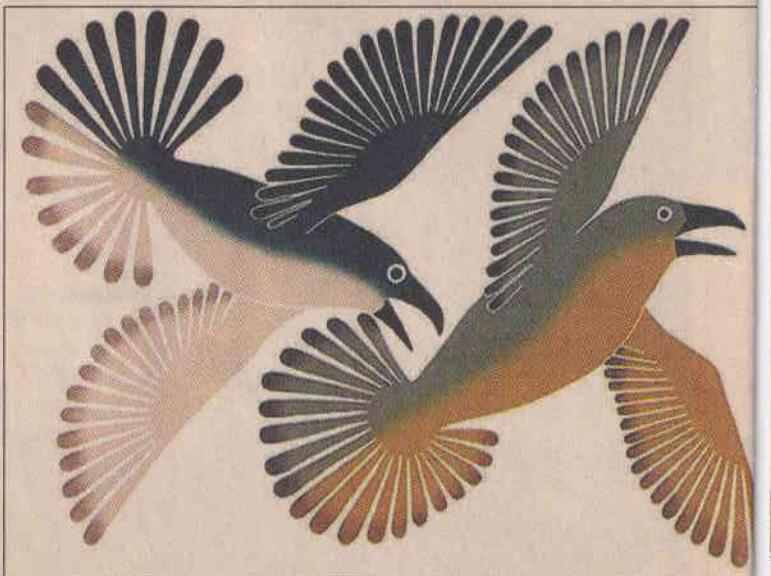


Globe Review

THE GLOBE AND MAIL ■ CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

'Art is my job and my love'

She's a celebrity guest on board an Arctic cruise, but nothing the Inuit artist does broadcasts her profession. When the ship pulls into Cape Dorset, however, it's as if the Queen herself has landed



BY MARINA JIMENEZ
CAPE DORSET, NUNAVUT

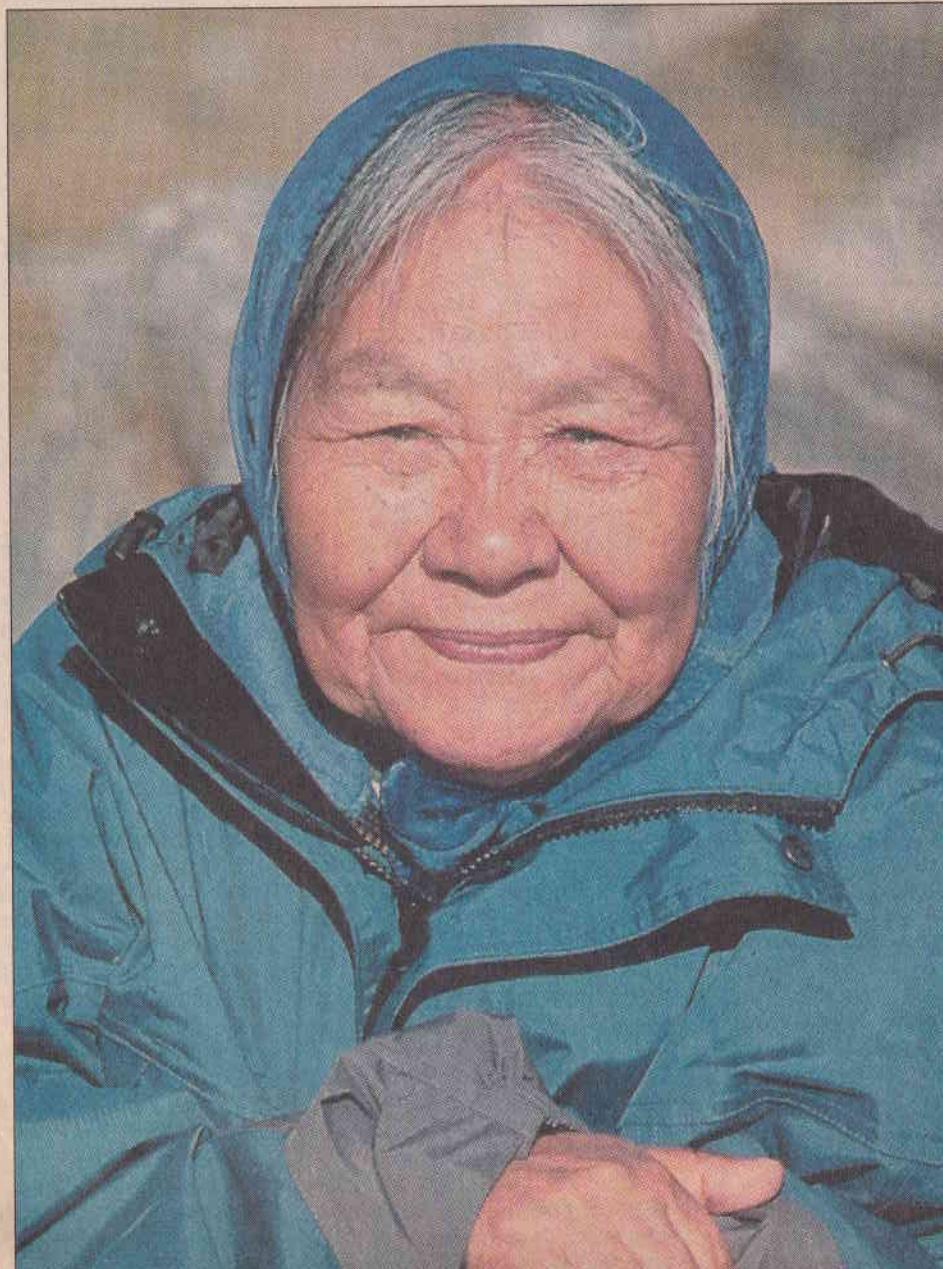
the late afternoon sun, on an ice floe that glitters turquoise in the frigid Arctic waters.

book or palette of watercolours, keeps her pencils crammed in old Tiffany box. She does not

Joe Millionair home on the range

ANDREW RYAN,
R2

■ GLOBEANDMAIL.COM ■ MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2003



It's only a walrus. A letter aboard the cruise ship Akademik Ioffe, as it sails across Hudson Bay. Her chiselled face is impassive and she seems as oblivious to the cold as to the throngs of passengers nearby, who are shivering but clearly enthralled to be in the presence of this renowned artist and carver from Cape Dorset, Nunavut.

She is a guest on this Arctic expedition led by Adventure Canada, the first travel company to invite an Inuit celebrity on board, and passengers are thrilled for the opportunity to eat breakfast with her, and learn about her art and her life. Adventure Canada has also invited Doris McCarthy, the 93-year-old landscape painter, on board as the great Canadian artist of the south.

At the moment, however, fans of both artists are jockeying to photograph several walruses basking in

In her youth, Kenojuak was an avid hunter, who shot caribou and fished: "I remember camping out on the land once when three polar bears attacked our camp at midnight. I had a rifle on hand to help scare them away," she says through her Inuktitut interpreter.

At 76, her hunting days are mostly behind her. A tiny, plump woman with a chortling laugh, Kenojuak is a much jollier figure than the stoic, idealized Inuk of the popular imagination. In her uniform of black stretch pants, sensible shoes and a fleece vest, with her long salt-and-pepper hair pulled back in a flowery plastic barrette, she looks more like an energetic grandmother than a grand matriarch of the arts.

Nothing she does on the cruise, in fact, broadcasts her profession. She does not carry around a sketch

pad, drawings, which hang in London's Tate Gallery as well as Ottawa's National Gallery of Canada.

Instead, she sketches quietly in her room, plays Ping-Pong on the ship with art historian Carol Heppenstall, dances to oceanic troubadour Tom Kovac's version of *Twist and Shout*, and poses with all the patience of a Hollywood celebrity.

'Watching her draw is like watching a high-wire act'

KENOJUAK from page R1

"She has spent a lifetime making beautiful things and always has fresh ways of presenting her images."

The day the ship pulls into Cape Dorset, the South Baffin community where she was raised, it is as though the Queen herself has arrived. The sun hangs low in a radiant blue sky as Kenojuak steps ashore in her rubber boots and life jacket. Relatives, well-wishers and fishermen crowd the rocky shore. Artists stop to shake Kenojuak's hand.

There are six recipients of the Order of Canada living in this tiny community of 1,200, and Kenojuak is at the centre of it all. She has been with the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative for 50 years.

The prints and carvings sold here have become a means of survival for the Inuit, many of whom rely on the steady source of income in a society marked by unemployment, social problems and an unforgiving climate.

Kenojuak is no different. The walls of her house, a humble bungalow with a carving tent out front, are utterly devoid of art. Instead, they are crammed with photos of her children, grandchildren and great-granddaughter. Kenojuak tells me she has kept only two of the hundreds of prints that have been made from her drawings: one of *The Enchanted Owl*, which was printed on a six-cent postage stamp in 1970 (a copy of the print recently sold at auction for \$58,000); as well as the owl and raven image that has been reproduced on the back of the Canadian quarter.

"I support an extended family with my art," she says. "My son

Adamie is a hunter and he needs money for things like a canoe or a motorboat or gas. Two of my grandkids live with me and they need money for swim class and dance class. The Inuit tradition is to help each other."

And yet, the very medium that she has helped to make so famous is undergoing growing pains today, as the Co-operative struggles to promote new artists and convince the Nunavut government to support its enterprise.

Kenojuak worries about the next generation of Inuit graphic artists who need help to develop their talent, if they are to fill the shoes of the "greats" from the 1950s and 1960s. There are now many more carvers than graphic artists. Printmaking is a much more collaborative and time-consuming medium and many do not have the patience. Kenojuak hopes that the form won't die with her.

In some ways her life story reflects the history of the Inuit, as they moved from a nomadic existence in outpost camps to permanent settlements, turned to art as a means of survival and finally, won the right to self-government and became Nunavut in 1999. Her success, though, is all her own, the unique product of vision, drive and talent.

Born in an igloo in Camp Ikirasak on the southern coast of Baffin Island, Kenojuak lost her father at a young age, after he was murdered by rival hunters. Her mother, pregnant with her fourth child, was forced to leave the camp and return to her own family in Cape Dorset. There Kenojuak's grandmother taught her traditional handicrafts. She learned to sew waterproof seams with caribou sinew and repair skins that were being sold to the Hudson's Bay Company.

Inuit artist Kenojuak Ashevak dances with filmmaker John Houston aboard a cruise ship in the Arctic.

She made sealskin bags with beautiful appliquéd images that would eventually catch the eye of James Houston, an artist sent to the north as a government administrator, who is credited with introducing printmaking to the Inuit.

In her early 20s, Kenojuak married a hunter named Johnnie Ashevak, who was also an artist. Their married life was quickly interrupted after she was diagnosed

with tuberculosis in 1951. She was sent to a hospital in Quebec City to recover and did not see her husband for three years. During her long convalescence, all three of her children died. (Altogether, she bore 10 children, six of whom died as infants. She adopted another four.)

In the 1950s, she met up with Houston, the visionary who would become her champion. Captivated by an image of a rabbit eating sea-

weed on Kenojuak's sealskin bag, he encouraged her to give drawing a try. At first she refused, but finally took the sheets of paper and drawing pencils he gave her and began to draw. She was the first Inuit woman artist whose drawings were selected by the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative to be made into prints.

"James Houston was really the first person to help the Inuit and

help them make art," she says. Sailing with her today across the Arctic on this expedition is Houston's son, John, a filmmaker and gallery owner who grew up with her in Cape Dorset. She has known him since he was a baby and remains close to his family. "Kenojuak has blended a great sense of humour, a virtuosic artistic ability with a deep caring for her family and community," says John Houston, who is completing the last in a trilogy of award-winning films about Inuit art and culture. He is on board this journey as an Adventure Canada resource person.

"Kenojuak found an outlet for her expression and has pursued that with a singular vision," Houston says. "She came of age just as Inuit art was becoming fashionable."

"Watching her draw is like watching a high-wire act," he continues. She makes no preliminary sketches, he adds, but puts her pencil to paper and does not lift it until she has completed the outline of her exquisite images — fish, birds, sled dogs, igloos, faces. Her style is instantly recognizable: clean, strong lines and fantastic colours. She has described her work as "explorations of design and form and colour, rather than illustrations of events or stories."

♦ ♦ ♦

On the second-last day of the voyage, there's an auction. The long tables in the dining room are filled with Doris McCarthy's beautifully turned out watercolour sketches of icebergs and Arctic scenes. Among the prints that Kenojuak unfurls are: *Tulugaq*, a raven with a blue feather in its mouth; *Timmiaruqsimajug*, a girl's face with raven hair and an owl body; and *Primal Exchange*, a raven and seagull surrounded by stylized feathers.

"When I see people are very interested in one drawing, I will recall it and think about it and it will motivate me to keep exploring that theme," Kenojuak says. "I try to present my ideas in the strongest possible way. I try to show an animal's great strength. I used the enchanted feathers on the raven, for example, to show its glory."

She beams when all her work is purchased — and bristles at the question about when she will stop drawing: "People often treat art as though it is very different from any other profession and ask, why would you want to keep doing this? This is my job and my love. I cannot imagine life without art."



TRAVEL

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3 | 2009 | EDITOR LINDA BATES 604.605.2371 | LBATES@VANCOUVERSUN.COM

D12

NUNAVUT

Northern delights

Exhibitions across Canada celebrate 50 years

BY MARGO PFEIFF

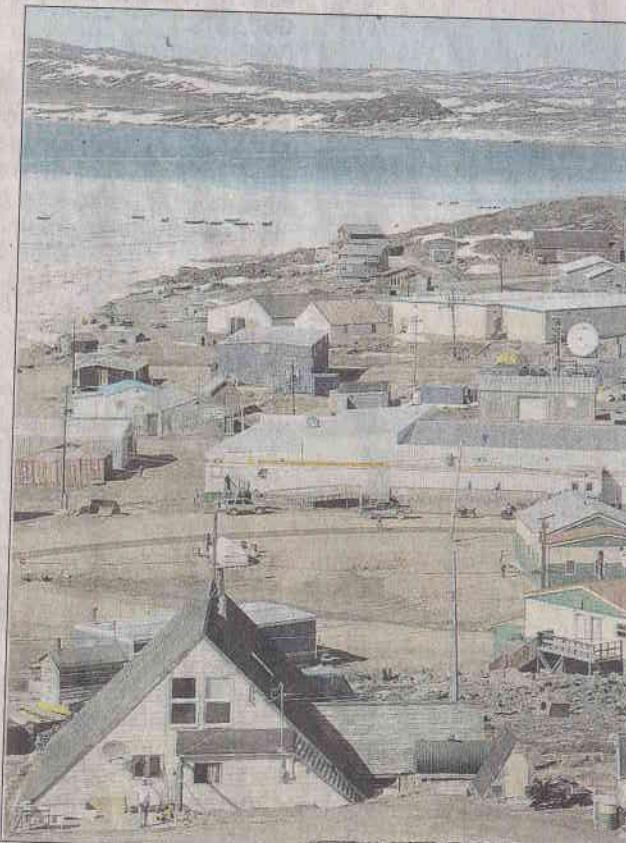
CAPE DORSET, Nunavut — Perched on a stool, wearing a faded windbreaker and sneakers, 81-year-old Kenojuak Ashevak signs one print after another in the workshop of Cape Dorset's Kinngait studios. She looks more like a typical grandmother than Nunavut's artistic superstar — the recipient of the Order of Canada, two honorary doctorates and, in 2008, the first Inuit ever to earn the Governor-General's Award for visual and media arts.

Freighter canoes, snowmobiles and caribou antlers litter the yards and beachfront outside the doors of the unassuming cluster of green buildings that make up the small studio complex. Sled dogs howl. Cape Dorset in southern Baffin Island is a small grid of unpaved roads lined with no-frills bungalows alongside two churches, a couple of government buildings and windowless shops.

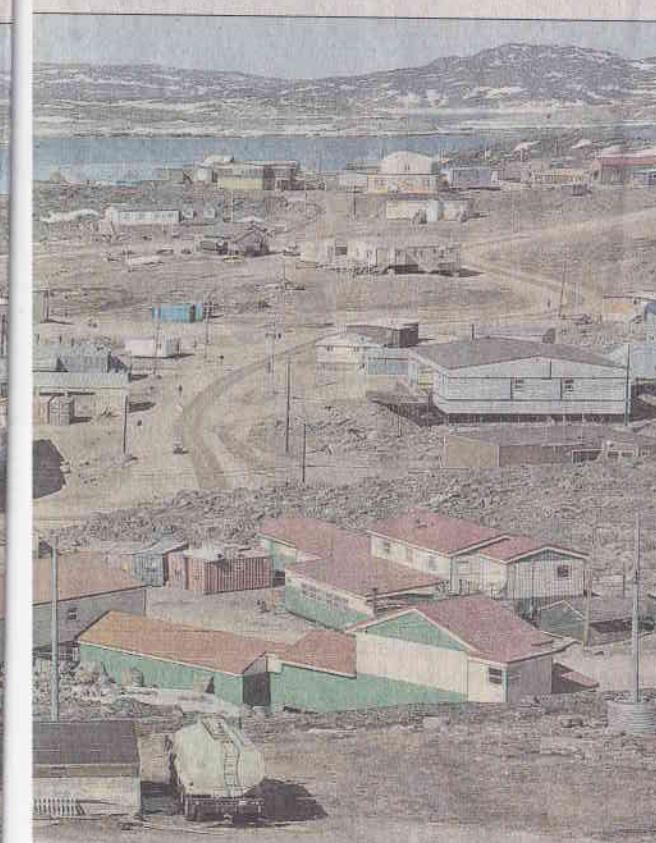
In no one's wildest dreams does this look like the country's most artistic community. Yet the hamlet's 1,200 residents have more artists per capita than any other Canadian municipality. With about 110 carvers and printmakers, nearly one quarter of the local workforce is made up of artists, according to a federal government study.

Cape Dorset is Inuit Art Central, the birthplace of the North's highest quality stone carvings and traditional prints of hunters, parka-clad women, shamans and northern creatures. These images have become Canadian icons, bestowed upon visiting royalty, presidents, prime ministers and popes. Not bad for an art form with a history of only 50 years.

But, as in most Nunavut communities, locals still rely heavily on hunting and fishing to feed their families. Many artists are also subsistence hunters who turn to art to earn cash to buy the fuel



Cape Dorset is a small centre of unpaved roads lined with no-frills bungalows, two churches, government buildings and



frills bungalows, two churches, government buildings and

If You Go

- **What:** Kinngait Studios (formerly West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative)
- **Where:** Cape Dorset, Nunavut
- **When:** Open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- **Cost:** Admission is free.
- **Contacts:** 1-867-897-8878 or <http://www.dorsetfinearts.com/athome.html>
- **Where to stay:** Cape Dorset Suites is the only hotel in town. Rates about \$200 per night.
- **Contacts:** 1-867-897-8806 or www.dorsetsuites.com

Nunavut's Olympic art connections

When inukshuk — man-shaped stone trail markers — became the official 2010 Olympic logo, Vanoc (the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games) commissioned hundreds of hand-sized carved inukshuk from Nunavut carvers.

Carvers put their unique style into the first-ever handmade official Olympic souvenirs, which will sell for \$150 each. Created from traditional green or black stone, they come packaged in a special Olympics-branded tin complete with the carver's name and a short biography. No two are the same.

Meanwhile, over in the Southern Baffin Island community of Pangnirtung, during the spring of 2009, an igloo, speed skater, inukshuk, ski-jumper and the criss-cross image of the Inuit string



and bullets they need to survive. This is a part of the world where a new snowmobile can cost more than \$10,000 and employment in our southern sense of having a "town job" is rare.

The prints Kenojuak is signing will be released on Oct. 16 as part of the much anticipated 50th annual Cape Dorset collection produced by Kngait Studios — formerly West Baffin Eskimo Co-op (WBEC).

Canada's longest continuously running print studio has been so successful that Greenland, India and Africa have asked for its help in setting up their own indigenous fine-art agendas.

Throughout 2009, small galleries across the country have been celebrating Cape Dorset's anniversary. And from Oct. 16 to Jan. 17, the National Gallery will launch its own major tribute featuring experimental prints and drawings never displayed before as well as most of the original 1959 and the newly launched 2009 collections. Kenojuak and fellow pioneer Kananginak Pootoogook, the only other 1959 veteran, have offerings in both collections.

Kenojuak started her artistic career in the 1950s, drawing by the light of a seal-oil lamp in outpost camps as her husband hunted and she raised their children.

Over the past half century, she has become a legend with her 1960 Enchanted Owl, which appeared on a Canada

Dorset studio.

Post stamp and fetched \$58,650 in 2001 at a Toronto auction, the highest price ever paid for an Inuit print.

When I asked her what she thought about all the attention and kudos she generates, she laughed and shrugged, saying simply, "I'm just happy to make some money to help my grandchildren." Like all things Inuit, there is no pretentiousness about the artists up here.

Kenojuak was encouraged by a young artist named James Houston who first brought international attention to the artistic talents found in the eastern Arctic in the 1950s. In 1960, Toronto artist Terry Ryan took over the reins from Houston and nurtured an industry that now generates \$20 million annually for the territory. Ryan was back in Cape Dorset last spring to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

"This was the original '512' — the entire craft shop," he said, looking around what is now the studio coffee room's tiny 512 square feet, a standard issue 1950s northern house. Ryan never dreamed he would remain in Cape Dorset for 40 years before heading south in 2000 to help run a southern outlet, Dorset Fine Arts, from Toronto for nearly another decade.

The quiet, intense man gazed slowly

depicting Olympic

around the room as the women stepped to shyly hand him wings that were stashed in their parkas along with

he could still see through the door wings that were stashed in their parkas along with

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art is unique to Cape Dorset.

"In the beginning local rock was used and it was hard work cutting and polishing a boulder into a flat surface onto which the image could be etched," said Manning. In the early 1960s after a pool hall in town went broke they found the table's slab of slate perfect for printmaking. "And that's what we've used ever since," he said.

Over the past decade, the face of Inuit prints has been changing as a new generation of Dorset artists shifts from traditional images to bold and sometimes disturbing visions of the contemporary Arctic in which they grew up.

They didn't live nomadic lives as hunters with legends, spirits and creatures. Their reality is often crowded housing, substance abuse, southern schooling and television — and that's what they're putting on paper.

While the art-buying public still prefers classical renditions of igloos and prancing caribou, the contemporary work is receiving critical kudos. In the spring of 2008, a special collection called Nine

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