

SHUVINAI ASHOONA: MAPPING WORLDS

FINAL DIDACTICS

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Shuvinai Ashoona: Mapping Worlds is organized and circulated by The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto

The exhibition is curated by Nancy Campbell, PhD, with assistance from Justine Kohleal, Assistant Curator, The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery

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Shuvinai Ashoona Mapping Worlds

Mapping Worlds presents a selection of works on paper produced by Shuvinai Ashoona over the past two decades. Ashoona was born in 1961, the daughter of the prolific figural sculptor Kiugak Ashoona (1933–2014). Her childhood followed a period of great upheaval in her community due to a decline in animal populations, the collapse of the fur trade and the centralization of Nunatsiarmiut (Baffin Island Inuit) in Kingait (Cape Dorset), which enabled a rapid increase in government control over education and development in the area. The greatest impact on Inuit society in the twentieth century was this shift from living off the land and moving between seasonal camps to settlement living, where survival depends heavily on wage labour and global economies.

In many of Ashoona's early drawings we see daily life in Kinngait, Nunavut, where she continues to live and work. These drawings extend a lineage of artistic practice beginning with her grandmother Pitseolak Ashoona (1904–1983) and continued by her first cousin Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016), who pioneered the representation of domestic life in Inuit drawing and printmaking. However, Shuvinai Ashoona has become best known for developing a personal iconography, ranging from closely observed natural scenes of her Arctic home to monstrous and fantastical visions.

Her imagery consists of human-animal hybrid creatures, women birthing worlds and barren landscapes that appear to be post-apocalyptic, taking inspiration from both the terrain of her Northern home and the pop cultural worlds of horror films, comic books and television. Ashoona's earthly and extraterrestrial drawings project the past and present into an otherworldly, almost prophetic future, standing in contrast to typical visions of "times to come," which often focus on violent clashes between humans and nature, humans and other humans, and humans and otherworldly invaders. By inviting us into her world, inner and otherwise, her work has become a vision for dialogue on the effects of climate change in the northern hemisphere, the role popular culture plays in Arctic communities and the ways in which lnuit art and artists are represented within Canada and abroad.



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From One Cape Dorset to Another

The West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative (est. 1959) and its art-making arm, Kinngait Studios, has been instrumental in developing a thriving arts community in the region capable of managing the international export of its artistic production. Like her grandmother, Pitseolak Ashoona, Shuvinai Ashoona sought an income through artmaking at the co-op, submitting her first drawing at the age of 25. This was the beginning of a prolific international career and ardent relationship with the studio and its many makers—a community that is the subject of many of Ashoona's drawings. William Ritchie, who has been a master printer at the studio since 1987 and became studio manager in 2010, recalls his wonder at the intricacy of Ashoona's early work, comparing the illusion of depth created by her numerous fine hatch marks to those found in the works of Renaissance artists Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516) and Pieter Breugel the Elder (1525–1559). The repetition of fine lines remains a signature of Ashoona's work today.

Describing her early landscapes—which portray infinite rock ledges retreating like stairs—Ashoona has said, "They led from one Cape Dorset to another." The expressive, circular composition of many of her drawings reflects Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, a body of knowledge that rests on a belief in the interconnectedness of all life. This idea has found expression in a number of her repeated motifs from eggs, tents and globes (not geographically accurate but "earth like and/or suitable for life") to rings of figures and faces with different skin tones and hair colours, represented hand in hand with animals and monsters alike.
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Points of View

Shuvinai Ashoona has described her process as open-ended and intuitive, as "not knowing what [a drawing] really means. Just making it appear." Superimposing drawings within drawings, she combines different viewpoints to show the past within the present or worlds within worlds. Her drawings approach subjects head-on or at an angle from above, causing the land to tilt across the page while figures on the ground often appear both as if seen from above and in profile. Only subtly playing with forced perspective, Ashoona creates the idea of distance through close cropping or through a figure in a crowd who looks up at us.

Satellite television came to Kinngait in the 1970s and immediately had a noted effect on local artists. Though Ashoona rarely offers a personal point of view on social or political conditions in her artworks, on occasion she has illustrated global and local crises seen in the media, which have impacted her visually and emotionally. The globe motif first appeared in her work around 2010 as an object birthed or embraced by peoples and tentacles alike. Shown as both an extension of bodies as well as food for consumption and the home of many beings, the globe signals a worldview that does not see nature and culture as dichotomous realms but as enmeshed. In 2011, Ashoona placed this globe icon in direct dialogue with environmental duress in images made in response to news coverage of the tsunami in Japan. Such works in her oeuvre show sensitivity to human fragility and an apt understanding of the connection between social and environmental crises.

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International Recognition

Inuit art has been slow to hit the radar of international curators and is often segregated from other Indigenous art in Canadian and international museums. Gradually, through the work of artists like Shuvinai Ashoona and Annie Pootoogook, whose drawings and prints challenge outdated expectations of what Inuit art should look like, Inuit artists are gaining international attention beyond the spheres of ethnography and anthropology.

Ashoona's collaborations with two Canadian artists highlight this shift in the spaces and discourses in which Inuit art is participating. In 2008, Ashoona collaborated with the painter John Noestheden, who lives and works in Hamilton, Ontario. Their project, *Earth and Sky* (2008), created for Art Basel in Switzerland, is a 50-metre-long banner reproducing a collaborative mixed-media drawing that combines Arctic landscapes and astronomical bodies. Ashoona also has an ongoing collaboration with the painter and sculptor Shary Boyle, from Scarborough, Ontario, who travelled to Kinngait Studios for a three-week residency in 2011.

Ashoona's work has been included in survey exhibitions such as *Oh Canada* at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (2012), curated by Denise Markonish, and Candice Hopkins' *Unsettled Landscapes* as part of the SITElines biennial in New Mexico (2014). Her artwork also features in publications like *Vitamin D2: New Perspectives on Drawing* (Phaidon, 2013). These recent inclusions of Inuit art in contemporary art conversations speak to the increased accessibility of material online and Inuit arts' presence in international exhibitions. Inuit art is constantly changing and adapting, like Inuit culture more broadly, and Ashoona's practice is pivotal to this change.

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West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative

When the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative and its art-making arm, today known as Kinngait Studios, was established in 1959, its members hoped it would become a vehicle for establishing locally owned businesses independent of the Hudson's Bay Company and Baffin Trading Company, which had been the area's sole importers and exporters for over five decades. The co-op was the result of an arts and crafts program initiated in Kinngait (Cape Dorset) by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Indian Affairs and Northern Development after 1966). The program was intended to create economic incentive for Nunatsiarmiut (Baffin Island Inuit) to make the transition from subsistence hunting and trapping to a wage economy in settled communities.

Artist James Houston (1921–2005) and his wife, Alma (1926–1997), first travelled to the Arctic in the 1940s, returning to Montréal with carvings. Encouraged by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild and grants from the federal government, the Houstons moved to Kinngait in 1956 to open the first studio, with the intention of developing a thriving arts and craft studio capable of exporting its own work. The Ashoona family is among the co-op's original members, and the subsequent generations of artists who have worked there.

A history of drawing within Inuit art may be found in incised patterns in stone, ivory and bone, however there was no precedent for printmaking in the region, which was introduced by the co-op and has been a staple of its program since its inception. Whereas the occupation of "artist" did not previously exist within the community, today a quarter of Kinngait's labour force works in the arts.

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Earth Transformations, 2012

Fineliner pen, coloured pencil and Conté crayon on black paper

Collection of Martha Burns and Paul Gross

Earth Transformations is one of many works completed by Shuvinai Ashoona between 2011 and 2014 that feature a globe. In the upper left is an aerial view of a community complete with wildlife: a walrus, a caribou and a lemming. A globe grows out of two human legs, complete with sky-blue toenail polish. Circling the legs are the tentacles of an octopus, which stretch through the lower half of the picture plane. Its arms are made of strings of globes topped with clawed hands that seem to be grasping for something. On the far right, an Inuk dressed in a traditional parka and kamiks (boots) is holding up a drawing—a picture-in-picture motif Ashoona commonly employs. The inset drawing shows a hunter holding a rifle and kneeling behind a stretched canvas, perhaps using it as a blind to camouflage himself. These two levels of images are an artistic gesture to the notion of worlds within worlds.

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To The Print Shop, 2013

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Paul and Mary Dailey Desmarais III

Shuvinai Ashoona has often depicted her path to Kinngait Studios, as seen here, and the various landmarks along the way in what is a relatively busy port city. She has commented on the energy she derives from her community at Kinngait Studios and has made many drawings depicting her time there, its convivial atmosphere and the various activities that occur inside. In particular, she has expressed how she cherishes the opportunity to work near and listen to the older women who converse as they draw.

*CD*つつ, 2014

Audience, 2014

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Paul and Mary Dailey Desmarais III

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Untitled (Birthing Scene), 2013

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Paul and Mary Dailey Desmarais III

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Composition (nude female), 2005-06

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Peter Goring

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Composition (Woman in Amauti), 2005/2006

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Peter Goring

Composition (Man), 2005/2006

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Diane and Robert Bezdikian

Composition (Man), 2005/2006

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Diane and Robert Bezdikian

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Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Diane and Robert Bezdikian

Composition (Woman), 2005/2006

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Courtesy of the Artist and Feheley Fine Arts

Composition (Woman), 2005/2006

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Courtesy of the Artist and Feheley Fine Arts

Composition (This is Me in My Coat of Many Colours), 2006

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Edward J. Guarino

CΔ۶Ϸ^{}Ϟ*ሥ⁵ውምቦ^cጋ⁵, 2017

۵LᲚ ᲘᲘႪჂᲘ ଏ୮ଏ₽ᡤ∽ ∩∩ႪჂᡤ <∆<<୮ Cơ५⊳∩୳~୰ଏ⊂™۲°๔Ⴊ๛ ๙๓५ ๙ഺ๛ כשי ו∩י

____`イダ[、]厂^b), 2010 ΔLー^b חח^いיンח אראראי חח^いיンח^c <Δ[<]<۲ ____

مـ*Δ*^c Δ°ά*?°b*^c, 2016

۵L᠆ᡃ חחײַכֹח אדאדאָ חחײַכֿה <۵<<ד כאירארייטאכײזײַטאַכײזײַטערײַזײַטאַראַ געראָד אַראָד

۵Lლ በበ፦ݢָח אַדאָאָרָה הַחָרָאָרָאָר אַבאָאָר אַבאָאָר אַבאָאָאַר Cdײאָאַראיישאַכײאַ בײּטָר TD אַבאָאיאַאַר אַבאָטיסי שאַנאאַנ

ርΔ৮Ϸ[>]ጚረና<u>ው</u>ምርጋጭ, (Lናቅ Δ.ώ ለርቃን ፈናረናΓ⁶), 2011

ΔLლ በበ፦ኃΛ, ΛΛ፦ኃΛϽΔ°ው «ΓϤΡΛ΄ ΛΛ፦ኃΛς <Δ<<Γ αμΓσι ααςΡκάςΩι

Untitled, 2017

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Allison and Damir Matic

Untitled (Woman Giving Birth to the

World), 2010

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of John and Joyce Price

Bear Mountain, 2016

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Stephanie Comer and Rob Craigie

The World in Her Eyes, 2011

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper TD Bank Group Art Collection

Untitled (Two People Cutting Seal), 2011

Fineliner pen, graphite and coloured pencil on paper Private Collection

ር⊿ᢣ▷᠈ᠵᠯᠬ᠖ᢡᡘᠺᠫᢛ, (᠘᠋ᠮᠵᡝ᠖ᠴ᠘᠖), 2010

۵L᠆ᡃ በ∩ייڬָח, חחייڬָחֻסַבּ אַדַּסְאָרָ חחייڬָחִי<ַבַיל כליגָאַחַראַיָּטַאַריאַראַדיַ פֿיאַ בּאַבאָ אַ אַי

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CΔ۶D^{}dCC*^{*}*b*^{*}*C*^{*}*C*^{*}*b*^{*}, (*L*^{*}*p*^{*} *ab*^{*}), 2010

۵Lლ በበ፦ኃበ, በበ፦ኃበጋፊ॰፬፦ «Г«?חֹלָם በበ፦ኃሰና<Ճ<ና ርሪናኣኦበርኦግህላር፦ፖ°ፊ፦ ﺧኣ.৬૮ «‹፦ኣ ۵«۲۲۰۰۰

*ᢗ᠘ᢣᢂ᠈ᢣ᠋ᡝ᠖ᡃᢞᡳᢈ᠑᠋ᡃ*ᢛ,ᢂ᠋ᡃᠴᡄ᠋᠋ᠬ᠋ᢦ᠘ᡃ᠋ᢞᠶᢈᠫ᠋᠋ᠬᡃ

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CΔ۶Ϸ^{}Ϟ*ሥ⁶ም[^]C⁵⁶, 2010

<u>۵</u>۲-۳ חח^יישׁס אדאאָר החיישׂח אדאאָר החיישׂח אדאאָר אַראאָראָ כאראארישאריישאריישאריישארייש גיס אראא

Untitled (two bears), 2010

Fineliner pen, graphite and coloured pencil on paper Lazarus Barnes Collection

Untitled (Two People Cutting Seal), 2011

Fineliner pen, graphite and coloured pencil on paper Private Collection

Untitled (two bears), 2010

Fineliner pen, graphite and coloured pencil on paper Lazarus Barnes Collection

Untitled, n.d.

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Marnie Schreiber

Untitled, 2010

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Marnie Schreiber

ל*bсс*, 2017-18

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Adjacent wall, from left to right:

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Ukulele, 2017-18

wood, paint Collection of Karen Schreiber

Untitled, 2013

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Michael Devlin II

Untitled, 2019

Coloured pencil on paper

Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery General Acquisition Fund

Composition (Fish, Baleen, Globes, and

Pebbles), 2018

Fineliner pen on paper Lynn and Gerald McMaster Collection

Posting Bones, 2015

Fineliner pen and graphite on paper Private Collection ᡬᠯ᠋᠋ᢛ᠋᠋᠋*ᠲᡄᡄᡄ*ᠧᠧ᠋

______), 2010

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*ር∆ᢣ⊳᠈*ᢣᡣ᠋ᡃᢧᢟᡗᠺᠫ^ᢛ, 2016

ΔLლ በበ፦ኃበ, በበ፦ኃበጋΔ°ഘ ዻΓዻዖሰኁຼ በበ፦ኃሰ <Δ<<Γ ርሪናኑዖበናምህላር፦ፖግም ፖር<ም ሪያ ላይ ነ ላይ ነ

Composition (Clams and Globes), 2010

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of John Cook

Untitled, 2016

Fineliner pen, graphite and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Stephanie Comer and Rob Craigie

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Sinking Titanic, 2012

Fineliner pen, graphite and coloured pencil on paper

Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Acquired with funds realized through the sale of Inuit prints, 2013–20

Sinking Titanic is the artist's interpretation of James Cameron's 1997 film on the world's most famous shipwreck-one of her favourite movies. In this image, as in the film, we see people fall from the sinking ship, screaming, with arms outstretched. Shuvinai Ashoona often weaves past and present together, combining representations of her own history with that of important figures and moments in the changing Arctic landscape over the last hundred years. The Nascopie, a Hudson's Bay Company steamship, which each summer from 1912 to 1947 brought "Crown, company and church" to the shores of Kinngait (Cape Dorset), played an important role in the development of trade in the area, resulting in a seasonal migration of local people to the shore for what they referred to as "ship time." The Nascopie, also the subject of other works by Ashoona, made 34 sailings to the Arctic before sinking in 1947, just off the coast of Kinngait. This local history perhaps heightens the relevance of all ship disasters for the artist, instilling a personal sense of loss.

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﴿^هەبەپلەخكە: كەنىڭ مەنىڭ مەن

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*C∆ᢣ⊳᠈*ᢣᡣᡃᢧᢨᡗ᠊ᢈᠫᢛ, 2017

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╡^ᡊ₽~[™]~LσĊ^C(₽<[™]⊃[™] σ^G*d⊂*[™] ⁵*└└*[™]), 2016

ΔLლ በበኈጏ፞በ ዻΓዻዖሰኁጏ በበኈጏ፞ሰና <Ճ<<୮ ርሪናኣ⊳በናፖ"ህ⊲ርኈፖ°ഘንኈ ኣ≫ቪዺ LΔΗ⊲ና

Composition (Attack of the Tentacle Monsters), 2015

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Paul and Mary Dailey Desmarais III

Composition (Hunting Monsters), 2015

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper

Collection of Oakville Galleries, Purchased with the Support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program, the cooperation of the Town of Oakville and the Elizabeth L. Gordon Art Program, a program of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation administered by the Ontario Arts Foundation, 2016

Untitled, 2017

Fineliner pen, ink and coloured pencil on paper

Collection of Marnie Schreiber

Composition (Red Headed Octopus), 2016

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Sabrina Maher

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Composition (People, Animals and the World Holding Hands), 2007–08

Fineliner pen and coloured pencil on paper Collection of Edward J. Guarino

There are seldom explanations for Ashoona's imaginings; they are dramatic stories that the artist delights in.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is a body of knowledge that rests on a belief in the interconnectedness of life. This way of thinking is aptly reflected in this drawing of a group of figures who stand hand in hand to form a ring around a brown bear, overlaid by a polar bear, overlaid by a seal, topped with an Arctic char. Interspersed alongside them is a winged narwhal with one flipper and one hand; a Sedna (sea goddess) wearing one kamik (boot); and the planet Earth—with arms and hands—to complete the circle.

About the composition, Ashoona remarks: "I was thinking that they were having a meeting, a world meeting about the seals, polar bears . . . rethinking what the world would be for the animals. I started thinking that all of these animals would be friends, even some of the dangerous animals I have seen in the movies are there."

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Composition (Creature Invasion), 2017

Fineliner pen, graphite and coloured pencil on paper Collection Hamelyn