



SAKKIJÂJUK:

Inuit Fine Art and Craft from Nunatsiavut



SakKijâjuk: Inuit Fine Art and Craft from Nunatsiavut has wrapped up, and it was a huge success. The exhibition displayed 170 works of art and crafts, created by over 80 Nunatsiavummiut. *SakKijâjuk* is an

Inuttitut word meaning, “to be visible,” and it certainly did just that as hundreds of people came and learned about Nunatsiavut artists and craft people. Visitors and buyers came to the *Kinsmen Centre* in Happy Valley-Goose Bay where artists earned nearly 10-thousand dollars for their works. A wide variety of items were on display including Inuit clothing, carvings, sculptures, paintings, photographs, grass work, and many more. The exhibition was held in tandem with *To Light the Fire*, Newfoundland and Labrador’s first Indigenous art symposium held at the *Hotel North 2*.

Two wrestling polar bears made from serpentine by carver Thomas Jararuse.



Heather Igloliorte poses at the SakKijâjuk: Inuit Fine Art and Craft from Nunatsiavut Exhibition in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Heather Igloliorte is an assistant professor of art history at Concordia University in Montreal, she has been studying Nunatsiavut art and crafts for years. She is the curator and one of the key organizers of *SakKijâjuk*.

“The reaction’s been so positive, the artists seem to be pleased, the audience that is coming in has been really receptive,” says Igloliorte with a big smile. “People have just been blown away, everyone that we worked with has been really pleased with the hard work that all the artists and organizers have put in.”

The organizing team have been working on this project for about two years. After speaking with artists who identified the challenges of accessing materials in coastal communities, they developed a plan to buy bulk orders of supplies and then fly the materials to the artists on *Air Labrador* flights. With their supplies on hand, and after months of work, the finished pieces were sent to Happy Valley-Goose Bay for the premiere.



All of the artists that could attend the exhibition were brought in from across Nunatsiavut and across the country to participate in the exhibition and symposium.

“The artists already know they have talent, they already know who are the talented artists in their communities. We all know what our local histories are and who the famous arts and crafts people are,” explains Igloliorte, “for me it was about having the conference, and having them all come together and see what other people in other communities are doing as well.”

A major goal of the exhibition was to connect Inuit artists and craftspeople with collectors, academics, galleries, museums, and institutions from across the country.

“We brought in a large group of people because they are the people who make Inuit art what it is. They care about, promote, and advocate on behalf of artists.” Says Igloliorte, “We need them to know we are here as a region. I was really confident that when they came here and saw the all work they would know we were a really high producing community.”



Seal hunter,
and other dolls
by Lydia Lucy.

“We are going to be here to make things change, this is not a one time thing.”

-HEATHER IGLOLIORTE

Igloliorte says it is important to have Nunatsiavut recognized as a region of artists because it shows to the world that Labrador Inuit culture is alive and well. She says that even though several Nunatsiavut artists have made a name for themselves outside of Labrador, the region has been generally excluded from the national conversation surrounding Inuit art.

“This is an important thing that other Inuit regions have, and we’re not part of that history yet. Culture is what represents a people, and so when you can’t see the art from a particular region, you can’t really understand the people either.” Igloliorte explains, “For example, when you go to a museum and you see Inuit art from all



Inuit carver Billy Gauthier, of North West River, displayed this work from a private collection.

over the Canadian North and yet there's nothing from Labrador in the collection, you would naturally assume that the Labrador Inuit don't make art, or maybe even that there aren't Inuit in Labrador. So we need to get Nunatsiavut art into these collections.”

As late as the 1980s Labrador Inuit were largely not recognized by academia as being Inuit. Since then academic fields such as anthropology, archeology, ethnohistory, and others have come around to include Nunatsiavut as part of the larger Inuit family, but Igloliorte points out that art history still has a ways to go.

When she began her masters at Carleton University in Ottawa she was shocked to find that there was almost nothing written about art from Nunatsiavut. Igloliorte is hoping to create an awareness of Nunatsiavut art and artists as a whole among galleries, museums and collectors, as well as academia.

“So without having our art and crafts included in the history of Inuit art, without seeing our work represented in museums and galleries, and without having it in books and texts out



there, then we're not visible to the rest of Canada," she explains. "So it really does play into the larger significance as being recognized as Inuit on the same level."

Igloliorte says that she wants the artisans to know that with the advent of this exhibition they now have a body they can turn to that can help support and promote their works.

"I just want them to know from here on out they have people that they can contact," says Igloliorte with conviction. "We are going to be here to make things change, this is not a one time thing, not just a pop up and pop down and you'll never see me again. We're going to be here a lot."



Miniature beaded moose hide boot by Kristy Sheppard of Rigolet.

"I didn't want to make something based on someone else's idea. I wanted to do something that was unique, that nobody else had done before."

-Inez Shiwak

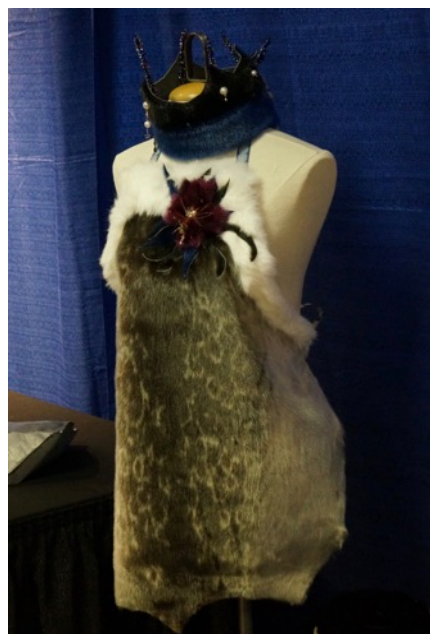


Sandra Baikie, a young artist from Happy Valley-Goose Bay made this miniature kammik. The “fur” on the legging is actually embroidery.

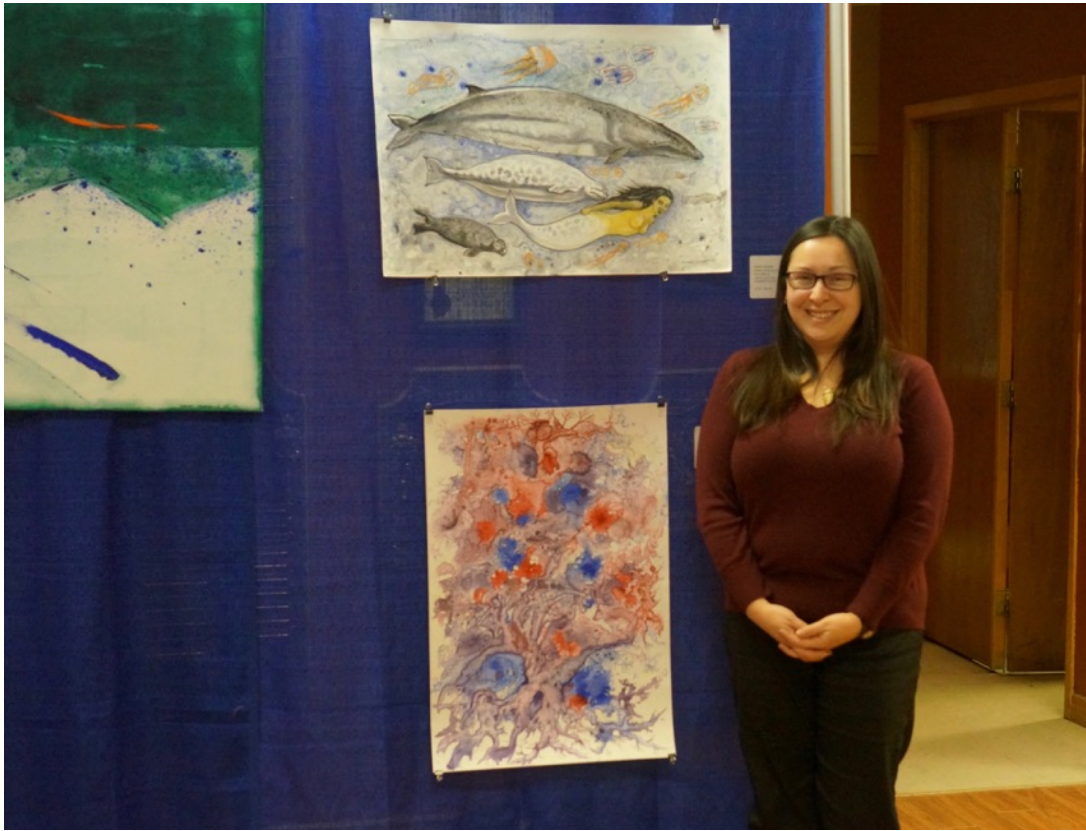


Nellie Winters, 78, of Makkovik had a number of items in the exhibition, including these boots, hats and mitts, made from sealskin, with rabbit fur trims.

Renowned Inuit sculptor, Michael Massie, originally of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, created this piece for the exhibition out of serpentine, antler, skin and ivory.



Textile artist Shirley Moorehouse of Happy Valley-Goose Bay created her *Domestic Goddess* display crafting an apron, tiara, martini glass, and even press-on eyelashes from seal and other furs.



Heather Campbell, originally of Rigolet stands besides her her two water colour paintings.

Heather Campbell studied art at Memorial University's Grenfell Campus in Corner Brook, but she says it was not until she moved to Ottawa where she was exposed to Inuit artists from across the North that she really begin to develop her own unique style that lies somewhere between the modern and the traditional.

"My work is a melding of both of those worlds along with my own thoughts and experiences on life in general," says Campbell. "Lately I've been experimenting with a different technique. I felt that I was blocked but what I was doing earlier was a bit too constrictive, it was getting so tight I wasn't enjoying it as much anymore."

Campbell now works with free-form ink blot paintings; splashing her canvas with water paint and then drawing in what feels right. "After I had my baby I didn't have as much time but I still wanted to do art," she explains. "So I started with these tiny little ink blot paintings. I would kind of drop the ink on the paper and smooth it around so it would do this organic forming shape. I'd let it dry and draw into it; that started getting bigger and bigger. I worked my way up to the size of my works in the exhibition, those are the biggest pieces I've ever done with that technique."



Sealskin wallhanging by Inez Shiwak of Rigolet.

Inez Shiwak is known for her creative uses of sealskin. The talented seamstress has made everything from sealskin pin-on flowers to sealskin bowties, to laptop cases.

For the exhibition she said she wanted to create something above and beyond that would get people talking.

“I didn’t want to make something based on someone else’s idea. I wanted to do something that was unique, that nobody else had done before,” explains Shiwak. “The wallhanging was something I was thinking of for a few years now and I knew I wanted to do it. So I sort of had the idea when Heather [Igloliorte] came around telling people of the projects and what was expected. My dad, who is a really good drawer, designed the picture in the centre of our small house [cabin] and I went with that.”

Shiwak had been making sealskin flowers as broaches for years, but had never before attempted a bouquet. She wanted to challenge herself and make something truly special.

“It was just a matter of going online and searching what people were using to make flowers with other materials like wool and felt,” she explains. “I found some patterns and they weren’t what I wanted so I adjusted them for what I needed. The challenge was to make the flowers in the amount of time I had. And since I’ve made these I want to try other kinds of flowers now. I want to try to do a daisy and a lily, maybe an iris.”



Sealskin flowers by Inez Shiwak of Rigolet.



Sylvia Saunders displays her piece designed to look like a stretched seal pelt.

Sylvia Saunders of Happy Valley-Goose Bay contributed two pieces to the exhibition, both made of sealskin: a pair of slippers, and a miniature seal pelt being stretched on a rack. Although she has been sewing all her life, she has only recently started working with sealskin.

“I enjoy working with sealskin because you can make some really beautiful stuff out of it,” says Saunders; “you got to be very careful with it and use a real good knife; you can’t just use any old pair of scissors to cut it. You have to be real careful not to waste any of it.”

Saunders said she learned to sew watching her mother and grandmother, who taught her proper stitching. She said if they didn’t like the way something was made they’d make her take it apart and do it all again. “I’m real picky too; the piece I’m working on is not going anywhere until it is perfect,” she says with a chuckle.



Sewn grass bowl by Garmel Rich of Rigolet.

This was Saunders first showing in a major exhibition. In fact this was the first major exhibition for most of the artists at *SakKijâjuk*. In the 1980s an exhibition featuring Nunatsiavut Grass working toured Canada and the United States. The work was all sold off and it was viewed as a major success. However, since then, this has been the only major exhibition of Nunatsiavut Inuit art to leave Labrador.

Selected works from *SakKijâjuk: Inuit Fine Art and Craft from Nunatsiavut* have been chosen to be part of the title exhibition for the Fall of 2016 at *The Rooms Provincial Gallery* in St. John's, and then the exhibition will tour nationally.

For more information about Nunatsiavut and Labrador Inuit arts & crafts visit:

www.tourismnunasiavut.com

www.michnunatsiavut.org

www.torngatartsandcrafts.com