CHANNEL 51: IGLOOLIK
EXHIBITION AND EDUCATION GUIDE

Humber
Galleries
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Film still from Inuit Cree Reconciliation
ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Channel 51: Igloolik was an exhibition presented across Humber Galleries' two locations celebrating 30 years of industry-changing video production coming out of Igloolik, a remote community of 1600 people in Nunavut. Guest curated by Asinnajaq, Channel 51: Igloolik - Chill Zone brought together a reading room and mediathèque with titles from Arnait Video Production and Isuma Video Collective dating back to 1988; and film paraphernalia, artwork, and historical objects from Isuma's own collection. L Space was outfitted as a cozy space with a screen, couches, and tables where all were invited to take in a film or peruse the literature.

Challenging stereotypes about ways of life in the North, these boundary-breaking video collectives are still going strong. Arnait and Isuma have shared a vast body of work about contemporary Inuit visual culture with the world. In fact, Isuma will bring their co-created, self-determined contributions to the international stage by representing Canada at the 2019 Venice Biennale. This pair of exhibitions presented an opportunity to see what has been accomplished over three decades. The sister exhibit at North Space, Channel 51: Igloolik - Atanarjuat, revealed the making of the internationally renowned film Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner.

This project marks an ongoing partnership and learning process between the Aboriginal Resource Centre and Humber Galleries at Humber College.
ABOUT THE GUEST CURATOR

Asinnajaq (pronounced ‘Ah-sinn-ah-yak’), known also as Isabella Weetaluktuk, is an Inuk visual artist, writer, and curator. She is from Inukjuak, Nunavik and grew up in Montreal. Asinnajaq’s first job was travelling the Inuit Nunangat. During this time she was lucky to take in the immense beauty of places like the Torngat Mountains, Diana Island and the fjords of Baffin Island. This was also an opportunity to see many animals, old food caches, and the site of a Thule whale bone dwelling near Resolute Bay. While looking for her next move, Asinnajaq made a storyboard for her father Jobie Weetaluktuk’s next film. This small task turned into the Assistant Director position, and the chance to film in Inukjuak, the place where many of Isabella’s aunts, uncles and cousins live. Inspired, Asinnajaq jumped into film school and completed her first film with the National Film Board, titled Three Thousand. Isabella moves to honor the past, and create a foundation for the future.

ABOUT ISUMA AND ARNAIT VIDEO COLLECTIVE

Igloolik Isuma Productions was formed in 1990 by Zacharias Kunuk, Paul Apak Angilirq (now deceased), and the US-born Norman Cohn in Igloolik, Nunavut. For thirty years, they have been producing groundbreaking media from the small, remote region of Igloolik, giving Inuit a voice and a tool for self-representation in media. They have found critical acclaim through their productions, have empowered the people of Nunavut, and have brought the stories and issues of Inuit culture to the attention of the world. Kunuk and Cohn will be representing Canada at the 2019 Venice Biennale.

Related to Isuma, Arnait video collective is an Inuit women’s collective created in 1991 to broadcast the unique culture and voices of Inuit women through video production, and to open discussions with Canadians of all origins. It was founded by Marie-Hélène Cousineau (from Montreal), and Igloolik residents Madeline Ivalu, Susan Avingaq, Carol Kunuk, and Atuat Akkitirq.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Asinnajaq: Ah-sinn-ah-yak
Atanarjuat: Ah-tah-nar-joo-at
Inuktitut: I-nuk-ti-toot
Nunuvut: Noon-na-voot
Unakuluk: Oo-nah-koo-louk
NOTE FOR FACULTY

This guide was designed to help contextualize the films of Isuma and Arnait Video Collective, as well as to provide a starting point for studying some of the issues affecting contemporary Inuit society. Originally designed to supplement an exhibit of the films, the guide can also be used by faculty and college students alike in any classroom that is screening one or more of Isuma or Arnait Video Collective’s films.

For more of an overview of Inuit culture in general, we recommend consulting the Teachers’ Resources created by Isuma, which they have made available on their website here: http://www.isuma.tv/isuma-productions/teachers-resources

For an overview of Inuit culture, contemporary life, language, and traditions – particularly in engaging younger learners, you can consult the Exploring Inuit Culture Curriculum created by Isuma, as well as some of the lesson plans on their site. Although the former is designed for grades 4-6, some of the discussion questions and readings can be adapted for the college classroom if the goal is to introduce Inuit culture to those who have no prior awareness.

Isuma Inuit Studies Reader: Anthology of Selected Writings by and about Inuit, edited by Gillian Robinson, is also an excellent starting point, as it provides a broad survey of readings related to Inuit culture that are suitable for older students. The book provides an overview of Nunavut, Igloolik, and the meaning of “isuma,” as well as primary source documents regarding 1800s and 1900s contact between settlers and Inuit.

Refer to our annotated bibliography for a complete list of readings related to Inuit culture, Inuit media (specifically Isuma and Arnait), and Indigenous Resurgence. This bibliography can be found in our LibGuide, as well links to the resources that can be found through Humber Libraries.

Outsider Depictions of Indigenous Communities

It is important to discuss with your students the many misconceptions that exist about Indigenous people and their culture and where these misconceptions come from. This is partly due to a lack of knowledge about these communities but is also rooted in what can be called “damage-centred” research. A letter by Eve Tuck addresses how this kind of research and the portrait created by settlers about Indigenous communities perpetuates the idea that marginalized communities are broken and hopeless. Isuma, Arnait, and other self-represented media hope to overcome this image through the use of artistic and performance-based traditions that reclaim the best practices of traditional cultures as a means of resurgence.

We encourage you to read the full Eve Tuck Letter. It can be found here:

EXERCISE TO USE WITH THIS GUIDE

Begin by trying to learn as much as you can about what your class already knows about Inuit culture and what they would like to learn. In order to properly frame your discussion and pull out relevant films and talking points – the annotated bibliography is divided into sections about Isuma, contemporary Inuit culture and Indigenous resurgence which, along with the keywords under each article, should help you to quickly locate articles of relevance if you feel that you need more background on a subject.

Before viewing the films, ask:

What do you already know about the Arctic/Nunavut/Inuit? Are you familiar with Isuma?

If there is time and depending on the class size, you could go around and ask each student their name and background, and if they would like to volunteer any knowledge they are bringing into viewing the film(s) or questions that they are hoping you will address. This is a good way of gauging possible preconceptions/misconceptions and gaps in knowledge, as well as determining if there is information that the class has already been given.

Share the following quote from Assinajaq:

“Isuma’s work is about knowing yourself, about following the Inuit way if you are Inuit. If you’re not Inuit, it’s about engaging in a similar process for yourself.”

Ask the students to just think, quietly, to themselves for a bit:

What makes you who you are? How do you know yourself?

In a short paragraph, ask them to describe their findings.

After viewing the film(s), After viewing the film(s), finish by having the students reflect quietly on what they learned. At the end of class, ask that they take this knowledge with them when they leave the classroom and to let it open their minds to discussions of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization, and the role that they can play in breaking down structures we operate within. Ask them again to consider the guiding questions of the exhibit, and have them note how their answers may have changed.
ABOUT THE WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

THE FILMS:

We have 34 films on exhibit at L Space, ranging from documentaries to animation, short films, and feature-length movies. The films are produced by Isuma and Arnait Video Productions. They represent a diverse range of topics, and tell stories of the Inuit way of life, historical experiences, and important traditions and legends. Some of the films may present material that is challenging to viewers, as topics of youth suicide and historical injustices are explored, as well as films that are reactions against anti-hunting lobbying. In this guide, we have included resources related to some key issues in the film, which will help give context to the films.

Atanarjuat, the film that is the focus of the exhibit at North Space, is an epic film based on a traditional Inuit story. This film was groundbreaking, as it brought international attention to Isuma and to Inuit storytelling and media. It was Canada’s first feature-length fiction film written, produced, directed, and acted by Inuit. It was critically acclaimed, winning the Camera D’Or (for best new director) at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival. The success of Atanarjuat led to the recognition of Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn as important filmmakers, and they will represent Canada at the 2019 Venice Biennale.

Please refer to page 25 for a complete list of films in the exhibit.
THE SOAPSTONE SCULPTURES:

These sculptures were created by some of the people involved in the production of *Atanarjuat* to celebrate the release of the film in 2001. They are created in a traditional Inuit style, using stone that is found in Cape Dorset, Nunavut.

*Headpunch* by Zacharias Kunuk, the director of *Atanarjuat*.
Green Cape Dorset stone.

*Love and Hate* by James Ungalaq, production designer of *Atanarjuat*.
Green Cape Dorset stone.

*Shaman Spirit* by Natar Ungalaq, lead actor from *Atanarjuat*.
Green Cape Dorset stone, marble, raven claw, walrus whiskers.
WALL HANGING:

The film *Unakuluk (Dear Little One)*, and this blanket are about adoption in Inuit culture. There are scenes of the blanket's creation recorded in the film.

*Unakuluk (Dear Little One)* Blanket, 2003. By Susan Avingaq, Marie-Helene Cousineau, Madeline Ivalu, Mary Kunuk, Mary Qualitaluk.

Wall hanging made for the production of the same name.

Film still from *Unakuluk (Dear Little One)*, showing the creation of the blanket.
ISSUES TO DISCUSS IN RELATION TO THE EXHIBITION

The following pages discuss some of the key issues around the works in this exhibit, and can serve as a starting point for discussion. This guide is by no means exhaustive in listing the issues relevant to contemporary Inuit society, but was created to help address the themes present in many of Isuma and Arnait’s films.

We have included selected articles to supplement the discussion, and have also created a full annotated bibliography related to the exhibit, which can be found in our LibGuide.

INUIT MEDIA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ISUMA

Igloolik Isuma Productions was created in order to promote self-representation in Inuit media, which allows Inuit to transcend stereotypes. The goal of Isuma’s productions is to create media for Inuit, using their own language and stories, and using actors and film crews from Igloolik. Outsiders are welcome to view this media to see this self-representation, as Zacharias Kunuk has stated that, “Our style is inside looking out rather than vice versa, the community expressing itself to itself and others are welcome to watch.”1 It is important to note that the director Kunuk is using a medium that he was exposed to after his land had been colonized in his childhood, but he has adopted it for Inuit so that they can reclaim their representation in the media, and preserve their culture for future generations.


Further reading:


INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE

In her curator’s notes for the exhibit at North Space, Asinnajaq said,

*The word of the hour is Resurgence. In so many ways, Indigenous people throughout the Nations that inhabit Turtle Island are finding and remembering the activities, relationships, and objects that help make them shine brightest, striking much-needed balances and answering some extremely challenging questions. In my estimation, so many of Isuma’s struggles and questions and the filmmaking in Igloolik speak to this notion of resurgence.*

In *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, Leanne Simpson echoes this thought, as she states,

*Building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly re-investing in our own ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions. All of these require us—as individuals and collectives—to diagnose, interrogate and eviscerate the insidious nature of conquest, empire, and imperial thought in every aspect of our lives. It requires us to reclaim the very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems and lifeways in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context within which they were originally generated.* (pg 17-18)

Resurgence in Action

When television was first introduced to the community of Igloolik, many residents worried that it would weaken their Inuit culture. It became imperative to show Inuit on screen. Isuma took the medium of television and filmmaking and used it to empower the community through self-representation to preserve the culture that risked being lost. Asinnajaq says,

*The threat of becoming less Inuk and more of something else was transformed into a strength: that Inuk can see themselves and answer their own questions about who we are and where we come from. An Inuk presence in so many spheres has been created by these efforts: in the film Festival circuits, on TV, and on the internet. Imagine how many minds that is! These people and their collaborators are strong in the capacity to make work that is for Inuit, while remaining accessible to most everyone.*

Isuma is an act of resurgence in that it captures Inuit showcasing their own stories, speaking their language, honouring their ancestors, dressed in traditional attire and, most prominently, using film to capture true Inuit life and passing it on to the next generation.
This Exhibit’s Guiding Questions and Resurgence:

*What makes you who you are? What are you thinking about?*

By investigating our own histories and experiences and the structures we operate within, we are able to confront colonialism within the institutions we are a part of. By understanding who we are and where we come from in relation to Indigenous issues, we can address barriers to Indigenous resurgence. This reflexivity is embedded in Isuma’s work, as the complex spiritual, political, and social relationships that hold peoplehood together are continuously renewed; their productions allow Inuit to reclaim and restore cultural practices that have been neglected and or disrupted.

![Film still from Exile](image)

**Resurgence Movements in Canada**

There are resurgence movements in Canada that are acts of protest in response to Canada 150 celebrations as well as the shortcomings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They are part of a broader history of rebellion and resurgence, which will continue beyond these individual movements.

**Idle No More Movement**

Idle No More is a peaceful revolution founded in 2012 by four women: three First Nations women and one non-Indigenous ally, calling for all people to come together and honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water. It began as a reaction to alleged legislative abuses of Indigenous treaty rights by the Stephen Harper and the Conservative federal government. The first protests were timed to coincide with the announcement that Chief Theresa Spence of Attawapiskat was launching a liquid diet to demand a meeting with Prime Minister Harper and the Governor General of Canada to discuss Indigenous rights.
The goals of the movement are to help build sovereignty and resurgence of nationhood. These goals have strong roots dating back to hundreds of years of indigenous sovereignty and resistance on Turtle Island. The movement pressures the government and industry to protect the environment and to reframe the nation-to-nation relationship. It supports similar movements and demonstrations in countries other than Canada.

**The Idle No More Manifesto:**

*The Treaties are nation to nation agreements between First Nations and the British Crown who are sovereign nations. The Treaties are agreements that cannot be altered or broken by one side of the two Nations. The spirit and intent of the Treaty agreements meant that First Nations peoples would share the land, but retain their inherent rights to lands and resources. Instead, First Nations have experienced a history of colonization which has resulted in outstanding land claims, lack of resources and unequal funding for services such as education and housing.*

*The state of Canada has become one of the wealthiest countries in the world by using the land and resources. Canadian mining, logging, oil and fishing companies are the most powerful in the world due to land and resources. Some of the poorest First Nations communities (such as Attawapiskat) have mines or other developments on their land but do not get a share of the profit.*

*The taking of resources has left many lands and waters poisoned – the animals and plants are dying in many areas in Canada. We cannot live without the land and water. We have laws older than this colonial government about how to live with the land.*

*Currently, this government is trying to pass many laws so that reserve lands can also be bought and sold by big companies to get profit from resources. They are promising to share this time…Why would these promises be different from past promises? We will be left with nothing but poisoned water, land and air. This is an attempt to take away sovereignty and the inherent right to land and resources from First Nations peoples.*

*There are many examples of other countries moving towards sustainability, and we must demand sustainable development as well. We believe in healthy, just, equitable and sustainable communities and have a vision and plan of how to build them.*

*Please join us in creating this vision.*

This movement is a reaction to Canada 150 celebrations. The celebration of Canada’s 150th birthday ignores the Indigenous people who have been on the land for over 15,000 years. The celebrations cost the government half a billion dollars while many First Nations are still without potable drinking water. It is a project that highlights current and future resistance and asks people to share their work and approaches to resistance. It brings attention to the many ways Indigenous peoples have historically resisted, and continue to resist, what many see as discriminatory and assimilationist policies of the Canadian government, such as those regarding pipeline construction, access to drinking water and child welfare funding gaps and—perhaps most importantly—the Indian Act itself.

Examples of #Resistance150:

The majority of examples are in the arts and social media fields. They include: the cutting up of Indian Status Cards (The Indian Act has been identified as a main contributor in youth suicides and MMIW [Murdered & Missing Indigenous Women in Canada and US]), and plays showcasing Canadian History from an Aboriginal perspective.

Christi Belcourt, who started the movement, has said of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

I don’t believe that reconciliation is even possible. The entire premise of Canada rests on the dispossession of Indigenous people of their lands. As a people, everything we have known for generation upon generation has been the land. Because our connection to the lands has been severed, it affects our whole being. Until the theft of lands is looked at, until we can reconcile our own relationships with the lands, then reconciliation with the Canadian state is not possible. Until then, reconciliation is only a move towards assimilation.

Examples of the work being done can be seen on the movement’s twitter page, @Resistance150.
Discussion Questions

1. The main barriers to resurgence have been identified as intimidation, cooptation, and the politics of distraction. What do these terms mean, and how can these barriers be addressed?

2. How can settlers step aside to allow room for Indigenous resurgence? What are some behaviours that impede resurgence and perpetuate colonialism?

3. How has the Truth and Reconciliation Commission failed to address the concerns of all Indigenous people in Canada? What can the government do to improve their relationship with Indigenous peoples and build a relationship with them? What sort of actions can they take?

4. Indigenous people hold places (as in the land), as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind. On the other hand, most western societies place time as the narrative of central importance, and tend to derive meaning from the world in historical/developmental terms. How can these differences work together to establish an equal and just relationship?

Further reading:


EATING MEAT, HUNTING, AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Several films in the exhibition, such as Tungijuq (What We Eat), Aiviq! (Bowhead!), and Nanugiurutiga (My First Polar Bear), depict the importance of hunting to Inuit. Many other films in the collection also show hunting scenes as part of the Inuit way of life. Tungijuq was created in response to anti-seal hunting lobbying, and Aiviq! follows hunters as they illegally catch a bowhead whale to fulfill an Elder’s dying wishes despite the Canadian government’s ban on bowhead hunting. These films can open a discussion of the role and necessity of hunting to Inuit, and how claims of animal cruelty from outsiders could arise from a lack of understanding of Inuit practices. Not only is hunting a tradition to Inuit, it is a necessary means of survival in a region where other food is prohibitively expensive and inaccessible and where the trading of pelts is a source of income in a region that faces vast unemployment. Fur also provides Inuit with necessary warmth. Tungijuq aims to show outsiders that Inuit see themselves as part of a food chain, and hunt with respect for the animals. Animal parts are not wasted in Inuit culture, and their consumption of animals must be viewed as distinct from industrial farming practices. With laws protecting certain animals from being hunted and pressure from environmentalists, Inuit food sovereignty is at risk. These films can give outsiders an understanding of why hunting is important to Inuit, and can help challenge their assumptions.

Further reading:


SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN MODERN INUIT SOCIETY

The works by Isuma and Arnait have given people in the remote region of Igloolik the tools to show their reality from an inside-out perspective, and this can provide outsiders with a greater understanding of the social issues faced by people in Nunavut. Difficult topics are often addressed in their films, including the devastating legacy of colonization and missionization and how that has contributed to the modern-day epidemic of Inuit youth suicide. *Artcirq* follows the formation of a circus to help youth reject suicide. The films *SOL* and *407* address the topic of suicide, and *SOL* looks specifically at the community’s response to the alleged suicide of one of the actors from *Artcirq* who was in RCMP custody at the time of his death. Films such as *Exile* give harrowing accounts of the mistreatment and forced relocation of Inuit by the Canadian government. We can hear in these first-hand accounts a mistrust towards the government and the RCMP, due to how their society has been negatively impacted and changed by colonialism. These films can help outsiders to understand how the problems faced by modern Inuit are deep and complex. They illustrate the need for Indigenous resurgence and cultural reclamation from an Inuit perspective, which is also asserted in the films *Attatama Nunanga (My Father’s Land)* and *Show Me on the Map*, which focus on the conflicts around modern resource development in Nunavut.

For a better understanding of the Inuit perspective, it is essential to know a few key points about the Inuit language, custom, and education. For starters, Inuit have an oral history: nothing is written down. Learning comes from observing and imitating, not through indoor classrooms. During the early 1900’s, a syllabic writing system was adopted from the Cree language by a missionary who taught it to Inuit, who then taught it to their children. Inuktitut is one of the traditional languages that has survived and is commonly used today, written and orally. In schools today, up until grade three, Inuit children are taught in Inuktitut and then only taught English from fourth grade onwards. School systems in the North of Canada follow a southern curriculum that conflicts with hunting season. The result of the use of a misplaced curriculum is a high drop-out rate. For this reason, Inuit are starting to develop their own curriculum that also has roots in Indigenous resurgence.
Unlike other communities in Canada, where a lot of value is placed on higher education, within Inuit society an illiterate person is still seen as a valuable contributor to society.

When approaching sensitive topics that highlight people’s differences, such as Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous, it is important to keep in mind and respect background and history. In this discussion, it is vital to think of Inuit traditional way of life when examining their traditional and modern lifestyle, their current social problems, the effect of colonialism on their culture as a whole, and their future.

Zacharias Kunuk, one of the founding members of Isuma Productions, explains his experience as he witnessed Inuit move from “the Stone Age to the Digital Age” in his lifetime. A drastic shift like that experienced by Inuit should not be taken lightly. It is in part due to this momentous shift that we now see a rate of youth suicide in the North that is ten times the national average. Aside from a drastic shift from one age to another, it can not be forgotten that 4,000 years of oral history was silenced by fifty years of priests, schools and the multiple failed attempts at incorporating English cable TV into Inuit communities.

Kunuk explains the suicide rate as being high now but also points out that it was not always like that. In Inuit history, the only people who committed suicide were elders. He explains,

The elders are respected, but when an old man cannot hunt and supply the community with more food, he is just being carried around. This is a moving culture. People are always moving from place to place, seeking better hunting grounds. Elders—men and women—would get left behind. That was their choice. We call it suicide, but probably it was their last communication with the spirits, and the spirits just took them. But today our young people are committing suicide because they are now in a lost culture. They are not educated; they went to school, but didn’t receive an appropriate education.¹

¹http://www.isuma.tv/isuma/isuma-style/zacharias-kunuk-speaks-with-joysanne-sidimus

LOOKING AT THE SUICIDE EPIDEMIC

Teens face issues everywhere, but the suicide rate in the North is ten times the national average. School-aged children as well as teens are hit hard by what is clearly an epidemic. The factors contributing to this are numerous and it is difficult to evaluate and treat the problem. People in the North face poverty, inadequate housing and lack of access to clean water and food, substance abuse, unemployment, and youth inherit the painful legacy of their parents’ and grandparents’ experiences in residentials schools. As Inuit have been forced to assimilate into white culture, the traditions and language of their own culture have been lost at a rapid pace, while forced relocations by the RCMP exiled people to the remote High North. The situation feels desperate.

The documentary SOL offers a powerful account of how suicide and relations with the
RCMP affect individuals in the North. It tells the story of a young man who was found dead while in police custody. The RCMP ruled the death a suicide, but the people who knew the man are certain that it was not. Those interviewed in the film speak to the many issues facing Inuit and how suicide and police brutality have affected all of them. The film may be difficult to watch for some students, so it is recommended that faculty pre-screen the film and inform their class of troubling subject matter before it is shown.

The following moments in the film are poignant, and offer starting points for discussion in classrooms that are viewing the film:

19:30 - 22:30: Historical background to the suicide epidemic is given, showing that the suicide rate is growing exponentially. In 1968, coroners’ records indicate that only one person died of suicide. In 1988, 101 Inuit died by suicide (a rate of 6 per year). In 2003, it was 37 people. By 2013 (45 years later) the number was 728.

33:34: Sol describes himself in relation to those in his community, saying, “if people around me are happy, sad, then I’m happy, sad.”

37:42 – 42:00: These scenes question how Sol died, with those interviewed noting that, while he was in police custody, “everything that could possibly be used to kill yourself is taken.” There is discussion of the transition period from the old way of life to the new, and that government programs that should address the change are based on “white people’s” mentality, when they should be based on Inuit values.

1:10:00 - 1:14:00: This section highlights the problems facing Inuit, asserting that trauma is not something that can be fixed; monetary gain is not going to help. When you inflict that kind of damage on society, there’s no easy fix. Assimilation has led to people not knowing who they are and who they want to be.

Discussion Questions
1. What is meant by the term "a lost culture?" How can being a part of a lost culture lead to suicide?

2. Is there a relationship between being in the Digital Age and high suicide rates?

3. As the social problems in the North are so complex, how can they be approached in order to work towards solutions?

4. Explain the role of Indigenous resurgence in addressing these problems.

**Further reading:**


ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT: CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION

The film Qapirangajug (Inuit Knowledge of Climate Change) details how Inuit elders have been witness to the changing climate of the North, and how their experiences inform and help prove scientists’ evaluations of climate change. The loss of sea ice and rapid changes to climate have affected the population of animals that Inuit depend on for food, complicating their ability to hunt. Efforts to slow climate change made by the Canadian government have enforced bans on hunting certain animals, presenting further challenges for Inuit survival. The issue of sustainable hunting is one that arises in Isuma productions and in literature around Isuma: Inuit hunters maintain that their methods of hunting are sustainable and limited only to hunting what they need, and that extending hunting bans beyond commercial hunting limits their livelihood.

Attama Nunanga (My Father’s Land) and Show Me on the Map (Parts 1 and 2) are documentaries focused on the conflicts between Inuit and mining companies. Resource extraction in the North creates environmental challenges, and Inuit find themselves in conflict with mining companies over land ownership and protection of their territory. Some Inuit welcome mining companies into the North as it opens the possibility of employment in an area where jobs are scarce, but others feel that the companies do not hire Inuit workers and are merely taking advantage of their land.

Further reading:


FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

1. (In response to the films) Is this how Inuit live now/are there still people who live like this?

It’s important to point out that several of the films show historical recreations of pre-contact Inuit life, as a way of preserving this culture for future generations. The creation of props for the films also allow those involved to learn traditional crafts of garment and tool-making. Many of the traditions and practices demonstrated in these films are still a part of everyday Inuit life, although their modern way of life is also heavily influenced by the South. Many of the documentaries in the collection show what Inuit life is like now.

2. Are you Aboriginal? Was this exhibit created by Aboriginal people?

For this exhibit, we brought in a guest curator, Asinnajaq (pronounced ‘Ah-sinn-ah-yak’), known also as Isabella Weetaluktuk. She is an Inuk visual artist, writer, and curator. The exhibit is also presented in partnership with Humber’s Aboriginal Resource Centre (ARC).

In her Curator’s Notes, Asinnajaq said, “Being invited into new spaces presents great opportunities each time to not only share our voice but to listen to those who have arrived before us. With that idea in mind, the shows that are presented were decided only after speaking with the Aboriginal Resource Centre to find out what is important to the students they work with. This chance to listen and rebound off each other gave us the following path.”

3. What languages are they speaking in the films/how many people know these languages?

They are speaking Inuktitut (pronounced I-nuk-ti-toot). There are approximately 35,000 Inuktitut speakers in Canada. Most of the younger generation of Inuit also know English and sometimes French as they are now taught those languages in school. There is risk of losing the language as the younger generation is no longer speaking it, and reliance on texting forces them to write in English to each other. One of the goals of Isuma is to preserve the language for future generations, which is why their productions are filmed in Inuktitut.

4. Why did you choose to have this exhibit?

The exhibit presents an opportunity to exclusively showcase Inuit art, which we had not yet done at Humber Galleries. We worked with the Aboriginal Resource Centre and a guest curator to bring together an exhibit that celebrates the work of Inuit filmmakers
and showcases Inuit art from an inside-out perspective. The exhibit was timely, as it was announced that Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn would be representing Canada at the 2019 Venice Biennale. For those previously unfamiliar with their work, this exhibit could serve as an introduction.

5. Where can I watch these films at home? Where can I learn more about this culture?

Many of the films can be watched at isuma.tv. We have resources that in the gallery for learning more about Inuit culture: including books in the exhibit and our annotated bibliography. Humber Libraries also has an Aboriginal Resource Guide here: http://libguides.humber.ca/aboriginal

6. Do they (in Nunavut) have animal protection laws?

It is important to note that there are animal protection laws and hunting restrictions imposed on Inuit by the Canadian government. These laws are often guided by environmentalism in response to a warming climate. There is also pressure on Indigenous hunters to cease their traditional hunting practices over concerns of animal cruelty, which comes from groups like PETA who do not necessarily understand the importance of seal hunting to Inuit communities as well as the methodology by which Inuit hunt. This is an important topic to discuss, and one that is directly addressed in the films Tungijuq (What We Eat) and Aiviq! (Bowhead!). As there has been so much controversy and debate over the issue of hunting, you’re encouraged to watch these films and to consider issues of food accessibility in the North. The films promote the Inuit treatment of animals as respectful and part of a complex, sustainable food chain (consider, for example, how they use all parts of the animal, and how they inherently hunt sustainably as they depend on the population of animals for their survival).

7. Where is/what is Nunavut/Igloolik?

Nunavut is a territory in the Arctic that was created on April 1, 1999. Prior to 1999, this land was part of the Northwest Territories. The Northwest Territories was divided along ethnic lines in order to form Nunavut: it was created to establish a separate territory for Inuit. Because Nunavut (along with the Yukon and the Northwest Territories) is a territory and not a province, the government has more direct control over it (compared to the rights of provincial governments). Although it is the largest in area of all Canada’s provinces and territories, it is the second least populous with a population of 35,944 (mostly Inuit). The name means “Our Land” in Inuktitut. The land has supported a continuous Indigenous population for 4,000 years. Most of the territory’s population resides in Iqaluit, the capital city. Igloolik is located much further north than the capital city (in Foxe Basin), and has a population of just 1682. Despite the small population of Igloolik, Isuma Productions has made it into an important cultural centre.
8. What is the difference between Métis, First Nations, and Inuit?

From: https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1303147522487/1303147669999
While there are many differences between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, these names refer to the three main groups of peoples who are the traditional inhabitants of this land. First Nations are those peoples who historically lived in North America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, below the Arctic. Inuit historically lived along the coastal edge and on the islands of Canada’s far north. The Métis descend from the historical joining of First Nations members and Europeans.

It is important to remember that First Nations, Inuit and Métis each have their own culture, based largely on the environment they traditionally inhabited.

9. What is the correct terminology to use when referring to Indigenous/Aboriginal people (what is the difference between these words)?

There is an excellent break down of the history and use of these terms here: http://indigenousfoundations.web.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/

It is important to note that specific individuals or groups may have terminology that they prefer to use when describing themselves. If in doubt, ask these people which terms they prefer, or use the word “Indigenous,” as it refers to people of various Aboriginal descent, who have a longstanding connection to a land or settlement, and who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement, and settlement of their traditional territories by others. It is used in a global context. The term “Aboriginal” is most often used in a Canadian context, as it refers to the first inhabitants of Canada, and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. “First Nations” refers to Aboriginal people in Canada who are not Métis or Inuit. “Native” and “Indian” hold negative connotations and should not be used by settlers.
LIST OF FILMS IN THE EXHIBITION

Qaggiq (Gathering Place), 1988, 00:55:00: Isuma’s first recreated fiction. In winter 1930s, four families celebrate the coming of spring.

Nunaqpa (Going Inland), 1991, 00:58:00: In summer 1930s, families go hunting summer-fat caribou for the hard winter ahead.

Attagutaaluk (Starvation), 1992, 00:23:00: Story of Attagutaaluk, a woman who survived starvation and became an honoured resident of Igloolik.

Saputi (Fish Traps), 1993, 00:30:00: As summer ends three families build a saputi to trap fish.

Quilliq (Oil Lamp), 1993, 00:10:00: The story, through word and song, of the seal oil lamp: the essential source of light and warmth.

Piujuk and Agutautuq, 1994, 00:26:00: Portrait of two Igloolik women as they engage in community events.

Nunavut (Our Land) Series, 1995: 13 part dramatic television series follows the lives of five fictional families living on the land in the Igloolik region in 1945.

Unikausiq (Stories), 1996, 00:06:00: Though computer animation, Mary Kunuk explores stories and songs recalled from her childhood.

Aqtuqsi (My Nightmare), 1996, 00:06:00: Aqtuqsi is a paralyzing from which one must wake up.
Nipi (Voice), 1999, 00:51:00: Inuit leaders and elders talk about leadership in the old way of life and in the new.

Ningiura (My Grandmother), 2000, 00:29:00: An elder and her granddaughter become closer after a family tragedy.

Nanugiurutiga (My First Polar Bear), 2000, 00:48:00: An 11-year old is taught to catch his first bear by his grandfather.

Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner, 2001, 2:41:00: Winner of the 2001 Camera d’Or at Cannes, Atanarjuat is an ancient legend from the Igloolik region and an epic story of jealousy, murder, and love.

Anaana, 2001, 00:52:00: Vivi Kunuk–mother of Zacharias Kunuk–recounts her life story, which contains the experiences of Inuit in the last 70 years.

Ajainaa (Almost), 2001, 00:52:00: Igloolik elders discuss their views of contemporary life.

Artcirq, 2001, 00:51:00: Story of Igloolik’s Artcirq Inuit youth circus, growing out of a desire to use circus and art to celebrate life and reject suicide.

Arviq! (Bowhead!), 2002, 00:52:00: In 1994, fulfilling the dying wish of a respected Elder, Igloolik hunters spark controversy when they illegally catch a bowhead whale.

Kunuk Family Reunion, 2003, 00:48:00: Zacharias Kunuk’s family gathers at their traditional home camp. Stories are shared as the family honors the ancestors who came before them.

Angakkuit (Shaman Stories), 2003, 00:52:00: Inuit memories and experiences of shamanism in the Igloolik region.

Unakuluk (Dear Little One), 2005, 00:46:00: Documentary on the common practice of adoption in Inuit culture.

The Journals of Knud Rasmussen, 2006, 01:53:00: The great shaman Avva and his family return to their home community of Igloolik, that lately has taken up the teachings of Christian missionaries.

Issaittuq (Waterproof), 2007, 00:45:00: After a violent incident a young man is sent to an outpost camp, where a hunter is waiting for him.

Maana (Now), 2007, 00:05:00: A young Inuk becomes aware of the impacts of global warming on his community.

407, 2007, 00:09:00: Short film highlights the importance, in a small Arctic community, of saying “hello.”
Exile, 2008, 00:42:00: With devastating first-person accounts of survival, Exile tackles the subject of the 1953 High Arctic Relocation from an Inuit point of view.

Before Tomorrow, 2008, 01:33:00: In Arnait Video Productions’ first feature film, a grandmother and her grandson are challenged to survive on their own when their family is killed by smallpox in the 1840s.

Inuit Piqutingit (What Belongs to Inuit), 2009, 00:49:00: A group of Nunavut elders travel to five museums to identify tools and clothing collected from their ancestors.

Tungijuq (What We Eat), 2009, 00:07:23: Inuit singer Tanya Tagaq talks back to the anti-seal hunting lobby on the eternal reality of hunting.

Qapirangajuq (Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change), 00:54:00: Elders and hunters discuss the social and ecological impacts of global warming from an Inuit point of view.

Charlie Pisuk, 2011, 00:17:00: Charlie Pisuk is your uncle, cousin, brother-in-law. What do you have to say about him? Someone is listening.

Show Me On The Map (pt.1 & 2), 2011, 00:58:00: Two part series on mining impacts in the north focusing on the Igloolik region and uranium mining in central Nunavut.

Unikaat Sivunittinnit (Messages from the Past), 2012, 00:60:00: Shot in 1992, elders tell stories about their family’s ajaja songs before recording them in an Igloolik studio. Inuktitut: no subtitles.

Inuit Cree Reconciliation, 2013, 00:45:00: Zacharias Kunuk and Cree filmmaker Neil Diamond explore the impacts of an 18th century conflict between Inuit and Cree in Northern Quebec.

Attatama Nunanga (My Father’s Land), 2014, 02:43:00: Mixing scenes from past and present, this film explores the relationship between Inuit history on the land and modern resource development on Baffin Island.

Angirattut (Coming Home), 2014, 01:25:00: After being relocated five decades ago, a group of elders return to Siugarjuk and embrace the restorative power of their homeland to heal personal loss. Inuktitut: no subtitles.

SOL, 2014, 01:16:00: Examines the underlying issues of youth suicide in Canada’s North while investigating the death of Solomon Tapatia Uyarasuk, a charismatic young artist who died in police custody in Igloolik.

Maliglutit (Searchers), 2016, 01:34:00: Nunavut, circa 1913. Kuanana returns from caribou hunting with his son to find his wife and daughter kidnapped. With the guidance of his father’s spirit helper, he sets off to reunite his family.