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# The Tactile Eskimo Art Collection

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The Tactile Eskimo Art Collection  
Presented by the Department of  
Indian and Northern Affairs,  
in co-operation with the  
Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

Commentary by Gilles and Leslie Duplantie  
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Through "The Tactile Eskimo Art Collection" the blind, as well as the sighted, will enjoy a rare experience in art appreciation.

Thirty-two pieces were chosen by two blind women for this special collection, sponsored by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Texture and form as perceived through sensitive touch were important criteria in selecting the carvings.

This collection has a two-fold purpose. One is to enable the visually-handicapped to capture the exquisite design of Eskimo carvings. The other is equally important: It is to acquaint all Canadians with the rich heritage the contemporary Eskimo has inherited from his forebears.

The Eskimo carvers, craftsmen and artists, bring to their art objects the sum total of their attitudes, concepts, and natural creativity. This art, so recently appreciated and understood, is bursting with vitality and strength.

Art and carving cannot be separated easily from Eskimo life, forming, as they do, an integral part of Eskimo culture.

Studies indicate that artistic creativity is greater per capita among the Eskimo than any other culture. It is through this medium he is able to express his very essence, his origin, his destiny.

The birth of contemporary Eskimo Art, around 1948-49, was brought about largely through the keen interest of James A. Houston. Houston awakened the eyes of the world to the treasures of Eskimo art and promoted the sale of art objects to the people in southern Canada as well as abroad.

The materials used by the modern Eskimo artist are those readily

available and include ivory, antler, soapstone, bone, driftwood, and animal hide; they are the same materials as those used before the Eskimo artists had contact with the outside world. Bone, antler, and ivory are used frequently because they have strength yet are light in weight. Ivory has physical limitations of size, thickness, and availability. Scarcity of wood as a material is obvious. Vegetation is sparse and wood is limited to driftwood. Soapstone on the other hand is plentiful and may be acquired in small as well as large pieces and for these reasons contemporary artists lean heavily toward soapstone as a medium of their expression.

Eskimo sculpture cannot be categorized; no two individuals have the same style and each is original. Some carvings depict an obvious activity or theme while others are abstract.

Pick up, handle, and study the collection:

Kalloor, Francis

Hunter

ES-574

Baker Lake, 1965

Soapstone, 11" x  $6\frac{1}{4}$ " x 3"

As you lift this object you easily will detect many obvious details.

The "Hunter" is a sturdy fellow with one arm uplifted, his hand clutching a knife poised for the kill. He stands erect with broad shoulders. This typifies the strength and purposefulness of the Eskimo hunter, on whose prowess as a hunter the family depended.

Note the facial features and the layers of clothing - the long hooded coat slit at the sides, the pants meeting the bulky, warm

foot-gear.

Francis Kallooar, was born October 5, 1931, in the Kazan River area but prefers living in Baker Lake because of the excellent Caribou hunting.

He carves only when inspired, and has created masterpieces which have been acclaimed by the outside world.

Kallooar is a printmaker as well as a sculptor and prefers printmaking to carving although he occasionally finds it difficult and tiring. His wife, Irene Toweener, also carves and makes prints. They have five children.

Artist unknown

Polar Bear ES-612

Arctic Bay, 1972

Ivory, 5" x 2" x 1½"

The features of the "Polar Bear" are delicately carved in creamy white, polished ivory. The eyes, nose and claws are painted black.

Maktar

Man Building Igloo ES-627

Arctic Bay, 1972

Stone, 9½" x 7" x 5¼"

Maktar depicts a man building an igloo; possibly the beginnings of a home or of a temporary shelter for a hunting expedition.

This carving has a fine, silky texture. One can feel the slight slant of the first layer of snow blocks. The man carrying a block is detachable.

The snow house was only one type of shelter in the Arctic and

used by many Eskimos during the winter. Other dwellings were made of stone, wood, whalebone, or skins.

The snow house or igloos, were fashioned in a dome. Blocks of snow were cut and fitted together; the blocks approximately ten inches wide, thirty inches long, and twenty four inches high, cut to slant inward. The type of snow used had to be very hard and obtained from a single snow fall so that blocks were uniform in strength.

A 10 to 20-foot tunnel was constructed for the entrance and double doors were utilized by some ingenious Eskimos for added protection against the cold. During stormy weather, dogs were permitted to stay in the tunnel.

At least half of the interior was used for the bed platform. This area was raised above the floor by snow blocks, covered with boards and with skins on top.

The floor plan was not always the same and the igloo could be very large. When more than one family was housed in a dwelling, a large dance hall and one or more cook-houses often were incorporated.

Born in 1932, Maktar is married to Emeegooetoo and has one adopted son.

Kenojuak

Man Holding Pup

ES-457

Cape Dorset, 1968

Green Serpentine, 11" x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4"

As you handle this piece, note the man is in a sitting position and holding a pup in his outstretched arms. One can almost feel the affection between man and his dog.

The green serpentine used for the carving is found only in the Cape Dorset area.

Kenojuak is probably the most famous of all Eskimo artists. Her drawings of imaginary birds and other complex compositions are done with exquisite detail in her unique style. She created her first print, "Rabbit Eating Seaweed", in 1958 and several of her drawings have been produced on stone-cut-prints. Her 1960 print, "Enchanted Owl", also was used for the design of a postage stamp. In recognition of her artistic accomplishments, she was awarded the Medal of Service of the Order of Canada. Recently, Kenojuak has devoted her skill to sculpting.

Born on October 3, 1927 at Ikarasak, Kenojuak grew up in several camps in that area. Her mother was widowed three times, so Kenojuak knew many step-sisters and step-brothers in addition to her own brother and sister.

Kenojuak married Johnniebo in 1949; during their early married life, they migrated from camp to camp as hunting dictated. In 1967, they settled in the Cape Dorset area with their five children, two of whom are adopted.

Sohopi

Two Men

ES-622

Region unknown

Soapstone and Bone,  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6" x  $2\frac{1}{2}$ "

These two minute soapstone figures standing on a white bone may have several interpretations. One version could be of two friends standing only a slight distance apart and engaged in conversation.

The white bone could represent snow.

Petolassie, Timungiak

Seal

ES-609

Cape Dorset, 1972

Soapstone,  $13\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $5\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6"

This gray-greenish soapstone sculpture of a seal is massive. The flippers and tail are well defined. Note the relatively small head compared to the trunk.

Timungiak Petolassie began carving in 1962 and for her, it is not only a means of artistic expression and satisfaction but also her only available source of income. Her favorite subjects are seals and birds. She feels that a small, sharp axe is the best tool to use when carving.

Born on April 1, 1940, Timungiak is the wife of Aggeak Petolassie and has one daughter, four sons, one stepson, and one adopted son. Many of her relatives are also carvers.

Etuktu, Walter

Gosling

ES-614

Coppermine, 1972

Whalebone, 12 x 11 x 6

Etuktu's "Gosling" is well defined; note the detailed head and, on the wings, the indentations depict feathers. The position of the wings expresses flight.

The texture of the whalebone adds color to the carving; the smooth surfaces have a light shade while the more porous areas are darker.

Walter Etuktu, was born in 1919 and is married to Mona Kagitak.

They have three daughters and two sons.

Qupannuk

Mask ES-624

Repulse Bay, 1972

Soapstone,  $4\frac{1}{4}$ " x  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " x  $1\frac{1}{4}$ "

This small "Mask" has well defined features. It is grey soapstone.

The carving was probably meant to be hung on a wall as there is a string hook on the reverse side.

Shooksklak

Head ED-619

Spence Bay, 1972

Whalebone, 9 x 9 x 2

As you handle this "Head", you will feel the primitive nature of the object. The features show a wide mouth, prominent lips, large teeth and wide, high cheek bones. One eye is less defined than the other.

The texture is rough. There are deep indentations throughout the object that are unrelated to natural features.

This white whalebone sculpture fits loosely into the base so it may be easily lifted out for inspection.

Born in 1918, Shooksklak is married to Lena Keyauk and has one son, one step-son, and three adopted sons.

Selina

Mother and Child ED-610

Repulse Bay, 1972

Soapstone, 6" x  $5\frac{1}{4}$ " x 4"

Here you have a carving which is a central theme of Eskimo culture. Selina's "Mother and Child" radiates love and warmth.

Note the typical facial features and clothing. The smooth soapstone is dark gray.

Artist unknown

Hawk

ES-626

Region unknown, 1972

Soapstone,  $9\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $13\frac{1}{2}$ " x 7"

The "Hawk" is a very heavy piece. You may pick it up, but perhaps you will want to inspect it as you stand.

This massive piece of art depicts power and endurance. The wings are well defined.

This black soapstone "Hawk" stands on one leg with the other claw snugly against its body.

Neeveasheak, Johnny

Drum Dancer

ES-602

Spence Bay, 1972

Whalebone,  $5\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $7\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $4\frac{1}{2}$ "

Neeveasheak's "Drum Dancer" portrays the popular Eskimo pastime of singing and dancing. In earlier times, the drum was the only musical instrument and it is still popular in some northern areas.

In this carving, the man holds the drum in one out-stretched hand and the thong in the other, in readiness to begin the dance. The drum is detachable. The sculpture is made of porous whalebone and thus, has a rough texture.

An Eskimo drum is constructed by stretching skin over a wooden

frame which is in a circle or oval form. The thong or drum stick is wood covered with caribou hide. The drums are not tuned to any specific key although the thongs may be covered with skins of different softness which modifies the beat. Drum Dancers do not always participate in the dance.

Born in 1923, Johnny Neeveeasheak is married to Etenumaia, who also carves, and they have three children, two boys and a girl.

Johnny Neeveeasheak began carving in 1971 and especially enjoys carving faces.

Porter, Benjamin

Three Birds ES-625

Pelly Bay, 1972

Soapstone and Bone, 2" x 1" x 1½"

On this felt mat you will find three small, gray soapstone objects attached to a bone base. These are birds. One bird has its head arched to the rear.

The artist, Benjamin Porter, was born in 1940. He is married to Lidwina Angmadlok and has one son.

Akkak

Fish ES-618

Spence Bay, 1972

Whalebone, 11½" x 6" x 3½"

Here you have a fish supported upon a peg. You may lift it free of the base.

The curve to its tail gives the impression of actual motion in water.

Note the indentations for the mouth, eyes, and gills. The sharp little appendage on top of the fish is a fin.

Akkak was born in 1933. He and his wife, Emily Oblogeak, have three sons and one daughter.

Taligiak

Needle Case EH-689

Coppermine, 1972

Antler and Sinew, 6" x  $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 1"

A needle case, known as KAKVIK by the Eskimos, was a tubular receptacle for holding needles. It was made from caribou bone, antler, or ivory: The needle was struck into a skin which was housed in the case for protection. A thimble holder, which was a curved object at the end of a piece of skin or sinew, was used to hold the thimble to the case.

The "Needle Case" in this collection is made of antler. The cord is sinew and the needle is copper. The needle can be extracted from the case by pulling on the sinew.

Artist unknown

Ulu (Woman's knife) EH-688

Coppermine, 1972

Copper and Antler,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  x  $3\frac{1}{2}$ "

The "Ulu" or woman's knife was a crescent shaped copper blade and a handle made of antler.

Eskimo women usually have several ulus which vary slightly in design and in use. Ulus are used for scraping skin, sewing, and chopping.

Artist unknown

Harpoon

EH-687

Region unknown, 1972

Antler, Wood, and Leather, 46 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

The harpoon was, and still is, the most important hunting weapon in the Arctic. There are three main parts: the long, firm shaft is made of wood, and at one end of it there is a relatively short expanse of decorative antler; at the other end of the shaft, you will note a longer piece of antler, securely attached to the shaft by a leather cord which is threaded between the two parts. The extreme end of the antler tapers to a point and is inserted into the antler spear head. Note the detailed construction of the pointed spear head. A leather holding line is attached to the spear head; the hunter would hold the other end of the line in his hand. Note the knob on the shaft; it serves to keep the holding line taut and thus, firmly secures the harpoon head. After harpooning an animal, the head will be detached from the shaft and antler.

Artist unknown

Snow Goggles

EH-690

Coppermine, 1972

Antler, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Snow goggles were used to protect the eyes during the spring months. They were fashioned out of bone, wood, or ivory, in the contour of one's face and were held in place by a cord fitted around the head. The slits for the eyes were extremely tiny, lengthwise cuts.

The snow goggles in the display are made of antler. One is able to feel the narrow slits and the curve of the antler which fits the face.

Neeveasheak, Johnny

Children at Play ES-617

Spence Bay, 1972

Whalebone, 9" x 9" x 2"

On this mat you will find a whalebone sculpture entitled "Children at Play". The group depicts activity and life.

Observe the unique way the three figures are joined together: One figure is in a standing position with another in his shoulder while the third is in a lying position. The standing figure has one detachable leg.

Talirunili, Joe

Woman with Children ES-424

Povungnituk, 1968

Soapstone, 7" x 3½" x 4"

This gray soapstone carving is actually three figures.

The large central figure is a woman holding two children. The children are held with their backs toward the woman and face in the same direction as the woman.

The features are finely-carved and may be traced to detect facial features, ears, hair, fingers, and clothing.

Joe Talirunili thinks he was born on the shores of the Kugaluk River in 1899. When he was a young child, his family, together with about forty other Eskimos, sailed across Hudson Bay bound for the

Ottawa Islands in search of better hunting grounds. In 1965, Talirunili made a soapstone carving depicting their journey in a umiak; he portrayed himself being carried on his mother's back.

Talirunili is a widower having survived his wife Paniaalu Surusiq. He has three sons and one daughter and lives in Povungnituk with a grandson and granddaughter.

Angmarlik, Isiasee

Goose ES-615

Pangnitung, 1972

Whalebone, 14" x 12½" x 1½"

The head and neck of the goose are three-dimensional. However, the body, while also three-dimensional, is not proportioned realistically; this portion is flat and more like a silhouette with an indentation outlining the wings. The goose is attached to a base.

The coloration of the whalebone is not entirely white; it has dark areas throughout.

Born on February 12, 1936, Isiasee Angmarlik is married to Seela and has two daughters and one son.

He started carving in 1965. Birds, narwhals, and figures of humans are his favorite objects. His father and three of his brothers, Zetaboo, Inukee, and Geesee, also carve.

Angmarlik is a trapper and hunter as well as a sculptor.

Ekidlak, Alice

Duck ES-606

Belcher Islands, 1972

Soapstone, 7" x 4" x 2½"

Note the sleek, smooth, flowing lines of the duck. Also notice the flat bottom. In Eskimo carvings of creatures in the water, all portions below the water line are omitted. Feel the shape of the wings and look for the indentations of the eyes. The soapstone is medium gray, tinged with green.

Born on April 25, 1933, Alice Ekidlak is married to Paulassie Ekidlak and has two daughters, two stepsons, one adopted son, and one son. Her husband also is a sculptor.

Anatiak

Whales ES-620

Pelly Bay, 1972

Ivory and Bone,  $4\frac{1}{4}$ " x  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $1\frac{1}{2}$ "

As you hold this tiny art object you will detect the sleek, polished lines of the four ivory whales. Note the tiny air holes, the protruding front flippers, and the flat, horizontal tails.

The whales are attached to a whalebone base.

Munaluk, John

Bear ES-616

Spence Bay, 1972

Whalebone, 7" x 11" x 4"

Through Munaluk's "Bear", one can appreciate the Eskimo artist's keen perception. Muscle, strength, power, and movement are evident; one can see it; one can feel it. The rough texture of the whalebone gives the piece ruggedness.

John Munaluk first began carving at the age of seventeen while he was in a hospital. Figures of humans and polar bears are his

favorite subjects. He finds it very difficult to obtain carving material.

Munaluk was born July 1, 1940, and is married to Seeta Star.

They have three children, two of whom are adopted.

Akeeah, Matthew

Woman

ES-16-470

Baker Lake, 1970

Soapstone, 10" x 9½" x 5½"

Akeeah's "Woman" is a good likeness of an Eskimo woman. Through it, one can appreciate the physical characteristics of an Eskimo. The round face, high cheek bones, and the short, sturdy body are apparent. The soft, rounded lines make "Woman" come to life.

The traditional dress of the Eskimo can also be appreciated from this carving. Eskimo clothing usually is made of caribou skins. During the winter, two suits of clothing are required; the inner suit is worn with the hair towards the wearer while the hair is outward on the outer garments. Women as well as men wear close-fitting trousers and boots. The ATIGI is a buttonless coat with a hood and with broad, tail-like flaps, the back flap serving as insulation to protect the wearer from cold when seated. The hood and back of the woman's parka or Amaut is very large and designed to hold the baby. The hems of the ATIGI are fringed with thin strips of caribou skin; this prevents the edges of the coat from curling upwards as well as being decorative.

Matthew Akeeah is a well-known sculptor. He is a serious artist and possesses high artistic values. His preferred medium is stone. The interaction and balance of shapes and lines in his carvings are

skillfully executed. Should an art object not satisfy him, he will break it.

Born August 14, 1940, near the Kazan River Falls, Akeeah is an Inland Eskimo. He is married to Marjorie Aglowak and they have four children. Marjorie makes wall hangings. His brother, Ekoota, is a sculptor.

After a two year illness, in the early sixties, Akeeah returned to Baker Lake and discovered he no longer was able to trap and hunt. Therefore, he turned to carving as a source of income. Today he supports his family by his excellent craftsmanship.

Akeeah is an authority among the Baker Lake carvers; he criticizes poor work and tries to help others improve. Unlike many carvers, Akeeah is willing to discuss his work, what makes it good, the pricing and his feelings about his art.

Anguti, Marie

Man in Kayak ES-621

Pelly Bay, 1972

Antler,  $6\frac{3}{4}$ " x  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " x  $\frac{3}{4}$ "

On this felt mat you will find a small, antler replica of a "Man in Kayak". The original kayaks were used for hunting; today, they have been almost totally replaced by modern canoes and motor boats.

Note the fine details of the man. His outstretched arms hold a detachable double paddle. Generally, a skin cord is placed just above the paddles to prevent water running down the shaft when paddling.

The kayak is long and sleek and tapers to a point at each end. It varies in length from twelve to twenty-two feet and is about twenty-two inches wide. The frame is made of wooden beams which are notched and fastened together by fine lashes made of skin or sinew. This framework is covered with stretched seal or caribou skins, sewn together, and waterproofed. A flat piece of wood or whalebone is shaped into a circle to form the manhole; it is just large enough for one rider.

Two straps or loops, attached on the front surface of the kayak, hold two spears in place.

Marie Anguti began carving in 1967. Her favorite subjects are narwhales, seals, and birds. A bone file, a smaller file, and sandpaper are her carving tools.

She works in a producer co-operative, the local marketing agency which sells the Eskimo work.

Born on August 15, 1943, Marie is married to Yvo Anguti and has two sons. Many of her relatives are carvers.

Ulikatar, Anthanase

Walrus ES-607

Repulse Bay, 1972

Soapstone,  $5\frac{1}{4}$ " x  $7\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $3\frac{1}{4}$ "

Ulikatar's "Walrus" is a fine example of a massive sea mammal; one can feel the heavy layers of blubber. Two tusks are protruding from its upper jaw. The curvature of the body gives the walrus life.

The soapstone is dark gray with a slight greenish shade.

Anthanase Ulikatar began carving in the mid-sixties. His

favorite subjects, narwhale and walrus, are both represented in this collection. Stone, antler, and whalebone are the materials used by Ulikatar.

Born near Pelly Bay in 1908 he married Justine Arnasiar and was widowed in 1958. Three of their children, two sons and one daughter, are still alive; one son, Peter Katokra, is a carver. Ulikatar's, Marc Tungilik, also carves.

Akeekee, Alex

Bird, Nest, and Eggs ES-604

Spence Bay, 1972

Whalebone,  $11\frac{1}{4}$ " x 6" x  $7\frac{1}{2}$ "

The exquisite balance of "Bird, Nest, and Eggs" is such that were the bird repositioned, the entire carving would topple.

Note the natural shape of the nest with the two eggs inside. Now observe the bird: Wings outstretched, it faces the eggs as though ready to take flight or alight.

The white bone lends itself to realism in the sculpture.

Alex Aleekie began his carving career in 1970. He uses an axe, a bone file, and a hand drill. He especially enjoys carving polar bears and says he gains much satisfaction from his work. However, as in every occupation, Aleekie finds carving tedious at times.

Aleekie, born September 1, 1936, and his wife, Alice Omadluk, have three daughters and a son. There are many carvers in his family.

Martha

Father and Son ES-608

Pond Inlet, 1972

Soapstone, 8", x 4" x  $3\frac{1}{2}$ "

This smooth, black soapstone figure depicts a father and son. The father bends slightly over the small son in a protective attitude. Perhaps he is comforting his son.

Martha, born in 1920, is a widow and the head of her family. She has two sons and a daughter.

She has been carving for a number of years.

Allurut, Ahloo

Man with Sled and Dog Team ES-613

Arctic Bay, 1972

Soapstone, Sealskin, and Wood, 33" x 5" x 3"

Allurut's carving is a detailed miniature replica of a sled and dog team, a mode of transportation still used in the Arctic.

Actual sleds are made of wood and vary in length from ten to thirty feet according to their use. Two long planks serve as runners; these are designed for maximum efficiency on the snow. Several eighteen-inch cross-wise boards are set approximately four inches apart between the runners. Runners and horizontal boards are sometimes fastened together with whalebone. Handles are used for steering. The overall construction is strong, yet resilient, enabling the sled to twist and turn on rough ice without snapping.

There are five soapstone dogs in this display. Each dog wears a harness made of sealskin and is attached to the sled by a line called a trace. Note the construction of the hinges in the trace.

The driver, sitting on the sled, is made of smooth gray soapstone. Note his facial features and clothing.

Ahloo Allurut cannot remember the first time he carved; he began

when he was a child. Then, he worked only in wood and made toy knives, toy harpoons, and dolls.

Today, Allurut carves many different subjects without favorites. A file, saw, and knife are his carving tools. Although he does not have a preferred medium, he finds it difficult to make his carvings, especially those of polar bears, as smooth as he would like.

Allurut was born December 15, 1939. He and his wife, Rebecca, have six children, three girls and three boys. Allurut makes his living by hunting as well as by carving, and also helps the local missionary. Rebecca carves as well.

Oomingurak

Spirit ES-605

Spence Bay, 1972

Whalebone, 9" x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5"

This is an abstract figure carved on the vertebrae of a whale. In the center, a well-defined face emerges. Hands are clearly marked on the two long, armlike extensions. The extensions on the bottom of the head resemble legs and feet. Note the extremely rough texture.

Ulikatar, Anthanase

Narwhale ES-611

Repulse Bay, 1972

Soapstone, 9" x 3" x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

The narwhale is made of black soapstone and has a spiral tusk of ivory extending from its upper jaw. It can be lifted from its base for closer examination; the tusk can also be removed.

The smooth, round body is slightly curved and gives the impression of motion.

Anthanase Ulikatar began carving in the mid sixties. His favorite subjects, narwhale and walrus, are both represented in this collection. Stone, antler, and whalebone are the materials used by him in carving.