

# Inuit treasures rediscovered

**SCULPTURE** | Show presents talents of aboriginal sculptors then and now

## VIEWFINDER

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VANCOUVER SUN

It started out, according to Judy Kardosh who owns the Marion Scott Gallery, as a "cash-flow show" but it wasn't long before it developed into something else and there was nothing cynical about what it turned into. They seem incapable of anything like cash-flow at the Marion Scott.

Treasures came out of the storage room and being a gallery owner, you sometimes forget what you've got back there. What lay there collecting dust surprised Kardosh and her curator son Robert Kardosh.

The significance of the show, with the exception of a few pieces, is that the sculptors as a rule are not big names in Inuit art. As Robert says, "It goes to show the tremendous talent that is widespread across the North, amongst both the older and younger generations."

There are more than 70 pieces in the show, which is considerably more than was originally planned. They represent pretty well all the regions of the Arctic, and the quality of the pieces is generally so high that you wouldn't begin to associate the showing with any questionable motive of just turning a profit. This is a beautiful exhibition by any standards and that includes the standards of Rodin and Henry Moore.

Who would not appreciate the shamanistic stone beluga whale of Josiah Nuilaalik with its gracefully curving body and human face? Nuilaalik, who died in 2005, lived in Baker Lake, the only inland Inuit community. His sculpture recalls an unusual occurrence that happened in the 1970s when a beluga somehow managed to swim upstream into the river that flows into Hudson Bay, finally entering Baker Lake. Nuilaalik desperately needed medical help at the time and took the event as an omen. He then lastingly devoted his art to depictions of the occurrence of magic in nature.

There is a little Pangnark, a romantic mountainscape when seen head-on, but which when viewed from the end reveals the delicate slashes that define the features of a human face.

I could just as certainly live with that in my living room as I could live with the masterly river otter of Mosusie Tarqiasuq Naluyuk on my mantel. This is a largish sculpture of an otter devouring fish. The curves of its back, continued by the curves of its tail, amount to more than the execution of a baroque curve by a naive artist who was nevertheless smart enough to intuit for himself an international art term. The rhythm of those curves reproduces in a stone

### CLASSICS AND RARITIES: INUIT SCULPTURE 1950S TO THE PRESENT

Marion Scott Gallery,  
308 Water Street  
To June 22

image the exact fluid rhythm of a running otter. It expresses the quiddity of the otter, its very essence.

The older pieces in the show that date to the early 1950s fall to Akeekashuk (Inuit artists in those days had only one name). His name was seminal, the first to announce the fact of Inuit art to the South.

These two pieces, both hunters, one with a walrus, are surprisingly small and amazingly fine. It was white forces who persuaded the Inuit that it was somehow "not right" to inlay the faces and hands in ivory or bone, and it was market forces that persuaded the Inuit that it was better to make their work much bigger.

Both influences were wrong, or at least crudely general. The Inuit artists knew what they were doing and didn't need advice from anyone.

Just look at the minute ivory angel of Mark Tungilik or at his People, Birds, Fish and Animal, which registers 1/2 inch by 2 and 1/4 by 1, and there are even expressions on the faces of these near-microscopic people!

The smooth, dark stone of Peter Sevoga's Untitled Woman begs to be touched, the wind-milling arms and huge parka hood essential to the form. The Oviloo Tunnillie sled dog with mittens on its feet, in black Arctic marble too reflective to photograph, is equally inviting.

The nuclear family groupings of Lucy Tasseor, their faces rising out of rock, are pure Rodin.

The contemporary pieces are very strange. There's an enormous stone fist by Toonoo Sharky from Cape Dorset with its sharply incised fingernails, bulging veins, ring on one finger and deeply lined palm. Who would do a piece like this but someone who knows the force of a hand? Art, by its very nature, must always change with the times, yet this piece still falls within the Inuit tradition of carving stone. And who would do as weird a piece as a pair of sunglasses in stone (Jamesie Pitseolak)? For some reason, I thought of an Inuit Man Ray. A Man Ray Ray Ban.

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See a photo gallery on this exhibit at [vancouver.sun.com](http://vancouver.sun.com)



Toonoo Sharky, from Cape Dorset, created Untitled Hand.



Sunglasses by Jamesie Pitseolak of Cape Dorset.



Peter Sevoga, who lived from 1940 to 2007 in Baker Lake, created Untitled Woman in the 1970s. The stone sculpture can be seen at Classics and Rarities: Inuit Sculptures 1950s to the Present at the Marion Scott Gallery until June 22.



Akeekashuk, who lived from 1898 to 1954 in Inukjuak, created Untitled Hunter out of stone and ivory in the 1950s.