guild of Crafts Quebec: The Permanent Collection, Inuit Arts and Crafts, c. 1900-1980*, ed. Virginia J. Watt (Montreal: Canadian Guild of Crafts Quebec, 1980), 137.

offend those upon whom they depended for survival.⁵⁸

Consequently, the place of shamanism in Inuit culture and society went part and parcel with the need for survival through sustenance; it was not a distinct and institutionalized religion but rather one integrated in the lived experiences of Inuit and addressed their need for survival.

The arrival of *qallunaat* in the North through trade, colonization and missionary work shifted that social landscape. Following the relocation from hunting camps to permanent communities, the meaning of survival also shifted. The relocation of Inuit in the twentieth century, as understood through a material lens, shifted their material knowledge from the necessities of life to the fringe benefits of a capitalist culture.⁵⁹ The comparatively easy access to food and shelter removed the fundamental need for environmental survival—as negotiated through shamanism—from the Inuit cultural cosmology. Significantly, the relocation of Inuit was tied with the Christian missionary agenda. While the conversion to that new religion in the Arctic is often assumed to have been the successful product of tireless missionary work, Laugrand and Oosten reveal that Inuit met separately from the missionaries to discuss the new religion and the possibility of conversion.⁶⁰ While missionaries arrived gradually in the arctic during the nineteenth century, it was only in 1901 that Edmund James Peck, “the Apostle to the Inuit”, noticed a general change in the attitude of Inuit towards Christianity.⁶¹ As Laugrand and Oosten remark:

Evidently, the Inuit leaders themselves had made a decision in their meetings. The missionaries had not participated in these meetings, and

⁵⁸ Marybelle Mitchell-Myers, “Eskimo Art: A Social Reality,” 137.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁰ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 42.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 37, 41.

Inuit had made their decision on their own terms. Inuit women and some of the men were allowed to adopt Christianity...⁶²

Thus, the transition to Christianity was not the singular accomplishment of determined missionary work, but also depended on the agency of Inuit themselves and their leaders (which would include shamans). While obvious efforts to integrate shamanism and Christianity, such as the Parousial movements of the first half of the twentieth century, were unsuccessful, Inuit nevertheless adapted the new religion to their old traditions. Interestingly, Inuit understood missionaries within the framework that was familiar to them. Missionaries thus took the role of shaman in the Inuit imagination, and did so knowingly to facilitate conversion.⁶³ Laugrand and Oosten recount examples of this:

[...] some missionaries began to exploit their reputation as *angakkuit*. Father Ducharme [...] tried to impress an *angakkuq* by using magnesium as a flashlight and this prove that his tricks were superior to those of the *angakkuit*. Father Rio outran an *angakkuq* in a running contest to show that the amulets of the *angakkuq* did not avail against him.⁶⁴

The missionaries came to understand that religious authority among Inuit was asserted. Consequently, they were able to impress Inuit with technological differences and slights of hand. This tactic was grounded in a fear of the unknown—especially, in terms of which unfamiliar spirits the missionaries addressed (a method of conversion very much dependent on the shamanic cosmology).

It would be rash to claim the total loss of Inuit shamanism in the face of Christianity. As Laugrand and Oosten state: “When Christianity arrived, shamanism went underground, but even today shamanism plays an important part in Inuit discourses.”⁶⁵ Art is a case in point. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand how the place and role of

⁶² Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 42.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁵ Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*, 1.

Inuit shamanism has shifted. One of the most prominent figures of the shamanic cosmology is the sea-woman *Sedna*, who endures accordingly in the Inuit arts.

Understanding how her role has shifted hints to the place of shamanism more generally:

In representations of the sea woman, shamanic accounts no longer have the same importance as in the past. Shamans no longer come forward to give accounts of their trips to the sea woman and describing her appearance, her house, and its inhabitants. The knowledge of the sea woman has changed accordingly.⁶⁶

The image of *Sedna* is certainly not lost, being a very popular theme in the arts, but the context in which that image and story is understood has shifted as a result of colonization and conversion to Christianity. The same authors (Laugrand and Oosten) highlight the easy transition for Inuit from the Winter Feasts (notably the *Sedna* feast) to the celebration of the Christian Christmas.⁶⁷ As is the case in many successful narratives of Christian missionary work in the last two millennia, the new religion was understood within a social framework and cultural cosmology that locals recognized and understood.

Inuit shamanism was grounded in its role of negotiating the dependent relationship of Inuit to their environment. Their traditional religion recognized the dependence of Inuit on nature for survival, both in terms of climate and animal populations. As the need for survival shifted, so did the place of Inuit shamanism.

Survival is a concept that can be distinguished throughout the history of the Inuit—first in terms of environmental survival, but then in terms of economic survival and cultural survival. In this sense, shamanism is crucial to the survival of the Inuit. While shamanism once negotiated the survival of Inuit people, ensuring good climate and hunts, it now offers Inuit a means of economic independence in a wage based economy

⁶⁶ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*, 133.

⁶⁷ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 69-100.

and of cultural survival by preserving the sacred stories of their oral culture in the new visual culture of Inuit art. Laugrand and Oosten speak to the enduring value of art to Inuit heritage:

Today, representations of shamanic scenes, helping spirits, dancing bears, etc. are still greatly appreciated in the North. The topic of shamanism is now recognized as an important part of the Inuit tradition and *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*, i.e., Inuit traditional knowledge. Art became an important medium for the expression of Inuit traditions (see Auger 2005: 158-186.) To some extent, *Inuit art has changed from an innovation introduced by outsiders into a medium for the preservation of the Inuit cultural heritage.*⁶⁸ (Emphasis added)

The enduring place of shamanism among the Inuit has arguably provided for their survival in terms of sustenance, economy and culture—even when it went “underground.”⁶⁹ Despite the statistic prominence of Christianity among Inuit, their shamanic heritage continues to hold currency in their contemporary society. It is a uniquely important feature of Inuit identity that is continuously adapting to their changing environment.

2.1.5. *Old and New Religions in a Changing Socio-Political Landscape*

The religious history of Inuit balances between Christianity and shamanism. Yet, that religious history does not occur in a vacuum. The socio-political landscape of the contemporary North offers a fascinating lens through which to understand that history. In the last quarter-century, the Inuit have arguably been able to assert self-government under the direction of the Canadian state. This reached its climax with the creation of Nunavut. While this falls short of the ideal of self-determination for Indigenous peoples, it has offered the Inuit the flexibility to increasingly assert their identity in an ever-increasing

⁶⁸ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*, 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

fashion.⁷⁰ In terms of religion, this political authority has run parallel to a rise in Pentecostalism and evangelicalism. As Inuit increasingly assert their identity, this religious shift raises interesting questions about the ability of various forms of Christianity in reflecting that identity as well as in regards to the shifting place of traditional Inuit shamanism.

Christian colonization inevitably polarizes, to a certain extent, the cosmology of a traditional religious practice with that of Christianity. Yet, the success of Christian missionary work is often attributed to its ability to translate the old into the new—such is the paradox of Christian conversion. Nevertheless, Christianity was framed in the North as the right religion of the colonial authority:

They assume that shamanism in the Canadian Arctic disappeared completely after the conversion to Christianity. It is true that Moravian, Anglican, and Catholic missionaries all were intent on eradicating shamanism completely. *Angakkuit* (shamans) were associated with the forces of evil, the devil, and witchcraft. They were viewed as frauds, misleading people with tricks in order to take advantage of them. Conversion to Christianity and civilization was certain to free Inuit of their superstitions.⁷¹

Shamanism was not visible in the public Inuit landscape prior to the genesis of contemporary Inuit art. Yet, as the power dynamics changed in the North, so did the religious ones.

Laugrand and Oosten identify two periods in the history of Pentecostal and evangelical movements in the North.⁷² The first is between the 1950s and early 1990s, when such movements began to establish themselves in the North but had little impact. The second period began in the early 1990s, and continues today, marked by a significant

⁷⁰ Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, *Finding Dahshaa*, 7-10.

⁷¹ Jarich Oosten, Frederic Laugrand and Cornelius Remie, “Perceptions of Decline: Inuit Shamanism in the Canadian Arctic,” in *Ethnohistory* 53 (2006): 447.

⁷² Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 346.

increase in followers. Laugrand and Oosten offer two leading reasons for this shift in religious membership. The first is the extensive development of Pentecostalism at the international level. The second is the shifting socio-political context of Inuit society in the early 1990s, when the 1993 signing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and the subsequent creation of Nunavut in 1999 translated into the “inuitization” of Western institutions in the North.⁷³

The concept of ‘inuitization’ is central to understanding the prominence of Pentecostal and evangelical forms of Christianity in the North. Catholic and Anglican Churches, which first introduced Christianity to the North, previously dominated exclusively the Christian North. The decline in membership of those Churches is not isolated to the North. Yet, it has been suggested that these Churches endured as non-Inuit institutions. Attempts at their “inuitization” were insufficient. Evangelical and Pentecostal movements, notably lacking centralized authorities, provided Inuit with a venue through which to express their Christian religion in a more Inuit fashion.⁷⁴ The concept of *inumariit* (‘the real Inuit’) speaks to the ideals of Inuit life and behaviour and is often used in reference to the pre-contact period. It is through this concept that notions of decline in shamanic practices (when faced with conversion in the 19th century) are explained. Yet, Anja Nicole Stuckenberg highlights that Inuit identity, *inuit inunnirarnirijangat* (‘what is considered as being said by the Inuit themselves concerning the fact of being Inuit’),⁷⁵ is not static. She further explains that acting in an ‘Inuit way’ is what defines an Inuk. Thus, it is not what a person does but rather how they

⁷³ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 346.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 346-347.

⁷⁵ Anja Nicole Stuckenberg, *Community at Play*, 16.

do it that makes them Inuit.⁷⁶ It is through this line of thinking that an assertion of Inuit religious identity in the North through growing evangelical and Pentecostal movements can be understood as part of the *inumariit* context.

Interestingly, when faced with declining membership, Anglican congregations began to adapt their beliefs and practices to Pentecostalism. As a result, the antagonism between the two forms of Christianity is disappearing (though a difference in church membership continues to hold social meaning).⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the growing prominence of Pentecostalism and evangelicalism in the contemporary North is not to be underestimated. Not only are there radio and television programs that speak to this religious movement, but their presence in the political arena is also growing.⁷⁸ Laugrand and Oosten relate this to the need for ‘inuitization:’ “Pentecostal and evangelical movements promote Christianity and Christian rules but at the same time put forward Inuit models that fit well within the Nunavut agenda.”⁷⁹ The value placed on healing in Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, particularly when with the debilitating social problems plaguing the North, is uniquely attractive.⁸⁰

The value of Pentecostal and evangelical movements in the North would seem to lie in their ability to reflect the *Inuit*. With that in mind, it is interesting to note that these Christian movements that strongly promote modernity in the North also easily integrate ecstatic experiences, visions, speaking in tongues, faith healing, and exorcisms into their public practise. Shamanism, as the historical religious tradition in the North, shares many

⁷⁶ Anja Nicole Stuckenberg, *Community at Play*, 210.

⁷⁷ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 347; Anja Nicole Stuckenberg, *Community at Play*, 209-210.

⁷⁸ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 348.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 369.

of these values. Laugrand and Oosten comment on the relationship on these new Christian movements in the North to the religious heritage of Inuit:

On the one hand, these movements claims to break with past views in order to promote modernity, formal education, and political initiatives, all the while taking from the shamanic traditions whatever is needed, and on the other hand, they must deal with the victims of the same modern system, which brought alcohol and other social problems to the North. One cannot attribute the success of these movements over the last fifty years to disorganization and deprivation in Inuit communities in the same period. Cultural dimensions have to be taken into account, for it is clear that these movements have integrated important Inuit traditions into a new Christian framework.⁸¹

They go on to expose primary research with Inuit elders who perceive shamanism in the features of Pentecostalism and evangelicalism that attract younger and middle-aged people to those faiths. Within that comparison, the interviewed elders challenged the efficacy of the new religious leaders when paralleled against the shamans of their youth.⁸² Interestingly, a significant difference between the two religious paths pertains to the role of elders. Whereas they were valued community members within the shamanic context, Pentecostalism promotes egalitarianism between its members.⁸³ There are certainly significant differences between shamanic traditions and Pentecostal or evangelical ones, but there are also significant similarities. The new religious traditions are arguably flourishing because of their ability to reflect the religious, cultural, social and political identity of its Inuit members—and, to a certain extent, that identity includes their shamanic heritage.

2.1.6. Distinguishing Shamanism in Contemporary Inuit Culture and Identity

⁸¹ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 349.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 350-351.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 371.

Contemporary Inuit identity has once again shifted the place of shamanism. It endures as part of the cultural and religious discourse of the Inuit even though its centrality as an artistic theme is compromised. It has previously been suggested that the prevalence of shamanic themes in art signalled the mutation of that religious practice—a shift from an orally based religious culture to a visual one.⁸⁴ That is to say that the genesis of contemporary Inuit art, through which the primitive (and shamanic) aspects of Inuit identity were emphasized and commercialized for market value, created a platform through which Inuit could express shamanic beliefs; a faith that was once shared through storytelling was then arguably shared through visual cues. Yet, as Inuit assert their socio-political authority, the possibility for a more-open religious dialogue becomes conceivable. Where shamanism was once the exclusive religion of the Inuit, prior to colonization, it was revived in public dialogue through the genesis of contemporary Inuit art and is again adapting to the changing landscape. Shamanic imagery arguably endures in the arts because of its social currency and it is perceived in a Christian religious context that is asserting ‘Inuitness.’ The place of shamanism in Inuit society, culture and identity is not institutionalized or static, but it continues to be distinguishable in the contemporary landscape and holds a certain currency.

Similar to the early anthropologists, explorers and missionaries who perceived a decline in shamanic practices in the nineteenth century and subsequently assumed the end of that tradition among the Inuit, the contemporary decline (or rejection by some) of shamanic themes in Inuit art need not signal the end of that religio-cultural tradition. Identity, and the religious and cultural features that make up identity, are not static. It is

⁸⁴ See Emily E. Auger, *The Way of Inuit Art*, 158-186; Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction*, 37-72; Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*, 11, 134.

vital to account for the depth of meaning of such traditions and the flexibility of religion and culture. The tendency for strict religious and cultural categories distracts from the flexibility of people's lives. The contemporary Northern landscape is not disconnected from its history. McMaster highlights that "The transition to modernity is an ongoing process, and both traditional and modern ways coexist in the North."⁸⁵ The perceptions of contemporary Inuit identity need to account for the flexibility of lived experiences. Shamanism is, after all, present in the contemporary North through the arts and arguably visible in the growing Pentecostal and evangelical movements. Gauging the place shamanism among contemporary Inuit need be considered from both religious and cultural angles.

In terms of religion, Inuit shamanism is best understood through the lens of *lived religion*.⁸⁶ That is to say, religion need be understood as the subjective experience of practitioners who personalize their religion in their daily life apart from any institutional or academic definitions. Essentializing religious expressions to the institutional tradition as the authentic image of that practice does not do justice to the social experience. The religious tensions in the aesthetics of Inuit art are a case in point. While Inuit may practise Christianity, or may have gone to church every Sunday (as many Canadian did in the 1950s), their personal experience—negotiating traditional knowledge and pastoral lectures, faith and socio-economic needs—permitted the emergence of a unique balance between shamanistic imagery and Christian institutionalization. As Inuit asserted their political autonomy in the 1990s through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA), they increasingly asserted their Inuit identity in other forums—including the religious. As

⁸⁵ Gerald McMaster, "Inuit Modern: An Introduction," 5.

⁸⁶ See: Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion*, and Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*.

a result, and as pointed out by Oosten and Laugrand, there has been a rise in Inuit Pentecostalism and evangelicalism because it is a form of Christianity in which Inuit have been able to hold a greater voice—and one that speaks to their (shamanic) heritage. This appropriation of the Christian religion in Inuit terms is a case in point for *lived religion*.

With such flexibility in religious practice, some may be tempted to shift the notion of Inuit shamanism to the sphere of culture. Certainly, that argument can be made but it ignores the specific religious meaning of that tradition among (at least some) Inuit. Yet, on the increasingly crowded platform from which minority groups such as the Inuit must assert their identity in order to preserve it, “*Culture* has become a ubiquitous synonym for *identity*, an identity marker and differentiator.”⁸⁷ Culture is the venue through which minority groups can express and assert themselves.⁸⁸ In terms of culture, shamanism has a currency that is not exclusively in the realm of the religious. It has meaning for Inuit identity beyond their religious practise, and can thus be understood within the socio-cultural paradigm. Arguably, it is because of this cultural currency that shamanic imagery is so poignant in social realist Inuit art; the use of such imagery conveys a multi-layered message to art audiences about Inuit heritage, identity and opinion on the contemporary experiences of their community and land.

Much as Inuit shamanism cannot be understood as static within the paradigm of the religious, so must it be flexible in the area of cultural theory. Seyla Benhabib argues against the idea of ‘preserving’ culture and favours a framework that offers minorities

⁸⁷ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1.

⁸⁸ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity: A Normative Guide to the Political and Legal Assessment of Identity Claims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

maximum cultural contestation and recognizes the ongoing negotiations between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Benhabib’s *deliberative democratic model* permits *qallunaat* to understand the complex relationship between Inuit shamanism and Inuit Christianity and their place as part of *inummariit* (‘the real Inuit’). Despite changing religious demographics in the North and changing religio-artistic expressions from the Inuit, shamanism continues to hold relevance and currency in the contemporary sphere. While the diversity of sacred stories and imagery born of those narratives may change, may even be more restricted because of the platform through which they are discussed (from oral to visual culture), the relevance of shamanism to contemporary Inuit identity is significant.

2.2. Defining Authenticity

The struggle to assert the authenticity of contemporary Inuit art has plagued that industry since its genesis in 1949. The popularity of Inuit art was followed by a rise in cheaper forgeries that flooded the market. These works threatened the ability of Inuit to participate in the capitalist market place. While mass-produced forged tourist trinkets are rarely sold for over \$30.00, they are part of a multi-million dollar industry—one that often deceives buyers into thinking they are investing in certified Inuit art when in fact they are not.⁸⁹ The struggle for authenticity in Inuit art, as a symbol of both Inuit and Canadian identities, continued and continues. Through these efforts, the place of Inuit art as a symbol of identity has been made clear. The continuing efforts to define authenticity in Inuit art are symptoms of an interest in perpetuating an image of Inuit art that not only

⁸⁹ Marc Denhez, *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art: Some Legislative Options in the Light of International Developments* (Ottawa: Unpublished report prepared by Marc Denhez, B.C.L. for Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, 1983), 3.

serves market interests in the North but also asserts an image of Inuit (and Canadian) identity.

2.2.1. *Assertions of Authenticity in Inuit Art History*

The earliest assertions of authenticity in Inuit art came in the writings of early Inuit art promoters, notably James Houston. When discussing the Northern crafts to Southern audiences, Houston emphasized the “cultural ambience” of his experiences to promote the ‘authentic’ appeal of Inuit arts.⁹⁰ Vorano recounts:

Houston’s first article was ‘Eskimo Sculptors,’ published in *The Beaver* in June 1951. The article was a first-person account of Houston’s experiences working amongst the Inuit; it was rich in quotidian details, and it provided the type of cultural ambience that was sorely lacking in previous efforts to market Inuit art. Houston accomplished in his writings [...] a multi-layered account of the art that situated it firmly in traditional life while showing how it responded openly to the changes of modernity.⁹¹

Houston did not ignore the responses to ‘modernity’ or Canadian culture among the Inuit he encountered, as had ethnographers in the previous century, but he focused on their ‘traditional life’ and active engagement with their heritage to sell their art to non-Inuit. This portrayal of Inuit culture and identity perpetuated the traditional or primitive lens through which the Inuit were viewed by the rest of Canada. Vorano frames Houston and others in the Inuit art world as *cultural brokers*, asserting that “... an object does not slide from one category to another by itself; it is put there by a person or a network of people [...] who continually manage the discourses about objects and, very often, re-shape objects themselves to better ‘fit’ into existing categories.”⁹² In this role, Houston balanced the impression of Inuit as both the exotic other as well as members of the

⁹⁰ Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 382.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 41-42.

Canadian nation. Inuit were thus fundamentally of the Canadian experience but also fundamentally different than their southern neighbours (and art buyers). It is through this crafted image that Houston, among other promoters, was able to set the tone in which Inuit art would establish itself as both an authentic symbol of Inuit identity as well as one of Canadian identity.

Houston's first article in 1951 was on the eve of his career at Northern Affairs. The majority of his writings were authored from his chair as a public servant. Nevertheless, Vorano qualifies the relationship between Houston and the Government:

Whereas Houston, writing under the aegis of Northern Affairs, appealed to the lure of the faraway arctic to establish the authenticity and exoticism of Inuit art—and that is to say, to maintain the perceived distance between client and patron—External Affairs wanted to sublimate the arctic, making it seem manageable, governable.⁹³

Despite the apparent contradiction between Houston's promotional strategies and External Affairs' mandate to govern the North, the drive to assert the authenticity of Inuit art was a shared agenda. In 1959, the Government implemented a program that sought to officially assert the authenticity of Inuit art: the Igloo Tag (see image 2 in appendix).

The Igloo Tag, an internationally recognized symbol of authenticity for Inuit art, was developed by Northern Affairs to counter a rise in forgeries of Inuit Art. Specifically: “The [forged] works in question are usually mass-produced for commercial profit. They usually carry tags with ambiguous language alluding to ‘inspiration’ by Inuit or by the North.”⁹⁴ Most simply, the ‘fakes’ are items not produced by Inuit but are sold to consumers under the auspices that they are. These items are sold at a lower price and compromise the value of Inuit art for Inuit as a means of economic development. It is

⁹³ Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 382.

⁹⁴ Marc Denhez, *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art*, 3.

worth noting the different perspective on authenticity in this context. Unlike Houston, who promoted an authentic image of the Inuit and their arts as a cultural tradition, Northern Development sought to protect the investment of consumers. The Igloo Tag is a legal trademark that asserts the authenticity of a product as an Inuit handmade craft created in Canada. Marc Denhez’s report “The Igloo Tag, What It Represents, and Where it May Go,” prepared for the Inuit Art Section of the Government in 1994, outlines that the concept of authenticity promoted through the Igloo Tag speaks to two interests: the *mode of production* and their *folkloric inspiration*.⁹⁵ Despite the discourse of consumer protection surrounding the Igloo Tag, this secondary interest in folkloric inspiration leads into the uncertain territory of intangible culture.

Not all Inuit-made artistic creations receive the Igloo Tag—even within the traditional sculpture medium. Guy Brett offers a poignant example of the early application of this concept of investment authenticity and its intimate ties to the conceptualization of a primitive Inuit identity while discussing the ‘myth of primitivism’ in the arts. Speaking on early contemporary Inuit art, Brett remarks that: “...everything produced had to meet a definite requirement which was somehow neither traditional nor modern, but ‘primitive’. A government-employed art-and-crafts specialist edited out any unsuitable carvings.”⁹⁶ Brett goes on to showcase a notable example of a sculpture deemed ‘unsuitable,’ a 1963 soapstone sculpture of Elvis Presley that was rescued from the sledge-hammer by a public servant who thought it reflected the Northern community

⁹⁵ Marc Denhez, *The Igloo Tag, What It Represents, and Where it May Go* (Ottawa: Unpublished report prepared by Marc Denhez B.C.L. for Inuit Art Section, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, ATIP Request 2011 – 00103, 1994), 36.

⁹⁶ Guy Brett, “Unofficial Versions,” in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 122.

of Sugluk with which he was familiar.⁹⁷ Despite the exception, the controlled market of Inuit art became recognized for the primitive quality of that art. While the Igloo Tag was intended to ensure that consumers purchased Inuit handmade creations, it also fostered an agenda that ensured the continued production of ‘primitive’ themed art; Inuit were meant to be interested in such figures as *Sedna*, not Elvis Presley. While the government took “... no steps to protect the Inuit style from imitators”⁹⁸ (underline in original), it did contribute to shaping the ‘primitive’ style of Inuit art itself. Nevertheless, the Igloo Tag proved an insufficient response to the problem of fake Inuit art. Despite Government promotion of the Igloo Tag among both among consumers and producers of Inuit art, it failed to fully resolve the problem at hand.⁹⁹

The shortcoming of the Igloo Tag has led to discussions regarding the need for regulation; ministers in Canada have supposedly been open to this policy as far back as 1973.¹⁰⁰ The discussion among expert observers and Inuit themselves gained ground in the 1980s in light of demands being made on countries by the international community through the United Nations’ World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to amend copyright legislation to protect the producers of ‘folklore’ (in this case, Inuit artists) against the producers of ‘fakelore’ (in this case *qallunaat* tourist products sold under the auspices of Inuit authenticity).¹⁰¹ This demand for legislative amendments obviously runs counter to the multi-million dollar industry of tourist arts produced to resemble Inuit-made arts. The debate on an appropriate response has thus continued, but any effort made is challenged with the rights to market competition that exist in any capitalist society,

⁹⁷ Guy Brett, “Unofficial Versions,” in *The Myth of Primitivism*, 122.

⁹⁸ Marc Denhez, *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art*, 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰¹ See Marc Denhez, *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art*.

such as Canada. The Government had two options in responding to the rise of forgeries that first flooded the Inuit art market in the 1950s: to either label the authentic pieces or label the inauthentic. They chose the former path as it presented a sounder legal option. It was not until 1991 that Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada (CCAC, now part of Industry Canada) published the “Misleading Advertising Bulletin,” setting rules on paper that producers should not misrepresent the *place of origin* or the *ethnic origins* of an art piece or its artist.¹⁰² Unfortunately, there is limited ability to enforce these rules.

Despite the limits of the Igloo Tag in differentiating Inuit art from its imitations in a hectic market place, that symbol endures as the principal marker for Inuit art in a market that is still plagued with forgeries. In a 2005 proposal prepared by Marc Denhez (on behalf of SynParSys Consulting Inc.) for AANDC, “A New Future for Consumer Protection in Inuit Art,” the author affirms the support given for the Igloo Tag by producers, wholesalers and respectable retailers of Inuit art. He goes so far as to state that the Igloo Tag has “political prestige” for Canada among such organizations as UNESCO and WIPO.¹⁰³ Interestingly, the above proposal is to transfer the administration of the Igloo Tag to a new organization, other than the Inuit Art Section of AANDC. The following best represents the value of the Igloo Tag in Canadian markets and political arenas: “Inuit arts and crafts are an icon – a symbol equated with Canada itself. The Igloo Tag is their mark of authenticity. The Igloo Tag therefore has connotations which are intertwined with Canada’s image internationally.”¹⁰⁴ The Igloo Tag thus relates to questions of ‘national pride’ and ‘Canadian self-image.’ Yet, the driving concern through

¹⁰² Marc Denhez, *The Igloo Tag, What It Represents, and Where it May Go*, 23.

¹⁰³ Marc Denhez, *A New Future for Consumer Protection in Inuit Art* (Ottawa: Unpublished report prepared by SynParSys Consulting Inc. for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, ATIP Request 2011 – 00103, 2005), 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

all these reports is that of the Government's liability in assuring the authenticity of something it is not able to administer. The two major problems outlined in the 1994 and 1995 reports is that it cannot keep track of *eligibility* and that there is a lack of supervision in *distribution*. Admittedly, this is a theoretical problem as no petition has ever been brought against the Government for misuse; the Igloo Tag, as a legal trademark, is still in good standing as a result of the success of the 'honour system' on which it is grounded. The effort to pass off the administrative duties of the Igloo Tag is part of a larger effort to phase out all 'cultural programs' at AANDC (at least in 2005; the Igloo Tag is still administered by the Inuit Arts Section of AANDC).¹⁰⁵ The widespread recognition of the Igloo Tag by the Inuit art market and industry has made it an indispensable feature of that industry and must thus be maintained by one institution or another.

What emerges from this back and forth in policy recommendations is that Inuit art is a recognized part of the canon of Canadian identity and the Government is influential in guaranteeing its value in that canon.

2.2.2. *Preserving Identity Through Authenticity*

The ongoing effort to assert the authenticity of contemporary Inuit art underlines the value of that art as a symbol of Inuit and especially Canadian identity. Inuit art is internationally recognized as an Inuit production and is also associated with the country in which Inuit reside: Canada. The value of Inuit art as a symbol of Canadian identity was recognized in the early days of contemporary Inuit art. The first international exhibit lasted seven years and travelled through both Western and Eastern Europe, between 1956

¹⁰⁵ Marc Denhez, *A New Future for Consumer Protection in Inuit Art*, 9.

and 1962.¹⁰⁶ It was a Government-sponsored initiative that served to assert a Canadian ‘national culture’ in the post-war period. The value of Inuit art to the canon of Canadian identity persists today, with exhibits travelling around the world to represent the multi-million dollar creative industry.¹⁰⁷

While the drive to assert the authenticity of contemporary Inuit art as both a symbol of Inuit and Canadian identity is laced throughout the history of that art, it is worth questioning the identity being protected in light of increasing innovations being made within the Inuit art world. The identity protected through the assertion of authenticity has historically been one in which shamanism has held a significant role despite the prominence of Christianity among Inuit and *qallunaat*-Canadian alike. The value of this imagery endures in the eyes of its audiences. Even though Inuit art is not simply arctic animals and scenes from the part, its audiences sometimes dismiss it as inauthentic if it incorporates noticeable signs of modernity.¹⁰⁸ Why is that? Inuit identity, culture and society develop like any other identity, culture and society. The recognized form of contemporary Inuit art, the form that is associated with Canada, is that which was founded on primitive (including shamanic) themes. The perception of Canadian and Inuit identity taken from the arts is thus frozen in that expression of Inuit identity and creativity. Asserting the authenticity of Inuit art serves to preserve a particular recognized representation of Canadian identity among non-Inuit. By asserting the authenticity of a

¹⁰⁶ Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 350-501.

¹⁰⁷ The first exhibit of Inuit art in India was recently shown at the National Museum in New Delhi, showcasing pieces from the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada. The exhibit, *Sanaugavut: Inuit Art from the Canadian Arctic*, was shown from September 27, 2010 to January 2, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ July Papatsie, “Challenging the Public’s Expectation of Inuit Art,” in *Transitions: Contemporary Canadian Indian and Inuit Art*, edited by Barry Ace and July Papatsie (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997), 4-8.

specific expression of Inuit art, Canada preserves a particular, well recognized, and well-received version of its cultural identity on the international stage.

2.3. Authentic Inuit Art, Authentic Inuit Identity?

The history of Inuit art, when considered from the perspective of its religious development, raises issues with the presentation of Inuit identity therein. In her book *Reasons of Identity*, Avigail Eisenberg challenges the public assessment of identity claims that raise concerns about the incommensurability and authenticity of such claims as well as the perceived risks of essentializing and domesticating the identities of claimants.¹⁰⁹ These concerns focus on the risk that minorities that make identity claims to an authority that is alien to their heritage will end up presenting a simplified version of themselves that might rest on the assumptions and presumptions of that authority in order to secure whatever interim right or benefit they seek. While Inuit art is not an identity claim in the courts or legislature per se, it is the principle venue through which Inuit identity is presented to non-Inuit. As a result, the history of contemporary Canadian Inuit art offers a rich field in which to discuss the possible risks of authenticity and essentialization.

The question of authenticity runs through the history of contemporary Inuit art, most visibly in the effort made by the Government of Canada to protect that art in creating the ‘Authentic Inuit Art’ brand through the Igloo Tag. Eisenberg describes it as such: “The challenge of authenticity presses the concern that it is impossible to distinguish reliably between claims that are genuine or ‘authentic’ for the people who make them and those which are made fraudulently in order to garner particular

¹⁰⁹ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*.

entitlements.”¹¹⁰ In the case of contemporary Inuit art, there is an enduring criticism that the aesthetic production that is now categorized as Inuit art has been created solely for non-Inuit markets and perpetuates thematic categories that are demanded by that market rather than those representing the diversity of contemporary Inuit identity. The use of shamanic themes in Inuit art is a case in point, highlighting the concern “...that minorities ‘perform’ their identity in order to fit into the majority’s distorted and essentialist conception of the minority’s culture.”¹¹¹ When Houston promoted specific themes and aesthetic standards in Inuit art, it served to reinforce the perception of Inuit as “...a happy, stoic, peaceful race, barely emerged from the Stone Age [and] threatened by modern civilization.”¹¹²

The expectation of a primitive people “...fixed in a generic white Arctic space and frozen in time”¹¹³ was formed in the Canadian imagination from early representations of the Inuit that ignored the impact of colonialism and Christianity.¹¹⁴ The ethnographic works of such authors as Franz Boas and Knud Rasmussen, who attempted to record Inuit culture in order to ‘save’ it, would deliberately omit references to innovations in Northern communities—rather, choosing to focus on their understanding and interpretation of ‘authentic’ Inuit culture.¹¹⁵ More vivid in the Canadian imagination is the staged presentation of “primitive eskimos” in Robert J. Flaherty’s 1922 silent ‘documentary’

¹¹⁰ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 92.

¹¹¹ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 95, referring to the work of Elizabeth Povinelli on Australian multiculturalism and indigenous citizenship (1998).

¹¹² Ingo Hessel, “The World Rediscovered ‘Eskimos’: A New Art is Born,” 62.

¹¹³ Alan Rudolph Marcus, “Reflecting on Contested Images,” in *Imaging the Arctic*, ed. J.C.H. King and Henrietta Lidchi (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 192.

¹¹⁴ See Norman Vorano, “Chapter 1: Representing the Inuit in the *Qallunaat* Imagination,” in *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 55-173, for deeper discussion of the way in which visual culture has shaped the popular understanding of “the Eskimo.”

¹¹⁵ Frederich Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, 5-6.

Nanook of the North.¹¹⁶ Flaherty's infamous presentation of the Inuit, along with other early twentieth-century media presentations,¹¹⁷ has been deconstructed in recent years but nevertheless promoted an image of an Inuit people untouched by modernity that re-enforced the primitive stereotype in the mid-twentieth century (see figures 7 and 8). It is the images fabricated by these early accounts that informed the interactions in which Inuit art, as now recognized, experienced its genesis. The long-established primitive stereotype applied to the Inuit by *qallunaat* impacted the demand for art meant to represent that culture, both in terms of themes and materials used.

The stereotype of primitivism has translated, in part, into a strong demand for shamanism in Inuit art. This can be seen in the numerous representations of *Sedna*, of shamans, and of human/animal transformations among others. Certainly, these themes, myths and narratives were not created by *qallunaat*, but they were encouraged. Hessel speculates that:

Even if Inuit artists had not been encouraged to do so, they would have chosen subject matter that was familiar to them; and so the great classic themes of Inuit art established themselves in the 1950s: Arctic animals, hunting, camp life, mother and child, mythology, shamanism and the spirit world, the human figure.¹¹⁸

Whether or not this is true, the history of Inuit art reveals an agenda promoted by non-Inuit invested in seeing the production of shamanic themes.

The question of essentialization is one that, like that of authenticity, resonates in Inuit art. The themes whose authenticity were so officially asserted hint to the essentialist

¹¹⁶ Ingo Hessel, "The World Rediscovers 'Eskimos': A New Art is Born," 62; Norman Vorano, *Inuit Art in the Qallunaat World*, 142-144.

¹¹⁷ Consider also the 2 April 1956 cover of *Life* magazine in which an idealized Inuit family is pictured on the cover under the title "Stone Age Survivors: Eskimo Family," suggesting that this family lives as they would have during the Stone Age, completely untouched by modernity (see figure 16).

¹¹⁸ Ingo Hessel, "We are Inuit': Art and Identity," 75.

definition of Inuit identity held by *qallunaat* in the mid-century. Essentialization refers to the fear that to interpret rights in terms of what is important “...has the effect of arbitrarily ‘freezing’ an aspect of that identity by elevating particular historical practices as core to the community and, at the same time, ignoring other features of the community.”¹¹⁹ Again, the prominence of shamanic themes in Inuit art is a case in point. Despite an apparent conversion to Christianity, Inuit were encouraged to reproduce what *qallunaat* saw as quintessential to an authentic Inuit identity. This, from the very genesis of contemporary Inuit art, froze Inuit identity in an idyllic pre-contact past.

Inuit art is the principle venue through which non-Inuit encounter Inuit identity. The history of that art raises two problems in that representation: namely those of authenticity and essentialization. These problems are rooted in the encouragement by *qallunaat*, especially Canadian authorities, to see the representation of shamanic themes in Inuit art (as part of a larger demand for primitivism). Yet, while Inuit art is a vehicle for Inuit identity, it is also a vehicle for Canadian identity on the international stage. Considering the problematic history of that art, the use of Inuit art as a symbol of Canadian identity raises key questions of the role of First Nations in Canada. Namely, in the wake of colonization, forced relocation and missionary work, why is primitive and shamanic imagery emblematic of a deeply Christian Canada (where even Inuit are Christian)? How is the prominence of Inuit art in the canon of Canadian identity reconciled with the problematic role of Canada’s First Nations? Are Inuit only prominent on the Canadian stage when an international audience is watching, as is the case with Inuit art? The place of Inuit in the canon of Canadian identity is grounded in their idealized place in the Canadian imagination; since Inuit are so removed from the rest of

¹¹⁹ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 120.

Canada, most Canadians rarely have the opportunity to interact with an Inuk. Consequently and historically, Inuit become a powerful discursive resource for *qallunaat* as few Inuit could contest their depiction in person. In this regard, Inuit *can* represent what *qallunaat* want from their First Nations people (depicting them in an idealized primitive fashion is handy way to avoid thinking about the horrors of colonization and Christian conversion while also maintaining their romanticized ‘otherness’). Playing into that idealization in the arts may have prevented Inuit from asserting their place in the Canadian socio-political realm, but as they eventually did so through the NLCA they were able to re-imagine their role as discursive resource in Canada and assert their own identity dynamically with the rest of Canada.

As non-Inuit invested in the development of a contemporary Inuit art that would appeal in the art market, a specific image of that art was created. That art was one that was meant to represent the Inuit experience in Canada. The standard of primitivism in Inuit art was thus established. Guy Brett remarks that “... the ‘myth of primitivism’ in modern art is connected with the whole issue of imperialism. It is part of a Europe-centred ideology which looks out over the world and sees, not other autonomous peoples, but societies occupying levels in a hierarchy with Europe at the top.”¹²⁰ With that in mind, the imperial condescension of the 1941 Guild document, *Suggestions for Eskimo Handicraft*, in which the authors state that they “...should encourage them to use their own materials and methods rather than imitate ours. We have the responsibility of not letting them forget their own arts”¹²¹ (underline in original) becomes clear. Ten years later, in a booklet published in response to a request made by the Government to establish

¹²⁰ Guy Brett, “Unofficial Versions,” in *The Myth of Primitivism*, 114.

¹²¹ “Suggestions for Eskimo Handicrafts” (Canadian Guild of Crafts Archives, C10. D1. 017 1941).

guidelines for Inuit art, Houston similarly states:

The Eskimo should be encouraged to use only the materials native to his land, such as ivory, stone, bone, skins, grass, copper, etc. The introduction of wood, cloth and metals into his art destroys the true Eskimo quality and places him in competition with craftsmen elsewhere who have a complete mastery of the materials.¹²²

The genesis of Inuit art, ushered by non-Inuit, emphasized the Inuit quality of that art. Yet, as this emphasis was placed by *qallunaat*, the image of what was authentically Inuit was that of an outsider.

The history of Inuit art offers a platform to discuss the concern of authenticity and the risk of essentialization as framed in Eisenberg's *Reasons of Identity*. Having identified the problems and risks perceived by others in the public assessment of identity claims, Eisenberg proposes a manner to move beyond them. Her *identity approach* rests on the two normative principles of institutional respect for identity claimants (in the sense that there must be an acceptance of difference) as well as institutional humility from the authority tasked with assessing a minority group's identity.¹²³ In this manner, Eisenberg acknowledges the risks perceived by critics of the public assessment of identity claims, but contends that identity can neither be ignored nor qualified. Identity and identity claims must be acknowledged and recognized to open the discussions of diversity and equality. In this regard, the history of Inuit art—especially the paradox of religion therein—raises particular questions regarding its role as a symbol of Inuit identity. Nevertheless, Inuit art endures as a symbol of Inuit identity and must be considered as such. As Inuit continue to assert 'Inuitness' in their socio-political theatre, so are the arts

¹²² James A. Houston, *Eskimo Handicrafts* (The Canadian Handicrafts' Guild and the Department of Resources and Development-Northwest Territories Branch, 1951), Canadian Guild of Crafts Archive, C.10 D.1 041 1951.

¹²³ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 15.

diversifying to reflect contemporary Inuit identity. For the Inuit, their art has become their voice to non-Inuit and is increasingly accounting for the diversity of Inuit identity.

2.4. Images

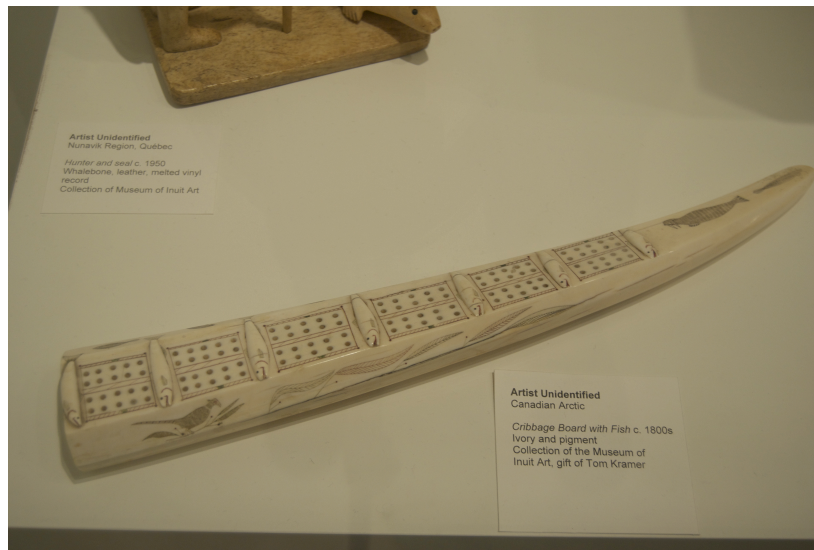


Figure 4: An Inuit made cribbage board, circa 1800s
(Source: Museum of Inuit Art, Toronto, ON; photo courtesy of John Wunderlich, 20 April 2011)



Figure 5: Sedna sculptures by Bart Hanna
(Source: Museum of Inuit Art, Toronto, ON; photo courtesy of John Wunderlich, 20 April 2011)



Figure 6: David Ruben Piqtoukun's *Invoking Spirit of Hunt* (2008)
(Source: Museum of Inuit Art, Toronto, ON; photo courtesy of John Wunderlich, 20 April 2011)



Figure 7: Publicity photo for Robert J. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922)
(Source: Google Images)

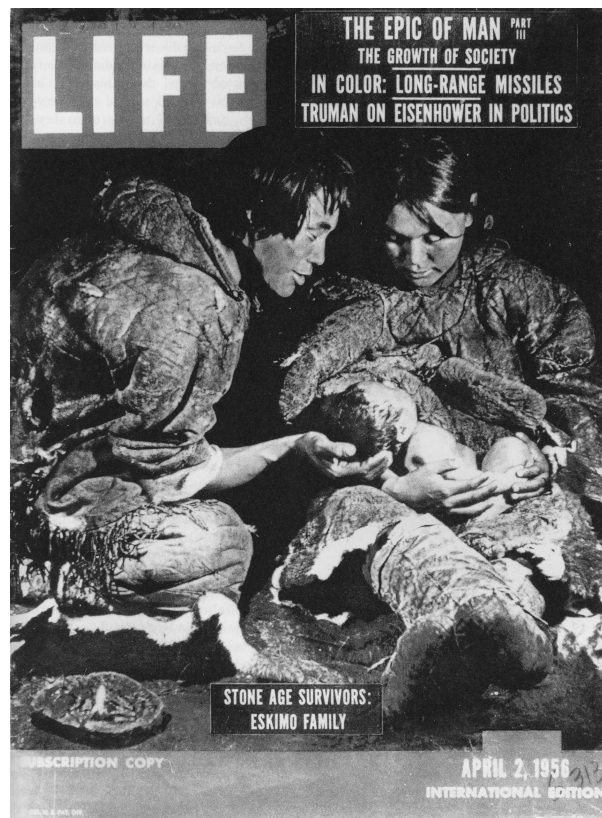


Figure 8: Cover of *Life* magazine, 2 April 1956, showcasing an article on Inuit titled "Stone Age Survivors: Eskimo Family" (Source: Google Images)

Chapter 3
Breaking the Mould:
New Trends in Contemporary Canadian Inuit Art

3.1. From the Individualization of Inuit Artists to the Personalization of Their Art

When first conceived, the art produced in the Arctic was marketed, not as art of a particular school or style, but rather as the product of a people. It was not art by artists who happened to be Inuit, but rather an *Inuit art*. But today Inuit art is recognized within a framework that recognizes the merits and style of individual artists. This shift in Inuit art, from a broad ethnic product to products of individual artistic merit, will be referred to here as the *individualization* of Inuit art. As artists became individually recognized they expanded their creative expressions to reflect their experiences rather than conforming exclusively to the standards established in the genesis of Inuit art. This is what will be referred to as the *personalization* of Inuit art. In what follows, I will outline how these shifts occurred since the last mid-century and then look at specific examples of Inuit art by artists who are personalizing their work by incorporating new mediums or new themes into their art. This chapter is based on both secondary and primary resources. It depends on references to previous field research conducted with Inuit artists by other scholars as well as direct input from two artists: David Ruben Piqtoukun and Bill Nasogaluak. They have offered insight for this thesis from their experiences as artists of the North as well as through discussions about specific pieces from their own catalogues that speak to the paradox of religion in Inuit art and the changing thematic currents of their craft.

Many of the earliest examples of Inuit sculptures were not signed.¹ These

¹ Ingo Hessel, “‘I am an Inuit Artist’: The Rise of Individual Artists,” *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 105.

anonymous pieces demonstrate that this was an ethnic product, and not art as normally conceptualized in the West. Inuit art was produced en masse for *qallunaat* audiences that wanted something from the stereotyped Inuit people of the iconic Canadian North. As Eilis Quinn remarks: “The marketing of traditional Inuit carvings and imagery to the South has been so successful, 'Inuit art', in the minds of most people, has become synonymous with depictions of a romanticized past in Canada's pristine North.”² Inuit art was promoted based on an idea – an idealized perception of Inuit and their environment – rather than on the merits of this modern art form. This cultural conception promotion offered non-Inuit a means of reifying the primitive image of the Inuit, perhaps as a substitute for having to acknowledge the voice of Inuit themselves. However, the Western culture of modern art places a high value on artists themselves.³ Since the market for Inuit art was largely in the South, such interests eventually contributed to shifting the promotional tactics of that craft. Through the 1960s Inuit artists were increasingly identified alongside their art using the categories of provenance in modern Western art.

Kenojuak Ashevak is a case in point. One of the earliest Cape Dorset print artists, she is today one of the most, if not the most, celebrated Canadian-Inuit artist.⁴ In an interview with Quinn, Ashevak remarks: “I draw from my imagination. Even though I think I sometimes draw the same types of drawings. But everybody likes them, so it’s

² Eilis Quinn, “The New Raw – Contemporary Inuit Art,” *Eye on the Arctic: Views from up North* (2010), accessed 21 May 2011, <http://eyeontheartctic.psrci.net/en/news/canada/46-culture/424-the-new-raw>.

³ Nelson H. H. Graburn, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts*, 22; Ingo Hessel, “‘I am an Inuit Artist’: The Rise of Individual Artists,” 105.

⁴ Ashevak’s 1960 print *Enchanted Owl* sold in 2001 for over \$58,000 – a record for Canadian prints sold in auction (see figure 9).

OK.”⁵ Ashevak’s prints and artistic style are iconic in Canada and in international art markets. While she grounds herself in a ‘traditional’ style of Inuit art, she celebrates the new themes being depicted by a new generation of Inuit artists, understanding that they draw from their experiences. That being said, the shift isn’t only in the artists’ imagination – as Ashevak puts it – but also in their willingness to expand what part of their imagination they depict in their art.

As the Inuit art world made space for the *individualization* of artists, such as Ashevak, so too are artists increasingly *personalizing* their art (with the so-called ‘modern’ or social realist themes that reflect their lived realities). The art market has not wholly validated this personalization, but modern themes are becoming increasingly popular; some artists have gained significant fame from pieces that break with the popular conception of Inuit art. The *individualization* of Inuit art alters the role of that art as a means of economic survival in the sense that artists are able to thrive individually as *artists*, rather than as creators of *Inuit art*. There have been great successes in this new framework of Inuit art. Consider Jamasie Pitseolak, an artist from Cape Dorset, NU, whose sculptures depicting modern machinery have become quite renowned. Particularly, his sculptures of motorcycles have earned him fame (see figure 12). There is one at both the Museum of Civilizations (Gatineau, QC) and another at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa, ON). Speaking on his experience as an artist and his *personal* expression of Inuit art, Pitseolak remarks: “Inuit art is always going to be Inuit art. But as generations come along, this new generation is going to make their own doorways, opening their minds. When I was doing ‘traditional stuff’ I felt limited, but when I started

⁵ Eilis Quinn, “The New Raw – Video Series,” *Eye on the Arctic: Views from up North* (2010), accessed 21 May 2011, <http://eyeontheartctic.psrci.net/en/video/video-categories/viewvideo/59/art-and-culture/the-new-raw>.

doing different stuff, it opened doors for me.”⁶

As Inuit artists became individually recognized, they developed personal styles and approaches to their art and implicitly challenged the validity of a perceived static identity created by early contemporary Inuit art. Whereas an idealized version of the nomadic lifestyle of Inuit was presented through early contemporary Inuit art, Inuit artists were increasingly disconnected from that heritage as a result of colonization and Christianization. Ingo Hessel speculates that the shift reflects the effects of Inuit relocation into permanent communities, as many of the new generations of artists have been raised in communities rather than camps:

It is the *lands* and *camps* that now perhaps have a slight air of unreality about them. I think that the work of the new breed of Inuit artists reflects this to some extent. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that, among the ‘new’ artists, subject matter has begun to shift from being primarily animal and spirit based to themes that have more personal and social relevance.⁷

That being said, the *personalization* of Inuit art has not wholly rejected the traditional themes (including shamanism) made popular in its genesis. Rather, the themes traditionally associated with Inuit art are now being re-conceptualized. They are becoming metaphors for a variety of themes. While the art solely depicting themes of ‘social realism’ are increasing, some artists make space for shamanic figures in the contemporary Inuit art of the early 21st century. Ningeokuluk Teevee’s “Untitled (Sedna by the Sea)” (2001/2002), is a drawing showing the sea woman of Inuit shamanism smoking a cigarette and surrounded by scenes of Arctic pollution (see figure 11). Such art speaks to both an audience capable of understanding the representation of shamanic themes as well as those interested in social realism (in this case, a commentary on

⁶ Norman Vorano, “Jamasi Pitseolak: Coming From Today,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 23 (2008): 12.

⁷ Ingo Hessel, “‘I am an Artist’: Inuit Art Transcends Ethnicity,” *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2011), 190.

environmental and social pollution). Similarly, Bill Nasogaluak's sculpture of a crucified Sedna captures the cultural and linguistic loss among Inuit for a non-Inuit audience and, conversely, to the problem of alcohol abuse and social pollution to an Inuit audience (see figure 17).⁸ The use of religious images from his 'bi-cultural' frame of knowledge – the crucifix image known to a Christian audience and the Sedna figure known to an audience familiar with Inuit shamanism – permits Nasogaluak a means of presenting socio-cultural subjects relevant to contemporary Inuit. Nasogaluak's socially conscious message about and to his community demonstrates the role Inuit artists are assuming in shaping their community and its identity. No longer are artists exclusively depicting the imagery promoted in the mid-century by non-Inuit for non-Inuit audiences, but rather appropriating them and incorporating new ones to speak to, and sometimes against, their experiences as contemporary Inuit.

Inuit art is the product of cross-cultural encounters. While it was grounded in a broad and vague ethnic category, it has developed into an art form that recognizes the merits of individual artists in accordance with the qualities recognized by its Southern or Western audiences. Of course this does not mean that the conceptualization of an *Inuit art* has disappeared, but the *individualization* of artists and the *personalization* of their art is slowly weakening that conceptualization. The tension between Inuit art by artists who have personalized their craft with social realist themes and the expectations of the market place is easing, permitting Inuit art into the southern markets where it can challenge notions of Inuit identity held by non-Inuit. This increasingly diverse Inuit art and correspondingly nuanced conceptions of the Inuit challenges earlier Inuit art that continues to feed a static understanding of Inuit identity.

⁸ Bill Nasogaluak, interviewed by Colette G. St-Onge, 12 July 2011.

3.2. Moving Beyond Tradition

As Inuit art developed past its mid-century genesis and artists became individually recognized, their art reflected that growing individuality in the public art sphere and in the wider Canadian theater. The personalization of Inuit art has translated into the introduction of new mediums and new themes. Interestingly, the shift to ‘modern’ themes in Inuit art is rarely paralleled with the incorporation of new mediums and materials. While the re-conceptualization of Inuit art is occurring in unique and dynamic ways, it continues to be on a level that can be recognized with the already well-received category of ‘Inuit art.’ Nevertheless, both expansions on the conceptualization of Inuit art speaks to the diversity of Inuit art itself and of the need to expand the definition of Inuit identity perceived in that art. Below, I will first outline the new mediums being used and introduced in Inuit art and then look at the new themes that are more directly challenging the popular static conceptualization of Inuit identity.

3.2.1. New Mediums in Inuit Art

From its genesis, when non-Arctic materials were actively discouraged to Inuit artists by non-Inuit promoters, there exists an enduring expectation in the audiences of Inuit art to see that art in Arctic materials. As George Swinton suggests, “To the purists all new materials used by ‘formerly pre-literate’ cultures are evil aspects of their cultural degradation. To the Eskimo, new materials have inevitably been a source of stimulation and enrichment.”⁹ Indeed, even the prominence of soapstone is disconnected with the carving history of the Inuit, who once relied more heavily on ivory, bone, and antler for

⁹ George Swinton, *Sculpture of the Inuit*, 135.

their tools and amulets because of the greater strength, durability and lighter weight of those materials.¹⁰ The incorporation of new materials, as a source of ‘stimulation and enrichment’ in Inuit art continues, even beyond the borders of the Canadian Arctic.

Such mediums as wood, cloth and metals were discouraged in the development of contemporary Inuit art because of the existing abilities of other Canadian First Nations in working with those materials.¹¹ Promoters of Inuit arts feared that the market place would not respond favourably to the production of more indigenous art using materials that already saturated that market. This fear was grounded in the presumption that the market place could only maintain a certain amount of indigenous art and that Inuit artists needed to distinguish themselves from their southern neighbours in order to flourish within it. Such a distinction was conceived by relying on the perceived *authentic* materials and themes of Inuit culture and heritage. Such an overlap in materials between Canada’s First Nations would supposedly risked the “true Eskimo quality” of an Inuk’s art.¹² Despite the early standard established for materials native to the Arctic, Inuit artists have increasingly incorporated new materials that do not challenge the “true Eskimo quality” of their art. Specifically, the incorporation of stones imported from beyond the borders of the Canadian Arctic as well as an increasing use of cinematography as a medium of artistic expression among Inuit is redefining the norms of Inuit art mediums. Such innovations are justified by the argument Inuit art is the product of artists who happen to be Inuit (rather than *Inuit artists*) and are in the process of exploring their imagination and developing as any other artist would.

In an article for *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Darlene Wight showcased three artists who

¹⁰ George Swinton, *Sculpture of the Inuit*, 123.

¹¹ James A. Houston, *Eskimo Handicrafts*.

¹² *Ibid.*

are pushing the norms of Inuit art by incorporating new materials—such as Brazilian soapstone, Italian crystal alabaster and bronze.¹³ Wight presents Abraham Anghik, David Ruben Piqtoukun and Manasie Akpaliapik as artists whose interests are apart from the market-oriented production that arguably dominates the Arctic co-operatives. Rather, their “goals are excellence and recognition within the international art community.”¹⁴ While each has had success as a carver, they risked the ‘authentic’ appeal of their art as an *Inuit art* by incorporating materials not native to the Canadian Arctic. That being said, the materials they did incorporate did successfully translate into the Inuit art world. There are two possible reasons for this: (1) the materials were similar enough to those traditionally used in Inuit art and (2) the subject matter of their art spoke to their Inuit heritage: “In all three artists’ work, there is an avid interest in traditional shamanic beliefs and values, as communicated in legends and stories.”¹⁵ While Anghik, Piqtoukun and Akpaliapik pushed the norm of Inuit art by incorporating new materials, they did so within a familiar thematic framework. In fact, Wight suggests that they engage their cultural heritage in an effort to preserve Inuit oral traditions in their art.¹⁶ While Inuit art may fulfill that mandate for individual artists, the traditional themes of Inuit art continue to resonate with audiences. The appeal of traditional Inuit culture endures in the art of these Inuit artists.

Piqtoukun is an excellent example of this shift. In an interview conducted for this project, the artist explained that, as an artist now living in Southern Canada, he has access to an ever-increasing range of materials. Inevitably, he should not be limited in the use of

¹³ Darlene Wight, “Inuit Traditions and Beyond: New Attitudes Toward Art-Making in the 1980s,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 6 (1991): 8-15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

his material merely because of his ethnic and cultural background. Nevertheless, he contends the use of increasingly different types of stone is part of his development as an artist within the Inuit framework, as “Inuit people are very adaptable. They have to adapt to any condition.”¹⁷ More significantly, he contends that this exploration and development is necessary to be true to the self and for society to be able to recognize an ever wider definition of that self and Inuit identity:

It [Inuit art] should not be seen with shutters, with blinders. Keep the blinders off. The more exploration happens, the more artists will be filtered out. From there, you will see a new development, a broader acceptance. [...] The more the imagination is exposed, whatever the material, the broader it will be seen and slowly acceptance will happen. For example, with my case, I had a difficult time but after a while it is the only thing I can do. My rhythm is in carving. It’s my playing field. I am inspired by travel, by experiences. In a few years, my work will change. It’s like tsunami, in a few years it will hit the beach and a creative explosion will happen. That happens all over the place with artists. To be true to yourself, you have to explore your imagination. You can’t be afraid. You can’t shut your imagination off. Keep exploring.¹⁸

In the framework outlined by Piqtoukun, art is understood as a product of what is encountered, pushing the boundaries of the self, of others and of society. Piqtoukun has received wide acclaim for his sculptures utilizing carving stones from all over the world—but it is interesting that he works with traditional – notably shamanic – themes. By his account, he began depicting such traditional religious themes after a Dr. Allen Gonor encouraged him to rediscover his mythic heritage, after years in Christian residential schools, a forceful religious experience that he compares to “standing under a cold shower,” unsure whether to stay or get out.¹⁹ Initially, he found that such pieces sold very well to his *qallunaat* audiences, but also permitted a means of processing his

¹⁷ David Ruben Piqtoukun, interviewed by Colette G. St-Onge, 17 June 2011.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Shamanic and Christian religious heritages. His description of his experience in the residential school system points to the personal difficulties of long-term proselytization, during which it is difficult to maintain a connection with one's traditional heritage. Speaking about the promoted faith, Piqtoukun simply stated that "Christianity is somebody else's imagination."²⁰ This drives home the difference between the two socio-religious cosmologies and the difficulties in negotiating a place between them. In his "Between Two Worlds" catalogue exhibit, Piqtoukun set aside an entire section for his works dealing with Christian subject matter. That being said, his work is not devotional in the traditional sense of that tradition, but rather reflects on his problematic experiences. Within this catalogue, two pieces point to the inability of the Christian missionaries he encountered in understanding Inuit. First, "The Ever-Present Nuns" depicts four faces, pointed in each direction, and a bird perched atop them. Piqtoukun describes the piece as such: "The four faces pointing in four directions represent the all-seeing nuns. They attempted to watch over and control the Inuit children in their school. *But the nuns could never see everything. They were blind to the owl spirit hovering directly above them.*"²¹ (Emphasis added.) Second, his sculpture titled "Priest and Nun" in the same catalogue similarly draws attention to the disconnect between the two groups. Piqtoukun explains it as such: "Their faces turned away from each other, the priest and nun share rudimentary seal's ears *reflecting their inability to listen to the Inuit in a human way.* The damaged base is intended to represent the incompleteness of their lives."²² (Emphasis added.) The value of his artwork as a means of self-discovery and healing becomes clear in the wide

²⁰ David Ruben Piqtoukun, interviewed by Colette G. St-Onge, 17 June 2011.

²¹ David Ruben Piqtoukun, *Between Two Worlds: Sculpture by David Ruben Piqtoukun*, curated by Darlene Coward Right (Winnipeg: Michalski Printing Ltd. and Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1996), 24.

²² *Ibid.*, 26.

body of work that Piqtoukun has produced, both in the smaller collection of Christian themes and the much larger collection of shamanic themes. He now continues to explore his imagination and shamanic religious heritage to depict such themes as a means of healing, cultural reclamation and to preserve those traditional values. While he works with the so-called traditional themes of Inuit art, it is an artistic expression that reflects his experiences as Inuit and as artist today, offering a strong message about each of those experiences in terms of religious heritage, cultural loss and residential schools, among others.

Similarly, Inuit cinematography has (arguably) emerged as the newest stream of Inuit art, yet it engages the traditional themes within that artistic category. Micheal Robert Evans contends that Igloolik, NU, should be considered one of the major art centers of the North alongside such communities as Cape Dorset, Pangnirtung and Baker Lake. While Evans' argument focuses on Igloolik Isuma Productions, he points to the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC), Arnait Productions and the Tariagsuk Video Centre to emphasize Igloolik's importance as a filmmaking center in Arctic Canada.²³ Isuma is best known for the 2001 film *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, which was awarded the prestigious Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival of the same year. Inuit film has obviously received international acclaim within the film community. Interestingly, Isuma is an Inuit-majority-owned production company and their films are available free online through IsumaTV. Their mandate is to illuminate Inuit history and culture with a mix of drama and documentary. Inuit film thus emerges as an authentically Inuit art (in the sense that Inuit developed the product without the incentives of non-Inuit) that curtails the role of Inuit arts as an economic marker. Specifically, since Isuma Productions makes its

²³ Michael Robert Evans, *Isuma: Inuit Video Art*, 50.

films available for free (or by donation) online, advertising them as “Fair Trade downloads direct from the Inuit producers,”²⁴ they are challenging the historically conceived role of Inuit art by *qallunaat* authorities as a means for Inuit to engage in wage-based economies.²⁵ Nevertheless, *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* – as the Inuit film to have received the widest acclaim from its artistic community – maintains the traditional themes of Inuit art by depicting the life-threatening struggle between powerful natural and supernatural characters. Evans contends that such films are produced as folklore, functioning as tales (new form of story telling) and material culture (since cultural symbols are used in the films). The artistic success of Inuit cinematography certainly asserts its space within the Inuit art world. The enduring use of traditional themes in that art may speak to the enduring interest of Inuit in those themes. While Isuma has explored a number of subjects from Inuit heritage and life, in accordance with their mandate to illuminate Inuit history and culture, it is very telling that their greatest success has been in illuminating a shamanic narrative. It is a subject that balances the interests of both Inuit and *qallunaat* in Inuit cultural heritage.

The development of Inuit art is moving in a direction that is incorporating new materials and mediums of expression. Interestingly, the majority of these, or at least the most widely recognized examples, are grounded in a thematic framework that can be described as ‘traditional.’ That being said, the use of traditional, specifically shamanic, imagery does not translate to a passive nature of that art; the agency of the artists and

²⁴ “IsumaTV Homepage,” IsumaTV, accessed July 28, 2011, <http://www.isuma.tv/>.

²⁵ Unfortunately, during the writing of this chapter and despite the company’s artistic success, Igloolik Isuma Productions has filed for receivership in Quebec, citing roughly \$750,000 in debts. This raises a concern about the production company’s archives, which contain “thousands of hours of interviews with Inuit elders, most of which has never been shown.” See: Paul Waldie, “Creditors Pull Plug on Inuit Film Company Behind Fast Runner,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 9, 2011, accessed July 20, 2011, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/movies/creditors-pull-plug-on-inuit-film-company-behind-fast-runner/article2091524/>

directors mentioned above cannot be ignored, they are engaging with ‘traditional’ themes as part of their artistic development. The inclusion of traditional themes in an Inuk’s art portfolio does not mean that they are creating works in accordance with the standards established by non-Inuit for financial reasons, but rather highlights the artistic interests and exploration of that artist. It is not merely the broad category of ‘Inuit art’ but art that engages and re-conceptualizes the heritage of Inuit people—whether as a means of preservation and documentation or as means of cultural healing in the wake of colonization and Christianization.

3.2.2. *New Themes in Inuit Art*

While many Inuit artists pushed the boundaries of their craft by incorporating new materials, they did so by maintaining many of the themes made popular through the genesis of contemporary Inuit art (albeit in unique ways). Both the sculptors and directors mentioned in section 3.2.1 engaged shamanic themes in their arts. Interestingly, parallel to this, there is an increasing number of Inuit artists who are rejecting those traditional themes in their work in favour of representing their lived experiences as contemporary Inuit in the North. This *social realism* is challenging the exclusive association between the concept of authenticity and the themes of primitivism otherwise promoted in Inuit art. Yet, some artists are also blending social realist and shamanic themes. The diversification of Inuit art is not a linear progression, but rather a developing conversation between all aspects of Inuit art and identity.

Since art speaks to the identity of an artist and identity is dynamically constructed in a person’s environment, it is only reasonable that Inuit artists depict what they know.

The mundane and routine aspects of Inuit life are increasingly being represented in their art, offering audiences an insight into the realities of a twenty-first century Inuk living in Arctic Canada. For example, while transportation in the Arctic is limited geographically, it is not limited to dogsledding (a popular traditional theme). In reality, all-terrain vehicles have a strong presence the daily life of the modern arctic (as depicted by Tim Pitsiulak, see figure 10) and transport ships and planes have a strong social meaning in providing the southern products many Inuit now use (consider the popular and colourful planes of Pudlo Padlat's art, see figure 13). Speaking on Padlat, Brian Lunger (manager and curator of Nunatta Sunakkutaangit museum in Iqaluit, NU) stated: "I really like his mixed-tradition works [...] They show his fascination with the non-Inuit world that would become his own world."²⁶ In terms of popular entertainment, the exclusivity of oral folk narratives has similarly been compromised. The influence of comics has been extensive—Robin McGrath highlights how features of comics have made their way into Inuit art: specifically the presence of syllabic text, the repetition of specific motifs, the occasional use of framing devices, and the presence of speech/thought balloons.²⁷ Moreover, with the arrival of televisions and the Internet in the North, more and more Inuit engage with southern entertainment (consider Jamasie Pitseolak's "Arctic Coast Choppers" – an allegory to the televised show 'West Coast Choppers' – or Annie Pootoogook's "Watching Erotic Film", see figures 10 and 14). The social landscape of the Arctic is not that described in the early days of Inuit art. Nor is it the same

²⁶ Sarah Rogers, "New Inuit Art Exhibit a Mix of Traditional and Modern: Works by the Late Pudlo Padlat at Iqaluit Museum Reveal his Fascination with Technology," *Nunatsiaq News Online*, May 25, 2011, accessed May 30, 2011, http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/987897_pudlat_exhibition_shows_a_mix_of_traditional_and_modern/.

²⁷ Robin McGrath, "The Influence of Comics on Inuit Art and Literature," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 4 (1989): 4-8.

experienced by southern Canadians. Rather, it is one that has negotiated Inuit heritage with Southern standards and amenities.

Art is also a means by which to provide social commentary in that inter-cultural environment; as Bertolt Brecht stated: “Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.” Bill Nasogaluak exemplifies this in his artistic work, describing himself as “bi-cultural.”²⁸ Many Inuit artists have used their artistic skill to speak to the experiences of their community. Nancy Gautsche points specifically to the increasingly popular theme of violence in Inuit art, specifically noting that traditional Inuit society encouraged the control of emotions within their customarily small communities.²⁹ Gautsche suggests that art is an acceptable release for irrepressible tension or anger. Art thus becomes not only a means of social commentary, but also a forum in which to discuss the taboo. It is interesting to also consider shamanism in light of this understanding of Inuit art, as a taboo subject for a colonized and Christianized people. Manasie Akpaliapik similarly depicts the growing problem of alcoholism among the Inuit in his sculpted work (see figure 15). The subjects of nationalism, self-determination, global warming and pollution are similarly presented in the art of the Inuit. What becomes evident is that as Inuit life changes, so does their identity and so does their art.

The artwork of Nasogaluak incorporates many ‘modern’ themes, ranging from environmental pollution, to residential schools, to alcohol abuse and even to the depiction of Inuit legends with personal twists. As Nasogaluak recounted for this project, he sold his first painting in 1976 while working as an electronics technician and continued his

²⁸ Bill Nasogaluak, interviewed by Colette G. St-Onge, 12 July 2011.

²⁹ Nancy Gautsche, “Myth, Murder and Madness: Violence in Inuit Art,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 4 (1989): 14-18.

path as an artists by relying more heavily on stonework, as it is more profitable (though he does continue to paint for personal reasons). In a recent exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) entitled *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, two of his recent sculptures were displayed.³⁰ Upon first impression, his sculpture “Best of my Culture,” depicting a crucified Sedna figure, speaks to the loss of the traditional Inuit cosmology in light of Christian conversion (see image 17) and the sculpture “My Disappearing World,” of a bear trapped in rotating ice, speaks to the environmental degradation of the North (see image in *Inuit Modern* exhibition catalogue). The artist expands on this, highlighting that the message behind each of these sculptures is very much pro-active and directed to shedding light on the problems plaguing Inuit today. The first sculpture is intended to have two messages, one for each audience—*qallunaat* and Inuit. According to Nasogaluak, his sculpture of a crucified Sedna speaks to the destruction of culture and language for its *qallunaat* audiences and to the cross Inuit bear in terms of alcohol pollution for his Inuit audience. More generally, these sculptures are “about the westernization of our culture, customs, beliefs, languages,”³¹ a reality that Nasogaluak fears will likely occur in this generation. The artist discusses the second sculpture by further by pointing to the sculpted ice itself, which is in two separate pieces and meant to signal the enclosed Arctic environment in which Inuit find themselves. In his words, “humans have the ability to take and to give back to the Arctic, to take that enclosure away—to slow or stop global warming.”³² As an artist, Nasogaluak has become

³⁰ Interestingly, in an interview for this project, the artist laments that the titles given to his pieces by the AGO curator(s) were not confirmed with him before hand. The first is “Sedna on Cross” (2006) and the second is “Bear Falling Through Rotating Ice” (2006). According to the artist, the proper title for the former is “Best of my Culture” and the latter is “My Disappearing World.” The titles provided by the artist were used for this project.

³¹ Bill Nasogaluak, interviewed by Colette G. St-Onge, 12 July 2011.

³² *Ibid.*

a spokesperson for many of the issues plaguing the Inuit and their natural environment. While Nasogaluak concedes that economic incentives continue to underlie his craft, especially for young artists, he now feels responsible to break through those barriers and take advantage of any available platform to advocate for the care of the Arctic world (as he did when we were concluding our interview). Moreover, he feels responsible to challenge the existing institutions of the Inuit artworld to allow for the growth of younger artists—to avoid ghettoizing them in the static categories that he himself developed with as an *Inuit artist*. He thus strives to break down the barriers that label him as such in favour of being recognized simply as a artist.

While modern themes of social realism are becoming increasingly popular and the place of art as a means of social commentary is becoming increasingly vocal, it is important to note that the traditional themes and imagery that once overwhelmed that art are not wholly rejected. Certainly, some artists reject traditional themes as they have little meaning for them, but not all artists do. While some reject traditional themes within the new paradigm, other artists continue to incorporate shamanic imagery in creative ways. While Jamasie Pitseolak (popular for his sculptures of modern machinery) has stated that he felt limited in traditional themes, it has not prevented him from incorporating shamanic imagery in his modern pieces, much as Nasogaluak has done; see Pitseolak's sculpture "Sedna Chopper" (figure 16). While the rise in modern themes in Inuit art has translated into a rejection of the traditional standard of primitive (including shamanic) themes by some, others have incorporated both and draw inspiration from the traditional context to participate in the new framework concerned with social realism.

3.3. The Possibility of Diversity

Being contemporary means being ‘of that period’. The evolving social, economic and political lives of the Inuit is reflected in the history of contemporary Inuit art. While the popular mind has had a fixed view of soapstone figures and simple prints, the reality is that the nature of ‘contemporary’ Inuit art has experienced numerous shifts since the mid-century. What was once an imposed cultural artefact, eponymous with the people it represented, has ironically created a school of art with a life of its own, organically connected to specific individual perception of their lived Inuit culture. Individual artists are increasingly recognized and have in turn personalized the materials and themes used in their work, as artists who happen to be Inuk. The inclusion of materials not native to the Arctic and themes not traditionally associated with Inuit religio-cultural identity has meant that the boundaries of Inuit art are increasingly being re-defined from within. This has raised the possibility of Inuit art as dissent with, or opposition to, the Canadian state that originally fostered ethnic production for its own reasons. As artists take control of their production, they present a more nuanced and diverse definition of what it is to be Inuit to non-Inuit. These shifts in Inuit art mediums and imagery are challenging the traditional perception of Inuit identity in Canada in a very direct manner. Perhaps ironically, this independence and diversity ensures that Inuit art will endure as a symbol of Inuit identity.

3.4. Images



Figure 9: Kenojuak Ashevak's "Enchanted Owl" (1960)
(Source: Google Images)



Figure 10: Jamasio Pitseolak's "Arctic Coast Choppers, Winterlude" (2006)
(Source: Inuit Art Alive)



Figure 11: Ningeokuluk Teevee's "Untitled (Sedna by the Sea)" (2001/2002)
(Source: Eilis Quinn, "The New Raw – Contemporary Inuit Art," *Eye on the Arctic: Views from up North* (2010), accessed 21 May 2011, <http://eyeontheartctic.psrci.net/en/news/canada/46-culture/424-the-new-raw>)



Figure 12: Tim Pitsiulak's "ATV/Family of Eight" (2008)
(Source: Google Images)



Figure 13: Pudlo Pudlat's "Aeroplane" (1976)
(Source: Google Images)



Figure 14: Annie Pootoogook's "Watching Erotic Film" (2004)
(Source: Inuit Art Alive)



**Figure 15: Manasie Akpaliapik's "Untitled" (1991)
(Source: Inuit Art Alive)**



**Figure 16: Jamasie Pitseolak's "Sedna Chopper" (2011)
(Source: Google Images)**

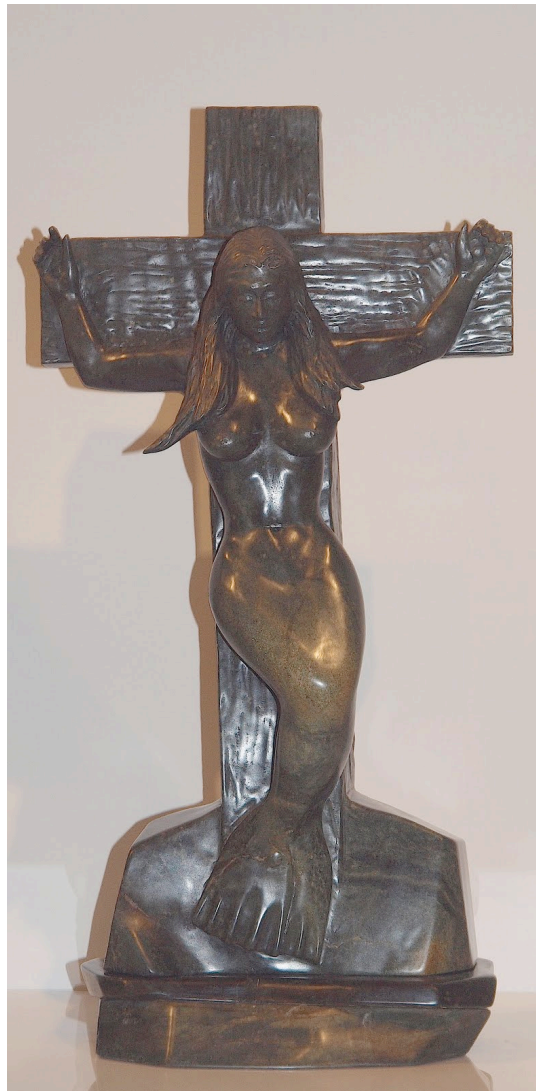


Figure 17: Bill Nasogaluak's "Best of my Culture"
(Also known as "Crucified Sedna" [AGO] and "Dying Culture" [Inuit Art Alive])
(Source: *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*, 2011)

Chapter 4 An Inuit Identity Claim in Art

4.1. Inuit Art as a Negotiation of Minority Identity in a Diverse Canada

Bill Nasogaluak’s sculpture of a crucified Sedna, titled “Best of my Culture,” exemplifies his ‘bi-cultural’ self-identification. This piece speaks to both an Inuit shamanic and a Christian frame of reference, engaging two powerful images from each of those cosmologies. Moreover, and as discussed in chapter 3, Nasogaluak created this piece with two audiences in mind, affirming a different message to each. This sculpture is particularly interesting because of this religio-cultural and thematic duality—engaging the so-called traditional themes in a *social realist* conceptual framework. What emerges from this particular sculpture in the context of this thesis is that Nasogaluak is making a claim about his identity as a contemporary Inuk through his art—an identity that straddles two worlds. It is this purpose of art, a medium through which to make claims about identity, that will be explored in this chapter—first in context of general identity claims in Canada, and then by looking at specific examples of Inuit identity claims made through that art.

Identity claims are the petitions of minority groups made to the state in an effort to ask for the protection or accommodation of aspects of their distinct way of life that may otherwise conflict with the general rule of law in that society.¹ Such a method of accessing collective rights bloomed in an environment promoting multicultural policies in the last quarter century—although the assessment of minority identities has always been a reality of diverse societies. In more recent years, there has been a backlash against these socio-political strategies, grounded in the argument that policies that account for the

¹ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 8.

vague concept of culture “...will essentialize, ‘domesticate,’ or ‘manage’ cultural minorities in the interests of majority groups.”² Inevitably, societies that acknowledge the rights of minority groups cannot avoid assessing cultural, religious, social and other identities—all of which are intangible concepts that avoid conclusive definitions. In such an environment, where the ideals of diversity and equality are acknowledged but where there is vast disagreement in the way such rights are applied, the currency and rhetoric of *identity* becomes a platform on which groups can access the rights idealized in the promotion of diversity.

In this political and legal environment, the discourse of *identity* embodies the means by which minority groups seek to secure the rights that enable them to protect their distinct way of life. It is often through discussions of identity that the twin ideals of diversity and equality are processed for minority groups in diverse societies—societies, such as Canada, that recognize both individual and collective rights. Yet, these political and legal forums are not the only platforms on which minority identity is negotiated in Canada. Obviously, Inuit art is not an identity claim made to the Canadian courts or legislatures (although Inuit do engage the state in those forums through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement [NLCA] and other rights petitions). Yet, Inuit art is the principle conduit through which the Canadian public encounters Inuit identity.³ In this regard, Inuit art can be understood within the model of identity claims because it is the platform on which Inuit identity is negotiated between Inuit, the Canadian public and the state; it is

² Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 8.

³ Inuit art has been since the mid-twentieth a century a platform on which Inuit identity has been presented to non-Inuit. While it continues to be the most prominent venue for Inuit identity construction in Canada, increases in migration and urbanization by Inuit (from North to South) can neither be ignored—especially in such cities as Ottawa, a travel hub to the North, where there is a growing Inuit community making itself present in the communities and cities of Southern Canadians.

subject to the same risks of authenticity and essentialization outlined in chapter 2.

Contemporary Inuit art has, to a certain extent, frozen the non-Inuit perception of Inuit identity into an idealized past, based on what the original promoters of contemporary Inuit art saw as authentic representations of Inuit culture and identity. Despite the early influence of *qallunaat* on the materials and thematic guidelines of contemporary Inuit art, Inuit artists are increasingly re-defining their craft by incorporating new materials and themes, as well as by re-conceptualizing traditional norms—as Nasogaluak did in his “Best of my Culture.” As Inuit artists push the boundaries established in the genesis of their craft, the Inuit minority is making an identity claim to their audiences—to the public and to the state, as the Canadian government continues to administer the principle symbol of authenticity in Inuit art. Eisenberg contends that political and legal identity claims can be fairly assessed by an authority given a normative guide (her *identity approach*) in which respect for the minority and institutional humility set the standard. Similarly, Inuit identity can be fairly represented and, in turn, perceived through contemporary Inuit art – incorporating both the traditional and the modern – given the acknowledgement of diversity and fluidity of minority identities.

4.1.1. Identity Claims in the Canadian Context

In Canada, identity claims fall within the judicial framework of minority rights disputes. The history of such claims in the Canadian context sheds light not only on the need for expanded rights on behalf of minority groups, but also on the normative position of Canadian authorities. As a result, the narrative of legal and political identity claims in

Canada creates a framework in which the religio-cultural identity claim of Inuit is made through their art. As mentioned, Inuit art is not an identity claim in the traditional sense but rather a platform on which Inuit artists are increasingly making claims about their identity. In so doing, they are expanding the definition and vision of Inuit identity in Canada as well as illuminating the similar problems experienced by many minorities in Canada – specifically those of essentialization and authenticity.

Identity claims are the petitions made by minority groups to governments for entitlements, resources and exceptions from the standard parameters of law allocated to them on the grounds that their claim signifies an important facet of their distinct identity within a society that recognizes ideals of diversity and equality.⁴ Examples of such claims include the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) cases in which a Hutterite Colony petitioned against the mandatory photo requirement for Alberta driver's licenses on that grounds that it contradicted their interpretation of the Second Commandment as well as a case in which a Stó:lō Nation woman petitioned for her right to sell salmon as part of her First Nation heritage and consequent fishing rights.⁵ These claims are made on the grounds that the general rule of law in Canada contradicts the identities of claimants that are otherwise protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (hereafter referred to as the *Charter*). In the above cases, the rights in question were freedom to religion under section 2[a] and the aboriginal rights granted under section 35, respectively. Within Canada, both religious and indigenous minorities make claims to the state that shed light on some of the most profound obstacles to the two ideals of diversity and equality. Minorities who make identity claims hold up a mirror to Canadian society that reveals a

⁴ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 1.

⁵ *Alberta v. Hutterian Brethren of Wilson Colony*, [2009] 2 S.C.R. 567; *R. v. Van der Peet*, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 507.

deeply ingrained normative position that is (often unknowingly) maintained despite the commitment to diversity and equality acknowledged in the *Charter*.

The claims made by indigenous minorities in Canada shed light on the risk that minorities might *essentialize* their identities – playing into the assumptions made by the majority about that minority – to secure rights and exceptions from the law (usually in order to pursue practices inherent to their people’s perceived ‘traditional’ way of life). Eisenberg underlines the risk of essentialization for the identity claims of indigenous groups through an analysis of the Supreme Court of Canada’s Distinctive Culture Test (DCT). The DCT was conceived during the claim made by the Stó:lō Nation woman, Dorothy Van der Peet, who petitioned for the right to sell salmon as an aboriginal right.⁶ This test was developed as a means to assess the merit of indigenous claims for rights outside the standard parameters of the law. Most controversially, it requires that the indigenous minority prove that a practice pre-dates colonial contact in order for it to be protected by the state outside of the rule of law.⁷ This requirement is particularly problematic for ritual ceremonies, such as the Sun Dance Ceremony among the Plains First Nations, which was long discouraged by the Canadian state but is now reclaimed widely by many different Peoples. Such ritual ceremonies are essential to indigenous self-identification and identity construction today but differ significantly from their historical origins. Similarly, the right of Inuit to acquire large amounts of carving stones on Crown lands in Nunavut is protected by the NLCA (see part 9 of article 19: Rights to Carving Stone) even though it is very much a practice – especially in the magnitude enshrined by the NLCA – that has arisen because of colonial contact. In this case, the

⁶ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 119-138.

⁷ *R. v. Van der Peet*, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 507.

state recognized the development of Inuit identity and material culture in the wake of colonization. On the other hand, the Distinctive Culture Test fundamentally denies the fluidity of indigenous culture and identity in Canadian identity claims.

Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox argues that indigenous policy, rather than indigenous peoples themselves, must change to enhance the lives and life chances of indigenous peoples in Canada.⁸ Specifically, she distinguishes between self-government, which is derived from the authority of the state and fails to address the problems facing Canada's First Nations, and self-determination, which is derived from within the indigenous context. Irlbacher-Fox developed her concept of self-determination from her work with First Nations groups; she writes:

Visions of self-determination among Indigenous peoples [...] far exceed the limitations of self-government. Indigenous visions encompass natural resource management and economic capacities gained through land claims; seek sectoral or other agreements with governments and private industry; and have social, political, psychological, and spiritual dimensions resulting from the importance placed upon fostering Indigenous cultural identity, rights, and practices. Indigenous peoples therefore combine what requires change, namely the interference and control of government, and the negative consequences of that, with a collective sense of self-realization originating in Indigenous culture.⁹

The claims of indigenous minorities highlight the hierarchy of power that is perpetuated in society by public policy and through the authoritative normalcy. Lori G. Beaman echoes this by showing that aboriginal spiritualities are institutionalized to be abnormal and beyond the normative definition of religious freedom that is protected by the state.¹⁰ From the perspective of the Supreme Court of Canada, where Christianity sets the standard religious form, the non-institutionalized spiritual beliefs and practices of

⁸ Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, *Finding Dahshaa*, 7-10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ Lori G. Beaman, "Aboriginal Spirituality and the Legal Construction of Freedom of Religion," 135-149.

indigenous peoples fail to fulfill that mould. Thus, even though their religious identity is potentially as strongly held as any other claim of faith, it is easily pushed beyond the edge of normalcy—beyond what is protected by the state. The identity claims of indigenous peoples shed light on the role of the state in delineating minority identities by affirming concepts of normalcy and perpetuating hierarchies of power that are based on a troubled and largely unquestioned history.

The experiences of religious minorities are often comparable to those of indigenous minorities, but raise their own set of concerns: namely, the problem of *authenticity*. Eisenberg highlights this problem by turning to the question of sincerity used by the Supreme Court of Canada in reference to the case of the Jewish man seeking to build a *succah* (or temporary dwelling) for the festival of *Succot* on the balcony of his luxury condominium in Montreal.¹¹ In that case, the question of sincerity upheld the claimant's interpretation of religion, his need to have his own personal *succah*, against the opinions of other practising Jews because the claimant was able to prove that this was his sincere interpretation of his Jewish faith. Yet, the question of sincerity is a fundamentally subjective one used by a Court that otherwise avoids adjudicating religion in an effort to acknowledge the lived or subjective component of religion. The problem is that there is no consistent and reliable way to gauge sincerity—it is entirely subjective. This response to the problem of *authenticity*, in which courts try to distinguish between legitimate and fraudulent claims for expanded rights, fails to provide a meaningful way to distinguish *authenticity* in *lived religion*. Much like sincerity, authenticity is a subjective concept that cannot be applied broadly—what is an authentic aspect of cultural or religious identity for one person may not be so for another. Seeking or asserting the

¹¹ *Syndicat Northcrest v. Amselem*, [2004] 2 S.C.R. 551.

authenticity of some aspect of intangible culture similarly fails to acknowledge the fluidity of that identity. Moreover, Beaman points out that religion is a socially constructed phenomenon and that freedom of religion is a concrete right that demands from minorities an understanding of religion that is derived from a normative Christian hegemony.¹² Religious minorities who cannot satisfy that definition are moved to the cusp of, or beyond, normalcy (as is noted above in reference to the religious claims of Canada's First Nations).

Certainly, it is clear that the identity claims made by Canada's indigenous and religious minorities fail to fully address the problems faced by those communities. Yet, they have proven to be a valuable resource in illuminating the normative stance of the Canadian majority and state when dealing with the fundamental rights and freedoms promised to all citizens. Despite Eisenberg's acknowledgement of the problem of authenticity and the risk of essentialism, the author insists that identity claims are not in themselves the problem. The fundamental problem is that those who must assess identity claims have not always been in a capacity to do so. As demonstrated by the Distinctive Culture Test and the sincerity of belief test, the Supreme Court of Canada has been creative (if inconsistent) in approaching identity claims. Those in positions of authority in Canada are largely from the majority community. While they may acknowledge the twin ideals of diversity and equality alongside rights and freedoms of the *Charter*, the assessment of identity claims (especially when coming from an 'other') pushes the boundaries of comfort and normalcy. As a result, Eisenberg argues in favour of a guide for the assessment of identity claims. She contends that there is value in such claims

¹² Lori G. Beaman, "Defining Religion: The Promise and Peril of Legal Interpretation," 197.

within existing social structures and, in light of diversity, it is necessary to assess identity directly. Her *identity approach* is grounded as follows:

...one reason why identity claims have normative value is that treating people with respect requires that public decision makers take seriously these claims as possible reasons why entitlements ought to be recognized. A second reason that addressing identity directly matters is that the assessment of identity claims is a prerequisite to ensuring the institutional capacity to reflect their own biases or on the possibility that unfair criteria related to how identities are understood have shaped the way decision makers have been made in the past. This is what I called the capacity of institutional humility.¹³

The central theme of this argument, in the context of this thesis, is that the Canadian majority should acknowledge the flawed nature of the concept of normalcy that dictates static standards to which a diverse population is held. Without this acknowledgement, actual equitable diversity cannot be realized.

While Inuit art is not an identity claim to be politically or legally assessed (and thus there is no need to expand directly on the *identity approach*), it is a presentation of identity that is gauged by that same un-questioned standard, fuelled with the same majority presumptions about the minority group in question. The history of contemporary Inuit art points to the essentialization of Inuit intangible culture by non-Inuit for the purpose of facilitating the participation of that minority in a capitalist economy. Following that essentialization, the same non-Inuit authority asserted the authenticity of that essentialized image of Inuit identity that was exported to a non-Inuit audience as the principle representation of their religio-cultural identity. The presumptions about the Inuit minority by the Canadian majority are at the very centre of this discussion. The identity claim made in Inuit art is not occurring in front of a court or in political context, but the diversification of Inuit art since its genesis embodies an identity claim nonetheless as

¹³ Avigail Eisenberg, *Reasons of Identity*, 140.

members of that minority are pushing against the boundaries set up by non-Inuit and serves to shed light on the normative stance of that majority towards Inuit in Canada.

4.1.2. Inuit Art and Inuit Identity

Inuit art can be understood within the framework of identity claims because it is the platform on which Inuit and non-Inuit shape the presentation of Inuit identity in tandem. Inuit art is undoubtedly an Inuit creation. There is also no doubt that *qallunaat* had an influential role in the genesis of contemporary Inuit art and continue to participate in an official (by asserting authenticity) and unofficial (by buying the majority of Inuit arts) capacity. The early influence of *qallunaat* on the arts and crafts of contemporary Inuit shaped specific aesthetic standards, materials norms and thematic guidelines. Among these influences, the promotion of shamanic themes is striking because the religious landscape of Northern Canada in the mid-century was largely Christian (and had been for some time).

As contemporary Inuit art developed, and increasingly represented Inuit in the Canadian context, that art became the locale in which Inuit identity was constructed and negotiated with non-Inuit. The essentialization of that identity is visible from the very beginning through the emphasis placed on primitive and shamanic themes. The continuous efforts made, primarily by non-Inuit, to assert the authenticity of that essentialized identity runs throughout the history of contemporary Inuit art. The place of Inuit in Canada can be distinguished in a number of ways, but the role of their art remains primary in the Canadian theatre. While *quallunaat* instituted strict aesthetic standards, materials norms and thematic guidelines that essentialized Inuit identity for a non-Inuit

audience, Inuit have increasingly reclaimed their art as a locale for negotiating the presentation of their collective and individual identities and are asserting a more diverse minority identity.

4.2. Moving Past Essentialization and Authenticity in Inuit Art

The risk of essentializing Inuit identity in the arts is evident from the standards established by non-Inuit, based on assumptions made about ‘authentic’ Inuit culture and identity. With the assertion of Inuit political authority in the last quarter century, alongside the increased individualization of Inuit artists, Inuit artists have increasingly been re-defining and diversifying the images of Inuit identity and culture in their art. The once static primitive identity of Inuit in the arts – including Sedna, shamans, shamanic transformations, dancing polar bears, etc. – is now being re-defined by a growing number of artists who are re-conceptualizing the traditional and incorporating modern images of Inuit identity and culture. The re-definition of Inuit art outlined in chapter 3, characterized by the individualization of artists and the consequent personalization of their art, speaks to rise of Inuit agency in Inuit art as an identity claim in Canada. From that development of Inuit art, it becomes crucial to emphasize the limitations of essentialization and authenticity in the context of Inuit identity construction.

Inuit artists are increasingly working in new mediums and materials as well as incorporating new themes based on their contemporary experiences as individuals and Inuit. Among the most striking new developments of Inuit art is the growing Inuit film industry. Unlike the genesis of other Inuit arts, Inuit film was not conceived by *qallunaat* as means for Inuit to engage in a capitalist or wage-based economy, but rather as a means

of artistic and cultural expression by Inuit themselves. The expressions of Inuit identity communicated from that industry are helping to promote the re-evaluation of Inuit identity by non-Inuit. Gerald McMaster comments on the role of film, as an art, in expanding the once essentialized image of Inuit for non-Inuit:

Until relatively recently, most of the world knew the North through images created by filmmakers such as Robert Flaherty, whose *Nanook of the North* (1922, filmed in 1920) made a ‘photoplay’ about life in the Hudson Bay region of the Canadian Arctic. It was not until the release of Zacharias Kunuk’s *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001) that Inuit and the North were imagined in new and authentic ways.¹⁴

Despite the expansion of Inuit identity from its once essentialized form, the concept authenticity remains intimately tied to that of identity in Inuit art. This ongoing need for authenticity raises a problem: if something is asserted to be authentic, then what is not specifically asserted risks being labelled as inauthentic (i.e. if the shamanic expressions of Inuit culture are labelled and promoted as authentic representations of Inuit religio-cultural identity, then those expressions that represent Christian or a-religious themes risk being seen by outsiders as inauthentic). As with the examples of political and legal identity claims in Canada, the claim to authenticity in Inuit art is made to something that is fundamentally subjective and intangible and thus beyond conclusive definition. When it comes to identity, it is crucial to continuously remind ourselves that it is not a static phenomenon but rather something that is created by a group or an individual in a dynamic relationship with their environment. It is continuously evolving in multiple directions. No single image of that identity can be more authentic than another. Claiming the authenticity of Inuit identity fails to do justice to the diversity of that identity; what may be an authentic identity for one Inuk may differ for another. The identity claims

¹⁴ Gerald McMaster, “Inuit Modern: An Introduction,” 1.

of Inuit continuously occurring in Inuit art cannot be isolated to one definition or another; expressions of intangible culture and identity necessitate a recognition of the diversity of identity. As with any identity claim, the negotiation of a minority identity need acknowledge the agency of that minority, the fluidity and diversity of their identity, and the repercussions of leaving the authoritative majority to assess that identity without acknowledging the first two points.

The increasing diversity in Inuit art re-ignites the debate surrounding the purpose of that art and its capacity as an art form. While Inuit art was originally conceived as a means for Inuit to participate in a wage-based economy, it has evolved past that. Yet this utilitarian understanding of Inuit art endures, as it does with any other craft. Hessel remarks, “Strictly speaking of course, *all* art made for sale is simply a commodity, in the utilitarian sense.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the increased individualization of Inuit art begins to remove it from the souvenir art trade and into the fine arts trade, as artists are not creating images that are expected by the commercial markets but are rather creating new and unique pieces that offer a more accurate image of Inuit life in Canada. Hessel highlights the rise of Inuit agency in Inuit art and the development of that art’s function as a means of presenting identity:

Consciously or not, Inuit in some real sense “took control” of Inuit art and began using it as a vehicle for cultural identity. [...] The utilitarian view [of Inuit art as commercial souvenir or folk art] does not take into account those things that Inuit artists have in common with artists everywhere: pride of craftsmanship; pride in one’s artistic vision, style and accomplishment; personal and/or shared community themes, subject matter and values; relationship with fellow artists and collectors/admirers—and in the larger sense, the artist’s status as keeper and sharer of community traditions and history.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ingo Hessel, “‘We are Inuit’: Art and Identity,” 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

Whereas Inuit art in its genesis functioned as a means for Inuit to engage in wage-based economy, it has become a platform on which to define and re-define Inuit identity—in the sense that it depicts traditional Inuit heritage as well as the experiences of modern Inuit who negotiate that heritage with their experiences in Canada. As Inuit art continues to be the vehicle through which non-Inuit encounter Inuit identity, it is worth considering the identity being presented, leaving behind the once ‘authentic’ essentialized image crafted in the mid-century.

4.3. Negotiating a Modern Inuit Identity in Contemporary Inuit Art

Understanding that Inuit art is the primary platform on which Inuit identity is presented and negotiated to non-Inuit leads to the question of contemporary Inuit identity itself. The perception of Inuit identity, as communicated through the arts, was once a static concept grounded in a non-Inuit imagination of a supposedly authentic but fundamentally idealic past. Yet, as Inuit artists pushed the boundaries of their craft, it is worth assessing the identity being re-defined. What Inuit identity is depicted in contemporary Inuit art? What is the place of the primitive or the modern within that conceptualization? What place does shamanism hold? What about Christianity? Does there need to be a conclusive definition in either of these binaries?

The socio-cultural binary depicted in Inuit art offers an interesting picture of the interplay between the conceptualization of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ identities among contemporary Inuit. The shift to *social realist* imagery in contemporary Inuit art signals that twenty-first century Inuit live in an environment that utilizes modern machinery, entertainment, and other amenities imported to the Arctic. Yet, the enduring place of Inuit

heritage in art and in the Arctic socio-cultural and political landscapes highlight that their so-called ‘primitive’ identity continues to have relevance today. What emerges from this binary is an understanding of Inuit identity that is not isolated at one end of the spectrum or another. Rather, Inuit – like many other minority groups attempting to maintain a strong cultural identity against a very different normative majority – balance the aspects of their heritage that resonates to their contemporary self-definition and live a life that reflects the diversity of their environment. The diversity of socio-cultural realities depicted in Inuit art reflects their experiences as minorities in contemporary Canada.

Within the assessment of Inuit socio-cultural identity taken from the arts, it is interesting to note the socio-economic realities behind the modern imagery in contemporary Inuit art. Specifically, artists who are depicting these modern themes are often artists who are well recognized (i.e. Bill Nasogaluak, Jamasie Pitseolak, Annie Pootogook, Manasie Akpaliapik, etc.). Being well recognized gives these artists an advantage because they are in a more secure position to push the boundaries of the Inuit art market and assert the presence of modern themes in that market. Moreover, specific art centres play an important role in fostering the depiction of modern imagery. Cape Dorset is a case in point. The yearly collection of prints is increasingly incorporating works that have been discussed in this project (i.e. those of Annie Pootogook and Tim Pitsiulak). This is noteworthy only because of Cape Dorset’s place as the self-titled ‘Capital of Inuit Art’; the West Baffin Co-op has enjoyed stable economic success since the mid-century in comparison to most other artistic co-operatives in Arctic Canada. This stability and reputation as an art centre has made it a first stop for all things ‘Inuit art.’ Consequently, they are in a comparable position to established artists to risk pushing the

boundaries of that art. Certainly, Inuit art and the economics of that business are part and parcel. Economics played a central role in the genesis of Inuit art and, as with most arts, helped dictate the shape and development of that art... but it is not an exclusive relationship. While many Inuit artists depend on the income of their craft, and certain themes and materials are likely to sell more easily than others, the agency of individual artists and their need for growing thematic exploration cannot be undervalued.

As that exploration expands and the boundaries of Inuit art are re-conceptualized, the religious landscape and identity of contemporary Inuit is also re-conceptualized through the arts. Within the mandate for primitivism established in the genesis of Inuit art, the market demand for shamanism flourished. Examples of this demand can be seen in numerous catalogues of Inuit art with sections devoted to Sedna,¹⁷ to the shaman¹⁸ and to the Spirit world.¹⁹ There are many examples of each of these categories in the various forms of Inuit art (i.e., sculptures, prints, tapestries, cinema etc.). Yet, they are also a selected piece of the Inuit shamanic cosmology. Nelson Graburn contends that Inuit art risks essentializing the traditional Inuit cosmology:

The many varieties of humans, humanoids, spirits, and transformations that appear in mythology and experience are not easily systematized. Any attempt at definitive classification or analysis contains the possibility of violating the data, for the Inuit did not traditionally feel the need for neatness or logical closure in many of their tales, nor did the multiplicity of individual experiences exclude considerable variation.²⁰

¹⁷ Harold Seidelman and James E. Turner, *The Inuit Imagination*, 71-87; Frederich B Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman*; David Ruben Piqtoukun, *Between Two Worlds*.

¹⁸ Derek Norton and Nigel Reading, "Beyond the Igloo: Shamans and Spirits," in *Cape Dorset Sculpture*, ed. Derek Norton and Nigel Reading (Vancouver, Toronto and Seattle: Douglas & McIntyre and University of Washington Press, 2005), 94-125; David Ruben Piqtoukun, *Between Two Worlds*.

¹⁹ Harold Seidelman and James E. Turner, *The Inuit Imagination*, 33-70; Marina Devine, "No 'Demon' Carvings from Baker Lake Arts and Crafts Center... Yet," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 4.4 (1992): 4-11; David Ruben Piqtoukun, *Between Two World*.

²⁰ Nelson H.H. Graburn, "Man, Beast, and Transformation in Canadian Inuit Art and Culture," in *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence*, ed. Marjorie M. Halpin and Michael M. Ames (Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 194.

He goes on to suggest that the materialization of the Inuit shamanic cosmology has limited or frozen the Inuit conception of the creatures of their traditional sacred stories. Certainly, the Inuit shamanic cosmology included more than the story of Sedna, the centrality of the shaman and the knowledge of some spirits. Yet, these were the subjects that became popular themes in contemporary Inuit art. What becomes clear is that *qallunaat* authorities emphasized the production of ‘primitive’ themes in Inuit art, including shamanism, but what was supplied in the art markets failed to represent the diversity of that religious tradition. As a result, the presentation of Inuit identity perceived through ‘authentic’ art fails to adequately represent either the traditional or contemporary Inuit way of life. Piqtoukun mentions that there are artistic subjects that are taboo for him to depict; he specifically references a sculpture he created of a shamanic transformation (into animal form) and explains that the power of that liminal period should not be dealt with lightly (he neglected to mention other examples of his works that touched on his understanding of the taboo).²¹ Specifically, Piqtoukun’s exploration of his shamanic heritage is intimately tied with his faith. While he was mostly raised in residential schools, his path of self-discovery taken through his art has provided him a way of reconnecting with his religious heritage. Maintaining faith or at least a connection with that part of his heritage has provided for a different understanding of the powerful. Engaging powerful subjects, such as shamanic transformation, is thus done with care and recognition. That being said, the acknowledgment of the taboo hints to the Inuit recognition that the specific shamanic themes depicted in art are but a part of that catalogue of faith within traditional Inuit religious culture. Certainly, Inuit art has played

²¹ David Ruben Piqtoukun, interviewed by Colette G. St-Onge, 17 June 2011.

a significant role in building the imagination surrounding the Inuit shamanic landscape, but it is also interesting to note that there are parts of that cosmology that are not acknowledged in the arts—especially for an outsider community.²²

Parallel to this is the small phenomenon of devotional Christian themed Inuit art that often remains in the North.²³ Such examples and their unique place in Arctic Canada offers an alternative to the image of Inuit identity communicated through the arts to Southern audiences. The rise of evangelical and Pentecostal movements in the North highlights the meaning and relevance of Christian religion to Inuit identity today—and in opposition to the prominence of Inuit shamanism seen in the arts. As a result, the religious identity of contemporary Inuit – similar to their socio-cultural identity balanced between the tradition and the modern – cannot be located in either the shamanic, the Christian or another absolute definition. Religion is a *lived* phenomenon and Inuit have individually constructed a religious identity that is relevant to their experiences, incorporating elements of their shamanic heritage alongside elements of the adopted forms of Christianity (consider again Nasogaluak’s “Best of my Culture,” a sculpture incorporating images from the two religious traditions to speak to the two socio-cultural groups that make up his audience).

While Inuit art is a platform to discuss aspects of Inuit identity, it is neither static nor singular. What emerges from the shifting themes in Inuit art, between the primitive and the modern and between the shamanic and Christian or non-religious, is that identity

²² This becomes an interesting dilemma to consider for research on Inuit religiosity. In this regard, and as *qallunaat*, I am limited in my capacity to learn about the Inuit shamanic cosmology. Conversely, a Inuk scholar might be limited in their capacity to disclose aspects of their shamanic heritage.

²³ In chapter 3, a few examples of Christian-inspired art were cited from the catalogue of David Ruben Piqtoukun, dealing with his experiences in Christian residential schools. Bill Nasogaluak has similarly tackled this subject. These are not the ‘Christian’ themed pieces in consideration here. Rather, see Jean Blodgett, “Christianity and Inuit Art,” (1988) for a discussion of the *devotional* pieces considered here.

need not be isolated in this binary, nor need it be exclusively framed within that binary. As artists continue to explore their imagination, incorporating new materials and new themes, the spectrum of Inuit identity will continue to develop.

4.4. What Contemporary Inuit Art Means to Other Minority Identity Claims

Canada is home to numerous minorities and each promotes an identity that sets themselves apart from the majority (or the authoritative minority). While diversity is an enshrined right in Canada, the means by which diversity and equality are lived is not so black on white. This is why minorities continue to present identity claims to the Canadian courts and legislatures in order to secure their right to live out such a distinct identity. For Inuit, their identity has been strongly negotiated through their arts. The development of Inuit art, and the negotiation of identity that occurs within that development, highlights that minority identities, whether of Inuit or another, should not be conceptualized as static by outsiders. In fact, societies should constantly be reminded of the diversity and fluidity of identity that is being negotiated between a group or individual and their environment. It is always contextual. The essentialization of identity and the emphasis placed on authenticity fails to do justice to the ideals of diversity and equality. Within the context of a state, it is therefore crucial to maintain the possibility of the fluidity of identity by respecting the evident diversity of minorities and, in this case, the evident diversity of identity in Inuit art in which artists are increasingly ‘taking control’ and redefining how Canadians and any *qallunaat* sees them.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1. Symbols of Authenticity

Qallunaat, especially Canadian state authorities, have played a decisive role in the genesis and development of contemporary Canadian Inuit art and, in consequence, the presentation of Inuit identity to non-Inuit. Specifically, the promotion of shamanic imagery, envisioned as an authentic expression of the Inuit by non-Inuit, asserted a static image of Inuit identity that was largely cast in the primitive. That being said, the role of Inuit art is changing and the agency of Inuit themselves cannot be ignored or undervalued. The individuation of Inuit artists and their art is emblematic of an assertion of Inuit identity by Inuit in the art world and in Canadian society.

Within Canada, and to a lesser extent on the international stage, Inuit art emerges as a symbol of Inuit identity. It is also, paradoxically, a part of the canon of Canadian identity to the world. It was marketed as such through the genesis of contemporary art, in which Inuit art served as a means by which non-Inuit could encounter images of the idealized and ‘primitive’ people of the Canadian North—being both quintessential to and an exotic facet of the Canadian experience. As Inuit art has established itself over the last half-century, Inuit artists have taken control of their medium of identity construction and are putting forward new definitions of the Inuit experience that challenge the once static assumptions based in a primitive conceptualization.

The concept of authenticity has been woven into the history of contemporary Inuit art. Early promoters worked to assert the authenticity of Inuit art as a symbol of Inuit and their place in Canada. As the value of that symbol grew, the marketplace was flooded

with imitations that often confused the buyer (with vague promotional strategies alluding to the North) into thinking that they were still investing in the unique and Inuit made artistic creations of Canada's North. As Inuit art was meant, in part, as a means for Inuit to engage with the Canadian capitalist economy, this crisis in the market place became a concern of the Government of Canada—who had promoted Inuit art for this very financial reason. As a result, the Government introduced the Igloo Tag in 1959 as a symbol of authenticity for this new and valued symbol of Inuit identity.

The Igloo Tag endures today as the most esteemed indicator of an Inuit and Arctic made unique creation—though the Government is seeking to pass on that responsibility as it risks being liable to misrepresentation since they, on paper, spend no time or money on this program. More generally, the concept of authenticity so intimately tied to Inuit art affirms a representation of identity – as it did with the primitive and shamanic categories popularized in the early days of that art – and pushes other representations of identity beyond the categories of normalcy. This is arguably why the market is so slow to respond to the new *social realist* trends in Inuit art that have emerged over the last twenty-five years. This static conceptualization of identity, enshrined through a government and industry endorsed symbol of authenticity, fundamentally denies the fluidity of Inuit identity. In so doing, the diversity of minority identities in Canada is also jeopardized.

5.2. The Fluidity of Identity

This thesis has tried to contribute in two distinct ways. The first was in an effort to expand the discussion of Inuit art by considering the meaning of shamanic imagery within it. The second has been to add depth to discussions of diversity in Canada—

particularly in terms of the unquestioned static representations of minority identities in this context. In so doing the value of art as a medium of identity becomes most clear; it is uniquely helpful in challenging the static delineation of a minority identity and providing for the fluidity of identity since members of that community contribute directly to that discussion, engaging directly with the construction of identity. Certainly, the success of Inuit art is beyond comparison with most other arts made by minority groups. Yet, it emerges a strong example for the possibility nonetheless.

Inuit today are increasingly participating in the definition Inuit identity. What remains an important feature to remember is that identity is fluid, being constructed by an individual or a group and their environment. It blossoms in numerous and diverse ways. Outsiders cannot accept one static definition and ignore the other narratives written by that community.

As for the identity of Inuit today, there is no doubt that shamanism continues to hold currency. Its prominence in art – both traditional and modern representations of that craft – exemplifies its symbolic value in social and political discourses. While Inuit statistically present themselves as Christians to Canada, they continue to engage with the traditional images of Inuit shamanism as part of an effort to preserve their distinct cultural identity. The value of shamanism as social currency among contemporary Inuit is closely tied with efforts to assert ‘Inuitness’ in the North in the wake of colonization and Christianization.

Shamanism, while being a religious tradition, emerges with social currency in the modern context. It serves as a means for Inuit to survive culturally in a multicultural and diverse world. Yet, survival has always been a feature of Inuit shamanism. It can be

distinguished throughout Inuit history. Shamanism first served as a means for environmental survival (as a mediator between Inuit and their natural environment), and then as a means for economic survival (as a sellable feature of culture that could be represented in art in the wake of the collapse of traditional economies), and finally as a means of cultural survival (as a social symbol of Inuit). In this sense, shamanism is part and parcel with the survival of the Inuit and one can only speculate on the mutation it will take as Inuit continue to assert and engage in the definition of their identity in a diverse Canada.

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