

EANADIAN ESKIMO EINE CRAFIS

E100.A72 L37 1963



Nepachee, Cape Dorset, N.W.T.

INDIAN AND TO THE ATTAIRS

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LOOK FOR THIS TAG, IT IS YOUR GUARANTEE THAT THE ARTICLE TO WHICH IT IS ATTACHED HAS BEEN MADE BY A CANADIAN ESKIMO

The true colour is blue on gold

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CANADIAN ESKIMO FINE CRAFTS



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AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

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Text By W. T. Larmour, Northern Affairs and National Resources



Arctic Owl in Sealskin, Eskimo Co-operative Association, Fort Chimo, Quebec

noitzubortaI

Arctic.

The Arctic, land of the Canadian Eskimo people, is said to be a silent place, with that kind of silence thought to exist only in outer space. But the Arctic has its own world of sound, of character quite different from the familiar tones of southern Canada. The almost imperceptible first rustlings of the ice in spring on frozen rivers before break-up, the call of the kudlikudliak at migration time, the wild courting calls of Arctic birds, the grunts and squeaks of land mammals and snortings in the sea, to say nothing of the racket that Canadians themselves make. The Eskimos, also Canadians, listen attentively to these sounds and gain knowledge of what is going on in the world around them.

The Arctic is said to lack colour or, at least, in a colour sense, to be atomal. This is quite wrong. The Arctic is splashed with colour but the scheme is different from what we know. From the pageant of the flowers and sad, varied mantle of September tundra to dazzling reflections of horizontal sun rays, splintered into fragments of light on drifting icebergs, the Arctic is rich with colour. The Eskimos observe these things and perceive their meaning in different seasons of nature.

Eskimos observe these things and perceive their meaning in different seasons of nature.

The Canadian Arctic has been described as barren waste, a vast lifeless desert, but this is false.

That realm of nature has supported the Eskimos, a unique segment of humanity, for thousands of years and is the place where birds, land and sea mammals, appear in their wanderings in countless numbers. All this too, the Eskimo observes with well-trained eye.

From his knowledge of life in the Arctic, the Eskimo acquired power to survive and to enjoy living. There were many things which the Eskimo did not discover, but what he has accomplished represents a remarkable achievement. This is to be seen in hundreds of articles which survive for daily use in living, from snowhouse to kayak. There is the principle of the seal oil lamp. There are combs, water-dippers, snow-knives, bowls, spears, hooks and needles; an entire material culture, painfully made by hand, piece by piece. Yet the materials the Eskimos once had to work with were limited to ivory, bone, stone, hair and hides.

Interest in Eskimo craft lies in the fact that, collectively, it represents the material achievement and cultural experience of the Eskimo people. They did not accumulate personal possessions and had no money, but their security, in the modern sense of the word, lay in their knowledge of the

That was hard-earned knowledge, acquired and passed down by word of mouth and through the arts. It is still expressed in contemporary crafts, in the decorative crafts employed, in the intrinsic

usefulness of many of these things today.

Often, one may say that an object is Eskimo, that nobody but an Eskimo could have made it.

It is this Eskimo-like quality which is pleasing in their crafts. It is a curious quality, not always recognizable. It may be seen in the shape of a slipper, in the flow of a garment, the shape of a knife blade, and, invariably, it will be found to come from something related to the Arctic, such as the sounds, colour and life there, and the long experience of the Eskimo. Many people can sense this quality, if only in the sense of recognizing something which is beyond their own experience. In some instances it becomes universal in its meaning, as in the carvings, and makes immediate sense.

For the Eskimos, the importance of crafts has two meanings. First, obvious to all, is that crafts mean income. The upholding of standards is of more than aesthetic importance. There are influences working, both in Eskimo society and in our own, against excellence. From this point of view, it is

important that Canadians take an interest in good crafts, learn to understand them, choose the good from the indifferent and reject spurious imitations. It is not the least important purpose of this booklet to suggest that Eskimo crafts ean only continue to be as good as the standards of the people who buy them.

Most Eskimo craftsmen and craftswomen may know good work and its value, but give up the effort when they find they can sell inferior, slipshod work for equivalent prices.

The second, and in many ways, more important factor, is the place of crafts in a social sense. Appreciation of them means much. Money is involved here again, but more important is the image one can have of Eskimos; the mental picture in the mind one may have of the Eskimos as perhaps a lazy lot, or a sturdy race doing its best. Crafts can, and do help to create such pietures. If the pictures are good, the image of the Eskimo is good. This is of great importance to the Eskimo people, today, when they are coming into contact with a new social order, new ideas and modes of living, with an increasing rate of intensity of contact.

Often, Eskimo customs of great antiquity are to be seen today depicted in their crafts, as for example in the unusual robes of the Eskimo woman of Baffin Island. Of these there were several styles, and custom required her to wear these styles successively, in the different ages of her development, in youth and in later life.

Such traditional themes are intensely interesting, especially when they find their way into use in articles for modern living.

Life would be a drab affair indeed, if we could not take the creative ideas of the past and adapt them to our use, a denial of all human experience.

This is what the Eskimos are attempting to do in their crafts, to set out their own ideas, not in blind imitation of ours, but rather to bring out in their own work, designs and specific perceptions which are theirs alone.

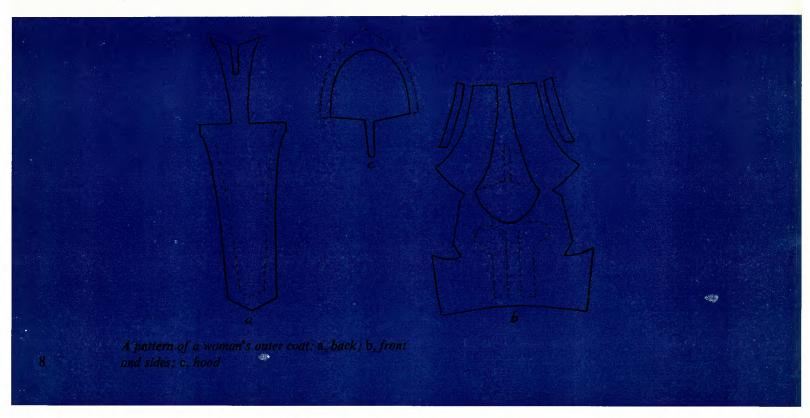
The articles appearing in this book are representative of fine hand-made craft being made by Eskimos across the Arctic today.



Emily Annatuk and young hunters, Port Burwell, N.W.T., Kikitaoyak Eskimo Co-Operative Limited.

Dolls in Eastern Arctic Parkas

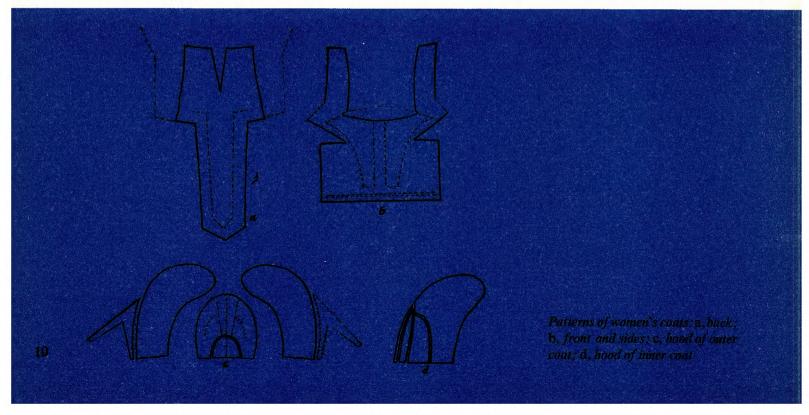
These dolls are dressed, to the last detail in the style, and manner of Eskimos living today in the Eastern Arctic. Great care is taken in their making. The Eskimos have always made dolls for their own amusement. In recent years they have found, somewhat to their amazement, that other people like to have and to buy their dolls. This has been a source of great satisfaction to the Eskimos. They like to be able to use all kinds of materials for dolls and to experiment as much as possible. The making of dolls is a subject of much discussion. Note that the dolls on the left wear a woman's outer coat of traditional design, with the flap in front and back; a most practical innovation of Eskimo design. Colourful relief has been added to these garments by bright red, green, and blue stitching. A light windproof cover is worn over this coat during the colder seasons of the year.





An Eskimo Family in Winter Dress

The group of dolls in this photograph is representative of styles of Eskimo winter dress in the Eastern Arctic. The dolls wear various modes of dress current among these northern citizens. One may see traditional styles, together with southern influence, evident in the bright calico prints worn by the ladies in the group.

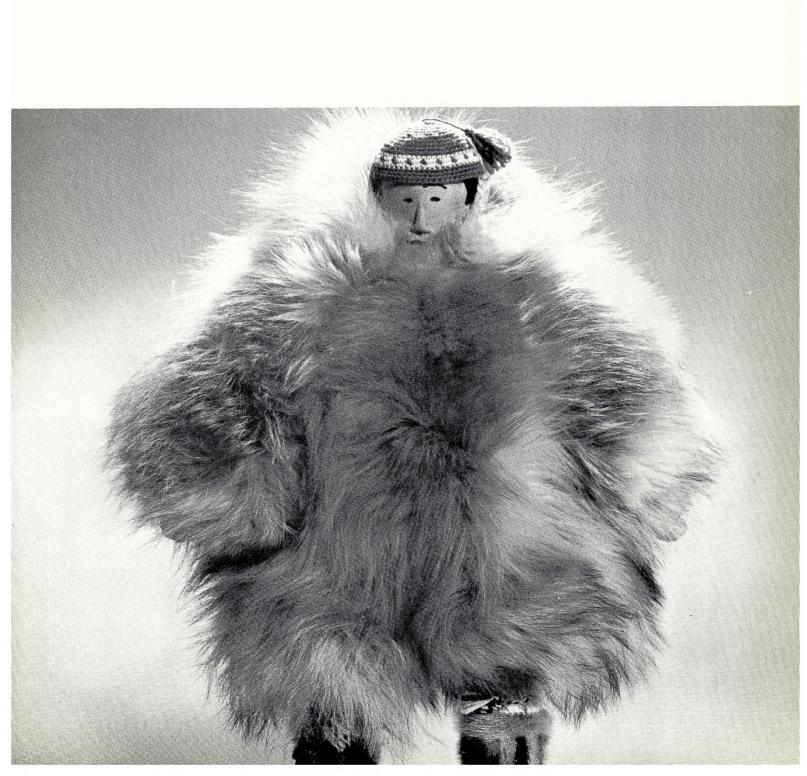


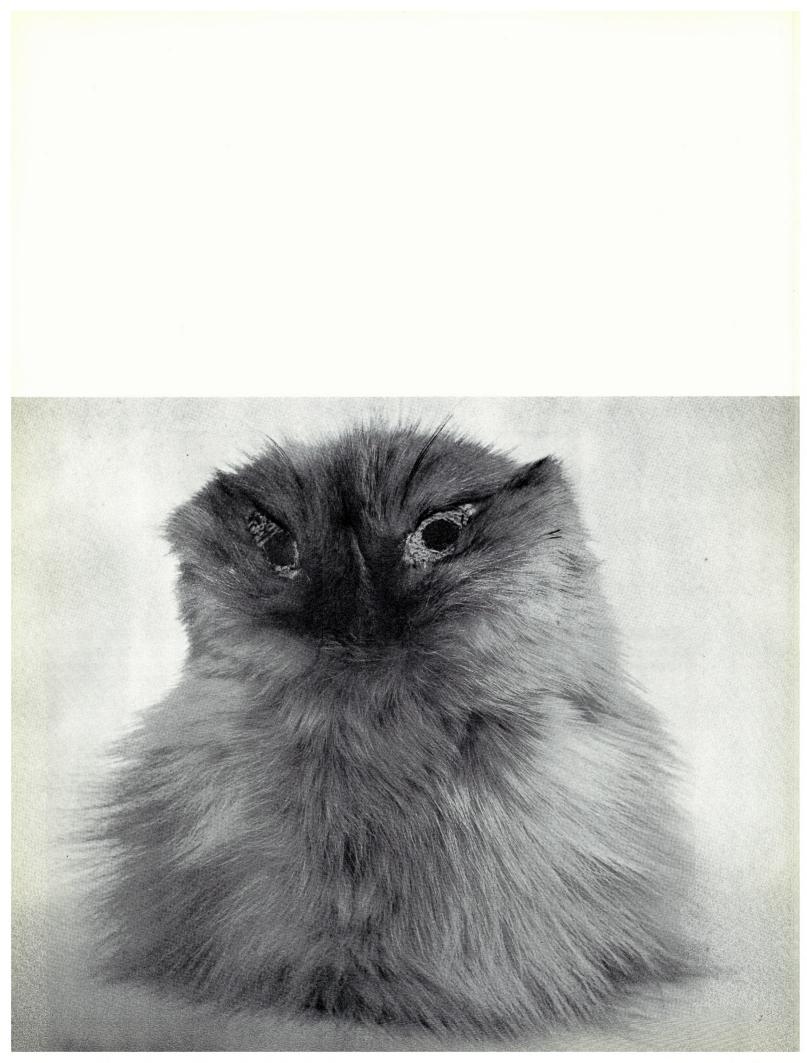


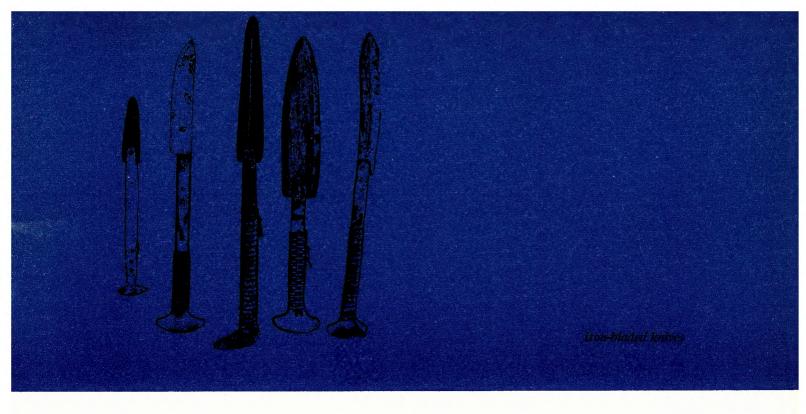


Red Fox Doll

World fashion decides the prices Eskimos receive for their fine furs. These prices fluctuate from year to year. Red foxes bring so little it is hardly worth the hunter's time to trap them. But they have found that by using red fox, in the making of fine crafts, they could turn this resource into a profitable means of income, while producing many pleasing articles such as this doll dressed in red fox.



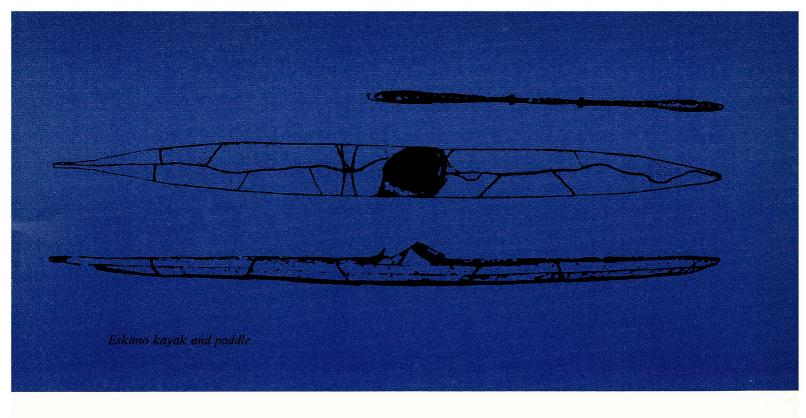




Arctic Owl of Red Fox

In their crafts Eskimos find it difficult to be uniform. They are constantly thinking of new ideas and each new idea takes on variegated forms. The creatures of the land and sea are close to them in their existence and traditionally have formed the most important part of their lives. They take pleasure in using country materials in new and interesting ways as in this soft and fluffy owl form, made of tanned red fox fur.





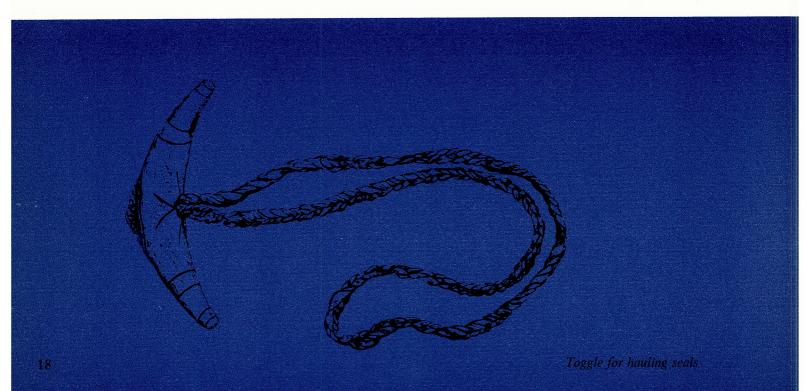
Miniature Kayak and Hunter with Seal

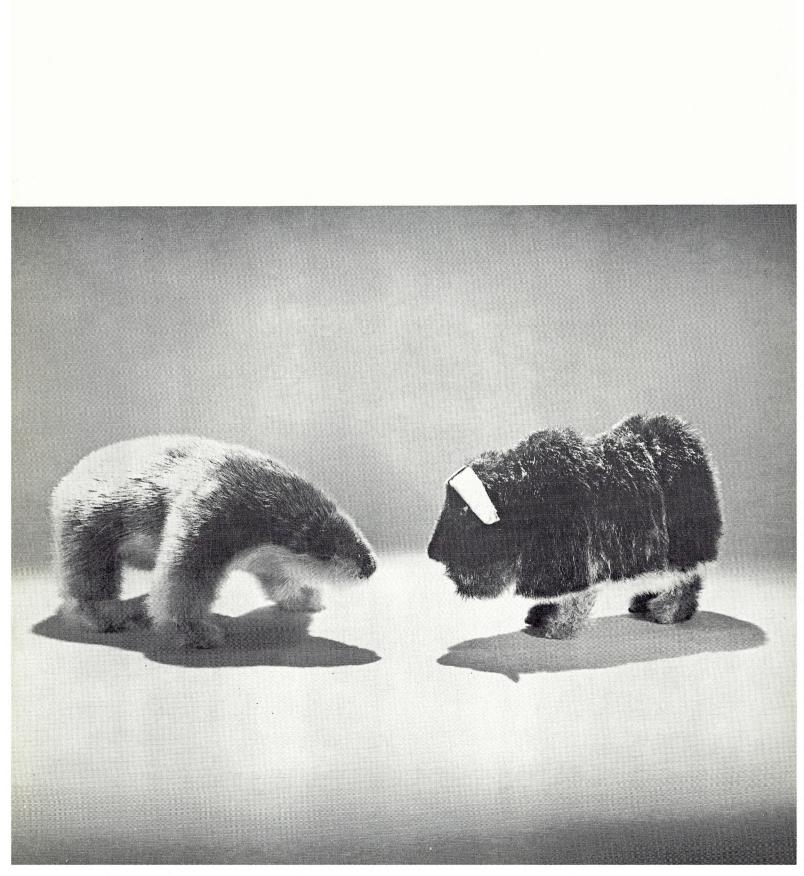
Miniature kayaks used to be made by Eskimo fathers for their sons as part of their early training as hunters. Skill in the art of handling a kayak was acquired from childhood. The father would make all the tools of the hunt to go with the kayak. Great care went into making exact copies of these tools, harpoons and bird spears made from driftwood and ivory so that a small boy became accustomed to their use.

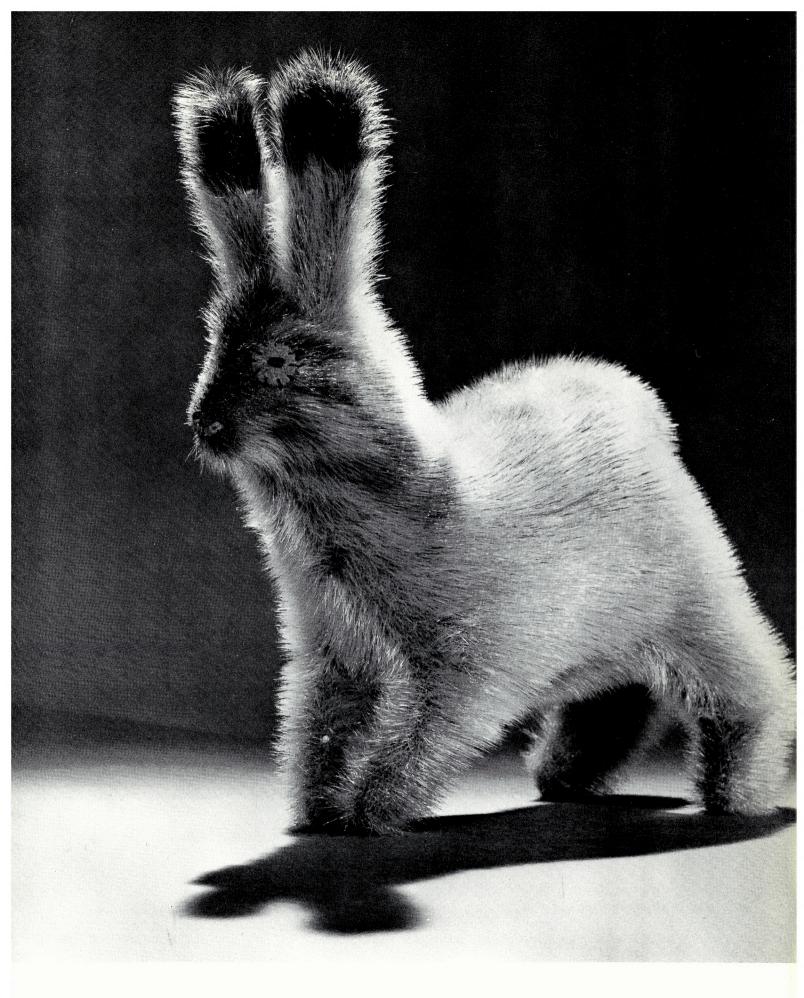
Arctic Life in Sealskin

The Eskimos now use tanned sealskins to make forms which represent the land and sea animals and birds of the Arctic. This has developed into one of the finest folk art forms in the world and the variety is seemingly unlimited.

The making of them is a comparatively simple matter, but their appearance is the result of years of experience, of a thoroughly learned skill and a finished technique. The Eskimo woman, or young girl, who may be able to make a sealskin bird in a matter of hours, has sat at her mother's knees as a child, and as a child has learned to clean and handle the sealskins, has learned to select and match the various tones in the skins, to make meaningful patterns and designs. It is an incredible art and must be learned from infancy. The forms seem simple and this is their beauty, but the effect is achieved through knowledge that is quite complicated in its origins.









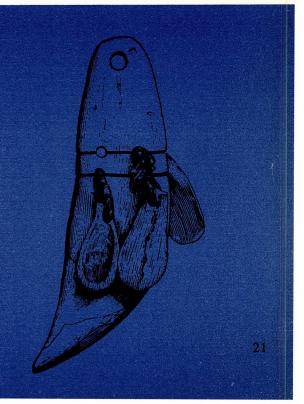
Arctic Hare in Sealskin

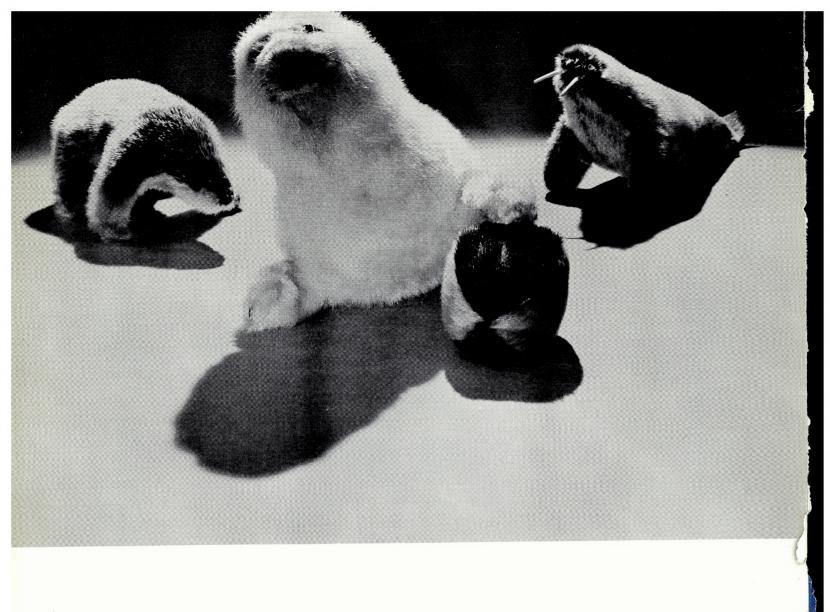
Much care and thought is given to making these animals. An Eskimo woman may think for days about what she is going to make. Sometimes a sketch of the form of the animal may be made first, but more often the woman simply takes an ulu (the Eskimo woman's knife) and cuts the skin according to the design she has in mind. Many of the traditional styles of form to be found in the carvings are now appearing in these sealskin toys.

Polar Bear and Walruses

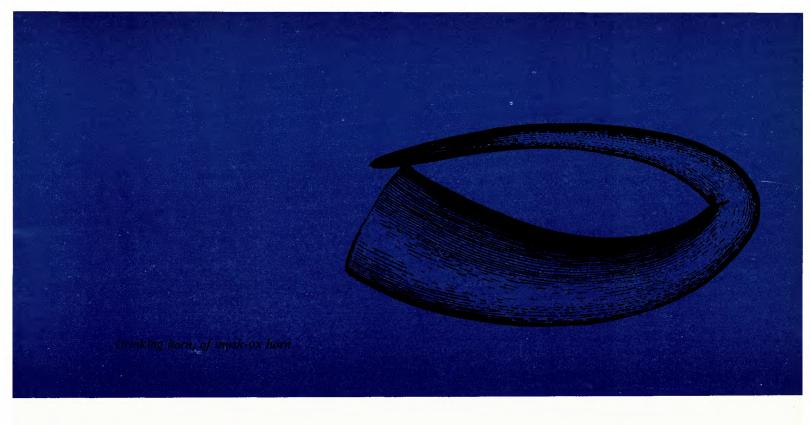
Sealskin toys have always been made by Eskimos for their children. In modern times, however, technical help has been given them in this craft, with the result that they have been able to develop their ideas to greater advantage.

The hunter takes the seal and his wife cures the skin, according to custom. The skins are then sent to southern Canada to be tanned and returned to the families who then divide them up for use in crafts. Eskimos now import fine materials for stuffing in these crafts.



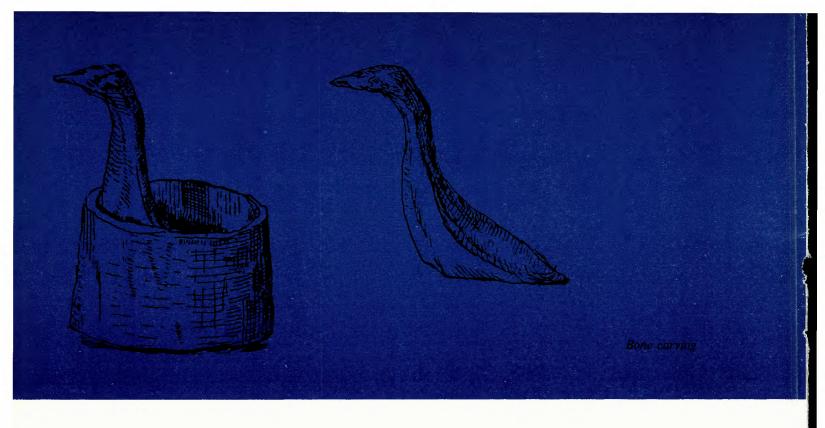






Polar Bear with Musk-ox

If this polar bear were made in stone it would be considered a fine example of Eskimo art. In form it is an excellent example of the ability of the Eskimo to portray the essential features of Arctic animals. Here the bear reveals its fierce strength while the musk-ox, equally powerful, stands in sullen immobile determination and defiance characteristic of that animal.



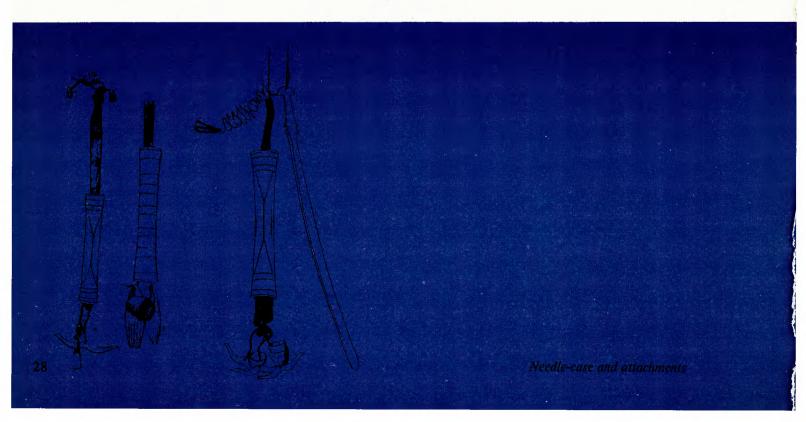
Bird Forms of the Arctic

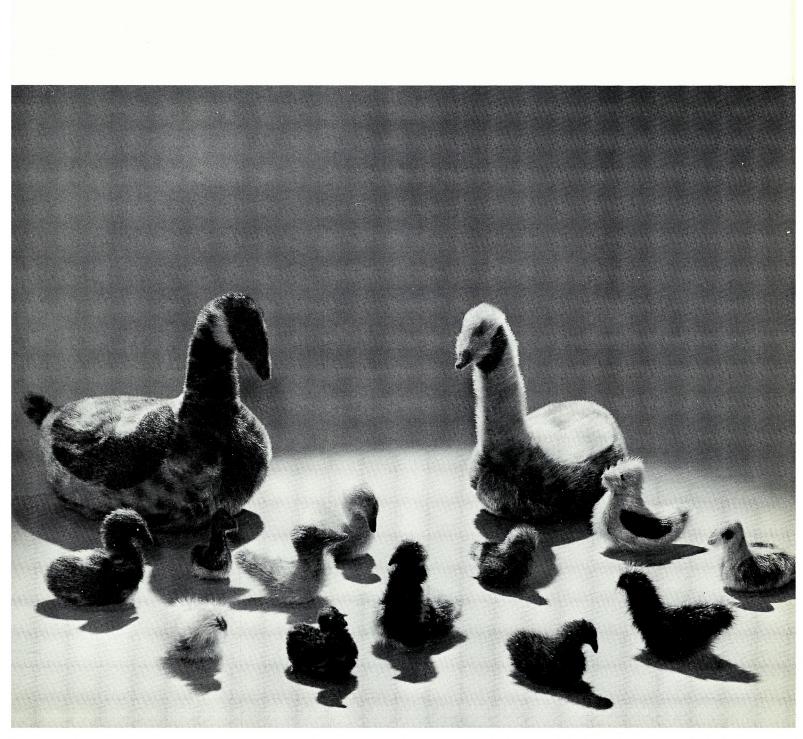
The Eskimo shows great imagination in making sealskin birds. Almost invariably they indicate some particular species. The Eskimos are extremely observant of the life around them. In consequence they see the birds and animals in all manner of attitudes. It might be thought that there are a limited number of positions in which any animal might be drawn but this is clearly not the case.

The sealskin birds are sometimes put together with sinew but since this material is much needed for making winter clothing, gilling twine is more often used. The toys are usually stuffed with long-fibred cotton, sawdust and sometimes caribou moss. Each bird form exhibits some feature which identifies it, as for example the markings on the Canada goose, or the distinctive wing markings of a pitsulak.

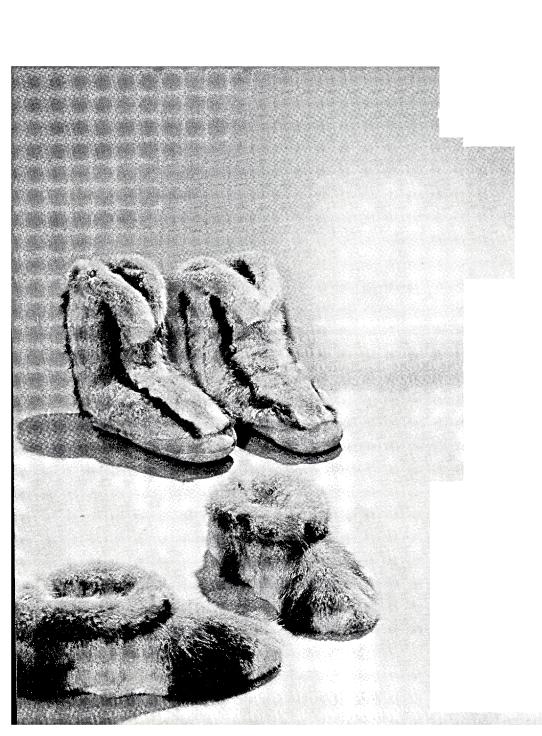
Things Made to Please

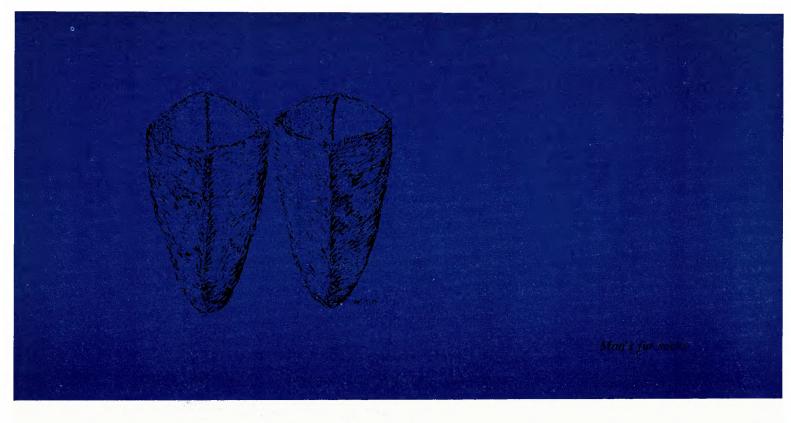
If there is anything which distinguishes the Eskimo people, in the sense of something being distinctive, it is their desire to do things, or say things and make things which give pleasure. This is a custom which they carry out among themselves in many ways. These hats are made to give pleasure to their strange southern neighbour. They are obviously not designed for use in the Arctic. The use of the natural design and the addition of the animal inserts are the pleasures which the maker retains for himself.





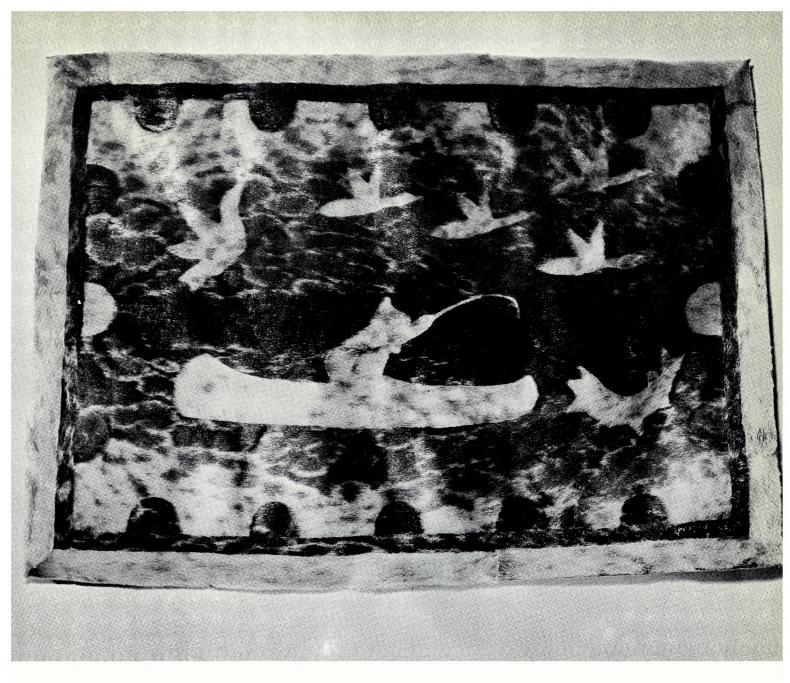






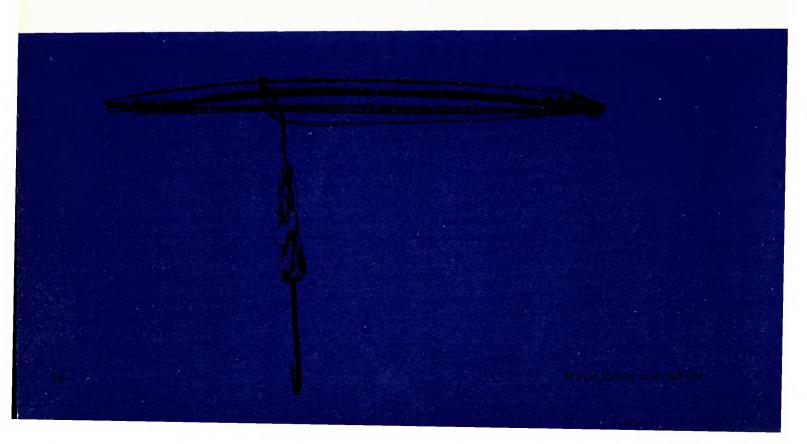
Eskimo-style Slippers in Muskrat Fur

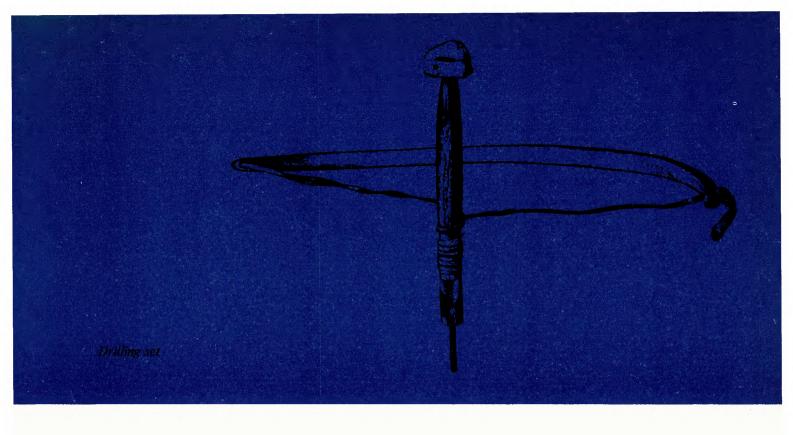
The Eskimo people developed a remarkable variety of styles of footwear for use in different seasons of the year, at different times and places. Sealskin was the principal item of use in footwear but boots and slippers might sometimes be decorated with other furs. The waterproof seam which is essential for the manufacture of the waterproof boot, the waterproof mitt and the kayak is considered to be one of the high points of their technology. With the arrival in modern times of many people from other countries and the extension of Canadian society into the Arctic, there has been an increasing demand for footwear made by Eskimos, not necessarily because they have a souvenir interest but, more important, because they are both useful and good looking. In recent times partly because of that demand, and partly because of the decline of the fur trade, Eskimos have turned to using their furs and skins to make fine footwear for sale. A fur garment industry has been established. Eskimos have been given technical help in learning to adapt their ideas into types and kind of footwear which can be used in the rest of Canada and abroad. The result is a product based on old forms made, however, from pelts which have been cleaned and tanned commercially to make them pure and mothproof. These slippers made of muskrat pelts, with moosehide soles, have attracted interest throughout the world.



Arctic Adventure

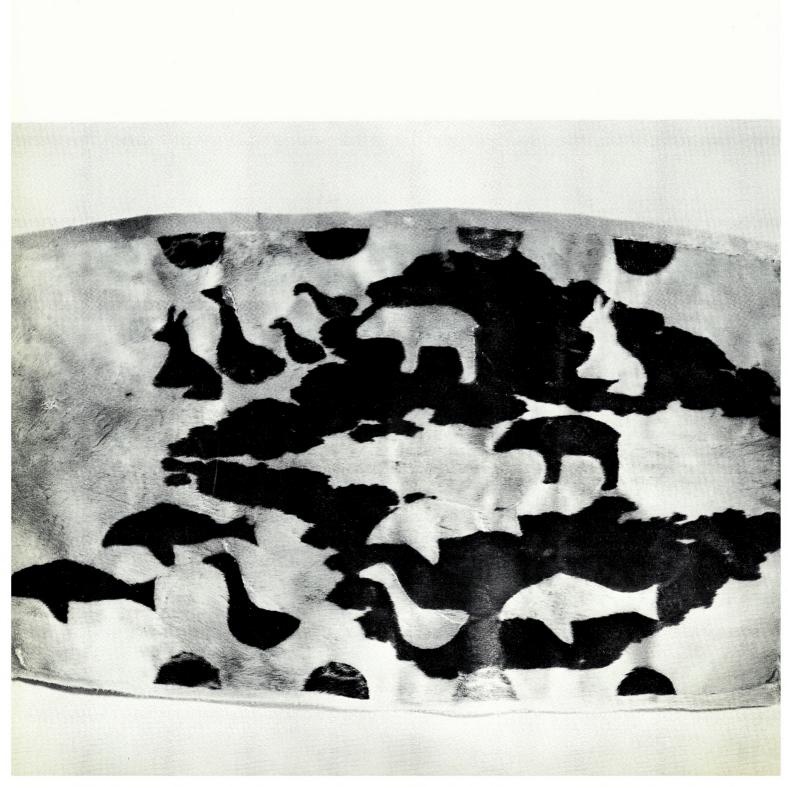
An Eskimo in a canoe instead of a kayak using a rod instead of a fish spear. Birds fly about and above clearly defined. The creature being taken from the sea is abstract and non-objective except for the tail and fins. The picture may be said to represent the exact moment of uncertainty when the fisherman has a strike and does not know what is on the end of the line, except for a splash on the surface, and a half formless shape beneath the waves. It is again an extraordinary example of the ability of the Eskimo to select a given moment of truth and to depict it with all its excitement.



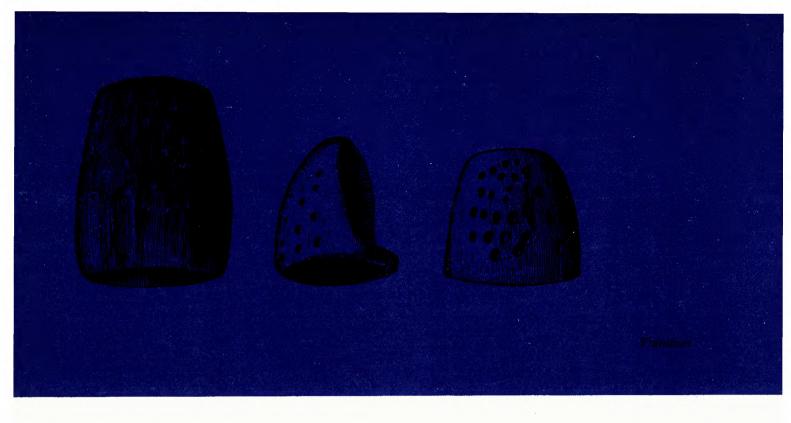


Tapestry in Sealskin

Sealskin tapestries are appearing in great variety as a result of the introduction of a new technique applied to old ways of making them. The natural oils which would rot the hides in our climate have been removed, the skins have been made soft and pliable and given lustre. The Eskimos, both men and women, are quick to appreciate the usefulness of perfectly tanned skins and like working with them. Confidence, authority and knowledge are needed to take a knife and cut out a design in a fine pelt. These qualities are evident in the manner in which this harp seal has been used. The white areas in the photograph are in actual fact of a fine silver lustre; contrasted with this are jet black natural markings of the animal. In these two parts of colour the Eskimo woman has worked shapes and forms, again in contrasting colours, creating silhouettes of various Arctic animals and birds, in positions that are quite natural to them. The entire concept produces an effect that is highly decorative but at the same time truthful. Eskimos see things around them, not necessarily consciously, but in their relationship one to the other. The formal semi-circular designs at top and bottom of the tapestry are also authentic in origin and are used in this instance to give balance. The small pieces that have been used have been perfectly matched as to colour and this is particularly noticeable in two opposing pieces third from the left, which are light in colour. These consequently succeed in breaking the colour line which otherwise might have had a rigidity that would have imposed itself on the whole composition. This is an understanding of colour in relation to design that has been taught to Eskimos by nobody but themselves. It is a highly distinctive expression of creative thought, is positive and creative and the fact that it may not be immediately understood is irrelevant. It is an expression of the Eskimos' own observation of life and in that sense is totally valid and an example of some of their best thinking. These tapestries vary in sizes of form from 4 to 40 square feet. They are usually not lined since they are designed as wall decorations although they may occasionally appear as attractive rugs on furniture or floor.

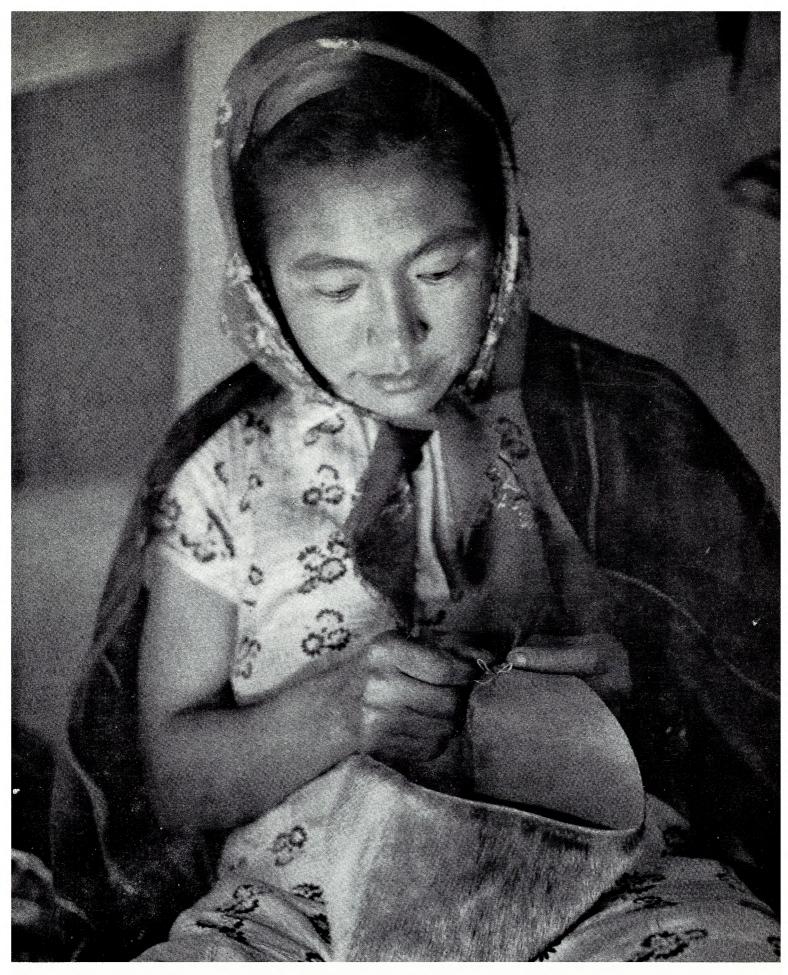




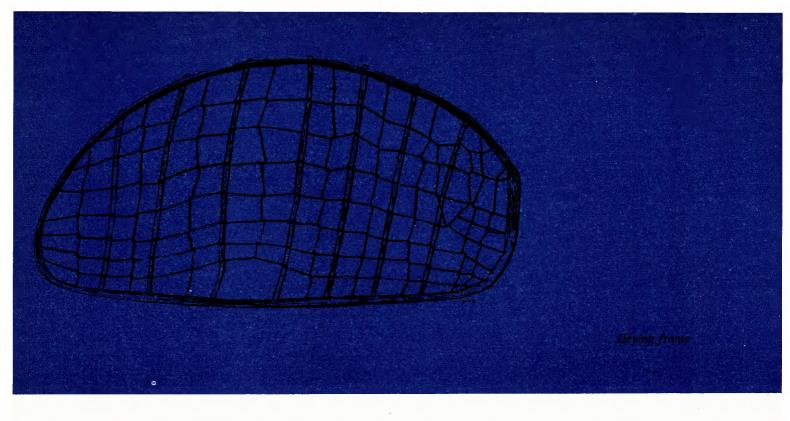


Technical Help

The style of the sealskin hat does not, of course, originate with the Eskimo people. The insertions of animals and birds for decorative purpose do. The hats are an interesting example of how technical help can encourage the Eskimos to make profitable use of the renewable resources of their land.

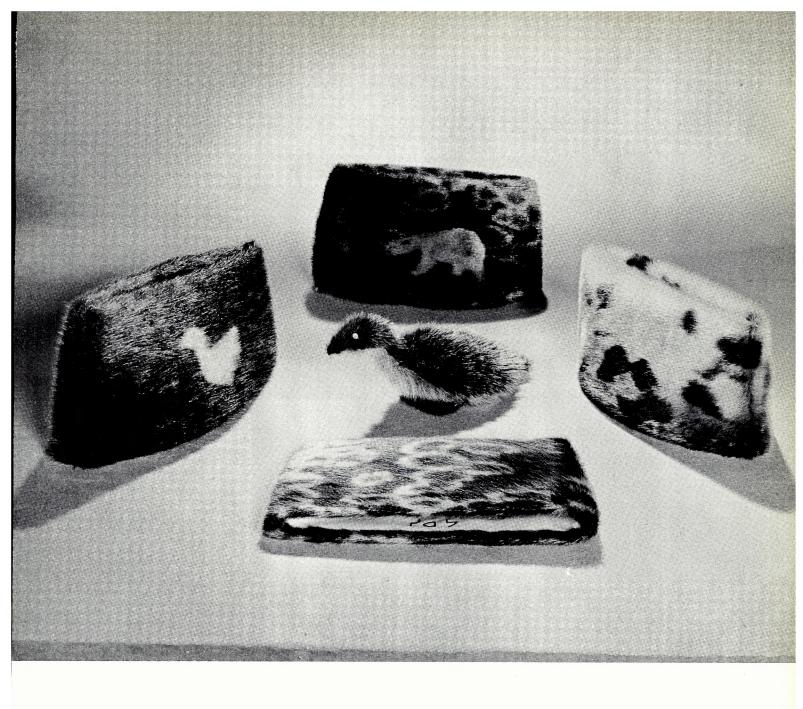


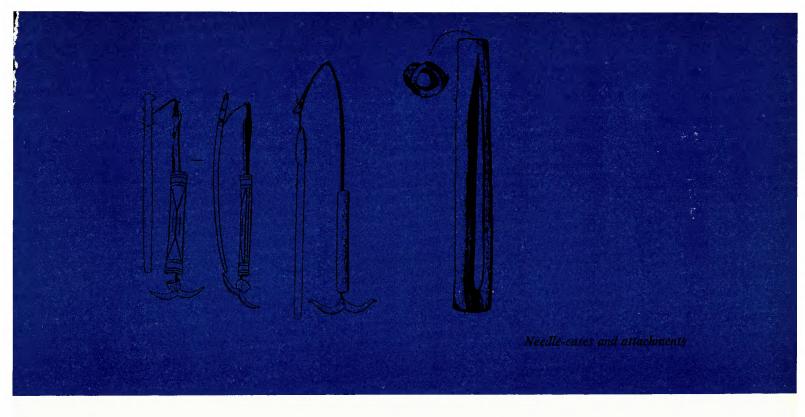
Emma Annatuk, Port Burwell, N.W.T., making sealskin hat.



Arctic Elegance in Sealskin

The sealskin hat, placed beside other objects which are indicative of the finest craftsmanship and skill in industry, loses nothing by the comparison and indeed, with its own particular Eskimo quality, adds to the general fine effect. The hats are warm and useful garments and being soft and pliant can be shaped to suit the cut of the head that wears one.





Sealskin Slippers with Duffle Liners

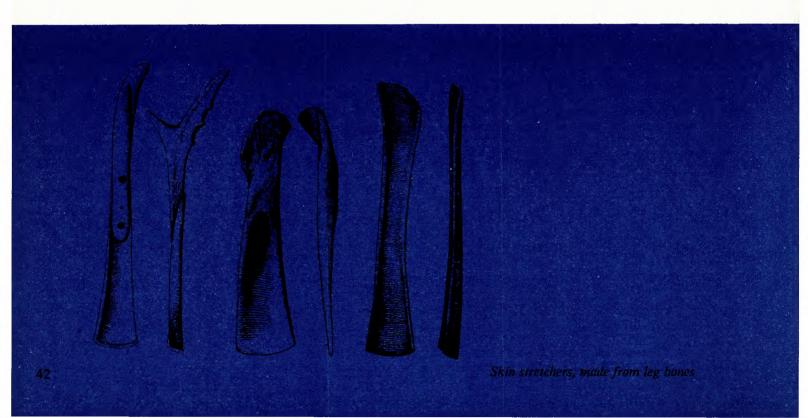
The traditional coastal Eskimo economy was based on the hunting of seals. An Eskimo's whole existence depended, and still depends in many areas, upon his success in the hunt. The numbers he caught affected his status in the community and provided his family with the necessities of life, tents, weapons, food, and clothing. It was the duty of the women of the household to skin the seal and prepare it for use in various ways. Needless to say over the years they developed great skill. It is a matter of much importance to an Eskimo woman to be able to produce fine articles in sealskin, whether they are intended for sale or for family use. With such an important tradition and background in Eskimo society, the production of sealskin articles for sale has become of new economic importance and is continuing to develop in a great variety of forms.

Four types of seals inhabit the Canadian Arctic waters and they are all hair seals; jar or ringed seal, harp, bearded seal and ranger. The jar is the most common. The skin of each seal has a different purpose and use in the making of clothes and crafts. The bearded seal, ugjuk, for example, having the heaviest hide is prized for boot soles. The jar which is silver in its adolescent stage is used to produce glittering effects in clothing and crafts. The ranger is scarce, is highly valued and saved for special garments.

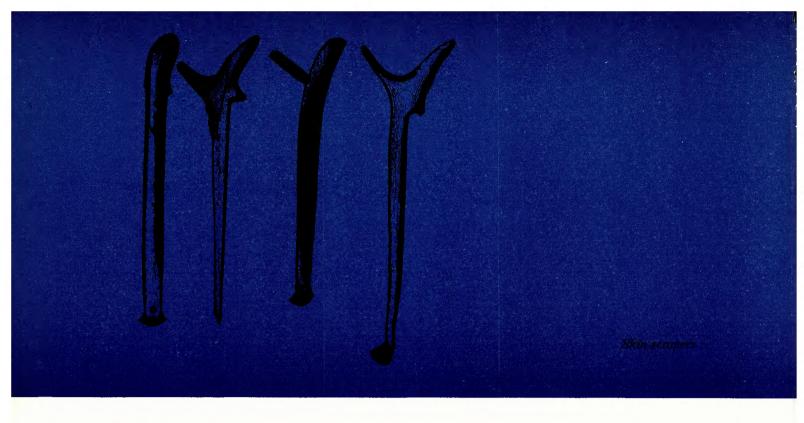
Sealskin Mitts and Purse

The skills which the Eskimo people have shown in making attractive and practical items of clothing from seal-skin, duffle and other materials familiar to them has won many admiring friends in Canada and around the world.

As we are attracted to the products of their way of life, however, so are they drawn to ours. This is evident in the purse which is of a design common to us, but even this item has been given the charming treatment so common to Eskimo work: an inset of a polar bear. Thus they bridge the gulf between us with a simple touch.

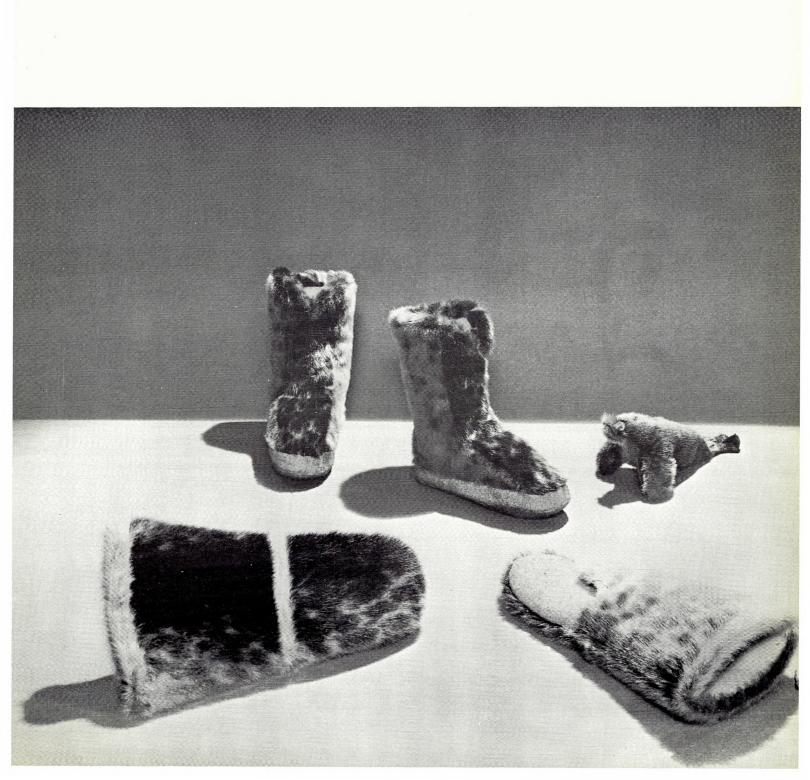


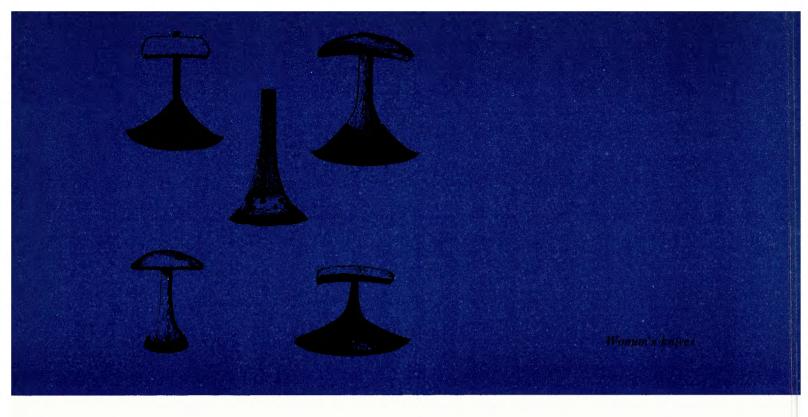




Sealskin Mitts and Boots

Decoration on articles of sealskin made for practical daily use is generally restricted to insets of sealskins of contrasting colours. These usually appear in geometric shapes or stripes, which are cut by eye with an ulu, and pieced together with sinew when that is available. The decorative forms are deceptively simple when completed, but the process is intricate. Eskimo women have been trained from childhood in this craft having watched their mothers making them from their earliest days, gaining practice usually by making miniature boots and shoes themselves. These are used in the dressing of their dolls. Nothing is wasted and everything has a purpose in the crafts and arts of Eskimo women.





Embroidered Ski-slippers

Here the principle of Eskimo footwear is adapted in an interesting way to the use of heavy woollen duffle, a material which was introduced to the Eskimos by the traders and has had such wide acceptance by them that it has become a part of their material culture today. It is used extensively as a liner in their parkas and for the lining in footwear. From such beginnings these embroidered slippers are derived, extremely useful for housewear or for resting the feet after skiing, and are washable and durable. They are generally made loosely for the purpose of being restful for the feet. The embroidery differs a great deal in its subject matter but the colours are invariably bright. Eskimos have a predilection for extremely bright basic colours and have not had the opportunity of working with subtle tones of brilliant hue. The designs in individual slippers are never repeated and it would probably be impossible to persuade an Eskimo woman to make two pairs alike. It is against her inclination to do so for reasons which are to be found in the Eskimo way of thinking. In such matters it is quite different from ours. They do not agree that because something is good it ought to be twice the same when it is possible to make something equally good, but different. Moreover they usually refuse to work to colour specifications, preferring to work up their own ideas. One can understand this when it is remembered that they work by eye and not to a planned design. This is not the least of the many reasons why their work is so strikingly different and different within itself. If this magic chain is broken that difference will be immediately lost.

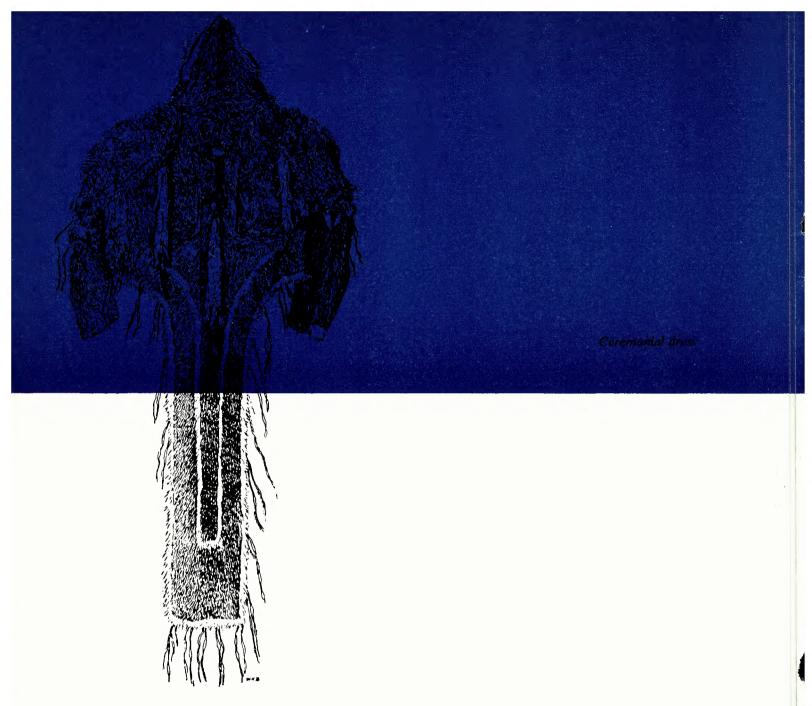




Duffle Socks with Animal Motifs

Through their embroidery work emerges the Eskimo sense of humour. For the most part they confine themselves to depicting forms which they see in the world around them. These are not necessarily forms which are immediately recognizable to us. Insistence on trying to get a definition of some form from the crafts-woman can result in annoying her intensely. There is a certain Eskimo logic behind all this craft, which is foreign to us, and requires sympathetic appreciation even if understanding is not possible. Duffle socks are used in the Arctic extensively for lining sealskin boots but in recent times they are being used by sportsmen as the inner lining for heavy hunting boots. They are extremely absorbent and when a light sock is worn under them keep the feet and legs dry and warm.





Styles in Arctic Clothing

Styles in Arctic clothing vary so widely that it would be difficult to find two settlements of Eskimos producing exactly the same things. Their ideas differ in these matters as do their environment and dialects. These are derived from local tradition and needs. Clothing was made and designed to fit such needs.



Contrast and Comfort in Clothing from the Arctic

The white duffle coat has its origin in the Eskimo parka. It retains its most useful function in the hood which is close-fitting to the head and prevents the wind from blowing in around the neck. The fur ruff, which may be made of wolverine, fox or wolf skins, protects the face. Sealskin and furs such as muskrat may be used in the making of parkas of derivative Eskimo design, or in the form of short jackets. Buttons and other accessories may sometimes be carved in ivory. This work is done by the man of the household.

Chain of fox bones from the front of a woman's coat











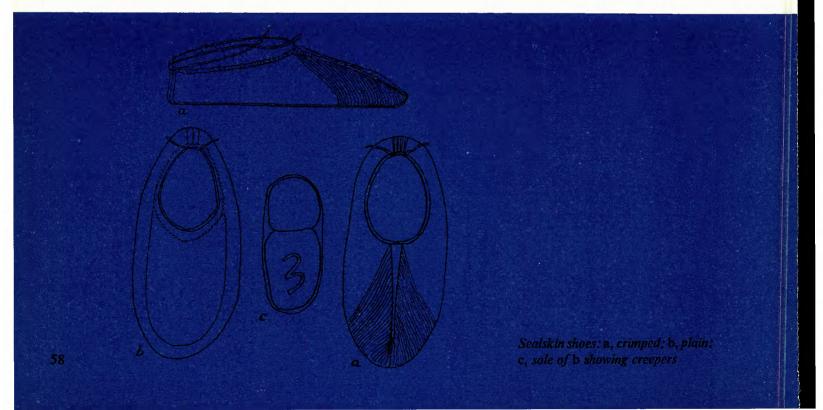
Bright Colour and Pleasing Forms

Eskimos generally are inclined to be exuberant and enthusiastic about any new way of doing things once they accept it. In their embroidery work, the result has been a healthy desire to experiment, to play with the idea of making things they had never been able to make before, in the materials they had to work with in bygone days. Flowers appear which of course had never been worked in sealskin and there are certainly flowers in the Arctic. Birds and animals also appear in bright colours but, always, there is some instance of a traditional formal design such as the abstract of a face taken from a design for a mask. The embroidery work shown in the picture on the left depicts a drum dance.



Eskimo Colour and Design Serve Beauty

The introduction of many materials with which they were not familiar has released the creative abilities of the Eskimo people. The expressions which they introduce into the features of many of the embroidered animals are essentially humorous. The glee with which Eskimo women produce these designs always working with the eye, their pleasure in their work and their pride in it are important factors in their success as in any hand-crafted article.

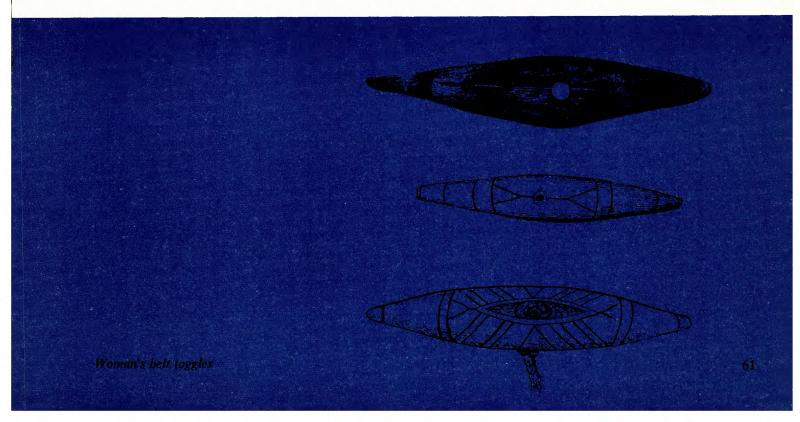






High Style in the Arctic

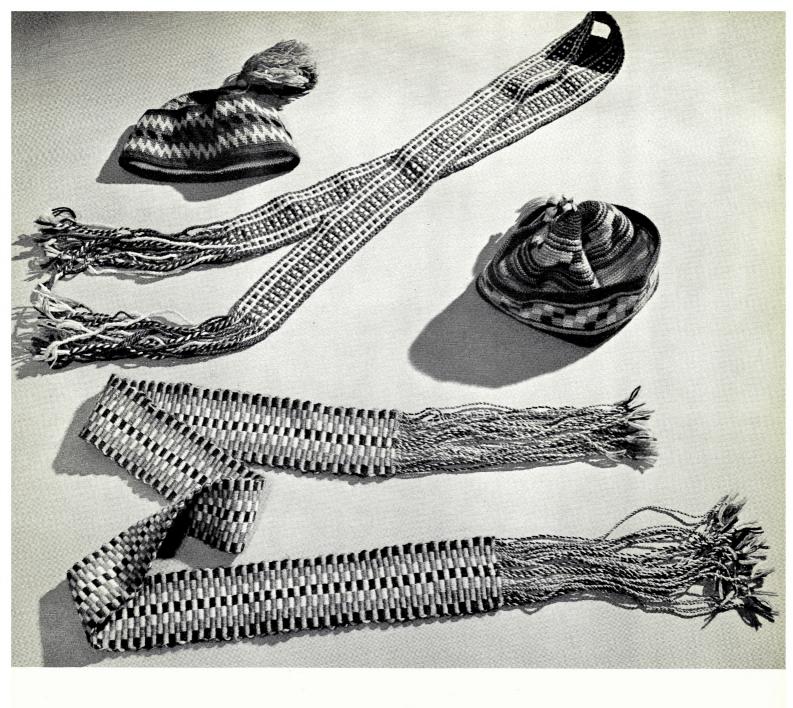
Eskimo garments have a distinctive flowing freedom of line which is derived from the roominess of their traditional clothing. This is noticeable in the Arctic fashions right across the country. It is based on a principle in dress, which was discovered by the Eskimos centuries ago. They permit the body to breathe and to be warmed by its own heat through convection. A sheath dress, to mention an extreme example, would be quite impractical in the Arctic and has its derivations from other sources. Nevertheless, the style of many gorgeous items of wear from the Eskimo eollection have their source in the practical purposes for which they were designed in the first place.



Arctic Accessories

Crocheted caps are worn by Eskimo men in some areas of Arctic Canada. Belts hand-fingered from wool are used by women to assist them in holding the infant in the hood of the parka. Both are used on special occasions simply as decorative forms of dress. New ideas in the use of accessories based on old designs are continually occurring for adaptation in modern use by Canadians in the north, setting patterns and style for the rest of the country.

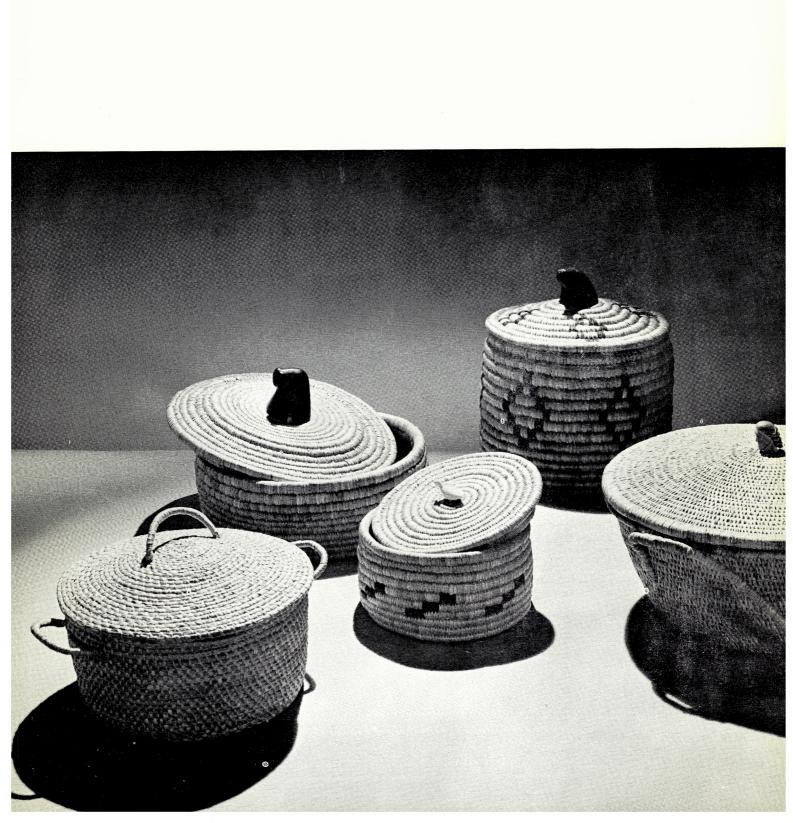


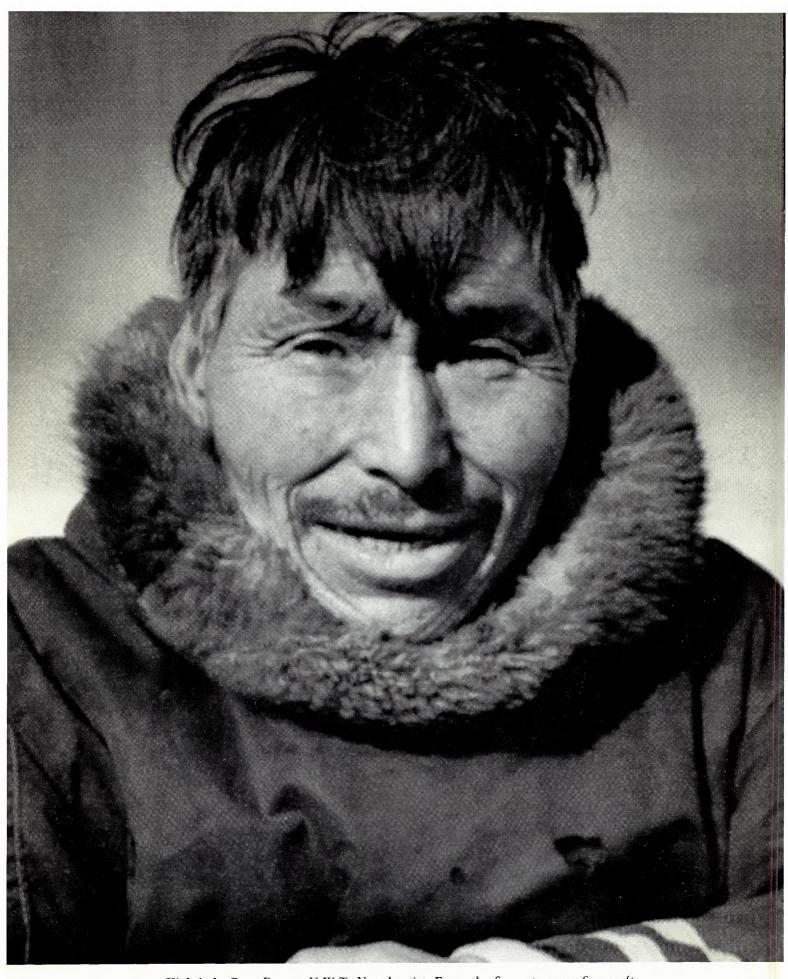




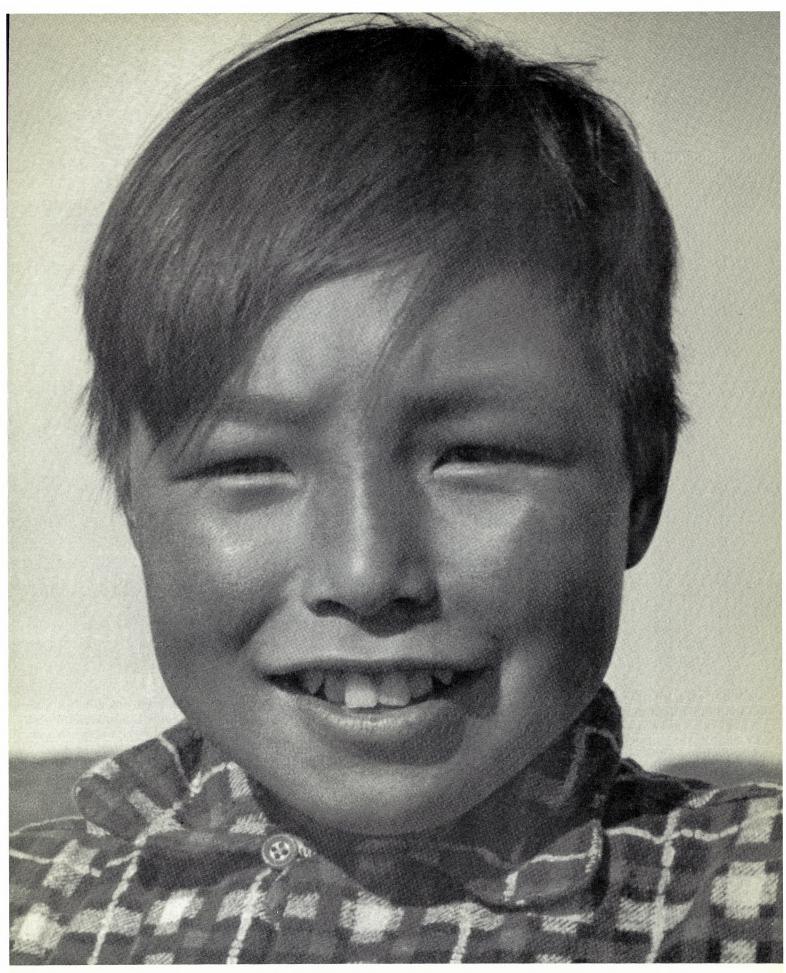
Eskimo Baskets are Sturdy and Pleasing in Form

Basket-making is one of the earliest crafts known to man. The materials most frequently used by Eskimos in Canada is wild rye or lyme grass (Elymus mollis). This grows in dunes or seaweed banks. Willow roots are also used in some areas and sometimes seaweed is combined with grass. Formal designs are introduced in the basket by the use of sealskin and in some instances the grass itself may be dyed in colours taken from tundra plants and fruits. Handles may be woven but more recently small carvings made in stone or ivory have appeared. Canadian Eskimos favour the coiled technique in basket-making, and they confine form as such to the simple and useful. The most usual shapes are the straight sided bandbox and the ginger jar, curved sides with the top and bottom narrower than the maximum width. Today, Canadian Eskimos who have experienced ideas and innovations from other countries, for many years, still make baskets which are almost identical to those made by distant Eskimo groups, such as those from Nunivak, in the Bering Sea. Their work is even, their baskets are strong, the standard of craftsmanship is high and they last for many years in daily use.





Kiakshuk, Cape Dorset, N.W.T. Noted artist. From the fine arts come fine crafts.



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