

NUVISAVIK: THE PLACE WHERE WE WEAVE.

Edited and with a preface by MARIA VON FINCKENSTEIN. Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-7735-2335-9. 202 p., including black-and-white photos of 19 tapestry artists and 49 colour photos of individual tapestries, suggested reading, index. Softbound. Cdn\$45.00; US\$35.67.

This book, available in separate English and French versions, was produced as an accompanying catalogue guide to an exhibition at the Museum of Civilization in Gatineau near Ottawa entitled *Nuvisavik: The Place Where We Weave—Inuit Tapestries from Arctic Canada*. The exhibition, running from February 2002 to September 2003, brings together 49 superb tapestries—most of which have never before been publicly displayed—by artists and weavers who have worked jointly to transform drawings into tapestries. This book is a permanent record of that exhibition, reproduced on quality semigloss coated paper.

The book describes the background and short history of this unique art form, beginning with the founding of a weaving studio in Pangnirtung on Baffin Island. In the 1960s, a controversial move by the Canadian government placed the Inuit in permanent settlements. Attempting to ameliorate the negative effects of forced relocation and to create an economic base, the government funded arts and crafts initiatives across the Arctic. One such project was the Pangnirtung weaving shop.

After abandoning a seminomadic life characterized by hunting, fishing, and trapping to move into a permanent settlement, the women of Pangnirtung were encouraged to take up weaving as a new vocation. Already skilled at knitting and the sewing of furs, they were quick to master tapestry techniques, and this book shows the degree of artistic excellence the community has now achieved.

This first book dedicated to the unique Inuit art form of tapestry weaving describes how European weaving techniques were introduced to the Inuit of Baffin Island and how artistic skill and subject matter evolved through three generations of artists. Both groups of artists, those who draw and those who weave, talk about the cultural context of their work and interpret the symbolism of traditional figures.

Since its humble beginning, the Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio has produced weavings that depict the North before settlement, humans, birds, animals, spirits and, most recently, landscapes. The book, like the exhibition, illustrates the striking results of adapting flat-weave French Aubusson techniques to interpret drawings by local Inuit artists. The drawing artist and the tapestry artist work jointly to create stories in wool. And out of this artistic dialogue came ever more detailed tapestries of precise craftsmanship, such as those shown in the colour illustrations of *Oalopalik* a helping spirit (1972) on page 55, *Going Fishing* (1981) on page 137, and *My Puppies* (1998) on page 171.

The foreword is by Donald Stuart, the textile artist whom the Canadian government dispatched to introduce smooth weaving techniques in conjunction with the former Karen Bulow Ltd. hand-weaving firm and the Canadian Guild of Crafts in Montreal. Stuart recalls approaching Malaya Akulukjuk, a known shaman in the Pangnirtung community, to draw her idea of what the sea goddess Sedna looked like. Akulukjuk's designs became a mainstay of the weaving studio, and following generations have refined this vision of northern life. Stuart notes that while the tapestries set Pangnirtung apart from other centres of Inuit art, they also display aspects of culture, environment, and history, just as European tapestries did centuries ago. An added dimension is that Inuit tapestries are very personal, reflecting the cooperative talents of both designer and weaver.

The first quarter of the book consists of essays by four contributors with specialized knowledge of Inuit tapestries and sets the stage for the presentation of artists and their tapestries in the remainder of the book. Deborah Hickman, a weaver who was general manager and advisor at the Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio, Cathleen Knotsch, a researcher specializing in issues pertaining to the Canadian Eastern Arctic, and July Papatsie, an established Inuit artist working in mixed indigenous media, talk about the legacy, lifestyle, and locale that have affected Pangnirtung tapestry art. Two of the essays are based on interviews with Inuit elders and recall the sustained interaction between Natives and Europeans starting in the early 19th century.

Maria von Finckenstein, who edited the book, writes about the ingenious ways in which Inuit have always adapted new materials to their culture and how they have changed the French Aubusson technique to suit their own sense of aesthetics. Finckenstein has worked in the area of Inuit art since 1979. During the 1980s, she was curator at the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, responsible for organizing travelling exhibitions featuring Inuit art. At present, she is curator for contemporary Inuit art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. She explains, "Pangnirtung tapestries use the woven surface like a canvas in which to paint a story or image. It is the narrative aspect that interests both participants—drawer and weaver—most" (p. 5).

The cultural context of the tapestries and the stories woven into them are the highlight of this book. In word and picture, the artistic voyage of the Pangnirtung artists unfolds. The old 'weave shop' has become the only tapestry studio in the North and is recognized as one of the most important institutions of its kind in the world. Now part of the Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts, along with the Print Shop and the Craft Gallery, and housed in an interconnected cluster of permanent buildings that resemble the traditional circular tents of old Inuit camps, the Centre is the business headquarters of a growing arts economy. It has built an international reputation, which this book on Inuit tapestries will only increase, for the quality and design of its products.

Today, most Inuit on Baffin Island live in modern settlements. However, they remain deeply proud of their forebears who survived and thrived in one of the world's most difficult environments. The tapestries are an expression of this pride. As weaver Leese Kakee says, "some people might think these are just wall hangings, but they are a part of us, our ancestors, our lives" (p. 7).

Nuvisavik: The Place Where We Weave is a blend of art history, cultural history, and Arctic studies. It engages the scholar and the collector equally. It also provides a new reference for the general reader with an interest in the Canadian North. This first major publication about the evolution of the weavers of Pangnirtung describes in words and pictures what will soon be a much better known Inuit art form.

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CANADA AND THE IDEA OF NORTH. By SHERRILL E. GRACE. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. 368 p., 44 illus., bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$49.95.

In *Canada and the Idea of North*, an investigation that crosses academic disciplines and so is properly identified as transdisciplinary, Sherrill Grace follows Wreford Watson (1969) in maintaining that the North is "an idea as much as any physical region that can be mapped and measured for nordicity" (p. xii, 53). But Grace also finds the North more than an idea: she concurs with Stephen Leacock (1936), who "put his finger on what is, for [her], one of the most important aspects of North" (p. 15)—that it is a *mentality*. However, her survey of this *mentality* must embrace such "discontinuity and difference" (p. 206), even in single disciplines let alone across them, that readers will question the value of so dilated a discursive formation. Grace clearly thinks it does have value, so Lawren Harris and Glenn Gould, René Richard and W.L. Morton, Minnie Aodla Freeman and Alookook Ipellie, R. Murray Schafer and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Robert Service and Louis-Edmond Hamelin all receive discussion.

Presumably not intended as a textbook for the undergraduate classroom, *Canada and the Idea of North* is a personal essay that requires a host of caveats and disclaimers. Grace's voice intentionally dominates; "insist[ing] upon being...eclectic" (p. 232), she argues not for thoroughness or sustained argument, but for problematizing, complicating, multiplying (p. 225), diversifying, and hybridizing (p. 268) ideas of North by means of a contrapuntal listening. "I have," she writes, "organized my writing of North in order to maximize voices" (p. 22). She governs her survey with extended discussions of particular works

of verbal, visual, audible, and performative art. Before these come "snapshots" and "quick look[s]," introductions and eavesdroppings (p. xii) on Canadian geography, historiography, cartography, and the like. Providing not so much coverage as access, then, she is suggestive rather than exhaustive. Both extensively researched and comprehensive, but also highly selective and indicative, her survey cannot be fixed in place. Given that this is Grace's aim, she understandably prefers the metaphor and the metonymy of the Magnetic Pole for the idea of North as a whole. If one were to insist that the work have a thesis (and Grace would insist that it not), it probably lies in this statement: "Canada will either recognize its northern identity by continually forming new ideas of North or it will die, with its story in brilliant fragments, in a foreign, southern place" (p. 224).

The two chapters of Part One point out many connections to material covered in later chapters but also introduce the book's conceptual framework, which depends for the idea of a discursive formation on the works of French historian and theorist Michel Foucault (1966, 1972). This idea is further elaborated with theories drawn from Russian philosopher Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1975, 1981), from Feminism, and from Postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Anne McClintock (1995). Grace aims for conceptual richness, but since she often refuses the critic's traditional role of judge (p. 23), many readers will find the value of her conceptual framework outstripped by her survey's discussions of selected art, film/photography, music, and writing (chiefly novels and plays). These discussions occupy Parts Two through Four and concentrate on the period 1930–2000.

The greatest rewards lie in Grace's discussions of the northern novel. She repeatedly exhibits sensitivity when treating this form of art. Her reading of the only northern epic novel, Mordecai Richler's satire *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1990), is sensitive. Her discussion of Gabrielle Roy's northern works, especially *La Montagne Secrète/The Hidden Mountain* (1961, 1962), is subtle and compelling, although her celebration of the novelist's romantic maternal vision is problematical because elsewhere this study criticizes chiefly romantic expressions of North.

The final part of the survey discusses how the North has written back to southern Canada's idea of it. Influenced by an esteemed work of post-colonial criticism entitled *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et al., 1989), this examination of northern self-identity understands the North as a region colonized by the rest of Canada. As comprehensive as other parts, this one is nevertheless resolutely pro-Native and anti-White. Works by white Northerners do not come under discussion, and there is no mention of artists in any medium who are of mixed blood. Consciously or not, Grace segregates northern voices by ethnicity from those in the rest of the country. Reading this part back onto earlier ones also reveals that northern white writers such as Robert Service are treated pejoratively in her discursive formation, while southerners like Lawren Harris, Glenn