

# *Nagvaagtavut: What We Found -* The Audio Guide for *INUA*

by Heather Igloliorte



Qaumajuq, the new Inuit art centre at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG), opened March 26–27, 2021, with a powerful two-part special event that was both televised and streamed live by thousands of people across Canada and internationally. The virtual opening was followed by the physical opening of the new space to the local public, using careful social-distancing protocols by offering time-ticketed visits to Manitobans. It was not the all-weekend, jam-packed opening celebrations I imagined when I first began working on the inaugural exhibition of the new space, *INUA*, back in 2017; but with the benefit of time to plan during the pandemic, with an amazing group of colleagues, the guidance of elders and artists, and the incredible Indigenous production company Eagle Vision, I think the virtual opening of Qaumajuq was one of the most moving, beautiful events I've ever witnessed. Still, we knew that due to travel restrictions, for at least the first half of the exhibition run, the majority of our audience for *INUA* would be virtual.

That is why we decided early on that we should prioritize the creation of a strong and complementary online presence for *INUA*.

The title of the exhibition—which I co-curated with asinnajaq, Krista Ulujuk Zawadski and Kablusiak—refers to *inua*, meaning spirit or life force. It is also an acronym conceived by Krista and her anana, Maggie. *INUA: Inuit Nunangat Ungammuaktut Atautikkut* translates to “Inuit Moving Forward Together.” We made Inuit collaboration and collective futurity a broad theme, but we didn't just draw upon this idea to select artworks. Rather, it also became the ethos that we brought forward throughout the project on multiple fronts. In one major manifestation of these efforts to work together, we brought artists into conversation with one another from across Inuit Nunaat, so that the national borders between Alaska, Canada and Greenland were deprioritized and our collective peoplehood highlighted instead. We also formalized this theme as our way of working as co-curators, agreeing early on



OPPOSITE  
**asinnajaq, Nicole Luke, Kablusiak and  
 Krista Ulujuk Zawadski** install wallhangings, 2021  
 ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE WINNIPEG ART GALLERY  
 PHOTO CALVIN LEE JOSEPH

ABOVE (LEFT)  
**INUA** installation at Qaumajuq, 2021  
 PHOTO DAVID LIPNOWSKI

that all decisions would be made by Aajiiqatigiinniq (through discussion and consensus), and we actively recruited Inuit into other key roles within the project, with the general aim of making this the most Inuk-led exhibition to date that we knew of.

Jocelyn Piirainen, the first-ever Inuk curatorial staff member at the WAG who was hired in 2018, was brought on board as our extraordinary project manager and ongoing collaborator. The exhibition design was created by Nicole Luke, an architect who recently graduated from the Master of Architecture program at the University of Manitoba, and perhaps the first Inuk exhibition designer to date. We were fortunate to work with early childhood educator (and recent University of Winnipeg graduate) Kayla Bruce, who developed educational youth programmes that will run in person and virtually throughout the year. We are also working with Inuk graphic designer Mark Bennett, who began by designing the exhibition title and labels and who is now designing the forthcoming catalogue. All the aforementioned Inuit have been invited to also contribute to the catalogue, along with Theresie Tungilik, who is a WAG board member, Indigenous Advisory Circle member and senior arts administrator, and who has been guiding the opening of Qaumajuq at a high level since before ground was even broken.

We have also been working with the training and mentoring initiative I direct, Inuit Futures in Arts Leadership: The Pilimmaksarniq/Pijariqsarniq Project, to develop a multivocal audio guide. Co-created by the curators, exhibition team, artists and the more than 20 Ilinniaqtuit (postsecondary students) currently working across this project; *Nagvaagtavut: What We Found* is an all-Inuit and Inuvialuit co-created audio guide—organized by Inuit Futures staff members Danielle Miles and Jasmine Shira, and copy-edited by Ilinniaqtuk Tiffany Larter—that accompanies the 360-degree virtual tour of *INUA* by showcasing Inuit and Inuvialuit voices, and sharing many diverse perspectives on the works in the exhibition.



As of June 1, 2021, visitors to wag.ca are able to “walk around” the 360-degree virtual exhibition; learn about the artists’ histories and biographies via a partnership with the *Inuit Art Quarterly*; watch the panel talks, artist interviews and workshops that will happen throughout the exhibition run and also engage with the audio guide, *Nagvaagtavut: What We Found*. The audio guide, which includes Inuktut translations for all entries, was named by Inuit Futures leadership team member and mentor Taqralik Partridge and PhD candidate Krista Ulujuk Zawadski. To create the audio guide, Inuit Futures, linniaqtuit and team members met, discussed and shared with each other “what we found” as we explored creative ways of engaging with individual stories and artworks through sound, music, memory, language and food.

Just as the exhibition draws attention to the changing seasons on the land and intersecting relationships between Inuit across Inuit Nunaat, the audio-guide entries in *Nagvaagtavut: What We Found* are distinct and varied, yet unified, much like the Alutiiq, Inuit, Iñupiaq, Inuvialuit, Kalaallit, Yup’ik and other distinct groups of the Inuit family around the circumpolar Arctic. The contributors, much like the 91 artists in the show, share their keen and cutting observations, wry Inuit humour and joyfulness, and perspectives on where we come from and where we are going. The entries are diverse; some of the linniaqtuit wrote art-historical analyses, while others wrote personal reflections; some wrote about community histories while others responded to the artworks with poetry and prose.

ABOVE  
**Suzannah Igloliorte**  
 (b. 1917–1992 Apvitok)  
 —  
*Purse*  
 n.d.  
 Tanned hide, fabric and beads  
 21 × 26 × 5 cm  
 PHOTO DAVID LIPNOWSKI

OPPOSITE  
**Heather Igloliorte and  
 Jocelyn Piirainen, 2021**  
 PHOTO CALVIN LEE JOSEPH

Here we share some excerpts of a few of the wonderful and distinct audio-guide entries of *Nagvaagtavut: What We Found*, and we invite you to visit [wag.ca](http://wag.ca) to listen to the full guide, which will continue to grow throughout 2021.

**Couzyn van Heuvelen, *Sealskin Rug*, 2021**

I love a lot of things about Couzyn's multidisciplinary practice, such as the way he blends unconventional materials and subject matter together, as well as how he carries our traditions into contemporary times, but the thing I appreciate most about his work is how he plays with scale. The way he transforms Inuk materials is so exciting. These unassuming, perhaps everyday materials to some Inuit (like sleds, or seals or hunting tools) become emphasized, and their larger-than-life representation expresses to every viewer just how precious these objects are to Inuit. I also love imagining a seal of this size, and thinking of how many it would feed and clothe, and how revered it would be.

—KABLUSIAK

**Oviloo Tunnillie, *Woman's Torso*, n.d.**

This carving resonates with my own sense of self. It makes me think of my inner journey of understanding my own body and my own sense of self as a woman, and specifically as an Inuk woman. When I go up North, I have a certain freedom in presenting myself without Western conventional expectations of beauty. It doesn't matter what I wear, if I put on some weight or if I decide not to put on makeup. Rather, my experience is about the connections I have with family and community members, and the land. As soon as I get off the plane in Tio'tià:ke (Montreal, that is), I feel like I immediately lose that connection with the land. The focus is no longer on these connections, but on mere aesthetics—where my body is ascribed certain expectations.

—CHRISTINE QILLASIQ LUSSIER

**Gabriel Isaac Suarak, *Man Laying Out Seals*, c. 1974**

Gabriel Isaac Suarak's carving shows a hunter, bringing in a number of seals all by himself, in preparation for a feast. He may look to be lonely, but what we do not see is the large family and community members that one would imagine he will be sharing his catch with. Sharing food with others strengthens the bonds between family and community, as also shown in Megan Kyak-Montieth's stop-motion animated film, *Whale Hunt: I Think Everyone is Here*.

—JOCELYN PIIRANEN



**Gukki Nuka, *Kaalaralaaq*, 2009**

As a curatorial team we have been excited to include ceramics in the exhibition since the early stages of planning. Nuka's ceramic work is completely unique and exceptionally executed. This matte black vessel holds a beautifully sleek shape on its own. I imagine the shape being delicate shoulders and a slender neck. Atop the vessel Nuka has placed rows of small white figures that look like a cross between a spirit and a seal. These figures are placed in rows that are reminiscent of the Nuilarmiut; an essential piece of the Greenlandic costume. This remarkable piece is the first borrowed work that we unboxed in the gallery. It was the first artwork that we installed as a team, as such it gave me an incredible sense of inspiration for what we were about to accomplish. Simply for this fact this artwork will always have a special place in my heart.

—ASINNAJAO

**Lindsay McIntyre, *Ajjiingiluktaaqugut (We Are All Different)*, 2020**

The artist Lindsay McIntyre holds a space for every Inuk who watches this to embark on this journey alongside the bear and the speakers. When it comes to identity, belonging and connection to land, our stories allow us to engage with these questions, but in such distinct and definitive ways that are unique to us as individuals as well.

For instance, I am a Black Inuk woman, and while I have lived in my home community, I moved to the city when I was fairly young. The longer I was away, the more I would ask myself if I was even Inuk anymore? The more people pointed out my Blackness, the more I would question where I belonged. How could I, a mixed Inuk living in Ottawa, be Inuk away from my homelands? However, this is an ongoing reality for so many Inuit youth, it's important we hold space and conversation for these types of reflections as prompted by Lindsay's use of animation and audio.

—JAEALYN TERRIAK





**Bill Nasogaluak, *W.3-1258*, 2020**

*The Number*

Our names are powerful beyond measure  
A part of us that we continue to treasure

Inuit names foster respect and closeness  
We, Inuit, have always known this  
Named after our ancestors and elders  
Our names were not based on genders  
To ensure a long and healthy lifestyle  
This custom has been around for awhile

A custom passed down from generation to generation  
To ensure a strong foundation  
By cherishing our loved one's legacy  
Their spirit was passed down to become our identity

This tradition was the Inuit way  
We never imagined it would be taken away

In 1941, our names were replaced.  
While our faces displaced  
Not by different names, but by a number  
Eskimo identification Tags

Good intentions they say?  
I say name exemptions on display  
We also experienced  
Residential schools  
And our children put out as offers  
The sixties scoop

Our sons and our daughters  
Put in homes that were seen as better  
Imagine how much this upset her  
First her name taken  
And now her children  
How is this humane?! We exclaim  
To a government who chooses to blame  
We coped  
And hoped

But yet still saw our rights revoked  
We never fought  
We only sought  
For justice that was never brought  
Instead of a face to a name  
We now had a number that we became

Inuit names, but never numbers, fostered respect and closeness  
We, Inuit, have always known this

—JENNIFER QUPANUAQ

OPPOSITE

**Lindsay McIntyre**  
(b. 1977 Vancouver)

—  
*Ajjiigiingiluktaaqut (We Are All Different)*  
2020

Animation on S16mm to digital video,  
stereo sound and mixed media  
Dimensions variable

PHOTO DAVID LIPNOWSKI

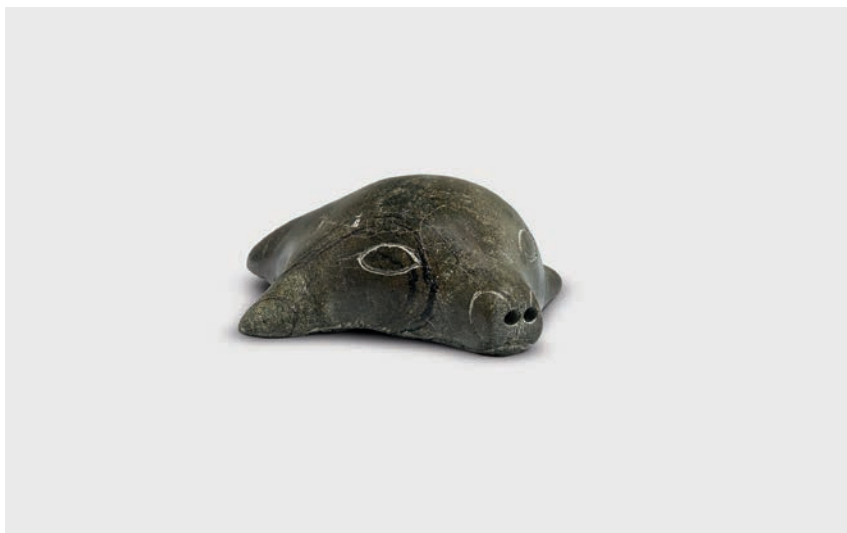
ABOVE

**Bill Nasogaluak**  
(b. 1953 Tuktuuyaatuq)

—  
*W.3-1258*  
2020

Green serpentine  
49 × 31 × 24 cm

PHOTO DAVID LIPNOWSKI



**Mary Pitseolak, *Seal Head*, 1968**

Natchiq natchiq I see you  
Peeking above the ocean waves  
Up for a breath of cold Arctic air

You see me too  
Standing upon the ice  
Seeing you

We are kin from long ago  
Connected through the sea goddess  
And the soot upon our knuckles

Natchiq natchiq you provide us so  
Food for our bellies  
Fur for our warmth  
Fat for our qullit

The works of art created from your fur  
are among the finest

For all that you give us  
I wish I had something to give

Yet

I meet you with respect  
As I meet other beings  
As I tend to your fur, meat, and fat  
As I speak and think of you

As I do now  
His little head natchiq natchiq  
Peaking above the waves  
Wandering the ocean  
Fingers of the sea goddess  
Kin of long ago

—TIFFANY LARTER



ABOVE  
**Mary Pitseolak**  
(b. 1931 Kinngait)

—  
*Seal Head*  
1968  
Stone  
5 × 14.5 × 14.5 cm  
REPRODUCED  
WITH PERMISSION  
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OPPOSITE  
**David Ruben Piqtoukun**  
(b. 1950 Paulatuk)

—  
*Airplane*  
1995  
Brazilian soapstone and  
African wonderstone  
26 × 36.5 × 27.5 cm  
PHOTO CALVIN LEE JOSEPH

LEFT  
**Jesse Tungilik**  
(b. 1986 Iqaluit)

—  
*Sealskin Spacesuit*  
2020  
Sealskin, sealskin  
leather, beads  
Dimensions variable  
PHOTO DAVID LIPNOWSKI



David Ruben Piqtoukun, *Airplane*, 1995

People in the Western Arctic will reminisce about their youth, even about the order that they were picked up in the plane to be taken to residential school. As a plane ride was more of a novelty back then. Some Inuvialuit would even spend five dollars at the trading post that would become Aklavik to fly for just a few minutes. But the stories stop there, no one will talk about what happened "at school" and no one will ever ask. This is the story depicted here by David Ruben Piqtoukun's *Airplane*, the abduction of children by the Canadian government. From their homes, the Igloo; onto the airplane and away.

—TOM MCLEOD

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NOTES

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OOLOOSIE SAILA Untitled, 2021