This past winter, **Heather Igloliorte** met with and moderated a conversation with fellow curators **Heather Campbell** and **Jocelyn Piirainen**. The following exchange highlights the diverse roles Inuit occupy as curators today, as well as the current state of the field.



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Heather Campbell, Jocelyn Piirainen and Heather Igloliorte in Ottawa on Saturday, February 4, 2017 Unless otherwise noted, all photos by Barry Pottle **ΗΔ΄Ο δ<>, ኑንሬ። ΛናΔσ** «ዛሬ**ጋ ΗΔΟ Δ'-3-ε ኦ°•∩** ላጋዊΓ ረሚርጎል⁴Γ, ልንላሊ 4, 2017 «/‹ປ² ኦ¹⁶ν²/L⁶σ³⁻⁶⁴σ⁴, ርሆም «ንኦር«⁴/C ΛϷ₆ <Ͻ



Heather Campbell

was Curatorial Assistant in the Indigenous Art Department at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) at the time of this interview. Previously, she held a curatorial position with the Inuit Art Centre at Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (now the Indigenous Art Centre at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC]] and has been active on the boards of various artist-run centres in the Ottawa area. In addition to her curatorial and arts administration work, Campbell is an actively practicing artist.

Heather Igloliorte,

Canada's first Inuk to hold a doctorate in Art History, is a Concordia University Research Chair in Indigenous Art History and Community Engagement and an independent curator. Recent major projects include the creation of the first nationally touring exhibition of contemporary Nunatsiavut art, *SakKijâjuk*, and the reinstallation of the permanent collection of Inuit art at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

Jocelyn Piirainen

is an emerging curator with a growing interest in contemporary Indigenous art. Piirainen recently participated in the 2016 Asinabka Film & Media Arts Festival and SAW Gallery's inaugural Indigenous Curatorial Incubator program. Her recent exhibition *Neon NDN* (2016) at SAW Gallery showcased Indigenous pop art.

Heather Igloliorte: So Heather, you are working at the National Gallery. What is your job there?

Heather Campbell: I am the Curatorial Assistant with Indigenous Art. I'm there on a contract position until the first week in April.

HI: How is that going?

HC: It's busy! I was there four years ago during *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art*, but this is different because we're reinstalling the Canadian and Indigenous Galleries—or as Greg [Hill, the NGC's Audain Curator of Indigenous Art] likes to call them, the Indigenous and Canadian Galleries—and it's a lot of work. But it's interesting to see how they're truly trying to incorporate Indigenous art into the galleries and have a conversation with the rest of the collection.

HI: So what part is it that you are working on?

HC: Mostly loans, because the gallery doesn't have an extensive collection of older [artifacts and works], so it's trying to borrow from a lot of other institutions [and collectors] across Canada, the United States and Britain.

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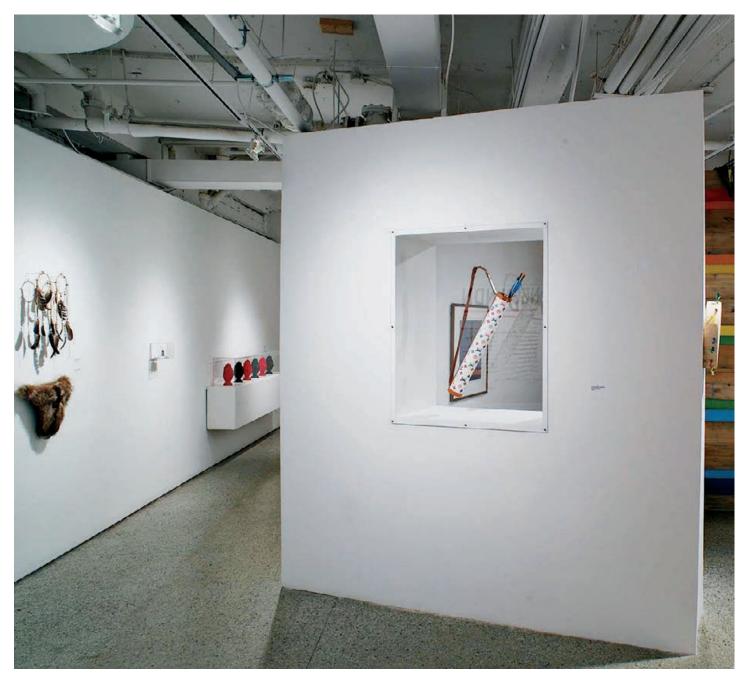
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Installation view of works by Kent Monkman *in Neon NDN*, curated by **Jocelyn Plirainen**, at SAW Gallery in Ottawa, 2016 Courtesy Galerie SAW Gallery ΔεΡ⁵ΔΔ4⁶⁰ CdንÞr/Ltσ²⁰ _ΔንÞr/LtΔ²⁰ Č²/L **P² LPΓ**⁴⁰ CΔδ⁵L⁷ σ⁴⁰ NDN, _Δ⁵Vd⁴r/Ltσ²⁰ bL²Þ2⁴⁰ **\$³Ca Å\$Δσ⁴⁰**, CΔbσ \ Cd7L⁵δ⁴⁰ dD⁴Γ, 2016 Dσ5⁴L Þ⁵δ-LL³L \ Cd7L⁵δ⁴⁰



We could see a whole new approach to curatorial practice emerge that we haven't seen yet, because there's this whole world of Inuit who don't think like other artists or curators. — Heather Igloliorte

HI: So it's a curatorial position with heavy administrative responsibilities.

HC: Exactly. Spreadsheets—very exciting [laughter].

HI: And what about you, Jocelyn, what are you working on now?

Jocelyn Piirainen: There are a couple of proposals [for future exhibitions] that I've just finished up, but I've mostly been working for the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and trying to work with the Canadian Film Institute, here in Ottawa, and some of the smaller film places here. I also love film and I do want to continue curating too, but just trying to find that balance, and, you know, I'm still learning a lot.

HI: Your degree is in film studies? I think you told me before that you were really interested in curating media art, trying to blend those two things together.

JP: Yes, my degree is in film studies. And definitely, from working on *Neon NDN*, taking that on and seeing what other contemporary Indigenous art is out there and what all these different emerging artists are coming out with; it's really exciting. And very different too!

HI: How was it that you came to work on *Neon NDN*?

JP: It was honestly just luck [*laughter*]. I was working with the two guys that run the Asinabka Film & Media Arts Festival, Chris Wong and Howard Adler. I had worked with them in the previous year for Asinabka. They did a whole curatorial incubator program, and they asked me to be their curator for the next year—

HI: To be incubated!

JP: Pretty much!

HI: They insert you into this incubator and you come out a fully formed curator on the other side *[laughter]*. Was that funded by either the Ontario Arts Council or the Canada Council for the Arts?

JP: It was the Ontario Arts Council. And it was full-on. They had that idea of doing kind of pop art. They had been cultivating that idea for a while, they just didn't find the right moment, and, again, it just kind of all fell into place, and I'm pretty happy about it.

HI: And what was your experience like during the show? SAW Gallery is not a museum, they're a digital art space, so it sounds like a good first fit. **ዘΔጋ Δ'_>ר>[%]በ:** CΔLר ኣഘ[®]ህሻ^{®®}/Lלס[®] bLኦϷ'_>ס Δ[®]bםΔאלג'_>ן Ϸם[®]<^c በበናרגאגל⁶ ש² ለאילו^c.

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HI: Did you find that you had a lot of support, or were you kind of figuring it out as you went along?

JP: They were definitely supportive. They have always been supportive before as well, as an alternative space.

HI: I didn't get to see it in person, but I read a couple of reviews and the pictures looked amazing. Heather, did you see it?

HC: No, I have no life now that I have a kid [*laughter*]. Seriously though, even at the gallery I'm always sitting at the computer. Half the time I don't see what's actually in the galleries! I've been down in the vaults twice, I think, since July.

HI: So what are you enjoying working on now at the NGC then?

HC: I think the acquisitions part is the most fun. I'm hoping that I'll be able to stay on a bit longer, so I can actually engage in those conversations about what's new and coming up and what they're thinking they might bring into the gallery to compliment what's already in the collection. It's kind of fun to see what's coming up in the near future.

HI: I wonder if you're the first Inuit employee at the National Gallery.

HC: I don't know! I was wondering that myself.

HI: You might be. I can't think of any [others]. Certainly you've got to be one of the only Inuit, if not the only.

HC: Geronimo [Inutiq] was doing something there last year; what was he doing?

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HI: Oh yeah! Geronimo was cataloguing and archiving work for the Igloolik Isuma Video Archive that [the gallery] acquired, doing the time coding and so on. They have this massive [collection], including many of their VHS tapes and recordings. It was a big job, and I think it was funded through Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage.¹ And I think, Jocelyn, that you are only the second Inuk to ever have a curatorial residency, because, I think, I was the first with *Decolonize Me* at the Ottawa Art Gallery in 2011.

JP: It's really surprising. I don't know why that is.

HI: I think there are different factors. I mean Heather was a curator [with the Inuit Art Centre]. July Papatsie was probably the first, and then Barry [Pottle] was also a curator there briefly.

HC: Actually, at the centre, just the structure of it—they had one curator for the First Nations side of the Indian and Inuit Art Centres, but they didn't have an official curator for the Inuit side. So I was technically a curatorial assistant, even though I often did the work of a curator. That's how I ended up going to that Aboriginal Curatorial Collective meeting.²

HI: What year was that? When were you there?

HC: I was there from 1999 to 2005.

HI: I think that's how we first met, right? I was a grad student at Carleton and I came to do research, and you helped me find some stuff in the archive. Does that sound familiar?



HC: Probably! Oh, yeah [laughter].

HI: How was it, curating at INAC?

HC: I think I was really lucky that they gave me a lot of leeway. My own interest then, and now as well, is art therapy. I have always been really interested in that idea. Some artists would tell me it was almost a spiritual thing, that there was a meditative aspect to Inuit art. And that was something I have always gravitated towards, trying to see what those ties are. We all know that there are a lot of issues back home and up North, but there's this idea that art is something more than just "making", that there's more importance there than we realize. Installation view of works by Sonny Assu in *Decolonize Me*, curated by **Heather Igloliorte**, at the Ottawa Art Gallery in 2012 Courtesy Ottawa Art Gallery Photo David Barbour Δ

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HI: That was 12 years ago. So now there's at least three of us! Why do you think there are so few of us when, if you look over the last 20 years, there has been such an increase in the number of First Nations and Métis curators, art historians [and] museum staff, [and] even though we have as many, if not more, artists per capita?

HC: Well you have to be comfortable in an urban centre—to really be able to adjust to and work in this environment. Even for me, it wasn't something that I thought I was going to do. I just ended up being at the centre and helping out with writing and it sort of morphed. But I would consider myself an artist first and everything else second. And then it's nerve-wracking when you have to talk about someone else's work and you're reading things into it. It's always a tricky thing to talk about someone else's work.

HI: I think that's true. One major barrier is a lack of access to places that you could even go and work or train or study.

JP: I'm finding that [having an] art history background definitely is one of the factors that can be an issue for young curators. Even though I don't really have an art history background either, a little art history background really does help. Even [for me], trying to learn all these different mediums and who came from where, it definitely helps.

 $\mbox{HI:}$ It's a big part of it, right? And if you don't live somewhere where you can go to art school—

JP: If you don't have that language—that knowledge of language—when writing a curatorial statement, it can be a little difficult.

HI: It's like grant writing! Grant writing is its own particular style of writing, its own special kind of literacy. If you don't know how to write for an art audience or for catalogues that's a huge barrier. I think you can get really interesting perspectives when people are not writing out of an art historical training, but it is a challenge.

JP: I feel like that is what a lot of museums and institutions are looking for—that background.

HI: Exactly, they want to see letters after your name or lines on a CV. It's hard to break into this when there's nowhere in the North to get your foot in the door—there are so few colleges or cultural centres where Inuit could even get an entry level position. I think the other part of it is that the art museum/ academic world doesn't understand what life is like in the North, or what life is like for Inuit who live in the South and how Inuit culture is different, how Inuit think a little differently than southern Canadians.
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ጵነረ^ዉ ለናΔσ^Δ: CΔL^eΦ.) ϷʹϧϲϷʹͽ ʹϧϷλͰ^e⁴⁶⁴σ - Ϸα ʹϧϷλͰσ^ͼϷ΄ϧϷλεσ^ͼ ϷʹϧϷλεσ⁶. በበናίσσίωσ ኣα³ህσ⁶/Lלσ⁶ ϧLλϷ[<] ϷίϧϷλ²⁶⁶⁶⁵, Λϧίσ²⁴⁶²⁶.

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፟ታ፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞፞ዾኇ፟፟፟፟፟፟ አ፟፝ ፟፟፟፟፟፟፟፟፟ አይላ"ል ዾጚ ⁶ የσ⁶⁹², CĽ⁹d4 ⁶ ነው Δ ር^{*} ሀር ኦን የ ኦን የ ⁶

But that could actually be a benefit; it doesn't have to be a barrier. We could see a whole new approach to curatorial practice emerge that we haven't seen vet, because there's this whole world of Inuit who don't think like other artists or curators. I think it would be great to have more Inuit curators because, to date, most exhibitions have been produced by gallunaat [non-Inuit], and it would be really good to have more balance in our field. Sometimes, I feel like my job is just filling in gaps, writing survey texts or providing overviews, and I'm bored of that kind of work. I want to do new, critical work-work that emerges from Inuit knowledge and perspectives. I don't get to talk to people like you very often and talk about things that are really Inuit-specific. Most of my colleagues are First Nations or Métis or qallunaat, so I can't really dig in and say, "What is an Inuit way to be a curator?" I can sort of write about it myself, and read and talk to elders and develop a philosophy, but I really wish I had more Inuit colleagues to bounce ideas off.

HC: I know what you mean, because you're always bridging a gap as the only Inuk in the room. I have a BFA, and sometimes at the NGC I wonder, "What am I doing here?" I also did the [Inuit Art Foundation]'s CITP [Cultural Industries Training Program]. We went to Carleton, where Maureen Flynn-Burhoe taught us Inuit art history. That was the first time I had really had exposure beyond *Inuit Art Quarterly*. So now I feel like I'm at this crossroads where I'm asking, do I pursue curating? And what else do I need to do to really be at that level?

HI: I still find that there are panels and discussions on Inuit art that you see advertised and there's no Inuit. You could never do that with First Nations or Métis artists—have a conversation about First Nations artists and not have First Nations people speaking about the art. But because of the expense of travelling people, or whatever the reason is, they do it with Inuit art. Which is mind-boggling to me. But there's not enough people to critique it.

HC: I also think with First Nations and Métis artists, they're [perceived of as engaging with more] conceptual art and so much of Inuit art is still [seen as] very "traditional". In the past, institutions have leaned towards very culturally focused [presentations], instead of maybe highlighting the more conceptual aspects of it. وبرطف ۳۹۹ مېږې کې۳۹۵ ۵۵۵ کې د ۲۹۹۳ کې ۵۹۹ کې کې ۵۹۹ کې کې د ۲۹۹ کې کې د ۲۹۹ ᠴ᠋᠋Ċ᠋᠋Г৽ ᠕ᢉ᠊᠋᠋ᠺ᠋ᡗᢦᢞ᠋᠋ᡄ᠉᠋ᢕᢐᠣ᠅ ᢕᢐᠴ᠋᠉ᢣᡆ᠑ᡧ᠉ᢣ᠘ᢣ᠋ᠵᢣᠴ᠋ᡗ᠕᠆᠇᠘ᡷ ۲٬۵۹۲ ۲٬۵۹۲ ۲٬۹۹ Δ /Lⁱ+ ℓ /6°C^c Δ /L^b/D^c Δ ^b/ Δ ለ⊳Ⴑታኈጋኈ ∆_⊳ር'bb°σ?σ ∖_∿ປ⊲፨ረLላው bLትው ለኦላበՐ'_J, CL'Γь ᡩ᠋᠋ᡗ᠋᠋ᢪᢣ᠘ᢣᠫ᠘᠋᠋ᠲ᠋ᠴ᠉᠆ᡬᡰᢣᠧ᠆ᡁ᠘ᢞᠵ᠅᠘ᢣᠧᢛ᠅᠘ᡁ᠘ᢣᠼ᠅᠘ᡁ᠘᠘᠘᠘᠘᠘᠘ ᡃ᠋ᡃ᠋ᡰᠣ᠘᠆᠋᠋᠋᠋᠋ᡶ᠆᠋᠋᠋ᢁ᠘᠘᠋᠆ᢧ᠘᠙ᡐᡀ᠆᠉᠘ᠺ᠋᠋᠕᠘᠘᠋ᢆᠴ᠘᠘᠋᠕᠘᠘᠋ᢆᠴ᠘᠘᠘᠋᠕᠘᠘᠋ᢆᠴ᠘᠘᠘᠋ ነάሊጋJ. ለርሊላĽላኈሁ ወĊσካ, ለ፟፟፟፟፟፟ ለ፟፟፟፟፟፟፟፟፟፟፟ አይትካንም, ነዉንና ነነዋጋው CĹኈሁና ΔወΔና ⊲dᡄ᠘ᡃᡗ᠋ ᢦᡃᡫᠴ ▷ᡃ᠔▷ፖሊጋՐ' Δ_⁰Γ▷ϹᡃᡄĊσʰ. ርLነℾʰ ኣգʻ₺በቦፇ₺ ⊲ᡃᡄ᠘' ۹^μLے ۹^μدΔ[%]υζ^c Ϸ^μΨϳ⁶⁶ ⁶⁶ ⁶⁶ ⁶⁶ ⁶⁶ P^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} e^{μ} ዮረ⊲σ ርΔLc ለላLLン⊲%ጋ∿Ⴑ Δ೨∿σి ላՉነ6በነ66°σነጋ∿Ⴑ Δ%62Δ۶%በርነ6ነጋσ ∧לו כ⊳ה יו∩ריווירית⊲ייר

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I'm finding that {having an} art history background definitely is one of the factors that can be an issue for young curators.

— Jocelyn Piirainen



I feel like I'm at this crossroads where I'm asking, do I pursue curating? And what else do I need to do to really be at that level? — Heather Campbell

HI: I sometimes wonder if the reason [for that] is because the curators don't expect it or encourage it, or because the market is so dominant that it doesn't create the kind of conditions that would encourage the development of more conceptual art. I think that it's at least partly because Inuit artists are not participating in the public funding system in the same way that First Nations, Métis and other Canadian artists are. I think you're right, it leads to these two different kinds of production.

So Jocelyn, what's next for you? Did you say you just put some applications in?

JP: I applied for a contract curatorial position. It was kind of a last-minute thing, but I decided to do it anyways. A learning curve that I'm still trying to get the hang of is proposal writing. Just kind of coming up with those ideas and doing something different and new.

HI: Like, what is a different way of curating new Inuit art? What is new Inuit art?

JP: Exactly, that whole idea.

HI: Well, I am so grateful to you both for meeting with me to discuss our experiences as curators, and I am so glad to see our numbers growing! As my friend Alethea [Arnaquq-Baril] recently said in a Facebook post, we are at a point now where we need Inuit leadership, not just in politics but in every area where Inuit are involved, and the arts are such a huge part of our communities and culture, it is so great to see us beginning to grow and thrive.

Image: Image and the second seco

This conversation took place on Thursday, February 9, 2017, in Ottawa, ON. It has been edited and condensed.

NOTES

- 1 Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage: a multi-media/multi-platform re-engagement of voice in visual art and performance is a York University-based Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Partnership Grant led by Principal Investigator Dr. Anna Hudson
- In April 2005, the Aborginal curatorial community came together to establish themselves as the Aborginal Curatorial Collective / Collectif des commissaires autochtones (ACC/CCA) to develop long-term strategic support for the Indigenous curatorial community, holding a roundtable discussion in June 2005. ACC/CCA, About, accessed April 5, 2017, acc-cca.com/wordpress/about/.

ΗΔϽ Δ·ͻϲϷʹͽՈ: Δέ°σ·ͽϤ ΔϟϹʹͽ·ϹͽϽͽυ ϹΔϹͽ ΛϟϤϳͽ;Ϟ [CLJJ%b] ለነረሀርጉጋን Pdd ነፈ%ህረ‰ረГረታ% PL>Pሩ ወጥ PL» (በ%ררק) ۵-ک^و ۹-۲ کا ۲۰۷ الد که ۵-۷ الد ۲۰۱۲ که ۲۰۷ ک <u>አ</u>ፈ∾ህ⊲[™]ፖL⊀[®]ፈ[®]ጋσ[®]. Δ/L⊀[®]ሁ ለኦ⊀C▷⊀[®] CΔL[®]ፈ▷[⊆]⊃σ Δ_ב[®]ሁ Δ_ΩΔ^α Ϟ<u>ϫ</u>ͽϑϤͽͶͼͺϘϚϷ_ͼϧϲϯͳϹͺϘͽϲϳͽͼͺϧϭϧͽ;ϧϧ;ϧϧ;ϲϧϫ ۹٬۵۵ ۵٬۵۰ ۵٬۵۰ ۵٬۵۰ ۵٬۵۰ ۵٬۵۰ ۵٬۵۰ ۵٬۰۰ ΠΡΡΠ/Lϲʹϧ·ϹʹͽϽ· ϹͽͿͽͽϧ Ϲ;ϧϫϿͼ ϥϧϧϥͼϧϲϲϽϿͼ ϒϭϷϧϥϢϷ

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NOTES



Installation view of Johnny Aculiak: Perseverance curated by **Heather Campbell** at the Indian and Inuit Art Centres in Gatineau, 2002 Courtesy Indigenous Art Centre at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada ΔεΡ⁵δΔζ[®] Cd۶Ρ/Lζσ⁸ ኣΔγΡ/Lζσ⁶ Ċ⁻/L [†]σ ddc-d[®]: /ζ⁵/Δ[®]/Lζ^c ኣΔ^{*}/Jd[®]/Lζσ⁶ bL³ **HΔD b[<]>** d⁺CΔ^c d⁴L₂ Δ_ΔΔ^c [†]Δ^{*}/Jd[®]/Lζσ Δ^c(ΛΛ⁴) Č(Λ₀, 2002 σσ³/L₀ Δ_α^{*}b⁶^{*}/L^c^c [†]Δ^{*}/Jd[®]/Lζσ^cΛδ⁴/L ΔΔ⁶ Δσ^cΛ²b⁴/b⁴ bac.

