

PRESS RELEASE

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Inuit Modern: an exhibition that sheds light on the evolution of Inuit art

Montreal, February 16, 2012—The McCord Museum is pleased to present the exhibition *Inuit Modern: The Esther and Samuel Sarick Collection*, organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), on display from February 24 to September 3, 2012. This will be its only Canadian presentation, after the initial exhibition at the AGO. The exhibition is co-curated by Gerald McMaster, Curator of Canadian Art at the AGO, and Ingo Hessel, Inuit art specialist.

“With more than 138 works created by nearly 75 artists, Inuit Modern traces the transformation of Inuit art in the 20th century,” says Mr. McMaster. *“Selected sculptures, prints and drawings highlight the work of some of the most prominent artists of our century, including David Ruben Piqtoukun, Kenojuak Ashevak, Karoo Ashevak, Annie Pootoogook and Lucy Tasseor. The exhibition will feature one of the world’s most comprehensive collections of Inuit art, where visitors will see the evolution of these artists and their society.”*

An evolving society

This exhibition immerses visitors in the very heart of a changing society. It examines the various upheavals the Inuit have faced and evaluates their consequences on a social, political, economic and cultural level, as well as in artistic terms.

“Inuit art is first and foremost identity-based, predicated on traditional knowledge and adapted to contemporary reality,” says Guislaine Lemay, Curator of Ethnology and Archeology at the McCord Museum. *“Paradoxically, it is through the evolution of this art, which has become hybridized, that the resilience of their traditions can be seen. Inuit artists have managed to preserve tradition while bringing ingenuity and innovation to their work. Inuit Modern sheds light on this progression spread over many decades.”*

Evolution of Inuit art

Inuit art has an undeniable presence in 2012: there is no doubt that the Inuit have made a rich contribution to the history of art in Canada. The exhibition examines several different topics:

Art in the Face of Colonialism explores the repercussions of the first contacts with Europeans. Starting in the late 18th century, explorers, whalers, merchants and missionaries travelled to the Arctic, bringing home as souvenirs small ivory objects made by the Inuit. These strangers (Qallunaat) would soon be commissioning sculptures, often of kayaks and small animals.

In the 1950s, the Inuit experienced major social and cultural upheaval as their lifestyle based on hunting and fishing began to collapse. The federal government urged Inuit families to give up their nomadic habits and settle in permanent villages.



Quvianatuliak Takpaungai
Woman Holding Braids before 1987
stone
29.9 x 45.5 x 14.0 cm
Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick,
Toronto, 1996 © Dorset Fine Arts



David Ruben Piqtoukun
born near Paulatuk, Northwest
Territories, 1950
Journey to the Great Woman
1995
Brazilian soapstone, Ontario marble,
Italian alabaster, African wonderstone
Art Gallery of Ontario. Gift of Samuel
and Esther Sarick, Toronto, 2001

Through James Houston and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, the government introduced an art program, in hopes of stimulating the Inuit economy. Art from this period was created in response to commercial imperatives.

We Are Inuit presents the establishment of co-operatives in the North, as the demand for Inuit art grew in the communities. This production not only brought in financial resources, but also helped Inuit society preserve its cultural identity. Through recurring themes, (shamanism, spirituality, relationships between humans and animals, nature, mother and child, and family life) Inuit artists told their stories to the outside world. In the 1970s, Inuit art joined the official ranks of Canadian art and thereby garnered international recognition.

I Am an Inuit Artist highlights the emergence and distinctiveness of individual artists such Pauta Sail and Karoo Ashevak. Although the subjects are still traditional, personal style trumps community style.

I Am an Artist, the final theme, brings together many different works that reflect the artists' awareness of their new hybrid identity. The exhibition presents the work of artists who, through their work, take a critical look at their society and their environment, addressing local and global questions that have an impact on Inuit society. Films, talks and presentations complement this exhibition and reveal some northern treasures from the McCord Museum's own collection. For additional information, please see the attached schedule.

About Samuel and Esther Sarick

Samuel and Esther Sarick were passionate collectors of Inuit art for more than 40 years. They developed one of the finest such collections in the world, spanning the entire history of modern Inuit art. With their gift of more than 3,000 works to the AGO, Inuit art has become a part of our national narrative, reflecting their belief that the North embodies Canada's uniqueness.

About the McCord Museum

The McCord Museum is dedicated to the preservation, study and appreciation of Montreal's history, as recounted by its people, artists and communities living in the city's past and present. The McCord Museum is home to one of the largest historical collections in North America, consisting of First Peoples objects, costumes and textiles, photographs, decorative and visual artworks, and textual archives, totalling more than 1.4 million artefacts. The McCord Museum produces exciting exhibitions that engage visitors from Montreal, Canada, and beyond by offering them a contemporary look at the world. The McCord Museum also offers educational and cultural activities, as well as innovative projects on the Internet. ***McCord Museum: Our People, Our Stories.***

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Photographs available upon request. Possibility of interviews with Guislaine Lemay, Curator of Ethnology and Archeology

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The McCord Museum thanks the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec, the Conseil des arts de Montréal and its partners: Astral and *The Gazette*.