Inuit

Inuit art

The Inuit are indigenous people who live in the Arctic region, an area that includes Alaska, Canada and Greenland. Artwork made by the Inuit includes pictures, carvings, sculptures and prints. Animals, cultural myths and legends are the main sources of inspiration.

Inuit carver at work

Inuit carvings

The Inuit have a long tradition of being expert carvers. Carvings include tools, weapons and decorative items, such as animals and figurines. Common materials used in Inuit carving include bone, ivory, stone and wood. The carvings can be in a variety of sizes and colours.

walrus soapstone carving

owl carving

Inuit printing

Printmaking is a more recent addition to Inuit art, starting in the late 1950s with the help of James Houston, a Canadian artist, designer and government administrator. At first, stonecuts were used to print images. Later, stencils were used.

James Houston, Cape Dorset (Kinngait), Nunavut, 1960

Return of the Sun, an Inuit print on a stamp, c1980

Stencil technique

A stencil is a sheet of paper, card, plastic or metal into which shapes, patterns or pictures are cut. Paint or ink is applied over the cut out design to create an image on the surface below. Inuit artists use stencils to add detail to stonecut prints or to make several versions of their original drawings.

stencilling

Significant artists

Today, Inuit artwork is extremely popular. It is displayed in art galleries and sold all over the world. Famous Inuit artists include Jessie Oonark, Karoo Ashevak, David Ruben Piqtoukun, Lucy Tasseor Tutsweetok and Pitseolak Ashoona.

The Enchanted Owl

In 1960, Inuit artist Kenojuak Ashevak made a print of an owl called *The Enchanted Owl*. It features a stylised owl with a spotted body and long, fanning feathers and was made using a stonecut on paper printing technique. The design became a commemorative stamp for Canada in 1970.

artist's impression of *The Enchanted Owl*

Glossary

carving	A shape or pattern cut into wood or stone.
indigenous	Naturally existing in a place or country.
printing	A technique that allows an image to be accurately reproduced multiple times.
stylised	An exaggeration of colour, pattern or shape.
stonecut	A printing technique that uses a flattened stone block that is carved and coated with ink to make a print.

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