

KENOJUAK ASHEVAK
INUIT / KINNGAIT / CANADIAN, 1927–2013

***My Birds Together*, 1979**

lithograph on paper

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edition 39/50

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MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA COLLECTION
1979-011-8

***A Vision of Animals*, 1961**

ink on paper

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edition 27/50

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MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA COLLECTION
1962-010-079

Rare is the bat that will praise an owl. As one of few natural predators of bats – and a nocturnal one at that – owls are messengers of misfortune, or worse, a source of immediate threat. Some bats are known to mimic the buzzing sounds made by bees as a measure of protection. Owls may have excellent vision at a distance, but rely on other senses when pursuing prey up close.

How some owls enjoy a mythological status – a high rank and perception of wisdom among so-called lesser animals – remains a mystery to this bat. For the artist Kenojuak Ashevak, the owl was a creature that held unlimited potential. Each more audacious than the next, her brightly-hued images captivated a fledgling colony. Reflecting on the unifying power of Ashevak's (Qinnuajuaq's) work, artist Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory offers:

*There is a myth that Inuit did not have
a concept of art before this modern age.
That there is no three-letter word for it, no full time
profession devoted to the creation of it.
That the introduction of paper transformed everything.
Allow me to defy this notion by saying this:
There was no such thing as
Canadian art before Qinnuajuaq.
Canada is hand drawn by Qinnuajuaq
The lines that swooped in and rushed out
at the same time,
The bulbs of power, the circles of light
The kimmernaq red
sungaq yellow
tungu purple
outline and colour our modern identity.
Her deft fingers created images that were catalysts...*

*-Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, "I am the light of happiness" in
Tunirrusiangit: Kenojuak Ashevak and Tim Pitsiulak (Toronto: Art
Gallery of Ontario; Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2018).*

SHARY BOYLE

CANADIAN, BORN 1972

Handflügler (Bat 2), 2008

porcelain on fabric

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, PURCHASED WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE CANADA COUNCIL
FOR THE ARTS ACQUISITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
2009-2

Fledertiere (Bat 3), 2008

porcelain on fabric

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, PURCHASED WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE CANADA COUNCIL
FOR THE ARTS ACQUISITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
2009-003

Handflatterer (Bat 4), 2008

porcelain on fabric

MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA COLLECTION, 2013, PURCHASED WITH THE
FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS ACQUISITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
2013-6

My story is one told anew through different eyes and on different continents over time. I am the stuff of folklore and fascination. After 50 million years, my evolution remains a mystery underlined by a singular goal: to confuse the categories that humans create to make sense of bodies that are not their own.

You could be forgiven for mistaking me for a product of the imagination, rather than biology. Neither bird nor rodent, my genetic make-up has more in common with humans and orchids. One human, Ernst Haeckel (German, 1834-1919) was particularly taken with structure and specificity in living creatures. Known as a naturalist and artist, Haeckel held the belief that a sophisticated organism's development replays the evolutionary phases of its ancestors as it becomes a new species. Haeckel was also a eugenicist and it doesn't take much effort to see how his ideas, when applied to the variety of human life, might yield more harm than good.

Humans have a name for just about everything. They also have a curious tendency to assign the names of other humans where they have no rightful place. You might be surprised to learn that bats and other living things know this to be true. What if, unbeknownst to humans, we animals quietly declined such customs? What if my elaborate ears were not merely a way to sense movement but a kind of biological resistance? Could the ornate folds in my face be proof of an ancient project, one where flora and fauna kin evolve to mutual benefit – building a network shaped by a logic without language?

AGANETHA AND RICHARD DYCK

CANADIAN, BORN, 1937; BORN, 1959

Hive Scan 05, 2001-2003

cibachrome print on paper

edition 1/2

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, GIFT OF RICHARD DYCK
2011-67

Hive Scan 11, 2001-2003

cibachrome print on paper

edition 1/2

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, GIFT OF RICHARD DYCK
2011-68

Hive Scan 13, 2001-2003

cibachrome print on paper

edition 1/2

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, GIFT OF RICHARD DYCK
2011-69

A young bee once asked me why it was that some humans called our respective communities by the same name: colonies. This was news to me. I had assumed that humans had given little thought to our communities, let alone our labour. (The bee takes the daytime pollination shift to serve the sun-loving blooms, while bats serve the moonflowers, among other nocturnal plants). Perhaps it was because our social tendencies and living arrangements make us susceptible to devastating forms of infection and community collapse. While I shared my speculations with the young bee, I wondered if there might be a human I could trust to honestly answer the same question?

Some humans are known to collaborate with other species in unexpected ways. Artist Aganetha Dyck has devoted decades to understanding how bees engage in artistic production. For the *Hive Scans* series, Dyck collaborates not only with a colony of bees but also with her son, Richard. To make these images, the pair placed a flatbed scanner and miscellaneous found objects – lace, drawings on Braille paper, and salt and pepper shakers – inside a hive for the bees to embellish. Light is introduced to the hive through the scanner and a raise of the hive's lid, revealing the transformative potential of insect labour and a rare glimpse of an artwork in the making.

KIAKSHUK

INUIT / KINNGAIT / CANADIAN, 1886–1966

Lumiuk And The Whales, 1961

ink on paper

edition 13/50

MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA COLLECTION
1962-10-62

Preservation can take many forms. For my rodent cousins, it may take the form of hoarding food in anticipation of winter. For humans, that effort varies wildly from community to community but usually remains tied to the seasons. Within the walls of a museum, preservation can mean freezing an object in time, but it can also mean sharing as a way to ensure ideas and truths are collectively remembered.

Some Inuk artists, Kiakshuk among them, retell a story about Lumak (or Lumiuk), a boy who loses his vision. Some say it was through overexposure to the sun, while others suggest an act of cruelty was to blame. Through an unlikely alliance with a loon, the boy regains his sight and enacts revenge on his mother for withholding food. The mother was unsuspectingly dragged by a powerful whale and condemned to an eternity underwater. In some variations of the story, the boy is grown and his mother laments how she could suffer such a fate despite nursing him in his youth. For humans, stories such as this one are passed from generation to generation to explain relations and codependence. How these stories are digested can depend as much on the listening as the telling.

PUDLO PUDLAT

INUIT / KINNGAIT / CANADIAN, 1916–1992

Avingluk (the Big Lemming), 1961

ink on paper

edition 3/50

MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERISTY OF REGINA COLLECTION
1962-010-22

Bats and rodents may be classified as distinct species by humans, but they share common wisdom that owls are not to be trusted. For my friend, the lemming, its main predator is the Snowy Owl, a creature that has adapted to the long daylight cycles of summer in the north. (Legend has it that lemmings have been known to appeal to the owl's vanity to create a life-saving distraction).

Some humans speculate that lemmings lack self-control and that the depletion of the diet available in their arctic homes is due to their lack of good sense. Other humans, such as the artist Pudlo Pudlat, understood the patterns of animal behaviour through close observation and knowledge of their cycles. In Pudlat's hands, the collared lemming (also known as *kilangmiutak* or "one who-comes from the sky") stands tall, on alert for avian threats.

Pudlat's grandson, Mosha Folger, created an animated short film inspired by this image. [Click the link](#) to watch *The Big Lemming* (2017) on IsumaTV.

DAVID MILNE

CANADIAN, 1882–1953

Lightning, 1936

oil on canvas

MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA COLLECTION,
GIFT FROM THE DOUGLAS M. DUNCAN COLLECTION
1970-18

In Nigeria's Cross River National Park, one of the oldest rainforests in the world, a story about lightning has been transferred across generations. It is unclear from whom the story originates – the animals around whom the story is shaped or the humans who ensure its retelling. In the story, Thunder and Lightning are kin on earth. Thunder, a mother sheep, and Lightning, her ram son. Hot-tempered and prone to outbursts, the ram left a path of destruction wherever he went. Despite the loud boom of her voice, the mother could do little to change his ways. After one disaster too many, the pair was banished by their community and forced to live in the sky where their destruction would be minimal. To this day, Lightning continues to misbehave, and Thunder's reprimand follows.

To access a family-friendly dramatization of this story from the *Circle Round* podcast, [click here](#).

SAKIASSIE RAGEE

INUIT / KINNGAIT / CANADIAN, 1924–2003

Sea Goddess Feeding Young, 1961

ink on paper

MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA COLLECTION
1962-10-37

As a creature that rarely visits large bodies of water, let alone more northern regions, I rely heavily on the knowledge of my cousins elsewhere to understand oceanic life. With oceans accounting for over 70% of the earth's surface, I can only imagine how little is known about life therein.

In Arctic maritime communities, the goddess Sedna is to thank for the success of the hunt. While her story is one that evolves in the retelling, there seems to be a constant across the variations: as the young human Sedna clings to the edge of the boat in defiance, her fingers (and in some cases, hands and forearms) are severed. She becomes a mother to the seals, the walruses, and the whales who have evolved from these fragments. From the ocean depths, Sedna is said to provide care to underwater life and when pleased, a livelihood for her kin on land.

[Click here](#) for an animated retelling of the Sedna legend in Zacharius Kunuk's *Stories of Our Elders, Episode 19: Sedna, The Ruler of the Sea* (2016) on IsumaTV.

ARTIST ONCE KNOWN
INUIT / CANADIAN

Untitled (whale), n.d.

ivory

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, GIFT OF HENRY AND BETTY TROUT
2017-166

*Once upon a time there was a giant sea mammal who weighed up to twenty-three tons, swimming in the Bering Sea. In 1741, a German naturalist “discovered” Hydrodamalis gigas swimming large and luxe, at least three times bigger than the contemporary manatee. Within twenty-seven years, the entire species was extinct...They say she couldn’t sing. The only sound was her breathing, but she could hear for miles and miles and miles. What a loss for listening. How can we honor it, the archive of your breathing? – Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (Chico: AK Press, 2020) 16*

A museum I once visited is home to the heart of a Blue whale. Through a process called plastination, the museum has preserved the massive organ, making it possible for its visitors to wonder at the scale of the body it once powered. At night, after the museum closed, I was among those who wondered. I had heard stories of these creatures, how they too relied on reflecting sound (echolocation) to understand their surroundings...how their eyes, like my own, had evolved to see in shades of grey where the distinction between dark and light can mean the difference between safety in the ocean depths and threat in shallow water. Out of view of the museum and conservators, I momentarily roosted deep within a valve in the whale’s heart where I imagined a life so majestic and yet, so vulnerable.

TIM WHITEN

CANADIAN / AMERICAN, BORN, 1941

Corona II, 2006

enamel, graphite on paper

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, GIFT OF THE ARTIST
2011-18

A little-known fact: the breath of bats is corrosive. Over time, its acidic nature can etch stone and other porous surfaces near generational roosting locations. Imagine cave walls embellished by our breath, murals made over millennia! It's an unintentional act of transformation, but it's fascinating still.

A corona can be a crown...it can be a tooth...a virus... In the human science of astronomy, a corona is the gas envelope around the sun and stars of all sizes. Atmospheric and yet dense, this gas is only visible during a total solar eclipse. In *Corona II*, Tim Whiten makes a drawing with carbon (in the form of graphite) and spray enamel – a medium that functions like pigmented breath under pressure. Could the artist of this work have been thinking of the sun and its breath? What other forms of creation are made possible when materials are under pressure? What do we risk when we separate our understanding of material from the transformation that can occur under force and over time?

MARTHA TOWNSEND

CANADIAN, BORN 1956

Burying Eve, 1985

shovel, gold wedding band

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, GIFT OF RICHARD SPAFFORD
2001-55

Among humans there is a curious tradition of creating something new from a combination of existing elements. In this object, the artist offers a tool and symbol in the form of mundane objects united. Placed on the spade of the shovel is a golden ring, a complicated symbol among humans. Engraved with the word “EVE”, the ring is a reference to an oft-told creation story of the first woman among humans, a parable of sorts for the risks inherent in curiosity. In the words of the writer, Monika Kin Gagnon, the work engages “in tragic dialogues; of love and labour, marriage and death, burial and bondage...the Original Sin that falls on Woman is alluded to as being ‘buried’ or covered by the movement of the work. In this, the problematic construction of myth and the issue of ownership in relation to the mythical female body are both foregrounded as layers of meaning.”

ALLEN (AHMOO) ANGECONEB

ANISHINAABE / OJIBWAY / CANADIAN, 1955–2017

Wolves Looking Out of Den, 1984

silkscreen on paper

edition 57/93

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, GIFT OF THOMAS DRUYAN AND ALICE LADNER, THE KAMPELMACHER MEMORIAL
COLLECTION OF INDIGENOUS ART
2018-76

In the absence of knowledge, misrepresentations can take root. As beings who are most lively at night, wolves and bats are often misunderstood by those who favour life in daylight. Some of us have been described as monstrous and lonely on account of human understandings of socialization. In truth, both bats and wolves are highly socialized and have adapted to protect our communities. In Allen (Ahmoo) Angeconeb's work, each wide-eyed wolf watches on behalf of the collective. Angeconeb's work has strong connections to the innovative work of another artist that came before him – Norval Morrisseau. His use of the x-ray view in this image shifts the focus away from the dark terrain of the den to the lines of communication that are woven through a pack.

MARGARET MAY

CANADIAN, BORN 1951

Night Journey - Full Moon, 1993

lithograph on Kitakata paper

edition 3/10

COLLECTION OF THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, PURCHASED WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT
OF THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS ACQUISITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
1996-8-1

The bat told the other bats about all the things you could see and hear in the daytime. "You'd love them," he said. "The next time you wake up in the daytime, just keep your eyes open for a while and don't go back to sleep."

The other bats were sure they wouldn't like that. "We wish you didn't wake up at all," they said. "When you wake up in the daytime the light hurts your eyes – the thing to do is to close them and go right back to sleep. Day's to sleep in; as soon as it's night we'll open our eyes."

"But won't you even try it?" the little brown bat said. "Just for once, try it."

-Randall Jarrell, *The Bat Poet* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964).

ERNEST LINDNER
CANADIAN, 1897–1988

Fungi, 1976

lithograph on paper

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edition 46/100

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MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA COLLECTION, GIFT OF MR. JACK COWIN
1977-21

A healthy ecosystem depends on communal relations to survive. The forest is a good a place to witness this truth at work. In recent years, humans have recognized that dense mycorrhizal networks formed by fungi function like a nervous system that allows individual plants to transfer water, nitrogen, carbon, and other materials to one another.

We bats also contribute to a larger network, doing what we can by pollinating plants, providing pest control, dispersing seeds, and making excellent fertilizer. However, in recent years a curious affliction has depleted our populations. A white fungus can be seen on the wings and muzzles of the infected among us. Contractions can often be traced back to physical contact with one another in caves, mines, and other areas where we roost. We are especially vulnerable during the winter when our hibernating body temperatures drop and our immune systems are slower to respond. While this infection is not known to transfer to humans, history has given us reason to fear what may happen when humans are more inclined to see us as a problem rather than a solution.