



facingNORTH

art | symbol | story

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2019

1999



ABOUT THE ARTIST | Abraham Anghik RUBEN



Inuit sculptor, Abraham Anghik Ruben was born on Nov. 26, 1951 in the hamlet of Paulatuk, Northwest Territories at a time when diamond and mineral exploration overshadowed fur trade and commercial whaling. Inuit culture was impacted by radical change at this time, forever altering traditional ways of life – which ultimately led Ruben on his introspective artistic journey of exploring connections between his ancestral roots and his identity.

Ruben was raised with both Christian ideas and a deep reverence for Inuit beliefs and traditions. His parents reinforced that the powerful interaction between humans and nature was integral to survival and the preservation of a nomadic way of life – with oral tradition animating ancient myths and legends – igniting a creative spark in an artist on a quest to re-discover his cultural identity.

Between 1959 and 1970 Ruben and his younger brother and sister were removed from their parents and sent to live in a residential school. The trauma of separation and forced assimilation left profound emotional and cultural scars on the artist. In 1971, after leaving residential school, “a lost 19-year-old youngster looking for himself” began his formal artistic training at the University of Alaska. He focused on design, the use of tools and the integration of old and new materials, techniques and styles.

Ruben’s long and distinguished career – which shows no signs of abating – has resulted in an impressive body of contemporary sculpture. His work is internationally applauded in the Canadian art scene for his signature interpretation of traditional Inuit subject matter, ancient northern cultures and artistic traditions. It is exhibited widely in numerous solo and group exhibitions and is housed in prominent public, corporate and private collections throughout the world.

ARTIST STATEMENT

As an artist, I have always been fascinated by the cultures and people of the Northern hemisphere. This interest has led me to the ancient relationship between the Inuit and the Viking Norse. There are interesting parallels between these two northern people. At the time of first contact, they had similar spiritual and religious beliefs through their respective practices of shamanism. Their spiritual, cultural and artistic traditions developed over long periods of time, tempered by their relationship to the land and the powerful spirits that inhabited these places.

The Inuit believed in the existence of the Soul in all living things. The concept of reincarnation was central to family and community beliefs. As a vigorous group of Arctic people, the Inuit came from west to east, in wave after wave of nomadic bands, in search of new land and game.

The Inuit shaman acted as mediator between the world of man, animals and the spirit world. He was the keeper of Inuit stories, myths and legends... the repository of knowledge of the land and the secret worlds. The Viking Norse came into North America by way of migrations from their Scandinavian homelands through the British Isles, Ireland and the Northern Islands, Iceland and Greenland. They had highly developed religious, spiritual and cultural beliefs and artistic traditions.



The Viking Norse had a mythological landscape inhabited by gods and goddesses, giants, monsters and demons. Their sagas speak of their shamanistic beliefs. In Iceland, as in Greenland, the Viking Norse gave names to places and things that held power in their imagination. They used the spirit names of the mountain, river, stream, valley and forest – protective spirits and malevolent ones as well.

My sculpture portraying Viking Norse myths, stories and legends have Norse decorative lines and motifs. These are designs that have adapted and changed to enhance visual impact, and to convey the sense of belonging to that place and time.

STONE





Abraham RUBEN
Into the Storm | Ragnarok End of Days
Soapstone | 2014

The Ragnarok saga prophesized the total destruction of the mythical world of ancient Scandinavia inhabited by combative Norse gods, giants and monsters. Some of the gods have knowledge of the coming of the end of days, and, in preparation, they planted the seed of humanity in the forests. After Ragnarok, a young boy and girl emerge from the primeval forests to once more begin the dance of life. Another story, dealing with the tree of life and Ragnarok, has a man and woman hiding within the branches of the tree and surviving the destruction brought about by the events of Ragnarok along with powerful gods who, after becoming resurrected, return to bring life to the world.

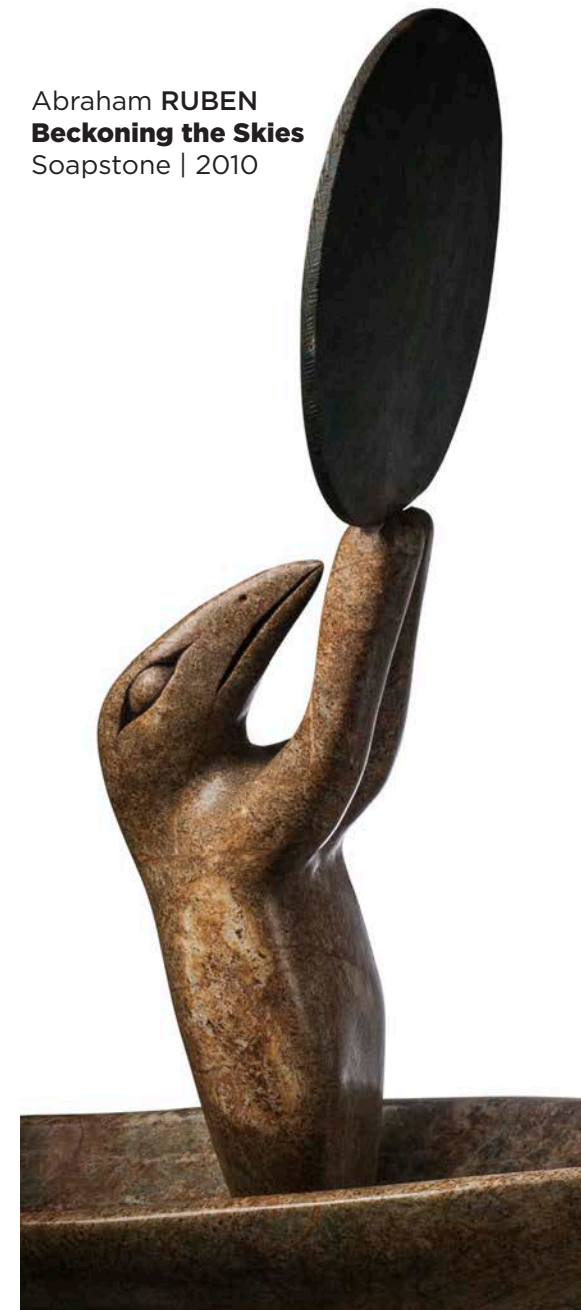


Abraham RUBEN
Beckoning the Skies
Soapstone | 2010

Two shamans, one holding the sun disk, the other with drum and mallet, perform a shamanistic ritual while standing in a umiak (open skin boat). Beneath the umiak, Sednas ride the waves. The traditional role of the shaman was to act as the mediator between Sedna, goddess of sea creatures, and his people.

At times of calamity and duress, the shaman would be asked to intervene on behalf of the people to set things right. His purpose was to re-establish balance in the lives of the Inuit in his camp.

Sedna was generally thought to be a benevolent spirit, tasked with providing food from the sea to those who would pay due respect and reverence for the life taken. The Sedna story differs greatly from region to region across the vast arctic world of the Inuit. In some stories, she is the old grandmother, in others a mature powerful woman with a husband and children or a beautiful maiden.





Abraham RUBEN
Nanuk
Soapstone | 2019

The polar bear or Nanuk – the most feared and respected of all land and sea animals – has played an important role in the cultural and material life of the Inuit. The Inuit have many legends that show their deep respect for the polar bear.

The shaman may take on the spirit of the bear and believe that their spirits were interchangeable. The bear is a representation of the shaman, whose face we see in the hollow of the bear's body. He is a symbol of the shaman's power and his form when he enters the spirit world. The portal is represented by the icebergs surrounding the shaman's face – which open and close – and allow the shaman to move between worlds.



Abraham RUBEN
Into Greenland Waters
Soapstone | 2019

This sculpture represents the Inuit who left their homelands and origins in Alaska, and travelled East to Baffin Island, and then on to Greenland. In this new territory, the Inuit came into contact with the Viking Norse. Over time and after initial contact, the Inuit and the Vikings came to some accommodation and engaged in trade and communal hunting that benefited both. Eventually the Inuit realized they were better adapted to Arctic life than the Vikings, mainly because of their elaborate hunting technology learned hundreds of years before from their ancestors in Alaska.



Abraham RUBEN

Dragon Ship

Soapstone and Metal | 2013

The Viking battle ship, its sail emblazoned with dragon motif made ready for conquest. The sides of the ship are decorated with images of Odin in his many guises. Odin, the ruler of the Norse gods, was a wanderer and had shamanistic qualities.

Abraham Anghik RUBEN

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017** The Guild, Abraham Anghik Ruben- Similar in Spirit: Norse and Inuit Interactions, Montreal, QC
- 2015-2016** Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Aurora Borealis, illustrated catalogue, Yellowknife, NWT
- 2014-2015** Museum Cerny Inuit Collection, Moving Forward, Breaking Through, illustrated catalogue, Bern, Switzerland
- 2014** Rockwell Museum, The World of Man Animals and Spirits, illustrated catalogue, Corning, New York
- 2012-2013** Smithsonian, National Museum of the American Indian, Arctic Journeys/Ancient Memories, The Sculpture of Abraham Anghik Ruben, illustrated catalogue, Washington D.C.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015-2016** Linked, Musée Océanographique, Monaco
- 2013** 100 Masters: Only in Canada, Winnipeg Art Gallery, illustrated catalogue
- 2011** Inuit Modern, Art Gallery of Ontario
- 2007** Inuit Sculpture Now , National Gallery, Touring Exhibition
- 1999** Northern Rock: Contemporary Inuit Stone Sculpture, illustrated catalogue, McMichael Canadian Art Collection

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC
- Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario
- National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario
- Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario
- Government of Canada, Centre Block Parliament Building, Ottawa , Ontario
- Canadian Museum of History (Civilization), Ottawa, Ontario
- De Young Museum- Fowler Collection, San Francisco, California
- McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario
- Musée des Beaux Arts, Montreal, Quebec
- Rockwell Museum, Corning, New York

CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

- Mackenzie Financial Corporation, Toronto, Ontario
- Labatt's Ltd., Ontario
- Imperial Oil Ltd., Calgary, Alberta
- BMW Canada, Ontario
- Citicorp, Toronto, Ontario
- GE Canada Inuit Collection, Mississauga, Ontario
- Sprott Asset Management, Toronto, Ontario
- Alberta Stock Exchange, Calgary, Alberta
- Elite Construction, Concord, Ontario
- Venture Metals, Etobicoke, Ontario

HONOURS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2016 Order of Canada

ABOUT THE ARTIST | Billy MERKOSAK



Born in 1966, Billy Merkosak makes his home in Pond Inlet, Nunavut, on Baffin Island. His artistic inspiration stems from local archeological artifacts and revered stories of the past shared by elders recounting traditional ways of Inuit life. "I try to draw on my own experiences and the real experiences behind those stories, and adapt those stories with our modern way of life."

As a Nunavut artist, Merkosak is primarily known for his wide range of whalebone sculptures – including transformations – occasionally producing works in stone, granite, ivory, graphic illustrations and water color paintings. He is also recognized as a traditional mask maker in whalebone and wood.

His wide range of interests include mentoring younger generations of Inuit artists and working as Project Officer for Public Works and as Arts and Traditional Economy Advisor for Economic Development and Transportation for the Nunavut Government. "I really like what I am doing in the field of art work, travel, culture and pursuing the traditional Inuit lifestyle. It gives me great pride to connect the past and present together with modern Inuit art."

Billy Merkosak's work is exhibited in prominent public institutions, including the National Gallery of Canada. It is housed in a number of public, corporate and private collections and enjoyed by many visitors to Canada's North, particularly in the community of Pond Inlet in the Territory of Nunavut.

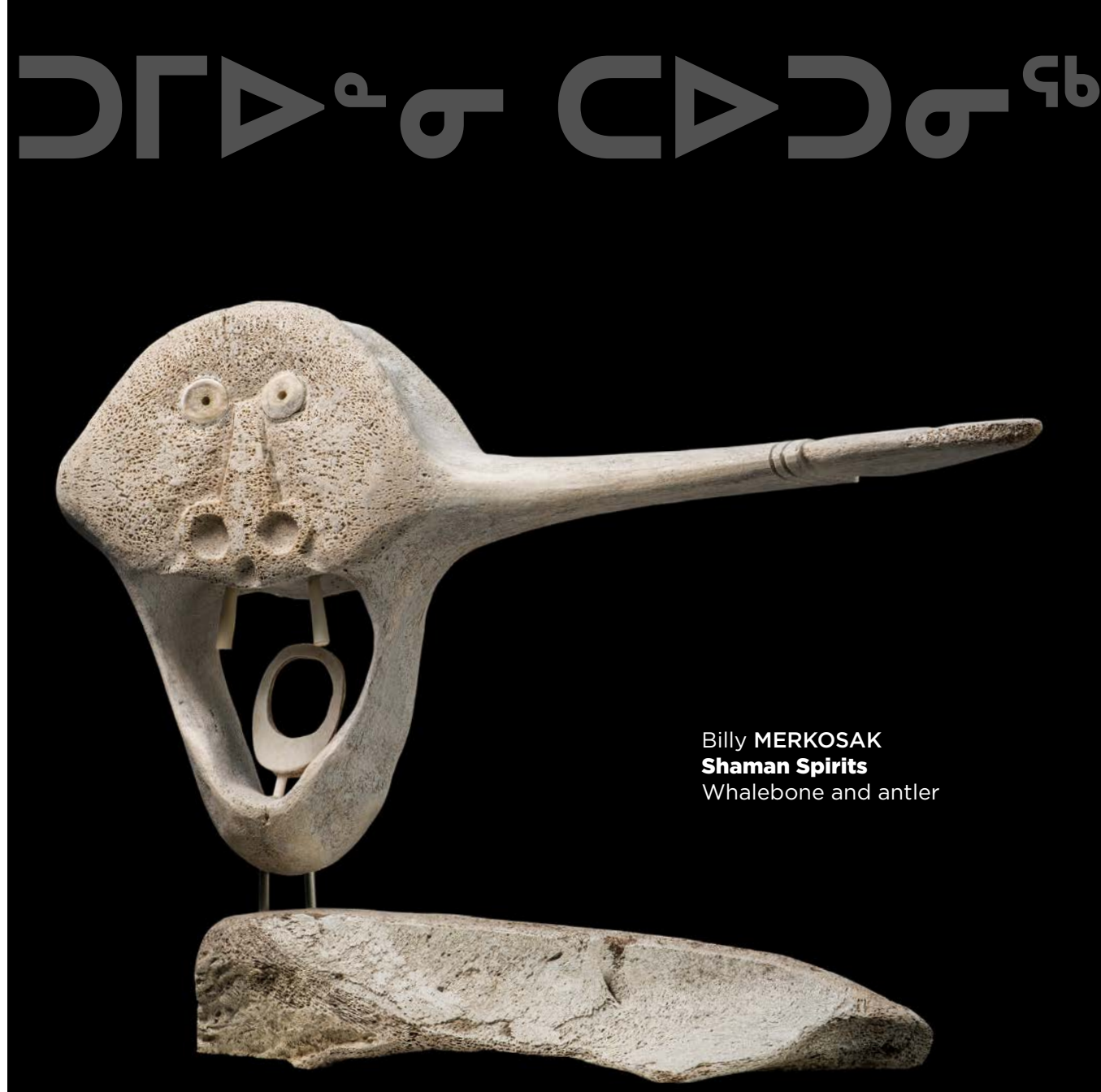


Billy MERKOSAK
Family
Whalebone

BONE



Billy **MERKOSAK**
Drummer
Whalebone, polar bear fur and antler



Billy **MERKOSAK**
Shaman Spirits
Whalebone and antler



Billy MERKOSAK
Shaman
Whalebone and antler



Billy MERKOSAK
Face
Whalebone and antler

ABOUT THE ARTIST | Irene AVAALAAQIAQ



Irene Avaalaqiaq Tiktaalaaq (born in 1941) is one of Canada's most respected Inuit artists. Her work is deeply rooted in her lived experience, often relating to being orphaned as a young child and the Inuit stories her grandmother told her. Avaalaqiaq is recognized for her drawings, prints and wall hangings.

The artist was born on the north shore of Tebesjuak Lake near Baker Lake, Nunavut. Her mother died shortly after she was born, and with her father unable to care for her, she was raised on the land by her grandparents in a traditional Inuit lifestyle until their deaths. Avaalaqiaq's early upbringing was steeped in myths and legends, ultimately influencing her creative body of work.

The artist's career evolved from drawing to sculpting to printmaking and led to her final preference – designing wall hangings in the now famous tradition of many prominent female artists from Baker Lake. The lasting impression Avaalaqiaq's grandparents left on the young child's imagination led to her signature artistic interpretations of shamanistic transformation in which myth and reality intersect and animals often appear with human heads.

In 1999, the University of Guelph awarded Avaalaqiaq an honorary Doctor of Laws in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the development of Inuit art and her leadership role in the Nunavut community of Baker Lake. Her work is housed in many public art collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre and the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

WALL HANGINGS



Irene AVAALAAQIAQ
Wool duffel and felt, and cotton embroidery thread



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Irene AVAALAAQIAQ
Wool duffel and felt, and cotton embroidery thread



Irene AVAALAAQIAQ
Wool duffel and felt, and cotton embroidery thread



Whenever I see my wall hangings, they remind me of my life. Also, I always remember my grandmother and the stories and legends she told me. When I grew up, there were no other people except my grandparents. I had never seen white people. When I do sewing and make a wall hanging, I do what I remember. I can see it clear as a picture. When I am looking at it, it looks like it is actually happening in those days, as it was in my life.

Irene Avaalaqiaq, 1999

Irene Avaalaqiaq: Myth and Reality, by Judith Nasby, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002



Irene **AVAALAAQIAQ**

Wool duffle and felt, and cotton embroidery thread



CREDITS

The City of Vaughan is extremely grateful to both the Kipling Gallery and the Canadian Arctic Producers for their invaluable exhibition support and generous spirit of collaboration in realizing **facingNORTH: art | symbol | story**.

Located in Vaughan, the Kipling Gallery, dedicated to advancing art appreciation and connoisseurship has established a highly respected reputation in the commercial art world, proudly representing prominent Indigenous and contemporary artists worldwide and acting as the exclusive agent for the internationally acclaimed Inuit sculptor, Abraham Anghik Ruben. Visit kiplinggallery.com to learn more about all the artists featured in this exhibition.

The Kipling Gallery represents Billy Merkosak and Irene Avaalaaqiaq through a commercial partnership with the Canadian Arctic Producers, the Inuit owned marketing arm of Arctic Co-operatives Limited. Arctic Co-Operatives is a service organization owned and controlled by the 32 community-based, multi-purpose co-operatives in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. They are dedicated to providing services and business development opportunities to communities throughout Canada's north with Inuit and Dene artists to promote the finest selection of their art and distinctive culture around the world.

All art featured in the City of Vaughan curated exhibition, **facingNORTH: art | symbol | story** is on loan from the Kipling Gallery.

PHOTO CREDITS

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Back Cover and Page 19 | Billy Merkosak, **Shaman Spirits** | Photograph: Daniel Dabrowski, Courtesy of Kipling Gallery
Page 2 | Billy Merkosak, **Transformation** | Courtesy of Kipling Gallery
Page 6 | Photograph (Abraham Ruben with mask): Courtesy of Nathalie Heiberg-Harrison
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Pages 8-9 | Abraham Ruben, **Into the Storm | Ragnarok End of Days** | Photograph: Daniel Dabrowski, Courtesy of Kipling Gallery
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Page 22 | Photograph, Courtesy of Inuit Art Foundation
Pages 23, 24, 25, 27 | Irene Avaalaaqiaq | Photographs: Daniel Dabrowski, Courtesy of Kipling Gallery
Page 26 | Photograph: Len Anthony





Prehistoric Bone Tools