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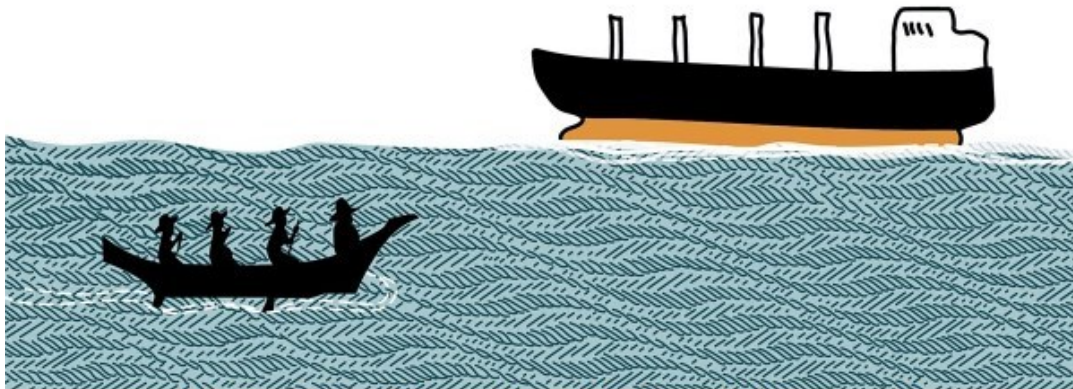
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The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global



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The Untold Story of Inuit Printed Fabrics from Kinngait Studios, Kinngait (Cape Dorset), Nunavut, Canada

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The Textile Museum of Canada holds a collection of close to 200 printed fabrics designed by Inuit artists at Kinngait Studios in Kinngait (Cape Dorset) during the 1950s and 1960s. The pieces are owned by the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative (WBEC) and are on long-term loan to the Museum.¹ The collection is a physical record of a relatively short-lived fabric printing initiative that was undertaken during the experimental years when Kinngait's famous print program was just beginning. Study of this production is an essential and under-researched facet of the history of Inuit art and one which is inextricable from the history and evolution of the broader print and visual culture of Kinngait, and which has important relevance today.



Figure 1 **Ulayu Pingwartok** (1904–1978), *Little Hawks*.
Unbleached cotton, silk screen printed (L 412 x W 118cm)
Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts.



Figure 2 **Pudlo Pudlat** (1916–1992), *Spirits and Birds* (detail).
Linen, silk screen printed (L 412 x W 118cm)
Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts.

The textiles demonstrate a diverse range of influences: Inuit graphic tradition; preferences and priorities of the southern art market; contemporaneous graphic design; and the influence of traditional Japanese wood block and stencil printing techniques and visual style. Some of the artists involved in the textile printing program include Pitseolak Ashoona (c.1904–1983), Parr (1893–1969), and Pudlo Pudlat (1916–1992), now recognized for their print and drawing work. Important, yet unstudied, this moment in the history of the development of the WBEC represents a largely unknown and unattributed body of work for many of the early WBEC artists.

¹ In the 1970s the term “Eskimo” was replaced by “Inuit” in the eastern Arctic; it is used here only when citing historical sources.

During the twentieth century in the Canadian Arctic, government policies and the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company forced traumatic changes to the Inuit way of life, and families went from living on the land and hunting for their food to living in settlements, which caused increasing dependence on store-bought food and items from southern Canada. The collapse of the Arctic fox fur industry in the 1930s forced many Inuit to become economically dependent on the state. Inuk scholar and independent curator Heather Igloliorte maintains that during this difficult period of cultural disruption, Inuit artists preserved intergenerational knowledge by expressing in their artworks what they were discouraged from practicing in their communities, including legends, the spirit world, and oral histories, now accessed through sculpture, and graphic print and textile arts.²

Igloliorte states “By embedding that otherwise forbidden knowledge in their artworks, Inuit artists expressed the principle of *qanuqtuurungnarniq*, being innovative and resourceful to solve problems, by using the means available to them—art making—to cleverly safeguard Inuit knowledge for future generations.”³ The ability of the Inuit to exploit the resources available from the land, sea and ice has ensured their long term survival in the Arctic. She notes “...today they apply this same principle of extreme resourcefulness to their daily lives, making use of all of the supplies available to them. This valued quality has been and continues to be a touchstone of modern and contemporary Inuit art production as well.”⁴

Inuit Graphic Traditions

Kinngait is situated on Dorset Island, one of a series of small islands connected at low tide to Baffin Island. The settlement grew up around the Hudson's Bay Company post, and by the 1950s most Inuit families were no longer able to sustain themselves through fur-trading. In 1957, printmaking was introduced to the community as part of a government program to encourage handicraft production initiated by James Houston, an artist and a civil administrator for the region. The roots of this program, which came to include the commercial hand-printed fabric enterprise, built upon existing textile and graphic traditions.

Inuit women are skilled sewers, and the survival of the family in the harsh northern climate depended on having expertly crafted clothing. Garments were decorated with appliquéd patterns and beadwork, demonstrating Inuit women's skill in graphic design. Through the framework of a structured marketing system for Inuit art across the Canadian Arctic, established by James Houston beginning in 1948, stone and ivory sculpture, basketry, and sewn products such as parkas, boots, slippers and mitts were produced for sale in southern markets.⁵ Among these were skin pictures, which were important antecedents to paper printmaking.⁶ Made with meticulous workmanship, skin pictures consist of appliquéd images sewn from bleached and unbleached seal or caribou skin. Designs cut from animal hides in silhouette forms and put together in striking patterns of light and dark fur panels, is a traditional method of decorating skin clothing.⁷

² Heather Igloliorte, “Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum,” *Art Journal* 76, no. 2 (Summer 2017), 109–10.

³ Igloliorte, “Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit,” 110.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁵ Norman Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration: Early Printmaking in the Canadian Arctic* (Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2011), 2–3.; Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 172.

⁶ Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 3.

⁷ Hessel, *Inuit Art*, 171.

The graphic design skills used by Inuit women in making clothing and skin pictures along with men's drawing skill in incising ivory tusks, served as important historic precursors to drawing and printmaking.⁸ Remarking on the evolution towards printed textiles Norman Vorano, Indigenous art and material culture scholar, suggests that "Such types of pictorial works, which grew out of garment- and bag-sewing, may have encouraged Houston to search for a more suitable graphic art format that could better fit within the existing regimes of value in the fine art world."⁹

Printing Experiments

In 1956, a craft centre known locally as *sanaunguabik* was built in Kinngait, the first effort by Northern Affairs and National Resources to organize and expand the development of handicraft in the Eastern Arctic.¹⁰ In the same year, at a meeting of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild's Board of Directors in Montreal on June 19, 1956, James Houston described his plan to introduce the manufacture of hand-blocked fabrics using Inuit designs, a precursor to the printmaking experiments that would follow. The following is an excerpt from the minutes:

Mr. Houston plans to teach twelve Eskimos to make stone blocks for use in hand-blocking yard goods. The designs will be in native character and with possibly one exception, these students will not be drawn from the well known carvers. In due course, Mr. Houston proposes to send examples of this work for exhibition purposes only, eventually creating a market. Mr. Houston showed the members fabric samples blocked with some of the designs he contemplates using.¹¹



Figure 3 Left to right: *Osuitok Ipeelee*, James Houston, *Kananginak Pootoogook*, *Lukta Qiatsuk*. Spring 1959, Cape Dorset studio. Library and Archives Canada / e006609566.



Figure 4 *Lukta Qiatsuk* and *Iqaluk Pingwartok*. No date, Cape Dorset studio. Charles Gimpel / Library and Archives Canada / e004922724.

⁸ Bernadette Driscoll Engelstad, "Inuit Art and the Creation of Nunavut," in *Inuit Modern*, eds. Gerald McMaster and Ingo Hessel (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 34–35.

⁹ Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 3.

¹⁰ Leslie Boyd, "Sanaunguabik: The Place Where Things are Made," in *In Cape Dorset We Do It This Way: Three Decades of Inuit Printmaking*, ed. Jean Blodgett (Kleinberg, ON: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1991), 13.

¹¹ Virginia J. Watt, "Introduction," in *Dorset 80: Cape Dorset Graphics Annual* (Toronto, ON: M.F. Fehleley Publishers, 1980), 7.

A photograph (Figure 3) taken in the Kinngait Studios, shows printers working on a fabric with repeating Arctic motifs, including polar bears, caribou and igloos, using stencils and brushes to apply the colour. Referring to the printed fabric stretched over a rectangular frame, Vorano suggests that at this experimental stage, “the printed fabrics, like the earlier skin pictures, anticipated the easel-like pictorial formats of printed graphic arts.”¹² In late 1957, the final step occurred in the transition from skin pictures to block printing on fabric to fine art prints on paper. Building on the fabric block printing done in 1956, the studio began printing paper gift cards and wrapping paper for sale, and one of the studio’s first fine art prints—*Three Caribou*, designed by Niviasi [Niviaksiak] (1908–1959) and dated November 20, 1957—was printed by Kananginak Pootoogook, (1935–2010).¹³ Kananginak, a hunter, carver, engraver and expert textile printer, was one of the first to work on prints and he was joined by Osuitok Ipeelee (1922–2005), Iyola Kingwatsiak (1933–2000), Eegyvudluk Pootoogook (1931–2000) and Lukta Qiatsuk (1928–2004). These men formed the core group of printmakers who produced most of the early print media, and some of them likely worked with Kananginak on fabric printing. Inventive and enterprising, they worked tirelessly and experimented with limited resources under challenging conditions.

Japanese Inspiration

In an effort to bring a greater knowledge of printmaking to the Arctic, in 1958 James Houston spent three months in Japan studying wood block printmaking under the Japanese master Un’ichi Hiratsuka (1895–1997). Houston learned hand-block direct printmaking, *kappazuri* stencil printing (a technique that layers colour using hand-cut stencils), and tool and paper (*washi*) making.¹⁴

During his visit, Hiratsuka introduced Houston to members of Japan’s *mingei* (folk art) movement and Houston gave a lecture on Inuit carving attended by many leading Japanese artists.¹⁵ Among them were Keisuke Serizawa (1895–1984), master of textile design and known for his pictorial use of stencil-dyeing, *katazome*; and Yoshitoshi Mori (1898–1992) who worked as an established kimono designer, using a stencil-based technique to dye textiles. In the 1950s, Mori began working with paper and translated his 30 years of dyeing experience to printmaking, adapting the stencil method used for textiles to paper.¹⁶ While in Japan, Houston’s interest in printing techniques prompted a visit to Mori’s print studio where he tried screen printing techniques and *kappazuri* printing, adapted by Mori and others from Serizawa’s cloth-dyeing stencil technique (*katazome*).¹⁷

When Houston returned, he brought Japanese printmaking tools and *washi* to Kinngait and shared what he had learned in Japan with the printmakers. He also brought back a collection of multicoloured *kappazuri* prints by Japanese artists, including two village scenes by Yoshitori

¹² Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 5.

¹³ Vorano, 5.

¹⁴ Norman Vorano, “Cape Dorset Cosmopolitans: Making “Local” Prints in Global Modernity,” in *Mapping Modernisms*, eds. Elizabeth Harney and Ruth Phillips (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 216.

¹⁵ Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 36. Vorano notes Houston’s lecture was mentioned in Makoto Nakao’s English-language magazine, *Art Around Town*, from late 1958.

¹⁶ “Yoshitoshi Mori (1898 – 1992)” *Ronin Gallery*, January 20, 2016, www.roningallery.com/education/yoshitoshi-mori-1898-1992/.

¹⁷ Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 41.

Mori.¹⁸ While there is no documentation that the printers attempted *kappazuri* stenciling—a complex method requiring specialized tools—after Houston’s return in the spring of 1959, stenciling in the print studio assumed a more central role. Houston’s encounters with the Japanese master stencil printers and dyers and the inspiration the printers gained from the Japanese stencil prints by Yoshitoshi Mori and others, drove stenciling at Kinngait Studios in a new and promising direction.¹⁹ It not only emboldened the studio printers with greater possibilities for colour stencil,²⁰ but also influenced the early stages of fabric printing, when stencils were used as a stand-alone technique.

West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative

In 1959, the Inuit-led West Baffin Eskimo Co-op was established in Kinngait and Kananginak Pootoogook was elected President. In 1960, Terry Ryan was hired as arts adviser to the Co-op and later general manager; he remained with the Co-op until 2000. Fabric printing was only one of many initiatives Ryan promoted while managing the growth of the Co-op: pottery, jewelry, weaving and hooked rugs were also tried, as Ryan sought to engage members in new types of expression and develop the Co-op into an arts centre.²¹ Although James Houston initiated the program, he left Kinngait in 1962, and Ryan continued to work with the artists for over 40 years as adviser to ensure its continued success. According to William Ritchie, the current studio manager of the WBEC, “Terry Ryan left no stone unturned in the quest for a viable creative enterprise that would reflect the beautiful art work pouring out of the Dorset artists.”²²



Figure 6 Parr (1893–1969), *Geese Dog and Walrus*, stonecut print
Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts.



Figure 7 Parr (1893–1969), *Proud Geese (detail)*, cotton sateen twill, silk screen printed (L 508 x W 113cm)
Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts.

¹⁸ Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

²¹ Terry Ryan, “Introduction: Looking Back at Cape Dorset” in *Cape Dorset Sculpture*, eds. Derek Norton and Nigel Reading (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd, 2005), 13.

²² William Ritchie, “Other Forms of Printmaking at Kinngait Studios,” *Musings About Kinngait Studios*, May 16, 2015, www.williamritchie.com/thoughts-and-ponderings/2014/10/28/other-forms-of-printmaking-at-kinngait-studios.

Fabric Printing Methods

At the WBEC, artists produced drawings which were bought by the Co-op, and the printer then interpreted the artists' concepts to create prints. In fabric printing, printers selected motifs from drawings and perhaps some prints, to interpret into a design of repeated motifs or sets of motifs for yardage production (Figures 6 and 7). The decisions of which drawings to make into prints and how to do so were made by the printers and their advisers.

The printing experiments were carried out on a variety of fabrics in the collection held at the Textile Museum. The majority are linen followed by cotton sateen twill, unbleached cotton (muslin), ramie, white polyester cotton broadcloth with starch, dyed polyester cotton broadcloth, rayon, sheer cotton, ramie and various plain weave cotton fabrics. Printmaking tools and equipment were not readily available in the Arctic, as a result printmakers developed various innovative approaches to fashion tools and test techniques. Early experiments in printmaking made use of linoleum tiles glued onto a thin wooden backing on which a design was carved, then inked and paper was laid on top to create the print.²³ Later, heavy paper impregnated with candle wax was used in making stencils (while Japanese stencil paper was tried by the printmakers, they preferred to develop their own).²⁴ This technique involves soaking paper or cardboard in melted wax to make the stencil plate, which could then be cut in an intricate design.



Figure 8 *Pannichiak Munamee* (1920–1968), printed by *Kananginak Pootoogook* (1935–2010), (detail) (L 396 x W 118 cm), unbleached cotton, stencil printed
Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts.



Figure 9 *Sheouak Petaulassie* (1918–1961), sample (L 44 x W 44 cm) cotton polyester broadcloth, stencil printed
Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts.

There are examples in the collection of the experimental use of stencils and brush to apply designs (see Figures 8 and 9). In some of these printed with stencils, the repeats are not uniformly placed, and there are uneven applications of the colour. These examples are a valuable

²³ Kananginak Pootoogook, *1973 Cape Dorset Prints/Estampes* (Cape Dorset, Nunavut: West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative, 1973).

²⁴ Linda Sutherland, "The Printmaking Process at Cape Dorset," in *In Cape Dorset We Do It This Way: Three Decades of Inuit Printmaking*, ed. Jean Blodgett (Kleinberg: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1991), 40.

source of information on how the printers experimented with stencil printing, persevering through trial and error in their attempts to produce a marketable product.

In 1960, 12 members of the Co-op decided to expand their activities into a larger business and invested \$30,000 to develop a commercial printed fabric enterprise (“Eskimo cooperative goes into drapery business,” *Quebec Chronical Telegraph*, August 4, 1966). In the summer of 1963, Olga Chajkowsky, a recent graduate from the Ontario College of Art’s Material Art and Design program, was hired to travel to Kinngait to teach Inuit printers to silk screen designs onto fabric (“Eskimo cooperative goes into drapery business,” *Quebec Chronical Telegraph*, August 4, 1966). Originally scheduled to stay for the summer, the members of the Co-op were so interested in this technique, she remained into the fall and worked specifically with Kananginak (Cheryl Larsen, “Eskimos design attractive fabrics,” *Calgary Herald*, August 11, 1966). For the next two years Kananginak and other printers continued to experiment; Kananginak was particularly adept and mastered the technique. Figure 10 shows one of the screens from Kinngait that was used to print fabric, in this case a design from the collection by an unknown artist (Figure 11). During this period of experiments, all the fabrics and printing materials had to be shipped to Kinngait. The need to adapt to working with what supplies were available illustrates the difficulties of printing in the north, but also the endless resourcefulness of the printers.



Figure 10 *Silk screen from Kinngait Studios.*
Courtesy of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative



Figure 11 *Unknown artist, sample. (L 44 x W 46 cm)*
cotton sateen twill, silk screen printed
Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts.

Artists and Designs

While a number of artists are believed to have participated in the fabric printing enterprise; the attribution of specific pieces is challenging as many pieces do not bear any identifying marks. According to the Canadian Industrial Designs Database, there were 51 fabric designs registered under the WBEC between 1965 and 1969, and the artists were not identified. Over 30 of those designs are represented in the collection held at the TMC. As the majority of the designs in the collection were not registered; this could suggest they were experimental designs that were never put into production.

Design Awards

In 1965, two years after silk screen printing on fabric was undertaken in Kinngait, the designs were entered into the Design '67 Awards competition.²⁵ The Design '67 Awards were initiated as part of the Design '67 Program meant to “stimulate better industrial design and to assist Canadian industry to take full advantage of the substantial business opportunities generated by Centennial celebration and Expo '67.”²⁶ They were organized by the Department of Industry in cooperation with the National Design Council, the Centennial Commission and the Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition.

The program accepted submissions in two categories: existing and new products. The WBEC submitted silk screened fabric to the new product design category under ‘Textiles & Clothing.’ The entry is described as follows: “Unbleached linen fabric featuring various silk screen designs, available in 36” and 42” widths for an estimated cost of \$5.95-\$10.00/yard.”²⁷

The Design '67 Program received 2,400 submissions: 1,300 in the existing product category and 1,100 in the new product design category. Of these, 650 existing and 410 new were accepted.²⁸ The WBEC fabrics were accepted into the new product category and were one of 58 products to win an award for exceptional new design. The award-winning new products were given monetary awards intended “to help defray the costs of prototype development.”²⁹ The WBEC received a \$1,000 award, sponsored by the National Design Council.³⁰ The other award winners were given prizes ranging from \$200 to \$1,500 per design; only 14 of the designs were awarded \$1,000 or more, suggesting that the Kinngait fabrics represented some of the best and most promising design in the competition.

Winning the award resulted in a significant amount of exposure for the fabrics. Information sheets about the winning designs were circulated to corporate buyers in Canada and abroad, including approximately 4,000 tear sheets for the textile designs.³¹ Tear sheets for new product designs were directed to potential manufacturers in an effort to bring designers together with

²⁵ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Industry fonds, RG20-B-1 “National Design Branch Canadian Design '67 Programme Awards Committee 1965” series, volume 2057, file number NDB4202-02-1,” page 4, “Canadian Design '67 Newsletter #3,” July 1965.

²⁶ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Industry fonds, RG20-B-1 “National Design Branch Canadian Design '67 Programme Awards Committee 1965” series, volume 2057, file number NDB4202-02-1, page 1, “Department of Industry, News Release,” February 17, 1965.

²⁷ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Industry fonds, RG20-B-1, “National Design Branch Canadian Design '67 Programme Awards Committee 1965” series, volume 2057, file number NDB4202-02-1, page 15, “List of Award Winning Designs - New Product Design Categories - Canada-Design '67 Program,” June 1966.

²⁸ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Industry fonds, RG20-B-1, “National Design Branch Canadian Design '67 Programme Awards Committee 1965” series, volume 2057, file number NDB4202-02-1, page 1, “Correspondence from E. P. Weiss, Director of National Design Branch, to Mr. Hubert De Sy,” October 26, 1966.

²⁹ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Industry fonds, RG20-B-1, “National Design Branch Canadian Design '67 Programme Awards Committee 1965” series, volume 2057, file number NDB4202-02-1, page 1, “Letter from E. P. Weiss, Director, National Design Branch,” March 18, 1966.

³⁰ Library and Archives Canada, “List of Award Winning Designs - New Product Design Categories,” page 15.

³¹ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Industry fonds, RG20-B-1 “National Design Branch. Canadian Design '67 Programme -- General -- 1964-1965” series, Box number 2057, File number NDB4202-01, page 1, “Draft of correspondence from C. M. Drury to Mr. Arthur Laing,” July 4, 1966.

manufacturers.³² The fabrics were also included in Design '67 'Design Marts' in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and the win was covered in newspapers and magazines across the country such as the *Globe and Mail*, *The Montreal Star*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, and *Style Magazine*.

Canadian Arctic Producers

In 1966, the same year that the results of the Design '67 Program and Awards were announced, John Patton, sales manager of the Canadian Arctic Producers' (CAP) fabrics division, travelled across Canada promoting the Kinngait textiles. Patton presented samples of twelve designs including Parr's *Proud Geese*, Ovilu's *Friendly Whales*, Innukjuakju Pudlat's *Many Eskimos*, Pudlo's *Spirits and Birds* and Mary Samuellie's *Fish and Shadows* on fabrics described as "heavy linen, sateen, cotton and fireproof saran" (Marie Moreau, "New Eskimo art a hit," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 15, 1966, 60). These samples were all printed by Kananginak (Cheryl Larsen, "Eskimos design attractive fabrics," *Calgary Herald*, August 11, 1966).

The cost of producing these fabrics was the responsibility of the WBEC³³ and in a 1966 interview, Patton stated, "This is a 100 per cent Canadian enterprise. More than that, it's 100 per cent Eskimo; 90 per cent of the profits realized from the sale of Eskimo work goes back to the Eskimos" ("Eskimo cooperative goes into drapery business," *Quebec Chronical Telegraph*, August 4, 1966).³⁴

Patton's marketing efforts on this tour were targeted directly to architects, department stores, contractors and public works officials, indicating that the fabrics would be available to the public in the future (Marie Moreau, "New Eskimo art a hit," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 15, 1966, 60). Patton said this specialized marketing was a part of a strategy to, quote "protect the Eskimo from the bargain basement" ("Eskimo cooperative goes into drapery business," *Quebec Chronical Telegraph*, August 4, 1966). It was also in alignment with the recommendations of the Canadian Eskimo Arts Committee who felt that the size of the patterns made them suitable for drapery only in an institutional context.³⁵

The tour was covered in newspapers across the country, documenting an enthusiastic response and Patton reported that "The reception in Ontario and across the Prairies has been excellent. If promises turn into orders the Eskimos will have a lot of work on their hands" ("Eskimo cooperative goes into drapery business," *Quebec Chronical Telegraph*, August 4, 1966).

The enthusiastic reception of the artist-printed textiles made in Kinngait was not an isolated phenomenon. In the 1950s and 60s, textiles were designed by leading artists for commercial sale: Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, Marc Chagall, Henry Moore, Andy Warhol, Zandra Rhodes and Sonia

³² Library and Archives Canada, "Correspondence from E. P. Weiss to Mr. Hubert De Sy," October 26, 1966, page 2.

³³ Library and Archives Canada, Inuit Art Foundation Fonds, R11333-17-0-E, "Correspondence and subject" series, volume 1, File number 9-10, page 19, "Canadian Arctic Producers Minutes," September 15, 1966.

³⁴ CAP took a 10 percent commission from pieces that were sold.

³⁵ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, R216-3854-4-E, "Northern Affairs Program central registry" series, "Canadian Eskimo Arts Council" sub-series, "Minutes of meetings and annual reports" sub-sub-series, volume 2172, Canadian Eskimo Art Committee File, page 3, "The Canadian Eskimo Art Committee Minutes," October 31, 1965.

Delauney. In *Artists' Textiles 1940–1976*, authors Geoffrey Rainer, Richard Chamberlain and Annamarie Stapleton write that “The 1950s witnessed the apogee of artist-designed textiles in America and Britain, with manufacturers in both countries persuading some of the most internationally eminent artists to take part in projects that elevated textile design to the status of high art.”³⁶ Brands such as Marimekko were also prominent in the 1950s and Alma Houston, Head of the Fine Arts Division of CAP, visited Finland and purchased Marimekko fabrics in 1967 and 68.³⁷ Artists and designers in Canada, too, embraced printed textiles “as an inexpensive and accessible process to reach wider audiences,”³⁸ exemplified in the work of designer Thor Hansen who used what he termed “distinct Canadian symbols” on printed textiles in an effort to create a national style in the handicrafts.³⁹

Expo ‘67

As stated above, the goal of the Design Awards was to stimulate development, production and visibility of Canadian design in anticipation of the Canadian centennial and the Expo ‘67 world’s fair in Montreal (April 27 to October 29, 1967).

Through the art, design and activities presented at Expo, there was an effort to articulate Canadian identity, including historic and contemporary First Nations and Inuit cultures. First Nations and Inuit art and culture were visible at Expo ‘67, particularly in the Canadian Pavilion, Habitat ‘67, the Man the Explorer Pavilion, the Yukon Pavilion and the Indians of Canada Pavilion. The exhibits in the Indians of Canada pavilion—the development of which was Indigenous-led—made visible the impact of treaty violations, colonization, and residential schools on Indigenous communities across the country. Presentations of Inuit art and culture at Expo were not curated or organized by Inuit people and were integrated into exhibitions and interior decor of living and eating spaces largely without thoughtful contextual information.⁴⁰

There are indications that the Kinngait fabrics were intended to be shown at the Indian and Eskimo Pavilion at Expo ‘67 (Cheryl Larson, “Eskimos Design Attractive Fabrics,” *Calgary Herald*, August 11, 1966) and aspirations that they be used by Canadian exhibitors to decorate their pavilions (“Eskimo cooperative goes into drapery business,” *Quebec Chronical Telegraph*, August 4, 1966), however no evidence of their inclusion in the Indian and Eskimo Pavilion has been found to date and documentation suggests that the fabrics’ presence at Expo generally was limited. The Design Canada publication *Canadian Design at Expo 67* shows two instances of the fabrics being used at Expo: in Moshe Safdie’s housing development Habitat, Inukjuakju’s *Many Eskimos* is visible in the background of an image of a sofa,⁴¹ and an image depicting children’s art classroom furniture in the Canadian pavilion shows the *Fabulous Geese* design by Anirnik Oshuitoq (Figure 13) used as curtains (Figure 14).⁴² A photo in the *Toronto Star* by photographer

³⁶ Geoffrey Rainer, Richard Chamberlain and Annamarie Stapleton, *Artists' Textiles 1940-1976*, (Suffolk, England: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 2012), 85.

³⁷ John Houston, e-mail message to Roxane Shaughnessy, March 16, 2019.

³⁸ Rachel Gotlieb, *Thor Hansen: Crafting a Canadian Style*, (Toronto: Textile Museum of Canada, 2005), 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁰ Sherry Brydon, “The Representation of Inuit Art at Expo 67,” *American Indian Art Magazine* (Spring 2012), 36.

⁴¹ National Design Council (Canada), *Design Canada: Canadian Design at Expo 67*, (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1968).

⁴² National Design Council, *Design Canada*.

Jeff Goode shows Ishuhungito Pootoogook's *Birds in Flight* used as curtains in a music classroom in the Canadian pavilion.



Figure 13 *Anirnik Oshuitoq* (1902–1983), *Fabulous Geese*, L 274 x W 111 cm (detail) unbleached cotton, silk screen printed



Figure 14 *Design Canada: Canadian Design at Expo 67* National Design Council, 1968

The fabrics were also used in at least one of the 26 Habitat '67 model suites that were open as exhibits for Expo visitors to tour. The suite was furnished by Barbara MacLennan, a decorator service consultant with *Chatelaine* magazine.⁴³ The furniture used to decorate the suites was chosen from submissions to the Department of Exhibits and loaned for the duration of the fair; the 262 artworks used to decorate the spaces, including Inuit carvings and prints, were also loaned; and carpet and drapery fabrics were donated.⁴⁴ In an article on "Arctic Highlights at Expo" published in a 1967 issue of *North*, a publication of the Northern Affairs Branch, writer Helen Burgess notes the impact of the fabric, saying "The Cape Dorset flair for colour and design dominates one Habitat bedroom where glowing red and yellow drapery fabric (*Spirits and Birds* by Pudlo) has been used in the drapes and bedspread."⁴⁵ The fabrics were supplied by CAP.

Marketing and Fashion

Interest in the fabrics was buoyed by the CAP promotional tour, the Design Awards, and their inclusion at Expo '67. Some examples of the venues the fabrics were advertised and displayed in the mid-60s include: the 1966 Kinngait print catalogue, CAP promotional material, a spread on Inuit art in the Los Angeles based magazine *Designers West*, and in *Chatelaine* magazine's list of 'must-have' Centennial souvenirs. They were sold at Snow Goose Gallery in Ottawa and featured in an exhibition and sale of Inuit art at Eaton's department store in Montreal in 1967; an ad for the exhibition and sale in *La Presse* newspaper says "decorators will be thrilled to discover this magnificent collection of fabrics from Cape Dorset, winners of the National Design

⁴³ Helen Burgess, "Arctic Highlights at Expo," *North* XIV, no. 2 (March-April 1967), 54.

⁴⁴ David Piper, "12 Habitat Suites," *Canadian Interiors* 4, no. 9 (September 1967), 38-52.

⁴⁵ Burgess, "Arctic Highlights at Expo," 54.

Award” (“Exposition et vente chez Eaton! L’Univers et l’art esquimaux au Canada,” *La Presse*, January 27, 1967). In the same year, the fabrics were shown at the Winnipeg Art Gallery alongside ceramics from Rankin Inlet in an exhibition highlighting new forms of Inuit art. Around this time, the Eskimo Arts Council received inquiries about the fabrics from interior designers, members of the public and a researcher writing about the development of the Canadian textile industry, demonstrating the impact of these efforts.

Despite the promising response, the limited sales records that have been located to-date indicate that the fabrics did not sell well: the CAP 1968-69 interim report indicates that estimated projected sales for the year were \$30,000, however the ‘Actual Sales’ over the first six months of 1968 were \$5,113,⁴⁶ well below the estimated projected sales. In January 1968, the fabric printing department in Kinngait was abolished and the fabric designs were licensed to Jeff Brown Fine Fabrics Limited.⁴⁷

Much of the marketing and design of the fabrics promoted their use as drapery in institutional and commercial settings which necessitated large quantities to be printed, something that was not possible in the Kinngait studios.⁴⁸ The textiles were also printed in the South by Jim Farquhar of the Toronto-based textile company Farquhar & Sons Textiles between 1966 and 1968.⁴⁹ Printing in the south enabled the WBEC to meet demand and make sales which benefited the Inuit artists who designed them.

In the late 1960s, the designs were licensed out for other uses. One well-documented example is Toronto-based fashion designer Anne Gamble, who obtained the rights to reproduce artists’ designs for women’s garments in 1968. Designs such as Pudlo’s *Spirits and Birds* were hand-screened onto fabrics to create jumpsuits, coats, tunics and suits (“Eskimo Art, Mod Designs Combine for Fashion News,” *The Ottawa Journal*, March 19, 1969). Gamble’s designs retailed for \$175-500 and the artists who created the original designs received 5% of each sale (Joyce Carter, “Eskimo by Design,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 28, 1968, A20). Early in the relationship, Gamble was only permitted to print on “natural fibre fabrics in the colors used by the Eskimo painters [artists]” (Joyce Carter, “Eskimo by Design,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 28, 1968, A20). Gamble tried printing the designs on “unmussable synthetic pink linen” and, according to Joyce Carter’s report on the subject in the *Globe and Mail*, “everyone loved it,” and the WBEC, CAP and DINA gave her permission to use the designs at her discretion (Joyce Carter, “Eskimo by Design,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 28, 1968, A20). In 1969, Gamble brought six outfits to Kinngait with models and a photographer; the designs were also shown and sold in Switzerland over two days in 1969 (Zena Cherry, “After a fashion: Eskimo designs a hit,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 17, 1969, 12).

⁴⁶ Library and Archives Canada, Inuit Art Foundation fonds, R11333-18-2-E, “Correspondence and subject” series, volume 1, file “CAP - Reports, etc.,” page 6, Canadian Arctic Producers Ltd. Interim Report for Contract Year 1968-69.

⁴⁷ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, RG85 2164, “Canadian Eskimo Arts Council” series, file “Reports, correspondence and articles,” page 1, Correspondence from Alma Houston to Peter Giebels, January 21, 1968.

⁴⁸ Library and Archives Canada, “Canadian Eskimo Art Committee Minutes,” October 31, 1965, page 3.

⁴⁹ Canadian Museum of History Archives, West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative Fonds, box 37, folder Farquhar & Son Textiles - Toronto 1966 - 1968.

Photographs from 1968 (Figures 16 and 17) show two Inuit artists, Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013) and Melia [Mialia] Jaw (1934–2006), wearing dresses made from the fabrics; it is not known who designed or sewed the garments. Ashevak is shown wearing a dress with her own design. These photos were taken by Norman Hallendy, an Arctic ethnographer who worked in Inuit communities around southwestern Baffin Island for more than 50 years.



Figure 16 Kenojuak Ashevak in a garment showing textile printing, 1968. Photo by Norman Hallendy, McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archives, ARC-NH1991.2.13



Figure 17 Melia Jaw modeling garments from textile/graphics printing experiment, 1968. Photo by Norman Hallendy, McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archives, ARC-NG1991.48.31

These projects from the late 1960s represent another period of experimentation for the Kinngait fabric designs as their use was licensed out to companies and designers for use in products ranging from fashion to luggage sets. In the early 1970s, WBEC manager Terry Ryan asked Doug Mantegna, a textile print specialist based in Toronto, to assess whether large-scale fabric printing in Kinngait was viable.⁵⁰ Mantegna found that the logistics, chemicals, and cost made printing up North unsustainable. Shortly thereafter, Mantegna and Robert Eaton founded a company called Inunoo which is under license from Dorset Fine Arts to develop, produce and sell Inuit “graphic art designs interpreted into commercial textile products” such as apparel and accessories.⁵¹ Inunoo reproduced existing designs on new fabrics for a line of cruise wear, scarves and men’s shirts. New designs were developed in the following years. Mantegna would work from a drawing, extracting and translating elements to create new designs that were approved by the Co-op and the artist or their estate before being put into production.

Throughout the active years of the textile printing initiative, efforts were made to keep the project in Kinngait where it created jobs and income for artists and afforded them direct control over the products. However, the nature of the textiles and the way they were marketed made the product incompatible with production in Kinngait, leading to its evolution toward the textiles now produced through Inunoo.

⁵⁰ Doug Mantegna, interview with Anna Richard and Roxane Shaughnessy, August 29, 2019.

⁵¹ “About Us,” Inunoo Textiles, www.inunootextiles.com/pages/about-us-1.

Conclusion

The fabric printing initiative, along with other attempts to produce handicrafts in the north for southern markets, embodies the Inuit concept of *qanurtuuqatiginniq*, the ability to adapt, innovate, and creatively find solutions to problems.⁵² Experiments with fabric printing were carried out during the same period as printing on paper, and the development of fine art printing was inextricably linked to the fabric printing enterprise. However, unlike the stone and ivory sculpture and the famous prints which have been collected and appreciated the world over, the place and importance of these printed textiles in the history of Inuit cultural heritage has not been fully recognized.

The story of this innovative printing initiative has resurgent relevance today. These powerful graphic representations of the natural world and centuries-old Inuit belief systems remain vital in the present, and connect the contemporary Inuit community to the creativity and resourcefulness of the artists and printers of previous generations. Drawing from a spectrum of local and global influences, they created a unique body of work that expresses Inuit values and culture,⁵³ while preserving Inuit knowledge, oral histories and legends, and demonstrating the importance of printed fabrics in the ongoing evolution of Inuit graphic arts.

No other public collection of Inuit printed textiles is known in Canada. The Textile Museum is embracing the responsibility of bringing more awareness to Inuit cultural heritage creating broad access through exhibition, publication and online resources, and educational programs, in partnership with Inuit cultural, community and research leaders. We are grateful to the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative and Dorset Fine Arts for the opportunity to access and research this collection; research will continue in anticipation of an exhibition in November 2019. We are welcoming members of the Inuit art community into leadership roles in the development of this exhibition and its programming.

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⁵² Heather Igloliorte, “Curating Inuit Qaujimaqatiginniq,” 104.

⁵³ Vorano, *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration*, 59.

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REVISED ABSTRACT

The Textile Museum of Canada holds a collection of close to 200 printed fabrics designed by Inuit artists at Kinngait Studios in Kinngait (Cape Dorset), Nunavut, Canada in the 1950s and 1960s. The pieces are owned by the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative (WBEC) and are on long-term loan to the Museum. Building on centuries-old Inuit graphic traditions, printmaking was introduced in Kinngait in 1957 as part of a larger initiative to encourage handicraft production for sale in the Canadian south. By the 1960s, the studio had a number of Inuit artists who contributed to the Kinngait Studios' print program which included a commercial hand-printed fabric enterprise. A selection of these fabrics exhibited at Expo 67 (The 1967 International and Universal Exposition) in Montreal drew substantial interest but, ultimately, manufacturing textiles in the North proved too expensive and found only a limited market, and this enterprise was abandoned. Based on the research of this unique collection, this paper will discuss the role of experiments in printed fabrics in the development of printed graphic arts, the history and evolution of production and the significance of this short-lived fabric industry in the context of Inuit printmaking. It will consider the broader theme of the relationship between the Inuit and their environment as expressed through cloth as well as the impact of cross-cultural contact on the evolution of Inuit art practices, including the influences of European and Japanese print traditions on Inuit printmaking and the role of the southern Canadian market on design and production decisions. The relationship between fabric and printed designs by well-known Inuit graphic artists will be traced. Today, Kinngait Studios' print industries continue to offer an artistic and culturally affirming means of recording oral histories, myths and legends of the Inuit, and the place of the printed fabrics in this creative venture will be revealed.