

# AGB

ART GALLERY *of* BURLINGTON

Notes from the September 28 Roundtable Discussion

## **Exploring the disconnect of ceramic production between the North and South**

### **Moderator:**

Robert Steven CEO of Art Gallery of Burlington

### **Panelists:**

Alysa Procida, Executive Director, Inuit Art Foundation

Dr. Anna Hudson, York Research Chair, Inuit Cultural Mobilization Associate Professor, York University

Kyra V. Fisher, Manager, Cultural Industries, Government of Nunavut

Pat Feheley, Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

### ***Conversational note style based on comments of panelists***

Northern reality –current practice artist cooperatives – art is purchased with cash and then distributed to the South –system requires a huge financial infrastructure –generally artists do not travel to the South and do not meet the Gallery owners or the potential purchasers – a disconnect

Matchbox Gallery where most of these works originated is an example of this type of artist cooperative – getting access to the best works was difficult – government gave and withdrew funding frequently – Government bodies who determine funding are not informed - Gallery not financially independent – some of the personalities involved made process difficult

Another consideration is that it is not just about buying and selling art it is about the need to mentor artists to support their growth – need to have someone who can identify talent – there are limited studios in the Arctic – geography, lifestyle and climate all impact the production

Dr. Hudson identified a research project she is working on called “Mobilizing Inuit Culture and Heritage” – goal to facilitate discussion – discussing what is the world view of their culture – what is the relationship between art and economy – challenge is that the artists want to be able to bank on art for livelihood – cannot buy items on line – challenges of shipping from their location – no reliable transportation – very expensive – prices work out of the market– collaborations with other grassroots organizations a possibility if North opens up to more tourism

Kyra Fisher commented that the contradictions between the North and South are another disconnect – most cultures use clay – government believed that pottery was a lost craft because of ceramics found at excavation sites – in fact probably not produced by Inuit – possibly transported by North American Indians from warmer climate – belief that Inuit people have always been makers – maker space was converted from the nickel mine that was closed in Rankin Inlet - government funded one electric kiln – believed they were helping Inuit to return to their roots – government gave directives – make bowls and tiles because they are easier to pack and ship – not allowed to have individual expression – no sculptures – also Southern ‘expert’ gallery owners with a different cultural bias and understanding - had power to limit distribution= disconnect

Challenges = distance and isolation – costs of travel and freight – in winter planes can only land on ice - in summer boats must wait until waterways clear of ice – clay is heavy – shipping is costly – internet service is sporadic – distribution model is 60 years old – wholesalers are carrying huge inventories – funding is not always based on good research – artists need patrons, distribution pathways and representation in Galleries – access to southern practices – artwork shipped from North in shopping bags with shredded newspaper – not current museum standards – what was available – breakage and insurance challenges

A number of panelists have noticed a shift– interest in visual arts are shrinking for next generation – performance art is growing – need to examine causes – Schools in the North might benefit from affiliation with schools in the South – however need to avoid pattern of South dictating to the North – another challenge – students from North do not have same access to education so the current standards of entrance to Southern schools might need to be reevaluated to ensure Northern students have same opportunities

In 2007 first All Arts Summit held – hosted by Ministry of Canadian Heritage – invited artists of Nunavut to discuss what is needed and give ideas for direction – most recent one in October 2016: <http://www.gov.nu.ca/edt/news/all-arts-summit-determining-future-arts-nunavut>

### **Audience Question:**

Inuit art is identified with stone sculpture and works on paper from Cape Dorset – ceramics are not well known –Pangnirtung known for Textiles – fear for survival of skills like tapestry artists – little known artists have no chance – with change of direction of emerging artists to film, dance, theatre and music what happens if visual arts disappear?

### **Responses:**

What does it mean to be an Inuit today – how do they understand their tradition – storytelling is at the root of art production – perhaps the choice of medium is in response to this –perhaps offering a residency in community of Pangnirtung might

reinvigorate the tapestry fabric arts – more art schools are needed – if something is meaningful to the community it will continue – might benefit from ideas from South as way to make money – tapestry is labour intensive and expensive to produce – using others patterns not creating their own – contemporary artists who are successful are original – those who produce ‘traditional’ works/subjects less successful suggesting public prefers originality

Model has to change – emerging Inuit artists do not want to be dictated to – capacity building – residencies helpful to teach how to transition to ways of the south where markets are – currently no fine art taught in K – 12 – all by distance learning and internet is sporadic – need digital libraries – media players – entrepreneurial education – are we teaching everyone fair practices or imposing southern traditions and skill sets?

Matchbox Gallery is still open and operates though only small items are being produced for tourists – ceramic production rests with single individual Jim Shirley (founder of Matchbox) health is poor – 3 artists are still working there but future is tenuous – some artists have passed away and new artists are not being recruited – need to see a new phase of ceramic production – cannot work in isolation – would benefit from collaborations like founding artists

Success of any program will depend on the individuals involved – an arts administration needs to determine how to involve the Inuit to be able to care for their own destinies

**Audience Question:**

Are there any solutions?

**Responses:**

Southern artists often work in experimental spaces – don’t always need dedicated spaces – pop-up options can be successful – Northern artists are not empowered to find solutions – indigenous council needed to discuss issues of cultural practices and habits – changing formats could have a negative impact – ‘capacity building’ can never really happen since the system in the North is so fragile best solutions will be organic – artists need to be aware of grant opportunities - don’t feel badly that we don’t have an immediate solution – baby steps – positive impact from conversations like tonight