# Sanajatsarq[1]: Reactions, Productions, and the Transformation of Promotional Practice

...Houston's single greatest feat on behalf of the Inuit arts industry lies in how quickly he perceived the shortcomings of Sunuyuksuk and the handicrafts initiative and executed an about-face

BY HEATHER IGLOLIORTE

While doing an internship at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 2005, I came across *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts*, a government-sponsored instructional booklet for Inuit, written and illustrated by James Houston. Published in 1951, the 28-page booklet was filled with suggestions of crafts and carvings that the Inuit could make for sale in the South.

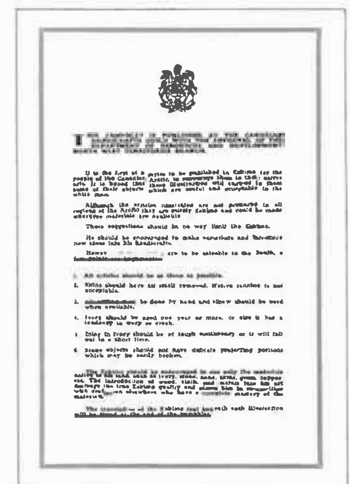
I was intrigued. While some of the clothing and carvings depicted were familiar, I could not recall ever having seen a soapstone ashtray nor an Inuit "totem pole." I assumed that the booklet was a mere blip on the map of Inuit artistic development, an idiosyncratic publication that had had little impact on contemporary Inuit art. However, over the course of the following year, as I visited other institutions with Inuit art holdings, I became aware of the many Inuit carvings and objects made specifically for trade in the late historical and early contemporary periods. For example, as I later discovered, the Canadian Museum of Civilization has a whole drawer containing ivory cribbage boards, a rifle case, and assorted clothing and accessories similar to those illustrated in the Houston booklet.

In addition, the National Gallery of Canada has a set of stone buttons that resemble drawings in the book. However, the most significant collection of objects resembling Houston's examples is most certainly that of now-deceased Inuit art collector Ian Lindsay, whose collection is housed at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. In fact, a number of objects in the Lindsay Collection served as the models for Houston's drawings.

If so many objects in our national public and private collections resemble objects depicted in *Sanajatsarq*, perhaps the booklet had a greater impact than I had first thought. Curiosity piqued, I made *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts* the focus of my Masters of Arts thesis research. What had been written about the booklet? How had it been used? What influence, if any, had it exerted on contemporary Inuit art?

## *Sanajatsarq* in the History of Inuit Art

In a review of the scholarly references to *Sanajatsarq*, it is interesting to note that, while a number of significant texts make mention of the booklet, citations are usually brief,



and often relegated to an aside or a footnote. Houston, himself, seems to have ignored it. His only reference to the booklet may be his comment in his memoir *Confessions of an Igloo Dweller* that "this childish pamphlet fortunately had little or no effect" on carvers and craftspeople (Houston 1996:156). Nelson Graburn had identified the booklet as being modeled on 1940s Alaskan Native Arts and Crafts (ANAC) catalogues, a discovery he attributes to his former student, Molly Lee (1987a:3–4). Graburn also wrote about the booklet's northern distribution via RCMP officers and government administrators (*ibid.*) and, more significantly, in another essay (1987b:52), he mentioned that some Inuit used the booklet as a "Bible."

Helga Goetz twice mentioned the booklet: in a chapter of the 1993 book *In the Shadow of the Sun*, as well as in a government publication during her tenure as head of the Inuit Art Section of the federal Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (1985:15–16). In the 1985 work, Goetz reprinted the introductory page verbatim, noting the similarities between it and a previous one-page list of suggestions from the Canadian Guild of Crafts first printed in 1941. In contrast to the negative commentary the booklet received from the department in later years, Goetz considered that a positive effect of the booklet had been to increase craft production.

Charles Martijn addressed the guide more analytically than most, demonstrating in two articles some of the contradictions between the archaeological facts and Houston's writing. For example, while it was stated in the booklet (p. 1) that use of wood by Inuit carvers "destroys the true Eskimo quality," Martijn pointed out that the ancestors of the Inuit often used wood for carvings (1967:15–16). He also noted that Houston, perhaps inadvertently, encouraged Inuit to ignore regional differences by advising that while "all articles illustrated are not produced in all regions of the Arctic they are purely Eskimo and could be made from whatever materials available" (p. 1).

In *The First Passionate Collector: The Ian Lindsay Collection of Inuit Art* (1990), Winnipeg Art Gallery curator Darlene Coward Wight dedicated approximately three pages of her essay to examining *Sanajatsarq* in relation to Houston's early instructional practices, including his encouragement of the practice of decorating functional objects for sale, and using drawings to bridge the communicative barriers between English and Inuktitut. She also alludes to the controversial question of whether or not Houston exerted undue artistic influence during the early years (pp. 80–81).

Finally, George Swinton weighed in heavily on the impact of *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts*. In response to the accusations that "White men and White values have changed and corrupted Eskimo art," Swinton's rebuttal was that White influence had altered but not degraded Inuit art (1999:131–133). His argument was that, while Houston's booklet might have had a beneficial impact on early Inuit art, a major problem was that it led Inuit to

Cribbage board, 1936, unknown artist, unknown community (ivory, 4.5 x 40 x 6 in.).
Photo: Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization

Gun case, 1971, unknown artist, Port Burwell (sealskin, sinew and nylon thread, 101 x 18.5 in.).
Photo: Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization

believe that the southern market was interested in only the exact objects depicted, and no others.

Swinton's view was that this miscommunication between instructor and artists had a result opposite to Houston's original intentions; yet, he immediately followed that statement by claiming that, "generally speaking, the booklet was largely ignored by the 'good' carvers and only affected the marginal carvers who could do no better than to produce for the souvenir market.

And that was precisely the pamphlet's purpose; for it was issued to provide some sort of economic base, other than welfare, in those areas that were economically depressed. The book never reached far beyond Ungava. I could find traces of it only in Port Harrison, Povungnituk, and Ottawa — and it was withdrawn from circulation and even office use before the middle [19]50s" (*ibid.*).

Swinton's position was, then, that *Sanajatsarq* had had a negligible impact on Inuit art because it was aimed at souvenir production, and because it had very limited circulation. To be fair, Swinton had an interest in downplaying the commercial and tourist elements of early Inuit "art," in order to make it appealing to those collectors who valued an "authentic" Inuit art.

However, for a brief period in the mid-20th century, the booklet was widely distributed in the Canadian Arctic, resulting in an abundance of crafts and carvings produced in a variety of places. In some communities, RCMP officers reported distributing the booklet to every family. At the National Archives, I discovered an invoice for 1,500 copies that had been shipped North in 1951 with as many as 70 or 80 copies being distributed to various settlements. Furthermore, the production of carvings and handicrafts increased dramatically in the communities that received the booklet; purchases in Port Harrison

(Inukjuak), for example, increased from $76 in 1948 to $11,700 in 1952. In Povungnituk (Puvirnituq), the increase was from $90 to $1,900 in the same time span (Goetz 1985: 22). The decline in the fur trade had left many newly urbanized Inuit dependent upon government support, but in communities that participated in the handicrafts industry, the distribution of relief funds was considerably decreased and an overall improvement in self-esteem was reported.

In addition, Houston's booklet was very well received and promoted throughout the Canadian Arctic, especially by RCMP officers, teachers, missionaries and Hudson's Bay Company traders. In the introductory text, Houston had announced that the booklet was to be the first of a series, not a one-time publication.

At the time, with so many people beginning to make art, *Sanajatsarq* was widely regarded as a good thing; it offered guidance to carvers and craftspeople on what objects would be valued cross-culturally.

Nonetheless, shortly after publication, *Sanajatsarq* was withdrawn from circulation. What had at first been so enthusiastically supported was now considered an embarrassment. It seems to me, however, that *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts* — as an extension of Houston's activities and, later, as a catalyst of that momentous shift from crafts to fine art — had a greater impact on the development of contemporary Inuit art than has been previously considered.

The naive booklet was, in part, responsible for the dramatic shift away from handicraft production and towards the development of fine art, including an increase in scale, the heightened importance of stone carving, and the new focus on promoting and fostering the talents of individual artists. This new direction was a reaction to the unpopularity of curio carvings and the mass production of acculturated objects.

It is possible, then, to imagine that the *real* success of *Sanajatsarq* was, paradoxically, that it failed. Had the standardized crafts produced in response to the booklet's suggestions been a "success" in the South, in a matter of years mass-produced knickknacks would have undoubtedly lost their appeal. In light of the low, souvenir status of "Indian" crafts in the mid-20th century, and the competition from a flood of imported Japanese fakes, it can be argued that one of Houston's greatest achievements in this transitional period was that, almost immediately following *Sanajatsarq*'s debut, he perceived the limitations of the souvenir trade, changed direction, and addressed himself to the revitalization of Inuit artistic production.

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## A Brief Look at the Content of the Booklet

The 30-page booklet was illustrated with images that suggested what types of traditional objects would appeal to the southern market. In the introduction, Houston wrote that all the objects depicted were "purely Eskimo." In addition, he included drawings of acculturated or transcultural objects — cribbage boards, bracelets and matchstick holders — all decorated with Inuit motifs and made from materials indigenous to the Arctic. Four pages were dedicated to grass basketry; there were many items of Inuit clothing, and several pages depicting traditional tools, such as a harpoon head, a model snow knife, an ulu and a goose wing brush.

The Canadian Handicrafts Guild and the public valued these functional objects as "curiosities," and to make them appealing as "collectibles," Houston repeatedly instructed Inuit to carefully clean and polish every item — especially those of skin or bone — to ensure that all smell was removed. He frequently emphasized the importance of finishing items according to

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*Untitled*, c. 1955, unknown artist (stone, ivory, twine; Carleton University Art Gallery).

Western tastes, all the while keeping the "Native" character.

While a number of curious objects are illustrated in the booklet, the most controversial — and confusing — inclusion is undoubtedly a drawing of a "totem pole" on page 11. While it is clearly drawn in a Northwest Coast style, sculpting in the vertical is often used by Inuit to represent the transformation from humans to animals, or to express kinship between people and the natural world. Also, real-life examples of totem poles made by Inuit predate the booklet's publication. The Ian Lindsay Collection, for example, includes numerous examples, several of which were created by anonymous Inuit in 1950.

Houston never refers to the piece illustrated in his booklet as a totem pole, describing it only as "animals carved from a single piece of stone." Arguably, this drawing influenced the production of several later, similar carvings in the Lindsay collection, including at least one in the Canadian Museum of Civilization (donated by Lindsay, who was well known for having personally purchased large numbers of the first items Houston brought back in 1949 and 1950). Winnipeg Art Gallery curator Wight has suggested that Houston was inspired to combine this "transformation" style imagery with "his own Northwest Coast-flavoured drawings," drawn prior to his first Arctic trips (Wight 1990:65).

One final possibility that I would add is that Houston was inspired to suggest the creation of totem poles based on those he had seen in Alaskan Native Arts and Crafts (ANAC) catalogues, which he had been directed by a Government official to use as models for *Sanajatsarq*. Indeed, D.L. Burrus of ANAC had sent R.A. Gibson, then Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Administration Office, a copy of a catalogue from the Alaskan clearing-house as a suggested format, along with a letter of suggestions. This was, in turn, passed to Houston who, presumably, used it as a model (Burrus 1949).

Although ANAC reproduced photographs and Houston used drawings, there are many similarities between these catalogues and Houston's. It is even plausible that Houston was responsible for the production of totem poles predating the booklet since, before writing *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts*, he had been circulating drawings of the carvings and crafts he wanted people to copy through Hudson's Bay Company stores. There is a 1950 National Film Board photograph of a shop display in Inukjuak, in which can be seen a poster of drawings and Inuktitut instructions in what is unmistakably Houston's hand. Below this, a few small totem poles are displayed, which leads me to think that Houston may very well have played a direct role in encouraging these early Inuit art anomalies.

As for the inclusion of the other cross-cultural objects, it is interesting to note that all parties involved — the guild, the government, and the HBC — agreed that these were objects that would be "useful and acceptable to the white man." (Houston 1951: 1) It soon became evident, however, that these items were not seen as authentic by southern buyers, whose preferences were deeply entrenched in the mid-century belief that Inuit were primitive, unspoiled people.

Fortunately for the Inuit art industry, the failed attempts to foster handicrafts in the Arctic in the pre-war period now worked to good advantage. The exotic unfamiliarity of this undiscovered art and its northern origin fostered the growth of an unbridled romanticization of Inuit art and artists; the primitive art market was quick to accept this invented mythology.

Between 1951 and 1953, following the publication of *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts*, the Inuit arts and crafts industry, as it had been known and imagined, dramatically changed in unforeseen ways. I would argue that there is a direct link between the acceptance of this new modern, "primitive" art and the rejection of crafts and carvings that contradicted the image of the "unspoiled" civilization. Many of those "acculturated" items, such as the ashtrays and rifle cases promoted in *Sanajatsarq*, were quickly replaced by the production of Inuit fine arts.

Finally, the booklet itself began to attract criticism for both its didactic tone and its content. Particularly objectionable were the condescending captions that accompanied some illustrations. For example: "The small Eskimo man and woman...are carefully smoothed and polished. Can you make one?" Also, statements such as "a man standing over the seal hole; snow blocks for protection. Dressed in skins; ivory face; harpoon in hand," or "they can be made in any position, either sitting or walking" seem, paradoxically, restrictive.

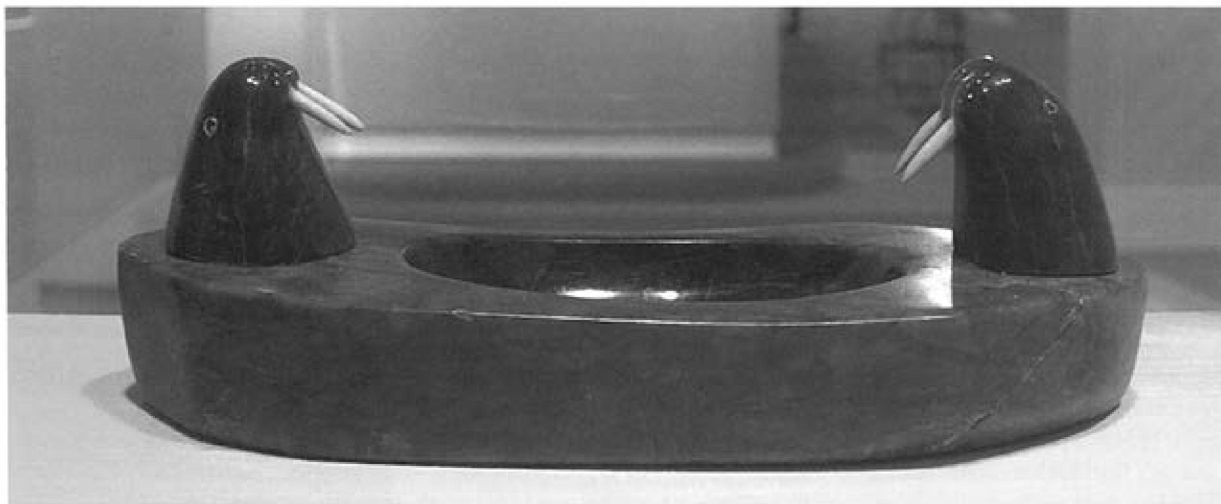
The nature of the "suggestions" left little room for creativity. Some Inuit might have interpreted the booklet as a definitive set of rules, producing large quantities of exact replicas with little deviation from Houston's drawings. At the Canadian Handicrafts Guild in Montreal, large quantities of grass basketry and the "hideously odorous" sealskin clothing, rifle cases, and accessories sat on the shelves for months (Goetz 1985:22).

## Stone Art Takes Over

Criticisms of souvenir art were many, but the new stone carvings started to attract the attention of the southern art elite. Cheaper than ivory, with infinitely more potential to be worked in large scale, the prices for stone carvings increased rapidly. The public reacted to the "Eskimo-ness" of these new works, responding positively to the rounded, reductive, and simplified forms of figures and animals, forms which conformed to romantic notions of the "Eskimo," closely associated with the rugged arctic tundra and the wild arctic animals.

Since the 1940s, "primitive" art had begun to be identified with modern art of the avant-garde. Historically, Inuit had rarely used soapstone for anything but seal oil lamps and cooking pots (Burch 1993:305), but small numbers of diminutive soapstone carvings — like the caribou Houston had been given on his first trip to Inukjuak [Port Harrison] — had begun appearing in the late contact period.[2]

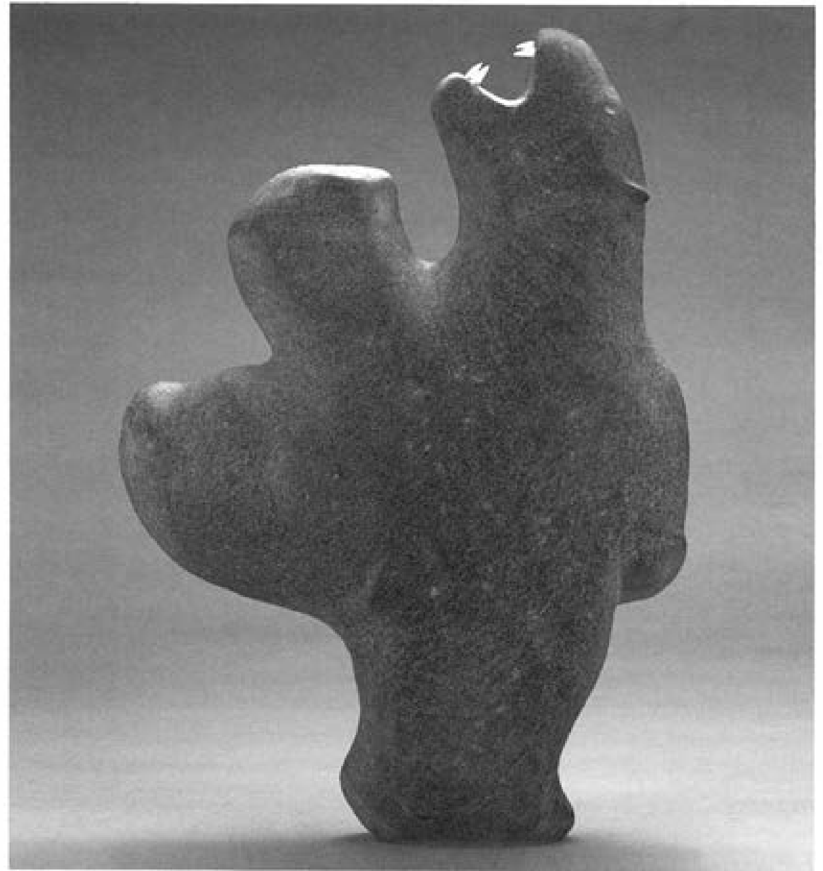
(below) *Ashtray with two Walrus*, c. 1950s, unknown artist (stone, ivory; Canadian Museum of Civilization: Tom Kramer Collection).



Houston foresaw that stone — less expensive to purchase and in ready supply — would be an ideal replacement for ivory, which, by the late 1940s, was becoming hard to obtain. Found walrus tusk had to sit at least one year to ensure that it would not warp or crack, and, since it had a high intrinsic value, post managers were reluctant to allow children or novice carvers to practice with it (Wight 1990:71). Because Houston tried to encourage people by purchasing everything produced, stone was an ideal material to give to inexperienced carvers.

In addition, stone facilitated work on a larger scale. As correspondence between the guild and the Hudson's Bay Company has revealed, *Sanajatsarq* was designed to create a viable "curio" market (Molson 1949). The suggestions were for "some small things you can make." Although scale was never directly mentioned in the booklet, Inuit were told that either stone or ivory could be used for all images, implying that a fairly small scale would be suitable. Whereas ivory pieces — such as those that inspired the illustrations in *Sanajatsarq* — were, on average, three inches long, the new stone carvings grew first to six or eight inches, then to pedestal or tabletop dimensions (Swinton 1999:142).

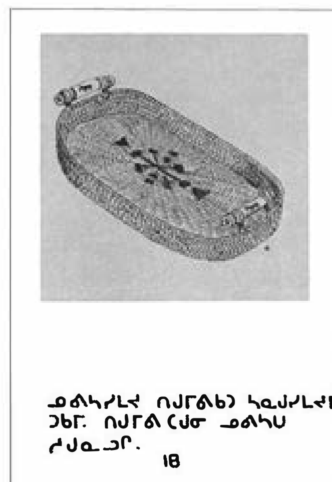
With the change in scale, it became more difficult to marginalize these works as souvenirs or "Native" crafts. However, as is described in Ian Lindsay's firsthand account, not all collectors were enthusiastic about this new development; some maintained that the change in scale would fundamentally alter the character of the art (1990:21). Other critics denigrated the shift in material and size as products of Western influence (Carpenter 1973:195).



(above) *Dancing Polar Bear*, c. 1980, Pauta Saila, Cape Dorset (stone, antler; private collection). This bear shows the solid "klumpen" style, still prevalent in Inuit sculpture.

Photo: Courtesy of Waddington's

(right) *Untitled*, c. 1955, unknown artist (ivory; Carleton University Art Gallery).



In spite of such criticisms, a market did develop for larger scale works and, in the minds of collectors, stone quickly became the favoured material. Gradually, each community was developing recognizable traits, based in part on the different colours and veins of stone. Large-scale antler and whale bone would also gain favour in the southern art market over the following decades.

Beyond the individual characteristics of each community, an Inuit style was beginning to emerge, modified as much through outside preferences as by internal choices. The formal aesthetic traits of Inuit carvings came under external influence in the form of direct suggestions and through the emulation of other artists whose works were purchased in the South or at the trading post. In "Inuit Art and the Expression of Eskimo Identity," published in 1987, Graburn repeated the findings of Eigil Knuth who, in 1957, reported that a central common feature of Inuit stone carvings from Greenland and Canada was their "klumpen" appearance; namely, works that were "clumped, rounded, lumpy, or thick," as opposed to linear, angular, separated or delicate (1987b:59–61). While this style quickly became recognizable as Inuit, it was, as Graburn adds, no coincidence that Houston's own artistic sense also displayed "klumpen" characteristics (*ibid.*).

Indeed, Houston actively encouraged the development of rounded or thick forms. In the introduction to *Sanajatsarq*, he wrote that as a preventative measure against damage during transport to the South "stone objects should not have delicate projecting portions which may be easily broken." In addition, in the 1953 pamphlet *Eskimo Handicrafts: A Private Guide for the Hudson's Bay Company Manager*, Houston recommended that managers selectively purchase works that could be shipped without damage: "A carving with delicate protruding pieces, such as birds' wings, presents a difficult handling problem and may be easily broken — the best type is the single carving in fairly solid mass." Inuit were instructed both directly by Houston and indirectly by the purchase of works with a "fairly solid mass" by the managers.

## Changes in Promotion: From Carvers to Artists

Even though the market for the new stone carvings was growing, Houston knew that, for this development to be a sustained success, the promotion of both the works and the Inuit who made them would have to change dramatically. It quickly became apparent that the potential of Inuit production had been underestimated.

The first task for Houston was to dissociate the curio-style carvings and crafts that had been suggested in *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts* from the new Inuit art. By their very nature, the acculturated objects featured in the booklet contradicted the myth of Inuit "primitiveness," thus diminishing their appeal to the modernist primitive art market. As James Clifford has explained, in the modern perspective, the value of primitive artworks could be gauged by their seemingly "vanishing" cultural status. Higher prices and greater appreciation were given to the artistic output of cultures whose disappearance was deemed imminent (Clifford 1988:223). At the time, many people, including George Swinton, were predicting the end of Inuit culture. As he admitted, in 1957, "we looked into the future and said 'How would it be possible for one's art to survive when one's culture is dying?'...We looked at what we thought were its essential factors, and we saw that [Inuit] were gradually disappearing" (1999:107). Even as late as the 1950s and 1960s, commentators believed that the culture would soon be extinct.

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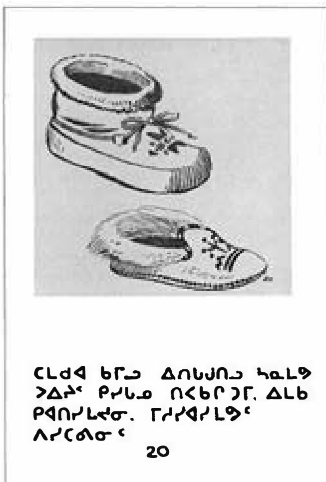
In hindsight, Swinton recognized the flaw in his reasoning, but a precept of modernity was the belief that, good or bad, the absolute triumph of modernization was inevitable. In the 1950s, acculturated art was much maligned, and to be "authentically primitive" the arts had to correspond



to what the Western world thought traditional "primitive" life was like. If the Inuit art industry was to achieve commercial success, it was necessary for Houston to counteract any suggestions of Inuit "civilization" or commercialism that would detract from the public reception of this new modern art form.

Houston, who wrote numerous promotional articles during the first decade of contemporary Inuit art, promptly shifted his writing style to suit the tastes of a modernist primitive art market. For example, in 1952, following the backlash to *Sanajatsarq*, he started referring to Inuit as "artists" rather than "carvers," and to their work as "sculpture" rather than "handicraft."

to his old ways," and, "there is no copying of one another in this work" (1954:44; 1952:100). The new art was authenticated by associating Inuit with ancient man, and by the implication that the commercial art derived from the mystical fetishes of a paradoxically prehistoric modern people.

Houston's understanding of the modernist market is further illustrated in his romanticization of Inuit society. Appealing to the modernist idealization of pastoral and primitive societies as more peaceful and pure than the industrialized world (Errington 1998:30), Houston wrote: "The Eskimo possesses a cheerfulness and a tranquility of mind to a degree that seems almost unknown in our modern civilization. He finds ample time in his life of hardships to carve fine plastic forms that perfectly portray his cultural rise above his savage surroundings, and show his feelings about the people and the life around them" (1954:41–43).

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By the mid 1950s, Inuit art had gained international recognition; markets had been created in the United States, and works had been exhibited in such fine art institutions as Gimpel Fils gallery in London. Houston's writing reflected a keen understanding of this new audience. First, he downplayed commercial production techniques: "files and saws are now used to some extent," he wrote, "but when those are not available the carver readily returns

For modernists, as Dean MacCannell has written (1999:3), authenticity, the natural, and thus the "real" are thought to be elsewhere: in other times, in other places, in other cultures, all more pure and simple than the modernist's own. The modern world is unstable and mutable, so the conception of the authentic world is necessarily static and distant, and frozen in imagined romantic nostalgia.

The mythology Houston created was perpetuated through secondary sources that reported his observations and opinions as fact. In a review of Houston's *Canadian Eskimo Art*, Henry Strub repeats:

> *Contact with white men has not yet affected their style which is not self-consciously primitive but is in the living tradition...Much of the work is evidently done just for fun, but some of it attempts and achieves a deeper meaning and inevitably calls for comparison with some of our greater contemporary sculptors such as Henry Moore* (1954:32).

Martijn has noted several other sources who repeated Houston's misinformation (1964:578), and George Swinton complained that "there has been published, reprinted, and quoted, a great deal of material, which was entirely misleading and which has established in the minds of even the not-so-gullible public a myth about various aspects of Eskimo carving that bears no resemblance to the facts" (1958:41).

Ironically, however fictitious, Houston's published work facilitated acceptance of the art as authentic. Exhibitions began to publicize emerging master artists. Boosted by Houston's articles, certain artists became sought-after by private and public collectors alike, beginning a newfound, if slow to develop, appreciation for Inuit

artists as individual talents rather than anonymous carvers.

## Encouraging New Work

In the Arctic as in the South, Houston significantly altered his practices in the production, purchase and promotion of works in the years following publication of *Sanajatsarq*. In 1953, he wrote again in *Eskimo Bulletin* with new instructions and suggestions, prefaced with the information on that, "the things some of you make are very good and many people in the white men's countries buy them and like them very much. Some things they like better than others and it is to let you know which things are best liked that we are writing this article" (1953a:1–2).

Two of the four pages of the handout are dedicated to illustrations, but it is interesting to note that, while the handout is titled "Handicrafts," it contains only images of and suggestions for carvings. This is telling. While Houston continued to refer to "handicrafts" activities in reports to the guild, many of these activities had, in fact, been discontinued due to poor sales. Most significantly, on the page before the illustrations, and separated from other text, Houston wrote: "The pictures here are some of the things that have been made by Eskimos. They are not shown to have you copy them but to give you an idea of some things that are wanted. Make your own carvings the way you want but try hard to make them the best you can" (*ibid.*). Clearly, Houston was trying to pitfalls of *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts* by encouraging the Inuit to experiment, even if the format and delivery of his new message was very similar to that of *Sanajatsarq*.

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In any case, as became evident in the works and the growing fame of individual artists, Houston had significantly altered his promotional style to encourage the use of stone, a new style of carving and, finally, the creativity of the individual artist — quite different from the anonymous, mass-produced objects associated with *Sanajatsarq*. As the most prolific writer on Inuit art, the most influential promoter of such art in the South, and the instructor with the widest reach in the North, Houston was positioned as a key mediator in the Inuit art industry. He was in an ideal position to orchestrate a shift in public attention from handicrafts to fine art.

## The Aesthetic Appeal of Inuit Art

This shift would not have been possible if not for the widespread appeal of contemporary Inuit art to both the general public and discerning modern cognoscenti. One of the contributing factors was the ease with which meaning could be deciphered from modern Inuit art. In contrast to the arts of other Native North Americans, the public could easily understand this contemporary art form. Free from abstracted or codified symbolic meanings, the expressive forms and recognizable subject matter catered to the market for so-called "primitive art." The logic of consumerism in a cross-cultural tourist art market, as Ruth Phillips has indicated (1998:10), encourages art producers to use iconic, generic imagery in their work. Furthermore, as Eric Cohen has suggested (1993:5), the trend towards naturalism and recognition in tourist art is often accompanied by an opposite trend towards modern-influenced abstraction. Again, Inuit sculpture fits the bill.

Houston was a modernist artist, whose exposure to the Group of Seven and life-long interest in primitive peoples as well as his arts education made him extremely receptive to the precepts of mid-century modernist primitivism. Houston had studied art in France in 1947, at a time when, as James Clifford has noted, primitive art had begun to be closely associated with the modern art of the avant-garde (1988:242).

It was Charles Martijn's conclusion that "as an artist in his own right, and having been imbued at art school with all of the values and ideas peculiar to Western art tradition, [Houston] could not help but interpret Eskimo carving wholly on the basis of what his training had taught him. Almost unconsciously, Houston ended up imposing his Euro-Canadian art concepts on the acquiescent Eskimo carvers who benefited from his hints and advice by making their handiwork as acceptable as possible to southern buyers" (1964:577).

## Conclusion

*Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts* has been characterized as inconsequential, due to its negative reception in the South and the poor quality of the resulting production. It is my view, however, that, while it began as an extension of Houston's activities to promote handicrafts, it soon became a catalyst of change that ultimately separated souvenir crafts from the more successful stone sculpture. Consequently, it has had a greater impact on the development of contemporary Inuit art than has been previously recognized, although there are undoubtedly many other factors and figures that contributed to the unanticipated success of this contemporary art form.

By 1953, the end of the handicrafts experiment, Inuit art had been catapulted into the international art market. The Canadian Handicrafts Guild was overwhelmed with the number of works and the volume of sales, and Houston had to find other outlets in the United States to accommodate the demand for Inuit art. The troika comprised of the Guild, the government, and the Hudson's Bay Company had laid the foundation of the carving industry in the 1950s but, by the end of that decade, Inuit cooperatives were taking over what was to become a multi-million dollar business (Mitchell 1993:343). Cape Dorset, for example, was recently acclaimed in the Canadian media as the country's most artistic community, with more artists per capita than anywhere else in the country.

In light of all this, perhaps Houston's single greatest feat on behalf of the Inuit arts industry lies in how quickly he perceived the shortcomings of *Sanajatsarq* and the handicrafts initiative and executed an about-face. This shift is evident in his promotional activities in both the North and South, in his writing and collecting and, especially, in his instructional practices. The evolution from handicrafts and carvings to sculpture, drawing, and printmaking might have happened gradually in any case, but Houston had the power to precipitate an almost immediate shift. It now appears that the failure of *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts* had a tangible impact on the development of contemporary Inuit art.

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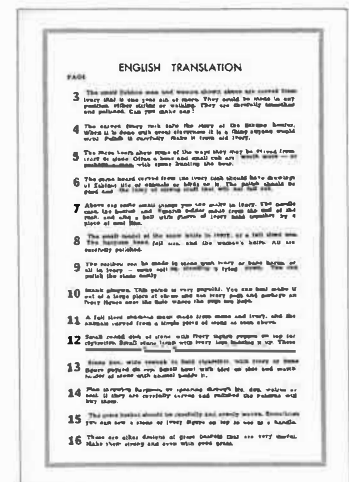
## NOTES

1 *Sanajatsarq*, the correct Nunavik spelling of the booklet's title, is commonly misspelled as "Sunuyuksuk".

2 Nelson H. H. Graburn noted that an Inuk in Sugluk (Salluit) told him that, in the 1940s, before soapstone was regularly carved, he ran out of ivory, carved some souvenirs out of a used soapstone pot and sold them to whalers. The Hudson's Bay Company would not purchase the soapstone items at that time, but he could trade them to sailors, which encouraged other Inuit to also begin carving soapstone for trade (1976:42–43).


ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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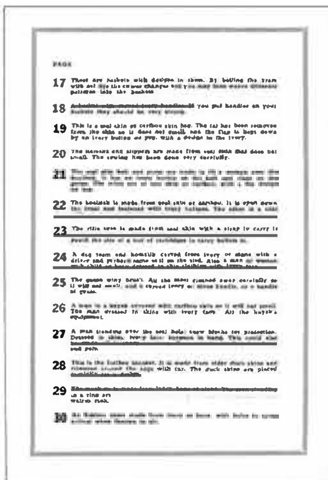


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