

FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann, 2007 *Yuungnaqpiallerput. The Way We Genuinely Live. Masterworks of Yup'ik Science and Survival*. University of Washington Press, with Anchorage Museum Association and Calista Elders Council, 360 pages.

Marie-Pierre Gadoua

Volume 33, Number 1-2, 2009

Éducation et transmission des savoirs inuit au Canada
Education and transmission of Inuit knowledge in Canada

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044974ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/044974ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Inuksiutiit Katimajit Inc.
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (print)
1708-5268 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Gadoua, M.-P. (2009). Review of [FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann, 2007 *Yuungnaqpiallerput. The Way We Genuinely Live. Masterworks of Yup'ik Science and Survival*. University of Washington Press, with Anchorage Museum Association and Calista Elders Council, 360 pages.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 33(1-2), 266–269. <https://doi.org/10.7202/044974ar>

Island, she would have been nearer to an eyewitness testimony. Instead, she was left with what others remembered of the elder's account, no doubt coloured by their separate interpretations of the original version. After reviewing various opinions from both Inuit and Qallunaat on the fate of Franklin's expedition, Eber sighs, "There are no shortages of possible resting places for Franklin's wrecks" (p. 107).

If *Encounters* provides little startling new information on the age of Arctic exploration, it offers pleasurable and profitable reading. The limitations of oral history are recognised; and Inuit culture, including shamanism, is sensitively treated. Interesting modern Inuit drawings and historic illustrations supplement the text. Among the latter is John Sackheouse's informative and amusing depiction of the meeting of John Ross and Edward Parry with surprised natives at Prince Regents Bay in 1818. In it the Greenlandic artist/interpreter is assured of visual immortality by representing himself, attired in European jacket and derby, vigorously trading with his fellow natives. Entrepreneurship and vanity were not limited to the English.

H.G. Jones
Wilson Library
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill (NC), 27599-3930, USA
hgjones@email.unc.edu

FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann

2007 *Yuungnaqpiallerput. The Way We Genuinely Live. Masterworks of Yup'ik Science and Survival.* University of Washington Press, with Anchorage Museum Association and Calista Elders Council, 360 pages.

Written after a decade of close collaboration with Yup'ik elders, Ann Fienup-Riordan's *The Way We Genuinely Live* was created with a museum exhibition of the same name at the Yupiit Piciryarit Cultural Center and Museum in Bethel, Alaska (2007). The book and exhibition feature Yup'ik tools, techniques, and technical knowledge, in relation to what Fienup-Riordan calls "Yup'ik science": the technological, personal, and spiritual relationship of the Yup'ik with their homeland. In this way, descriptions of technology and spirituality—or science and art—are reconciled and harmonised throughout the book and the exhibition.

In her introduction, Fienup-Riordan explains the guiding principles of Yup'ik science through various anecdotes of her interactions with Yup'ik elders. One anecdote appropriately sets the tone of the book. At an early stage of her work, Fienup-Riordan suggested "technology" as the focus of the exhibition. This, in contrast to that of a previous exhibition on Yup'ik masks (*Agayuliyararput [Our Way of Making Prayer]*, 1996). She was "reminded politely but firmly that Yup'ik tools and technology were also 'our way of making prayer'" (p. 6). The book follows this premise and presents clearly and cleverly the interwoven spiritual and technological aspects of Yup'ik tools. Fienup-Riordan's introduction also provides a brief but

important presentation of the Yup'ik cultural landscape through an overview of the museum collections (from 13 museums in the USA and Germany) described later in further detail.

The book's organisation, suggested by Yupiit elders, follows yet another guiding principle. Instead of a conventional presentation of artefact classes, Fienup-Riordan assigns Yupiit artefacts to seasonal-use categories. Each chapter is richly illustrated with photographs that show Yupiit engaged in various seasonal activities and that relate to the featured artefacts. Appropriately, Yup'ik vocabulary is used extensively in naming objects, parts of objects, and abstract concepts. Throughout the body of the text, insets provide Western scientific explanations of Yup'ik technology, emphasising the connections between Western and Yup'ik science, although Fienup-Riordan argues both traditions are inherently complementary.

The first chapter, "The Moral Foundations of Yup'ik Science," centres on the personal relationships Yupiit enjoy with animals, marked by reciprocity and compassion, and governed by various restraints. Fienup-Riordan describes the ethics of, and motivations behind, sharing within the Yup'ik community. She further examines how these principles contrast with Western views on hunter-prey relationships and how this can conflict with dominant paradigms of resource management. She then develops this theme through a reflection on the divergent, if complementary, natures of Yup'ik and Western sciences, the former being based on observation and experience, directed toward function and outcomes, the latter being theoretical, law-seeking, and focused on hypothesis and explanation.

In another chapter, Fienup-Riordan describes a central actor in Yup'ik community life, and the place of the transmission of knowledge: the communal men's house (*qasgi*). She examines how young boys were taught in the *qasgi* the "moral foundations of properly lived life" (p. 39), along with the technological rules of their future lives as craftsmen and as providers for their families. Young boys would observe elders manufacturing and repairing tools, or building kayaks and sleds, and would carefully listen to simultaneous oral instructions on morals. Fienup-Riordan is intently interested in how technology and moral codes are intertwined among the Yup'ik. The construction of the *qasgi* is also detailed, as are the associated utilitarian and symbolic artefacts.

The remainder of the book follows much the same pattern, with detailed description of the Yup'ik spiritual and technological rules on manufacturing and using tools. Each stage of the Yup'ik seasonal cycle is described in terms of its key activities and associated artefacts. This includes the gathering of raw materials, and the functional aspects of fashioning the items. Rationales for the use of one material over another are also provided. The spiritual aspects of these technologies are omnipresent; descriptions of the rules, taboos, and superstitions on making and using Yup'ik gear provide much-needed context. Oral traditions recounted by the Yup'ik elders illustrate these spiritual aspects of their tools in grounded terms. These chapters provide elders' testimonials and Fienup-Riordan's descriptions and interpretations. Thankfully, the two narratives complement one another well.

“Working with Wood, Bone and Stone” describes activities associated with the *qasgi* in late February and early March; the procurement of raw materials, and the means of producing artefacts are well described. As always, the spiritual and symbolic associations of the artefacts are front and centre. For example, Fienup-Riordan discusses the personhood of wood, the rocks used as amulets, and the role of the mineral paints and decorations made from them. In “Kayak,” she describes in detail the building and refurbishing of kayaks during the spring, the gathering and preparing of the materials, and the measurement, manufacture, and assembling of the composite parts. She also notes the importance of the kayak in the construction of men’s identities. In “On the Coast During Spring,” she describes open-water kayak hunting of sea mammals, with elder commentary on potential dangers, survival principles, associated gear and techniques, and material items made from the sea mammals captured.

In “On Rivers During Spring,” the knowledge and gear needed to travel inland to hunt terrestrial resources (caribou, moose, bear, and squirrel), and the objects and garments made from the products of the hunt, are juxtaposed with coastal subsistence. “Those Who Are Going to Fish Camp” describes the summer abundance associated with Yup’ik fishing, including discussions of fishing with nets, cutting, drying, aging, smoking, fermenting, and storing of fish, and articles made of fish skin. Similarly, the following chapter, “Birds in Abundance” depicts the tools and techniques used to harvest waterfowl, the objects and clothing made from their skin and feathers, and the figure of the bird in oral tradition, beliefs, songs, dances, masks, and amulets.

The title of the next chapter speaks for itself. “Things Made From Grass” describes the fall activity of gathering grass in large quantities for construction of houses and the making of baskets, mats, cloth, and ropes. “Fall Hunting and Trapping” and “Fall and Winter Fishing” provide background information: ancestral knowledge and technology needed to travel in the snow; hunting gear and techniques used during this season; items made from the animals captured (fox, moose, and caribou); fishing during the fall with dip nets, hooks, and spears; instructions and prohibitions on the harvest and use of fish products; use of fish parts for amulets; and a sample of Yup’ik legends about fish. “In the Home” centres on women’s activities during the coldest months, such as preparing food and sewing skins, and the numerous household artefacts involved. Finally, “Sharing, Celebration, and Renewal” presents the feasting and sharing traditions of Yup’ik people, embodied in various ceremonies. Of particular note is the finely detailed Messenger Feast, held in the village of Kotlik in March 2003. Fienup-Riordan compares this event with earlier historic ceremonies; the tools and technology are slightly different, but the preparation, its value, and its guiding principles remain the same.

By offering an authentic and explicit account of Yup’ik customs, beliefs, and spirituality through the lens of their material tools, too often limited by anthropologists and archaeologists to subsistence activities, this book brilliantly accomplishes the mission of faithfully portraying the Yup’ik concept of *science*, or technology as a *way of making prayer*. Fienup-Riordan and the elders effectively demonstrate that Yup’ik technology, tools, and techniques regularly “express and affirm human relationships

and relationships between humans and animals in a uniquely Yup'ik way" (p. 343). For this reason, this book is of interest not only to material-culture researchers, but also to anthropologists wish to include material items in their studies of human relations. This book may also be of serious interest to archaeologists for whom material culture is primary research data. It should not be forgotten that archaeologists often tend to minimize the importance of the spirituality and worldview inherent in technology. In this sense, Fienup-Riordan's eloquent publication is a meaningful source for interpretation of material culture, whether for the study of contemporary groups or for the reconstruction of life ways and beliefs of past hunter-gatherers.

Marie-Pierre Gadoua
Department of Anthropology
McGill University
855 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, QC, H3A 2T7, Canada
marie-pierre.gadoua@mail.mcgill.ca

LAUGRAND, Frédéric and Jarich OOSTEN
2008 *The Sea Woman: Sedna in Inuit Shamanism and Art in the Eastern Arctic*,
Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 152 pages.

The publication *The Sea Woman* exists because of Raymond Brousseau's interest in Inuit art; so, although he is hardly mentioned in the book, this review will begin with him. Brousseau started collecting Inuit art in 1956 when he was only 18 and could ill afford such luxuries. But he continued to indulge his interest to the point that, at age 35, he found that it was really time to open his own gallery in Quebec City. As he puts it, his "addiction" to Inuit art grew worse because he now had opportunities to discover an ever-increasing number of exceptional works and to meet more people who shared his passion (Brousseau, pers. comm. 2009).¹ The gallery expanded to include three separate locations and in 1998 was finally reorganised into a single building that included a gallery, a storeroom, and a non-profit museum, which operated without government support. Some 100,000 visitors have viewed the permanent and temporary exhibits. The museum has also sponsored travelling exhibits of the Brousseau collection outside the country and has published related catalogues.

John R. Porter, director of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ), was impressed by the development and success of Brousseau's museum and exhibits. He made arrangements with the premier of Quebec and the president of Hydro-Quebec to purchase 50% of the museum and asked Brousseau to donate the other 50%. The MNBAQ received 2,635 original and important Inuit works of art and

¹ All of the information about Raymond Brousseau, his museum, and his commercial gallery were provided by emailed responses to my queries from Lyse B. Brousseau writing for her husband. Frédéric Laugrand was also very helpful and filled in some of the information on how the book was created and his collaborative work with Jarich Oosten.