

***Inuit Art in Canadian and Indigenous Art: From Time Immemorial to 1967*, National Gallery of Canada, Permanent exhibition, Ottawa**

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the Confederacy and the right to bear arms underscore American nationalism's roots in the oppression of others through settler property rights and the displacement and attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples, as well as entrenched systems of white power and militarism. Galanin's artwork also calls to mind historical colonial massacres, such as Wounded Knee, as well as the ongoing, genocidal violence carried out by police, military, and white supremacists (aka "white nationalists") against Indigenous and other marginalized peoples. By emphasizing what is at stake in the "American dream"—symbolized by the nation's flag—Galanin's artwork asks viewers to reconsider the complexities of nation-building in light of past and present atrocities, but also to contemplate how our understandings of history can help us to imagine more just ways of living together on contested territories.

Other Indigenous artists featured in the exhibition include Sonny Assu (Ligwilda'xw territory), Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory (Iqaluit), Scott Benesiinaabandan (Montreal), Jordan Bennett (Stephenville Crossing), Sonya Kelliher-Combs (Anchorage), Skeena Reece (Vancouver Island) and Travis Shilling (Rama First Nation). Together their work reflects the ways in which "Indigenous peoples have been protecting homelands; maintaining and revitalizing languages, traditions, and cultures; and attempting to engage Canadians in a fair and just manner for hundreds of years."⁸ Despite these efforts, our current situation reflects an urgent need to rethink our relationship with the land, its gifts, and each other. We are at an important crossroads akin to the Fifth World, where the very life sources in which we all share—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—continue to be degraded, exploited, contaminated, and capitalized upon. The works in *The Fifth World* remind us that Indigenous peoples have always demonstrated thoughtful and sustainable ways

of living, and that non-Indigenous peoples need to reconsider their relationship with the earth. Recalling the Hopi prophecy of "an impending choice between destruction and conflict"⁹—or, ostensibly, between life and death—*The Fifth World* shows us that Indigenous peoples made a choice long ago to respect the earth and we should follow them. ¶

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3. Wanda Nanibush, curatorial statement, *The Fifth World* (Kitchener-Waterloo, ON: Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, 2016).
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8. The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, ed., *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (Winnipeg: Arp Books, 2014), 21.
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Inuit Art in *Canadian and Indigenous Art: From Time Immemorial to 1967*

National Gallery of Canada
Permanent exhibition, Ottawa

Christina Williamson

As part of the Canada 150 celebrations taking place across the country, several national museums in Ottawa have overhauled their permanent exhibitions. For its part, the National

Gallery of Canada (NGC) has rehung the Canadian Galleries, now known as the Canadian and Indigenous Galleries, as part of a show of support for the reconciliation movement sparked by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). NGC touts the new permanent exhibitions—*Canadian and Indigenous Art: From Time Immemorial to 1967*, which encompasses art made in Canada from 5,000 years ago to today, and *Canadian and Indigenous Art: 1968 to Present*—as a significant shift for the institution.

First Nations and Metis art were introduced into the Canadian Galleries in 2003 as part of the permanent exhibition *Art of this Land*, but Inuit works remained in NGC's basement in the Prints and Drawings Gallery, where the curator of Inuit art was also assigned. Historically, NGC resisted collecting Indigenous art, because it considered it craft and therefore the purview of the National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of History). In the 1980s, however, NGC began to systematically collect Inuit works of art, thanks to the active lobbying of the Canadian Eskimo Art Council (CEAC).¹

For Canadians and visitors alike, NGC plays a role in defining the officially embraced national story of Canada. Bringing Inuit art out of the basement thus represents a step towards challenging settler notions



Installation shot, *Canadian and Indigenous Art: From Time Immemorial to 1967*, 2017, National Gallery of Canada. Photo: Christina Williamson.

of what constitutes art within this narrative. Yet, as Steven Loft notes,

“Although there is a growing recognition of Indigenous artistic practices within Canadian museums [...] this inclusion continues to be contingent upon a relationship with the ultimately unshaken art-historical hegemony.”² Nearly thirty years earlier, Lee-Ann Martin similarly described this process as “soft-inclusion,” whereby settler museums and galleries merely incorporate Indigenous artworks into mainstream exhibitions.³ The result of soft-inclusion is a “settler move to innocence” in which settlers feel gratified by the work they have done while failing to dismantle or critically consider the colonial structures that perpetuate and maintain the oppression of Indigenous peoples.⁴ To get beyond this, NGC must not merely absorb Inuit art into the existing national story, but create a dialogue between Inuit and non-Inuit works. In this regard, *From Time Immemorial* to 1967 is, at times, a success, as it occasionally creates a vibrant dialogue between Inuit and other works. At other times, it isolates Inuit art, even when it is displayed in the middle of the room—an irony, indeed.

The most successful aspect of the exhibition is the stunning opening room. Here, Inuit art is placed in conversation with ancient, pre-contact, and contemporary artworks from different Indigenous nations. The works are curated in a way that declares the unequivocal reality of both persistence and change in Indigenous art practices across Canada.⁵ For example, Dorset and Thule carvings are juxtaposed with Tim Pitsiulak’s drawing *Armoured Whale* (2014), while ancient ivory hair combs are mounted beside Germaine Arnaktauyok’s large-scale textile work *Combs of our Ancestors* (2009). The Inuit works border the opening room, which is organized around an Anishinaabe drum (1950) by Daniel Smith of Kitigan Zibii, whose work serves to remind—or inform—visitors that NGC occupies unceded Algonquin territory. Behind the drum sits Luke Parnell’s *A Brief History of Northwest Coast Design* (2007), a

large formline panel that is painted over or exposed to varying degrees, thus bringing the colonial history of Canada into sharp relief. Together, the works speak to each other across time and national difference, and the room offers a clear message about what Indigenous art in Canada was, is, and can be.

The presence of Inuit art is extensive in the second half of the exhibition, although there are some notable gaps. For example, the works of marginalized Inuit artists from Nunatsiavut are not as well represented as those from Nunavut, Nunavik, and Inuvialuit; this is largely due to the historic neglect of Nunatsiavummiut artists by both CEAC and NGC.⁶ Traditional Indigenous women’s work, such as beading, sewing, and quillwork, is represented, although NGC’s spotty collecting history means that much of this is necessarily on loan from other collections. The mounting of the one Inuit *atigi* (parka)—a replica of shaman Qingailisaq’s *atigi*—fails to acknowledge the historical and cultural significance of this particular piece. This is a good example of how the exhibition isolates some Inuit works: the parka provides an opportunity to discuss Inuit relationships with the land and animals, or Inuit conceptualizations of gender identity (the parka’s design is remarkable for blending male and female aspects together), but this has been entirely missed.⁷ Instead, the parka has been placed in a corner as a prelude to a discussion of Euro-Canadian depictions of winter.

In stark contrast to the isolation of Qingailisaq’s parka, the section devoted to Inuit sculpture and abstract painting creates a memorable dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art. This is an innovative choice for NGC, as the section shows that Inuit sculptors were modernist artists like their *nouveau-plasticien* and *automatiste* contemporaries. They are celebrated in this section as modern artists with a distinctly Inuk worldview.⁸ The nine Inuit sculptures

arranged in threes echo the aesthetic of the modernist paintings, particularly those of Claude Tousignant. This section was especially intriguing, because it relates to a time-period—the 1960s—when Inuit and non-Inuit modernists were frequently displayed and collected together.⁹ Nods to some unsuccessful federal art programmes are included, such as *Seated Man and Woman* (1960s), a Rankin Inlet ceramic by Eli Tikeayak, and a stone totem pole from Inukjuak.¹⁰

The Inuit prints in a nearby side gallery provide a brief overview of Inuit print and drawing history, and include the monumental works of Parr, the bold colour-work of Jessie Oonark, and the historically precise work of Helen Kalvak, among others. Moreover, the work of Peter Pitseolak represents the beginnings of the Inuit photography tradition, one that continues today. Though issues around conservation may explain why these two-dimensional works were separated from those in the main gallery, it nonetheless means that they say little in relation to other artistic traditions. This, together with the other sections, frames Inuit art as an aside to Canada’s story, rather than an equal part or challenger of it.

NGC’s decision to include labels in each artist’s Inuktitut dialect is a sign of an institution willing to make changes. In the final analysis, however, the exhibition merely underscores that the gallery still has work to do in addressing what Dale Turner and Audra Simpson call the “interpretive gap” between Indigenous and settler understandings of their distinct histories and responsibilities to this land.¹¹ While NGC has taken its first steps towards curating Inuit art in a way that acknowledges the agency, skill, and artistry of the artists on display, greater attempts must be made in the future to generate new methods of consultation and curatorial collaboration—methods that are decolonizing, respectful, and open-hearted—so that the work of Inuit as well as Indigenous and Metis artists

can engage with the national narrative on its own terms. ¶

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4. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, 1 (2012): 1–40; Ossie Michelin, "The Hard Truth about Reconciliation," *Canadian Art* (Summer 2017), 70–75; Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).
5. A quote on one wall of this room by David Ruben Piqtoukun eloquently centres the theme: "We have to grasp the wisdom of the old and introduce it to our present way of seeing."
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Érika Wicky
Les Paradoxes du détail: Voir, savoir, représenter à l'ère de la photographie

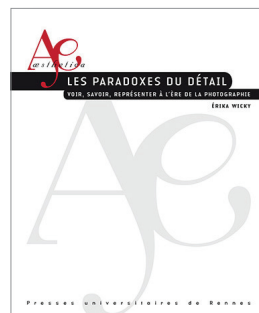
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Rennes, 2015

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Shana Cooperstein

Les Paradoxes du détail argues provocatively for the importance of "detail" in a variety of mid- to late nineteenth-century French discourses that depend/rely upon the comprehension of visual representations, including those related to aesthetics, history, sociology, and science. This intriguing book contends that the use of detail became a key rhetorical device upon which various representational, and, as a consequence, cultural, and epistemological, debates hinged. Although photography destabilized the connection of vision to knowledge by rendering detail with indifference to human perception, Wicky shows how detail became crucial to maintaining a connection between "seeing" and "knowing": the presence of detail also came to function as a criterion for "truth," navigating the complex relationship between "real" and "representation," and thus as a site upon which truth claims could be made and defended.

This is not the first time scholars have recognized the historical significance of detail. Wicky cites several book-length studies that have set a precedent for exploring visual and textual detail, such as those by Jean-Pierre Mourey, Daniel Arasse, and more recently, Anthony Wall and Marie-Dominique Popelard, as well as an anthology by Maud Hagelstein and Livio Belloi (to which Wicky contributed). Her research adds to these discussions by examining how multidisciplinary engagements with detail—above all, its reception—altered shortly after



the invention and popularization of the daguerreotype. "La photographie," Wicky claims, "a stimulé l'affirmation du détail comme outil théorique pour l'appréhension des images" (12). Although, as the text argues, this era increasingly relied upon details as a source of knowledge, too much detail flew in the face of time-honoured aesthetic standards based on idealism. Indeed, Wicky notes that while the focus on detail ostensibly conveyed more information about the object perceived, it also distracted the viewer from recognizing the *ensemble*, a concept valorized in the history of aesthetics that refers to seeing the whole or totality of an image.

Of course, the advent of photography transformed the history of image making. Art historians are well aware of how this led critics like Charles Baudelaire to conceive of photography as a mindless collection of individual details, lacking the focus and selectivity of paintings. Wicky notes how the problems with detail exceeded the discussions of photographic media, citing Baudelaire's warning against the "émeute de détails" that threatened a painting's compositional harmony. From connoisseur Giovanni Morelli's perspective, however, the impressive range and abundance of visual detail offered by photography warranted further scientific study.

Given the evocative ways photographic detail shaped both aesthetic debates and viewers' interactions with visual culture, it may come as a surprise that Wicky's book is one of the first to deal exclusively with the impact