



BEHIND THE SCENES AT KENNEDY ART STUDIOS

Submitted by:

site(media)inc.[®]

105 Maria St
Toronto On
M6P 1W5
Phone: 416-762-9682
E-mail: press@sitemedia.ca
www.sitemedia.ca

© Site Media Inc., 2008



Tim Pitsiulak, *Towing the Boat Ashore* (Detail), 38.5 cm x 112.5 cm, Pentel pen, coloured pencil. All photos © Dorset Fine Arts Used with permission

Behind the Scenes at Kinngait Studios

A one-hour documentary for television that provides audiences with an inside look at the renowned Cape Dorset Print Shop on Baffin Island, Nunavut. On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Co-op, the film illustrates the startling and original work of several generations of artists: from the internationally famous Kenojuak Ashevak to a new generation exemplified by Annie Pootoogook, just entering the world stage. The film follows these Inuit artists whose lives and artwork reflect the ongoing social and environmental changes that are transforming the north.

Synopsis

This one-hour documentary profiles the artists of Cape Dorset's famed co-operative arts-workshop on Baffin Island in Nunavut. This film introduces some of the finest artists working in this isolated community of 485 that has the largest per capita concentration of artists in Canada.

In 1993, artist Kenojuak Ashevak, now 80, reflected on the changes she had witnessed at the studio over the years. "When I look around at who is still drawing," she wrote, "it feels like we are babysitting, waiting for the departed ones to come back, knowing that they are not coming back. It feels like the light is getting smaller and smaller."

Kenojuak's sense of loss reflects the changes that Inuit societies have endured to their traditional ways of life since European contact. But those changes also highlight that Inuit people continue to demonstrate remarkable, and traditional, qualities of resilience and adaptation. Through this film, viewers will get a sense of that resilience in the art making that is carried out at the Kinngait Studios.

The film witnesses the annual printmaking cycle as the studio and its artists prepare the studio's annual print edition for 2009. The film closely follows the print folio's production cycle. We see the artists drawing and selecting images that will become prints, and as they work with the master printmaker on the final edition. Along the way we hear the conversations and thoughts of those involved. We also attend the gallery release of the folio edition and get a sense of its progress into the wider world as it is disseminated to art galleries and buyers around the globe.

The film's central motif is Kinngait Studios as it celebrates its 50th anniversary. From modest beginnings in the 1950s, the studio has become an important site for Inuit art production and is now the longest-established fine-arts studio in Canada. The co-op has fostered internationally recognized artists such as Kenojuak Ashevak and continues to bring emerging artists, such as Annie Pootoogook, to wider audiences. The studio is also critical to the community's economic well being as it provides incomes and respect for its artists and their families.

Yet challenges lie ahead. What affect do digital media have on traditional printmaking and sculpture practices? Will younger artist continue the co-op's legacy? Or will they move away from the studio's collective model and follow the path of southerner artists who work in solitude, and in competition, to produce art? What impact does climate-change has on art making and culture?

These questions resonate in the studio's 50th year as the circumpolar region comes to grip with massive change. The film examines how Kinngait's artists are responding to these evolving concerns. The ironically humorous and edgy works of the current generation of artists—exemplified by Annie Pootoogook—show that the studio's artists are engaged in vitally important cultural work. More broadly, the Kinngait Studio story shows that the Inuit people are resilient in the face of change, and that their adaptive strategies provide an important model for all of us in a rapidly changing world.

The following artist are featured working and in short interviews: Anirnik Ragee, Annie Pootoogook, Ningeokuluk Teevee, Arnaqu Ashevak, Papiara Tukiki, Kakulu Saggiaktok, Ohotaq Mikkigak, Kananginak Pootoogook, Pauta Saila, Kavavaw Mannomee, Pitaloosie Saila, Kenojuak Ashevak, Suvinai Ashoona, Tim Pitsiulak, Mayoreak Ashoona, Jutai Toonoo and Itee Pootoogook.

Filmic Treatment

Introduction

The film provides a well-rounded and comprehensible portrait of the Kinngait Studio, its people and its history. The film achieves a sense of immediacy and emotional authenticity by following the dictum, “show; don’t tell.” The camera enters the coop’s world as a respectful observer seeking the rhythms and actions that bring to life the creative process of the artists. For much of the film the artists will be speaking Inuktitut, the living language of the Inuit.

The Inuit artists of Kinngait do not theorize about their work. For them art making is the work that provides them with an income. However, to reduce their art making to this single motive would be misleading. The underlying theme of the film is the transformative potential of art making and the generosity of spirit that underlies the desire, as Kenojuak simply puts it, “to make something beautiful”.

Story components within the film include:

- The making and meaning behind the drawings, prints and sculpture
- Individual artists and their stories of life in Kinngait
- History of the cooperative and the history of Kinngait art
- The business of collecting, selling and buying Inuit art

The film weaves visuals of the art with archival footage and actuality footage shot on location in Kinngait, in the studios, and in the environs.

Structural components include:

- archival film footage
- Archival stills
- Actuality footage in Kinngait
- Actuality footage of southern locations and events related to Kinngait, including Dorset Fine Arts and Fehelley Fine arts in Toronto; Ottawa and other locations
- Interviews with the artists, significant individuals in the coops evolution, collectors, curators

The film is also structured around the tension and contrasts between the north and the south and between the urbane art dealers and collectors who are the patrons of Inuit art and the artists themselves who work in remote Baffin Island. There is also the contrast of the largely non-Inuit business infrastructure of the Kinngait Studio and the artists who work under the auspices of the cooperative. The film looks at this collaboration and speculates about what is next.

Treatment

The film opens with Kenojuak Ashevak, the undisputed master artist and elder of the Kinngait Studio, posed against a sea and sky wide shot of arctic landscape. It dissolves to show Kenojuak posed against the House of Parliament in Ottawa. She is in the city to receive the 2008 Governor General’s Awards for Excellence in the Arts.

Kenojuak is given a tour through the National Gallery of Canada. With her is Jimmy Manning, studio manager of the Kinngait Studio, who is accompanying her and serving as her interpreter. Now eighty years old, Kenojuak, accepts being toured through the gallery in a wheel chair guided by Jimmy. Following her is a retinue comprised of colleagues from Dorset Fine Arts (the marketing division of the Kinngait Studio located in Toronto) as well as other art dealers, curators and government officials. Kenojuak is in good spirits, confident and laughing. As one of the prominent artists in the idiom known as Inuit art, she has traveled extensively and has received numerous awards and acclaim. We see Kenojuak at the awards ceremony and later in an exclusive audience with Her Excellency Michele Jean in a luxurious reception room where Kenojuak is seated in front of a blazing fireplace.



Kenojuak Ashevak
Preening Loon
Stonecut
62 x 56 cm

The film cuts to the snow dusted, wind swept barrens of Baffin Island. In sharp contrast to the coziness of the previous scene the rocky ground seems to radiate metallic coldness. We are in Cape Dorset or Kinngait, as it is known to the Inuit. We see a close up on the face of a younger Kenojuak, 34 years old. The image widens to reveal a group of ten. Portrayed are the people who comprise the early stable of artists of the print studio: Pudlo Pudlat, Pitseolak Ashoona, Napachie Pootoogook, Kiakshuk, Parr, Joanasie Salomonie, Eegyvaduluk Ragee, Kenojuak, Lucy Qinnuayuak. It is 1961 and they are assembled in front of the first studio building, only 512 feet square - a place the Inuit refer to as *sanuaguabik* – a place to make small things.

Cut to a busy scene outside the studio today as a truck loads wrapped sculptures for shipping south. The activity continues inside. We see the studio storage areas, archives, and boxes of drawings labeled with the artist's names. One of artists takes a large flat box of drawings from the archive area out to the main studio. The camera follows as the artist sorts through drawings and tells stories.

The camera pulls back to capture the daily activity and scan the studio. Drawings at various stages of completeness are seen. The camera moves on to introduce other artists working in the drawing studio: Ohotaq Mikkigak, Ningekuluk Tee-vee and Arnaqu Ashevak amongst them. We are introduced to other artists as they arrive to pick up paper, markers and pencils.

The frame fills with the image of a hand holding a pencil that is tracing an outline on a largely blank piece of paper. We hear a soft murmuring and the sound of the pencil lead cutting into the paper. The camera holds on the close up until an image begins to build up on the paper. The perspective widens to show a woman crouched over the paper and drawing table intensively engaged in her work. Suvinai Ashoona is an artist whose work is attracting increased attention from Southern curators.

The camera captures coffee break, radio breaks and the end of day as the studio is shut for the evening.

Night comes slowly. The camera captures the rhythm of the town as people travel back and forth on the main road.

Cut to archival footage from 1970. We see black and white vistas of the town in the early 70s and footage from a snowmobile expedition with Jimmy Manning.

The camera pulls back from the full screen archival image to a wide view of the local community hall. A screening of Manning 8mm films has finished. The audience pushed back chairs and mill around with coffee and snacks. Nuna Parr talks about a recent hunting trip and the changing climate. There is general discussion about changing weather.

We are introduced to a younger artist recently returned from an exhibition in Toronto. He is interviewed. The camera follows as he leaves the community hall and walks to the container where soapstone is stored for carvers. We follow his selection of materials and hear his intricate description of what he looks for in his rock. The camera will revisit this character throughout the film as he begins, works on and finishes a carving. This carving will be followed through completion, air shipment and unwrapping and display in Toronto.

We join a local artist on a visit to the local high school. He is showing his carvings to a group of teenagers. We follow interactions between the artist and younger students. We hear about their ambitions. A student shows us her video camera. We cut to her footage. Voice over interview probes the teenager's thoughts on the role of the artist and image-maker. Opinions are gathered. We hear different perspectives on what it means to be an artist. Is digital media integrated in the school and home life? How does this change the younger generations approach to drawing and printmaking?

Cut to archival images. We see a sequence of photographs from the 50's. One shows a handsome young (non-Inuit) man in a parka and wearing desert boots. Off screen an older man's voice is heard. As the camera pans across each face the voice identifies each person in the group. The camera pulls back to reveal Terry Ryan, the young man in the photograph, now in his seventies.

Annie Pootoogook
Title
Pencil Crayon
Ink 50.8 x 66 cm



Terry Ryan is interviewed at Dorset Fine Arts, the Toronto showroom of the Kinngait Studio. Situated in a downtown loft with high ceilings flooded with light from huge windows on two sides, the large room is filled with shelf after shelf of soapstone Sculptures. Terry Ryan tells of meeting James and Alma Houston, the adventurous couple credited with introducing printmaking to the Inuit of Cape Dorset and how he became involved with the printmaking shop in Cape Dorset. He talks fondly of his friendships with the Inuit artists he worked side by side with. Of those portrayed in the photograph only Kenojuak is still alive. In the print stacks, room after room lined with narrow shelves where large portfolios of prints and drawings are kept, Terry talks about how the first prints were made, how difficult it was to get proper supplies. He talks about his travels to the outlying camps where he supplied paper and pencils and encouraged people to draw.

As he talks a montage of images from the drawing archives appears on the screen. Terry describes how it was most often women who most readily took up the invitation to draw. He describes his first hand experiences:

"Only when the onerous chores of the day were done, with children and husband asleep, could the women find the time to sit, legs outstretched on the communal sleeping platform, and attempt to put on paper their thoughts and fantasies. In the limited light of a kudlik or a kerosene lamp I had occasion to watch from the comfort of my own sleeping bag while the woman of the house created some truly fascinating drawings while cooing to an unsettled infant, sometimes totally along in her thoughts or; depending on the theme of her work, chuckling softly to herself."

Kananginak Pootoogook
Ninngaumajuq Nanuq (Angry Bear)
Stonecut & Stencil
62 x 49.8 cm



Cut to the lithography studio today where Kavavaow Mannomee, one of the master printers, works at a press. We hear a conversation between Kavavaow and Bill Ritchie, a long time art advisor to Kinngait Studio. Bill notes that for the complex and finicky medium of lithography there are no manuals in the Inuktitut language. Consequently, printers must learn through example – by watching, then doing under the guidance of a master printer. Kavavaow carefully peels a sheet of paper from the printing press to reveal a colorful, perfect print.

The camera cuts to the face of Kananginak Pootoogook, one of the first printmakers to work with James Houston in the 1950's when the medium was initially introduced and before the print studio officially existed. In Inuktitut translated through subtitles, Kananginak recalls the first experiments:

We first tried printmaking by using linoleum that was stuck to a piece of thin wood and when the glue was dry we would copy the design onto the linoleum with tools. When the design was finished it was inked and then paper was laid on top. This was rubbed well with a small spoon, and when it was well impressed the paper was removed. If it was satisfactory we made twelve copies. At first we just used black ink but later we progressed to using different colours, using wax paper. Whenever the prints were good we were happy and Saumik [Houston] would actually dance for joy, but at that time we didn't say anything about what we would use the increased money for. We also tried using small pieces of soapstone to see if it was better than linoleum, and so we made out first prints on stone

Kananganak's recollection is illustrated with some of the earliest images to emerge from the initial Cape Dorset printmaking experiment: a simple but elegantly observed linocut of two caribou from 1957; a strange but boldly graphic stonecut print entitled *Seal Thoughts of Man*, 1959; and an impressionistic image entitled *Polar Bear and Cub in Ice* also from 1959. This survey concludes with Kenojuak's famous 1960 stonecut print "The Enchanted Owl", an icon of Inuit art that is commemorated on a Canadian stamp.

The sequence is underlaid by an interview with Av Isaacs the preeminent Canadian art dealer. He describes how in 1959 he was approached to see if he would be interested in representing and exhibiting the first collection of original prints from Cape Dorset. He looked at the collection and rejected them.

Why? In my mind I had the stereotype of the 'Eskimos' (as they were then called) as a primitive people living under the harshest conditions who barely survived by hunting. The collection of prints was highly professional, sophisticated, and very readable. I may not have understood all of the imagery, but it was very graphic. How could these people produce such accomplished work? I though surely they were being exploited by some organization that was using them as a front. How wrong I was!

He goes on to describe the immediate public reaction to the release of the prints with people lining up for hours prior to the opening of the exhibit to vie for a desired print. Soon Isaacs was showing Cape Dorset prints at his contemporary art gallery on Yonge Street. We see archival film footage of Isaacs and his gallery in the 60's.

...but I soon came to realize that it bore no cultural relation to the contemporary art that I was exhibiting and was sufficiently important to make its own statement on its own terms. So in 1970 I opened The Innuit Gallery in Toronto and devoted this space to prints, sculpture and original drawings that were by that time flowing out of the north.

He notes that by 1967 there were twenty-nine dealers in Canada and thirty-one in the United States handling the annual Cape Dorset print catalogue.

The scene shifts to Toronto's Yorkville and the interior of Feheley Fine Arts dedicated exclusively to Inuit art. We are introduced to Pat Feheley. She is a second-generation dealer in Inuit art – her father, Bud, had been involved from the earliest days. Pat talks about her father's early interest and involvement in the emerging new art form and how the artwork and the changing tastes of collectors over the years.

As special as The Enchanted Owl is it really does resonate with what was going on in the world of design and culture in the 1960's. The Enchanted Owl is Dave Brubeck, Jackie Kennedy and black and white TV.



Kakulu Saggiaktok
Fleeting Transformation
Stonecut & Stencil
62 x 71.3 cm

Kenojuak voice replaces Pat. Speaking in Inuktitut. Kenojuak talks about the continuing southern fascination with the owl image. She laughs at this and tells us it is even a stamp. A full frame of the owl appears. It is replaced with actuality footage of an owl.

We accompany a young artist on a boat trip to one of the summer camps. His survival skills and knowledge of the north is evident in a sequence that captures landscape and peer interaction. Back at the coop, the artist shows his carvings of snowmobiles, ATVs and dirt bikes. He talks about making what he experiences.

The scene shifts to artist Suvanai Ashoona. She is known for her fantastical and surreal scenes of Kinngait. She is preparing for an exhibition in Ottawa at Carleton University Art Gallery. We accompany her on her journey and attend her opening.

We return to Kinngait and join Kenojuak at home. Her extended family is visiting. Some are watching TV, others are playing cards. Kenojuak shows us her Governor Generals medal.

Summary

While the Kinngait Studio remains artistically vibrant, the question of who will succeed the current management remains a question. A changing art market places less emphasis on print collections and is gravitating to drawings. A new generation of artists is accompanied by a new generation of art dealers and collectors. Another challenge is bringing new technologies and new ideas to the Cape Dorset community through artistic exchanges as was done in the 1970's, a period of vibrant experimentation.

The 50th anniversary emphasizes the urgency we feel, to capture on film what may be the last opportunity to interview the individuals who were formative in establishing this remarkable organization. We traveled to Ottawa this May to document Kenojuak receiving the Governor General's Award for Artistic Excellence and her audience with Her Excellency Michele Jean to ensure this moment could be included in the film.

Distribution

"Behind the Scenes at Kinngait Studios" will be broadcast in Canada nationally on Bravo! and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and regionally on TVOntario and Knowledge Network. Additional financing has come from the Canadian Television Fund and the Rogers Documentary Fund.

This program is in production and will be completed in high definition video by December 1, 2009. Broadcasting rights in territories outside of Canada are available as are non-theatrical and educational distribution rights. Please contact producer, David Craig at david@sitemedia.ca or 416-762-9682.

Creative Team

Director: Annette Mangaard

Annette Mangaard has written, and directed fourteen films in more than a decade as an independent filmmaker. She has just completed a one-hour documentary, GENERAL IDEA: ART, AIDS, AND THE FIN DE SIECLE about the celebrated Canadian artists collective. Other recent films INTO THE NIGHT, a film noir of the night with the N.F.B., as well as THE MANY FACES OF ARNAUD MAGGS, a one hour documentary on the celebrated Canadian artist/photographer Arnaud Maggs for TVOntario.

Cinematography: Marcia Connolly

Marcia Connolly's independent films and television pieces have been internationally shown and broadcast- including at the Galerie Nationale, du Jeu de Palme in Paris, The Toronto International Film Festival and The Atlantic Film Festival. She has produced over 50 shorts for programs at the CBC, which have been awarded the International Emmy, the Japan Prize and multiple Geminis. For Site Media she directed the half-hour documentary "Annie Pootoogook" and was cinematographer for "Pretend Not To See Me"

Cinematography: John Price

John Price is an independent filmmaker who has produced experimental documentaries, dance and diary films since 1986. His love of photography led naturally to extensive alchemical experimentation with a wide range of motion picture film emulsions and formats

Editor: Gary Popovich

Gary Popovich is an independent filmmaker, and an editor. Recently he has edited several television documentaries including Annette Mangaard's GENERAL IDEA: ART, AIDS, AND THE FIN DE SIECLE. His own work includes numerous films and videos that have been awarded and screened at international festivals and art galleries, and locally at places such as Cinematheque Ontario, Images Festival, CBC Television, and the Toronto International Film Festival.

Producer: David Craig

David Craig entered the Canadian film and television industry working on the 1986 feature film LIFE CLASSES. He was Film, Photography and Video Officer for the Ontario Arts Council from 1988 to 1996. Prior to joining Site Media Inc. in 2008, Craig worked as an analyst with Telefilm Canada for ten years. In 2008 he produced with Katherine Knight the hour long documentary "Pretend Not To See Me: The Art of Colette Urban"

Producer: Katherine Knight

Katherine Knight is an artist, award winning photographer, educator and filmmaker. She founded Site Media Inc. in 2006, producing the documentary portrait "Annie Pootoogook" which was broadcast on Bravo Canada and APTN. In 2008 she directed the documentary "Pretend Not To See Me: The Art of Colette Urban".