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RAM Showcase: Kinngait Prints

June 12 – August 10, 2024

While certain forms of image-making were practiced historically in the region, printmaking was not introduced to Kinngait (formerly known as Cape Dorset) in Arctic Canada until the 1950s. With purchases being made from cooperatives or artists directly, printmaking as a creative practice has become a primary economic stream for multiple generations of Inuit artists over the last few decades.

Most often experimenting with the printing techniques of etching, engraving, lithography, and silkscreen, the Kinngait artists tend to favor subjects and imagery that address the natural world, story-telling, and myths. This direction in subject matter echoes the content of other Kinngait art practices such as carving and drawing. Contemporary Inuit artists expand upon these traditions with work that embraces the past, but might also raise critical questions about identity, social and cultural dynamics, and politics.

Home to North America's largest contemporary craft collection, RAM also has an extensive works on paper collection that includes fifteen prints from Kinngait artists and a limited edition book featuring works by one of the most prominent printmakers, Kenoujak Ashevak. This exhibition is a sampling of RAM's current holdings in this area—Kinngait works are also being incorporated into other museum programs, such as theme exhibitions and social media.

The presence of this work in RAM's collection is invaluable as it reflects an impactful arena for diverse voices in contemporary printmaking. It also introduces what are most likely new artists into the vocabulary of RAM and Wustum visitors. RAM strives to increase its holdings by contemporary Indigenous makers to showcase these creative visions and help preserve them for future appreciation and consideration.

James Archibald Houston, an artist from Toronto who moved to Kinngait in the 1950s, encouraged printmaking in particular after conversations with a local carver. While the idea to develop printmaking in Kinngait was introduced by someone not native to the region, the Indigenous people of the area embraced the technique—and thereby opened up new avenues for economic development. There is still a close kinship with a cooperative that has ties beyond the community, but Kinngait artists have made this enterprise their own in many ways, including through leadership and continued support. This is significant as it draws attention to a relationship that has theoretically subverted the potential dynamic of oppressor/oppressed that seems to be more prevalent historically with "Western" or colonial entities and Indigenous populations.

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At the same time, it is still important to remember that easy categorizing of a relationship or history often leaves things out. Some might argue that while it has been successful, it also follows a model of capitalism that discouraged the more itinerant lifestyle that had characterized life for some in the region. Also, similar to questions about other Indigenous work that has been shaped by market practices—how can things like subject matter reflect a buyer-oriented audience? As a recent article points out: *“Outside interpreters have historically attempted to map simplistic definitions onto Inuit work, assuming that it must always reference indigenous spirituality or literal impressions of nature. Yet now it is more commonly understood that Nunavut artists work in a variety of materials, treat art-making as a profession, and incorporate both local and outside influence into their practice.”*



Quote from *The Inuit Artists of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative*
Art & Object (artandobject.com)
Rachel Ozerkevich
October 12, 2020

Biographies of Selected Artists:

Kenojuak Ashevak (1927 – 2013) was born on south Baffin Island, Canada, in a camp area known as Ikirisaq. Ashevak grew up moving from camp to camp, but moved to Kinngait in 1966 so that her children could attend school. She became one of the first Inuit women to create prints professionally. Her work immediately captivated others, and from 1959 until her death, she was continually represented in the annual Kinngait print collection.

Ashevak traveled the world throughout her life as an ambassador for Inuit art. She received honors such as Companion in the Order of Canada in 1967; Honorary Degrees from Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada, and the University of Toronto, Canada in 1992; a Lifetime Achievement Award at the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards Ceremony in Vancouver, Canada, 1996; and was included in Canada’s Walk of Fame in 2001. Her work can be found in the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C. as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ashevak is represented in RAM’s collection by four works.

Read:



[dorsetfinearts.com/
kenojuak-askhevak](https://dorsetfinearts.com/kenojuak-askhevak)

Watch:



[youtube.com/
watch?v=pN7chUba16A](https://youtube.com/watch?v=pN7chUba16A)

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Pitseolak Ashoona (ca. 1905 – 1983) was part of the first generation of Inuit printmakers in Kinngait. Her prints and drawings often depict traditional Inuit customs and traditions from the time before European contact. For example, her print *Summer Tent of Old* depicts a family dragging the bodies of three harpooned seals into their tent which will be used for food, clothing, and warmth.

Living a life of constant travel between camps, Pitseolak grew up as a member of a semi-nomadic hunting group. In 1922 or 1923, she married Ashoona, a hunter, and the pair had 17 children together. Six of these children would live with her until adulthood. After the death of her husband in the mid-1940s, Pitseolak and her children moved to Kinngait where she was able to support her family through art-making as part of the newly formed West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative, created under the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. Originally using her sewing skills to sell mittens and parkas, Pitseolak soon realized that creating drawings and prints might be more lucrative. She taught herself how to draw using graphite and paper, capturing scenes inspired by her lifetime of travel and Inuit culture.

Pitseolak produced roughly 9,000 drawings during her 20 years spent in Kinngait—250 of which were made into prints. In 1974, she was inducted as a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, and in 1977 was awarded the Order of Canada for her work as a visual artist. Pitseolak is represented in RAM's collection by seven prints.

Read:



[dorsetfinearts.com/
pitseolak-ashoona](https://dorsetfinearts.com/pitseolak-ashoona)

Watch:



vimeo.com/531349864

In the late 1950s, after the death of her first husband, **Kingmeata Etidlooie** (1915 – 1989) began to draw and carve. In the mid-1960s, she moved to Kinngait with her second husband in search of a more permanent residence, rather than the seasonal camps they had been living in along the southwest coast of Baffin Island. The pair quickly became involved in the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative, which was known for its printmaking studio. Four of Etidlooie's children and one of her grandchildren would later go on to become sculptors.

While working with the Cooperative, Etidlooie created more than 50 prints from 1970 until her death. Favoring formal studies of animals and birds as subject matter, she became well-known for her willingness to experiment with materials—combining watercolors and acrylics with drawing. Etidlooie was one of the first

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Kinngait printmakers to incorporate watercolors into their work and later became heavily involved with the newly formed West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative painting studio alongside Pudlo Pudlat. She is represented in RAM's collection by one print.

Read:



[dorsetfinearts.com/
kingmeata-etidlooie](https://dorsetfinearts.com/kingmeata-etidlooie)

Kananginak Pootoogook (1935 – 2010) was involved with the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative's graphic arts program since its founding in the late 1950s. Spending the early years of his life in the traditional Inuit camp Ikerasak, Pootoogook moved to Kinngait around 1950 as a result of his father's declining health. In 1959, a collaborative work that he created with his father was included in the very first catalogued portfolio of Kinngait prints. During his lifetime, Pootoogook would go on to be included in all but three annual print collections.

Pootoogook was heavily involved in the Kinngait art community—from 1959 to 1964, he served as the president of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative's Board of Directors. In the late 1970s, four of his prints were used as part of a limited edition set curated by the World Wildlife Fund. In 1980, he was inducted as a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts, and in 2010, he received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award for his work.

For most of his career, Pootoogook's prints centered around depictions of Arctic wildlife. He was especially interested in creating studies of different species of Arctic birds, as seen in his work *Great Green Owl*. His later work from the 2000s also included depictions of Inuit culture such as camp scenes and hunting practices. He is represented in RAM's collection by one print.

Read:



[dorsetfinearts.com/
kananginak-pootoogook](https://dorsetfinearts.com/kananginak-pootoogook)

Watch:



[youtube.com/
watch?v=SKBd7kylC1I](https://youtube.com/watch?v=SKBd7kylC1I)

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Often creating scenes of wildlife, especially involving Arctic birds, **Keeleemeeoomee Samualie's** (1919 – 1983) prints depicted the animals she encountered during her childhood on the west coast of Baffin Island and her adult years in Kinngait. While she created many images of animals interacting with each other, her body of work also includes prints of humans interacting with animals such as hunting scenes. Samualie often experimented with visual texture in her prints, adding depth to her animals by giving the illusion of fur or feathers on their otherwise flat forms.

Samualie moved to Kinngait in 1966 with her second husband where she began carving and drawing. The prints that she created during her time there were included in several of the annual print collections from 1969 until her death in 1983. Samualie is represented in RAM's collection by one work, *Fox and Seal*, which utilizes detailed patterning to create texture on the animals' bodies.

Read:



[inuitartfoundation.org/
profiles/artist/
keeleemeeoomee-
samualie](https://inuitartfoundation.org/profiles/artist/keeleemeeoomee-samualie)

Note: In texts about artists at RAM and Wustum, it is typical to refer to the artist by their last name once their whole name has been introduced. With Kinngait artists—and many other Indigenous artists—there is sometimes a reason to modify this convention because of the way that naming conventions work in different cultures. In these exhibition notes, you will see artists referred to by both first and last names for the sake of clarity.

For Further Reference:



[youtube.com/
watch?v=o54y4S-2NHc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=o54y4S-2NHc)



[dorsetfinearts.com/
printmaking](https://dorsetfinearts.com/printmaking)



Women Artists at RAM

RAM acknowledges the efforts of self-identifying women in the art world consistently and sincerely at all times. The museum highlights how women are inextricably woven—and often the foundation—of creative endeavors and discourse. By current count, 41% of the artists in RAM's collection are women. This percentage—which is consistently increasing—is already substantially greater than the ratios calculated at other organizations with permanent collections and active exhibition programs. At RAM, work made by different genders is considered for inclusion in the museum's holdings on equal terms. And notably, because RAM relies on gifts of artwork to build the collection, this policy has been reinforced by open-minded donors who have collected, and then donated, quality work regardless of the gender of the artist. The following is a list of women whose works are included in this exhibition. This effort—similar to efforts to highlight artists of color at RAM—is not meant to single out artists to stigmatize them but to magnify and cast a spotlight on their significance. It reflects intention, goodwill, and an attempt to reckon with years of historical underrepresentation. RAM hopes this provides opportunities for audiences to learn more about these artists and their ideas. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work.

**Kenojuak Ashevak, Pitseolak Ashoona, Kingmeata Etidlooie,
and Keeleemeeoomee Samualie**