

ONE HUNDRED WORDS FOR CONQUEST

ONE HUNDRED WORDS FOR CONQUEST:
CURATING ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY AT THE WINNIPEG ART GALLERY

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LAY ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I look at a series of catalogues for Inuit art exhibitions held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG), spanning from 1967 to 2017. I argue that the discursive conventions of settler-Canadian art appreciation, especially those geared towards Inuit creative production, have resonances with the political strategies that Canada uses to prove *effective occupation*—a term from international law—of the Arctic. My research intervenes in this context by showing how art appreciation encourages modes of effective occupation that are not obviously political, insofar as these modes operate in the realm of affect. The resulting work models some strategies for critiquing forms of settler benevolence that are unique to the art world, and offers a template for how to approach exhibition catalogues as a genre—both of which are underdeveloped areas of scholarship.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines a series of catalogues for Inuit art exhibitions held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG), spanning from 1967 to 2017. I argue that the discursive conventions of settler-Canadian art appreciation, especially those geared towards Inuit creative production, have resonances with the political strategies that Canada uses to prove *effective occupation*—a term from international law—of the Arctic. My work intervenes in this context by showing how art appreciation encourages modes of effective occupation that are not obviously political, insofar as these modes operate in the realm of affect. I first develop a critical framework inspired by Glen Coulthard's concept of colonial recognition politics, to demonstrate that there is an *affirmative recognition politics* at work in the WAG catalogues. I then theorize that catalogues' tendency to oscillate between an ethnographic (contextualist) analysis and an aesthetic (non-contextualist) analysis produces a tension that orients patrons towards the North accordance with Canada's position on Arctic geopolitics. Building on the work of Eva Mackey, I argue that a mixed ethnographic-aesthetic view of Inuit art activates a particularly expedient form of *belonging from afar* in settler patron-readers, whereby they are encouraged to feel as if they are of the North, while never having to be there. My third chapter attends to how the WAG narrates the dramatic social transformations that Inuit experienced in the mid-20th century. The catalogues implicitly invalidate many Inuit's experience of settler-colonial intervention by suggesting that the move to sedentary communities, often at the hands of the settler state, was inevitable and even desirable. This work provides strategies for critiquing instances of settler benevolence that are unique to the art world, and offers a template for how to approach exhibition catalogues as a genre—both of which are areas of scholarship that have been hitherto neglected.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AANDC	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
ACL	Arctic Co-operatives Limited
BMC	Bureau of Management Consultants
CCA	Canada Council for the Arts
CMA	Canadian Museums Association
FCNA	Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau Québec
HBC	Hudson's Bay Company
IAC	Inuit Art Centre
IAND	Indian Affairs and Northern Development
ICC	Inuit Circumpolar Conference
IFA	Inuvialut Final Agreement
ITK	Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (formerly Inuit Tapirisat of Canada)
LILCA	Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreements
NDCFP	Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy
NLCA	Nunavut Land Claim Agreement
NISA	Nunavik Inuit Settlement Area
NWT	Northwest Territories (formerly North-West Territories)
QTC	Qikiqtani Truth Commission
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
TFMFP	Task Force on Museums and First Peoples
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WAG	Winnipeg Art Gallery

INTRODUCTION

(An) Effective Occupation:

Inuit Art Put to Work for Canadian Arctic Sovereignty

In the summer of 2017, I visited Winnipeg to begin my archival research for this dissertation. The Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) had recently broken ground on its newest endeavour: the Inuit Art Centre (IAC), which is meant to display the gallery's enormous collection of Inuit artworks, and which will also serve as a sort of community hub for visitors to learn about Inuit, and sometimes even play at being artists themselves, under the tutelage of Inuit artists-in-residence.¹ The IAC building, like the WAG, will model the North, with glassy, ice-like enclosures and rounded, undulating sides in the style of rolling Arctic terrain. Michael Maltzan, the architect for the IAC, describes the centre as

¹ Best practices dictate using the term "Inuit" rather than "the Inuit" in most cases. Technically speaking, the latter is redundant, as "Inuit," an Inuktitut word, translates to "the people" in English. I use the former, except in cases when the text I am citing uses the latter. In references that use the term "Eskimo," I leave it only when (what I see as) its pejorative character supports my analysis. Note that "Eskimo" is still commonly used as a blanket term for Iñupiat and Yupik in Alaska, partly due to the fact that the term "Inuit" is not a word in the Yupik language. There has been some disagreement about where the term "Eskimo" comes from; recent scholarship suggests that it derives from an Anishinaabemowin word meaning "to net snow shoes," although it is commonly understood as a word of unknown origins meaning "eater of raw meat" (Kaplan 2011, np). Regardless of its origin, the term is generally considered derogatory – at least in Canada and Greenland – because it was assigned by Qallunaat (non-Inuit) without consideration for the agency of the people being assigned the label. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), which represents Inuit in Canada, repudiates the term "Eskimo," as demonstrated by their objections to the Edmonton football team's continued appropriation of the term (Obied 2015, np). On a similar note, I recognize that this dissertation's reference to Inuit as a cohesive group does not account for differences between Inuit communities, and possibly homogenizes them, in an attempt to provide an account of how the State and the WAG frame Inuit. This homogenization is ambivalent: it risks taking Inuit, as a political entity, as a given, thereby ignoring how encounters with non-Inuit have given shape to current Inuit lifeways, often with violent consequences. On the other hand, it has some benefits, including acknowledging the fact that Inuit have often organized *as* a single political entity – a fact that we should not ignore by presuming that Inuit as separate and distinct groups are more authentic than their relatively new political formation (which is, of course, internally complex and dynamic).

“a building both for the community in Winnipeg, but very much a bridge to the Inuit culture in the North.” The centre will “create a series of spaces that will represent that Inuit culture in its fullest form, from exhibition spaces to making spaces, spaces for visiting artists; and also to make the collection... much more visible to people who are just passing by the museum, it will become almost a kind of picture window into that culture.” The top floor will feature an exhibition space “suffused with light,” to give a “sense of the Arctic itself” (Shaw TV 2015). The building’s architecture, which is designed to offer passersby a glimpse of the Far North, is reflected in the IAC’s mission, which includes spatial metaphors that convey the intended social effects the gallery hopes to achieve by displaying and promoting Inuit art. The foreword for a 2013 catalogue states that the IAC will “showcase the world’s pre-eminent contemporary Inuit art collection... While providing a dynamic forum for people to experience the collection, the Centre will also strengthen ties with Inuit, their land, and their traditions. As well, it will connect people and places, helping shape the future of Canadian Indigenous art and art making” (Butler and Dumontier 2013, 7-8).

Such promotional material taps into the received idea that a natural kinship exists between Canadian settlers in the South and Inuit, and that “understanding” offers a path away from settler-colonial violence and displacement in the Arctic, and towards social equity. It also elaborates on—perhaps even exploits—the idea that art provides insight, and can therefore bridge the ontological gap between cultures. Inuit art serves a double purpose in this sense: it might foster understanding between Qallunaat—an Inuktitut term meaning non-Inuit, roughly—and Inuit, while also serving as something closer to an

actual bridge, carrying southerners to the North. When I first saw advertisements for the IAC, the framing of its mission struck me as enacting what Glen Coulthard (2014) refers to as a colonial politics of recognition—intended to demonstrate appreciation of Indigenous cultures in the interest of perpetuating settler-colonial systems—while also drawing on the vocabulary of reconciliation, which has gained prominence in recent years, especially since the release of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) final report in 2015. The IAC mission also reflects a widespread sense that Canada needs to leave colonization in the past so that the nation can move forward, unified. To use Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson’s terminology, appreciating Inuit art mobilizes “the impossible but therapeutic fallacy of ‘reconciliation’”—a “political language game and largely state-driven performance art that attempts to move elements of history forward in order to ‘move on’ from the past” while never fully addressing settler colonialism’s full, structural scope (2017, 23-24). At the same time, the fact that the settler state will finally, if inadequately, recognize the value of Indigenous perspectives has a certain “irresistibility,” as Allison Hargreaves puts it (2009, 112). For many, the imperative to “reconcile,” which the IAC is tasked with satisfying, comes as a relief. Given many Canadians’ nascent awareness of their own complicity in settler colonialism, alongside the intense racism regularly experienced by Indigenous peoples, who can blame Canada and its various publics for welcoming declarations of cooperation, appreciation, and understanding like those offered by the WAG?

In the early stages of this dissertation, I planned to chronicle and scrutinize cases where various people and institutions throughout Canada’s south have declared their

admiration for Indigenous art in general, accompanied by a foray into southern attitudes towards Inuit art. I was intrigued by the fact that Inuit artists were attracting mainstream attention, made evident by politicians, reporters, artists, and celebrities announcing that the time had come for Canada to finally turn to Inuit to access their expert knowledge about the Arctic. The newly declared respect for Inuit knowledge that I observed was often matched with a commitment to recognize the value of Inuit artistic production and material culture. This intersecting and multifaceted appreciation of Inuit culture struck me as potentially emblematic of Canada's particular brand of Imperialism, which is increasingly based on the nation-state meting out *cultural* appreciation of Indigenous peoples so as to retain the authority to assert *political* hegemony and facilitate the appropriation of Indigenous land (Coulthard 2014, 156). My sense was that turning our attention to the promotion of Inuit culture in recent years could offer one way of understanding how settler colonialism reproduces itself through the complex interplay between power and subjectivity in the Arctic.

Southern interest in art made by Inuit has manifested in acknowledgements of the importance of Inuit knowledge in recent years. For instance, Inuit throat singing gained national prominence when Inuit singer Tanya Tagaq won the Polaris Music Prize in September of 2014. After receiving her award, Tagaq stated in an interview with CBC that Inuit “are not a culture from the past. We’ve amalgamated and we’re part of everything” (Tagaq 2014), asserting that Inuit can no longer be ignored—a declaration that Inuit had finally achieved recognition and acknowledgement, partly by virtue of being a crucial component of Canadian culture. That same month, then-Prime Minister Stephen

Harper travelled, with much fanfare and publicity, to the Arctic to observe a Canadian mission that was searching for evidence of the long-lost Franklin Expedition. According to a previous chief of staff, the trip was a “milestone... on a journey [Harper] embarked on long ago... Mr. Harper has always been passionate about Canada’s North and about the potential of Canada’s North and its role in history and its importance to its sovereignty” (Humphreys 2014). Harper’s journey was plainly a cynical act of rugged masculinity, as he worked to collapse his own identity with past Arctic explorers, while also asserting Canada’s presence in the Far North.² Tagaq is an Inuk known for her artistic chops as well as for her political engagement; nevertheless, she had a strange ally in the Conservative Prime Minister at a moment of heightened nationalist sentiments pertaining to the Arctic. As the southern media turned its sights northwards, Tagaq was set to play at the 2014 Polaris prize awards ceremony. Musician Geoff Berner introduced her by referencing Canada’s search, and the fact that Inuit accounts of where Franklin’s ships could be found had finally been validated: “Canadian scientists recently found the so-called ‘lost’ Franklin expedition in the Arctic. Turns out, it was exactly where the Inuit have been saying it was, all along. Who would have thought?” (Nelles 2015).

Inuit knowledge played a starring role in this chilly drama, as news reports were coming out about the fact that Inuit possessed oral narratives that held the truth of what happened to John Franklin and his hapless companions. If only the South had listened!

² A *Globe and Mail* article reports that Harper toured northern Canada for one week each year for the entirety of his time in office: “The Prime Minister is not one for grand or sweeping gestures, but up North he has stood atop a submarine as jets roared overhead or sat in a fighter cockpit for the cameras. Each year before the trips, the Privy Council Office also assembles an update on northern initiatives from across the government” (Chase 2014, np). See Michaud (2011) for a discussion of an individual Prime Minister’s ability to set foreign policy agendas in Canada at the turn of the 21st century.

Berner's statement reveals how Inuit empowerment can also suit the agendas of the southern settler-colonial government. Perhaps unwittingly, Berner was declaring that Inuit could help give intellectual and narrative weight to settler Canadians' place in the Arctic. What seemed obvious to me was that Inuit knowledge is seen as valuable by southerners when it fits neatly within Canadian nationalist worldviews. Less clear was exactly how mainstream celebrations of Inuit culture play out in the realm of art appreciation—a correlation I would be required to explain in order to establish how Canadian settler politics operate through the WAG.

The architecture of the gallery itself evokes nordicity: a wedge of intimidating proportion, its cliff-like outer walls, constructed entirely of white marble, meet in a point where Colony Street crosses Memorial Boulevard, assuming the silhouette of an ocean liner plucked from the North Atlantic and dropped into the centre of the country. It might be a vessel, but it could also be a landmark—one that marks territory from a distance, orienting travelers. It can also be viewed as having arisen spontaneously, somehow not human-made; slightly menacing in the way that it looms over the sidewalk. I have never forgotten a friend's account of first coming across the gallery when he lived in Winnipeg; that he had been baffled by the gallery's edifice, which almost seems intended to intimidate, before concluding that the building is meant to mimic an iceberg. It is a wonder that we southern settlers can not only recognize an iceberg, but actually feel somewhat comforted by the familiar image: both in awe and somehow more at home. The image of a frozen leviathan, a piece of the Arctic, is not out of place in this city; the Canadian Far North is practically inscribed on Winnipeg itself. Painted polar bear

footprints on the pavement mingle with the shape of Maple leaves, leading pedestrians across intersections, from store to store, or from hotel to art gallery. The images are plainly representational as well as playful, magical, as if to suggest that one has an equal chance of turning a corner and finding a zoo as one does of stumbling into Narnia.

What are we to make of this city, which has been described as Chicago's northern cousin, an urban oasis in Canada's own Midwest, but which flaunts its northernness? Winnipeg is centrally located, and not only for those traveling the length of Canada (east to west); it also served as a hub for a stream of goods that once travelled from the North to the South. Winnipeg was the first stop for traders on their way southwards, making it an ideal site for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) to locate its headquarters. The WAG has the largest public collection of Inuit artworks in the world (Mantel and Lane 2010, 126), which is a direct result of the city's placement along trade routes, as well as its relative proximity to the Far North, by way of Churchill, Manitoba. Winnipeg also has the highest ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous people of any Canadian city.³ It is surely impossible for the WAG—or, to be more precise, its staff and administrators—to view the institution as working at a remove from the assortment of people, Inuit and Qallunaat, who move through and around it, and the WAG's stated mission for the IAC serves as evidence of the gallery's felt responsibilities.

³ This ratio does not mean that Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents live in harmony; rather, it correlates with seething intercultural tensions and anti-Indigenous violence. In 2015, *McLean's* reported, "Winnipeg is arguably becoming Canada's most racist city" (Macdonald 2015). The following year, however, concerted efforts in response to this scathing designation prompted the magazine to suggest that the city is "fast becoming a capital of reconciliation" (Macdonald 2016).

Exhibition Catalogues: 50 years of Interpretation

For this project, I leave the gallery's historical and cultural significance mostly to the side. This is partly to counteract the institution's attraction, which I felt intensely while visiting Winnipeg, and even now, writing in Ontario. The WAG is undeniably seductive in its promise to transport me northwards, seeking to interpellate me as a citizen of a far-off land that I have never seen. Rather than study the thing that charms me, I aim to study the very nature of that charm itself. To do so, I turn to the gallery's textual artifacts, as a way to figure out how to *read the institution*, and thereby examine the gallery's draw as a discursive effect. The gallery's exhibition catalogues are particularly useful in this regard: if Inuit art is meant to be a window into the North, then the books *about* the gallery's approach to displaying Inuit art surely contain clues for understanding how Inuit art operates discursively. This method also makes approaching the history of the art gallery difficult, as the books and people from whom we learn its history require what sometimes feels like endless attention. My choice of archive might therefore be seen as primarily a matter of practicality, in that the catalogues provide a manageable focus for my analysis, something I can grapple with. Even still, the archive seems unwieldy at times, spanning as it does from the 1950s to today, and comprising nearly 200 books and brochures, each text offering rich and varied accounts of the associated exhibition. The catalogues were initially meant to only comprise part of my project's focus; however, what I initially judged to be a marginal element of my archive quickly became my project's central focus.

Theory on how to read exhibition catalogues is remarkably sparse. Only a handful

of WAG catalogues include statements indicating the actual purpose of an exhibition catalogue, but these rare characterizations are important for highlighting the gallery's attitude towards the relationship between catalogue, exhibition, reader, and gallery goer. Such mentions tend to emphasize that the catalogue and the artwork, in combination, are meant to foster understanding of Inuit culture. The book for the exhibit *Holman: Forty Years of Graphic Art* is explicit about the purpose of an exhibition catalogue: it “brings the artwork to a wider audience and provides biographical and stylistic information about the people who created the prints and drawings” (Wight 2001b, 6). The catalogue for *The Coming and Going of the Shaman: Eskimo Shamanism and Art* (Blodgett 1978a), which showed in early 1978, explains that the catalogue is central to the mission of the exhibition—not so much to highlight the aesthetic qualities of the pieces on display, but to tease out what they can tell us about shamanism in particular, as well as Inuit culture more broadly. It is explicit about its own objective: to “provide the reader with a basic understanding of the complex but rewarding concept of Eskimo shamanism and artworks which illustrate that belief” (8). The language of challenge and reward feature prominently here. But what are the rewards associated with gaining an understanding of Inuit culture? And what does the gallery gain by facilitating such understanding; by ferrying its visitors towards enlightenment?

Exhibition catalogues give insight into the labour that has gone into staging the associated exhibition, and they offer a sampling of the artworks on display. They introduce visitors *to* an exhibition—thus foreshadowing and anticipating the gallery-goer entering into the gallery space—and they exist after and away from the exhibition, as a

document of the event. The latter is the cataloguing role of the exhibit book. Much of the interest in exhibition catalogues has centred on this function, meaning that art professionals have tended to focus on the degree to which an exhibition catalogue accurately depicts the exhibition that it accompanies. In a 1969 interview, New York gallery owner Seth Siegelaub opines that exhibition catalogues offer “a secondhand experience [of the exhibition], which does not do justice to the work—since it depends upon its physical presence, in terms of color, scale, material and context—all of which is bastardized and distorted” (Lippard 1973, 125). Richard Hill, the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Studies at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, offers a similar assessment: catalogues, in his view, fall short in their assigned duties “to serve as a supplement to the exhibition and to serve as a document of the exhibition” (2017, np). An exhibition’s catalogue functions as a public-facing gloss of the event, often excluding certain elements of the process *behind* the exhibition. These elided details are often contained in documents that have been relegated to a gallery’s archives—materials that are often considered “boring,” and do not fit neatly into a catalogue’s narrative, which is tailored to maximize the appeal of both the book object and the exhibition. Additionally, catalogues are commonly produced to coincide with an exhibition’s opening, which means that they must be printed before the exhibition is completed. According to Hill, “if there is a time crunch, the catalogue will be at press during installation and arrive just before the opening” (np). Given the inevitable disparity between the catalogue’s narrative and the myriad materials and interactions that form the scaffolding of an exhibition, not to mention the inability of the catalogue to even represent the actual exhibition as it will

appear on the day that it opens, Hill proposes that we must look beyond the catalogue if we hope to learn about an exhibition.

If a catalogue is meant to represent the corresponding exhibition with complete fidelity, simply encapsulating every aspect of the event, then it is doomed to fail from the outset. More important, perhaps, is that emphasizing the documentary function of catalogues ignores the fact that *all* texts operate ideologically, let alone ones, like exhibition catalogues, that strive to explicate an institution's mission while also making its project appealing to its public. As Amy Karlinsky points out, exhibition catalogues "play into relationships of power, assignments of value, and negations or affirmations of political ideologies" (2004, 163). Catalogues have a lot to tell us, then, beyond the question of whether or not they capture the essence of the works on display in the accompanying exhibition. Indeed, catalogues, some of which run in excess of 200 pages, serve a number of purposes, as evidenced by the various components that make up the over-half century of WAG Inuit exhibition books and brochures. The texts often include maps of the Arctic, usually pictured alongside Canada only, but sometimes from a global perspective, giving readers a sense of where the art objects on display were produced. A preface can be expected, usually written by the gallery's Director, followed by an introductory essay by the exhibition curator, either in-house or a guest. In addition to the curator's essay, the WAG catalogues might include write-ups from a number of people: art collectors, civil servants with experience working in the Far North, bureaucrats who can speak to the history of certain arts programs, politicians, both Inuit and Qallunaat; anthropologists; biologists; and, of course, artists whose work is on display. Depending

on the exhibition, the curator may offer either an extended historical overview, glossing several centuries of social and political life in the Far North, or an ethnographical account of a particularly intriguing aspect of Inuit culture, such as the role of the Shaman, hunting and fishing practices, or detailed accounts of traditional Inuit clothing. This all tends to come before the expected photographs of select pieces from the exhibition, as well as the conventional didactic summaries. In addition to describing the materials used, artist's name, and date of creation, the accompanying summaries often offer analyses of each work to elucidate the story behind its creation and what it tells gallery-goers about Inuit culture more broadly.

The catalogues' structure—a mosaic of political history, art history, biography – suggests a substantial degree of interdisciplinarity, but also intertextuality. These qualities accorded with the initial aim of my research, which was to both follow and to build on scholarship that theorizes the North as a discursive formation. In *Canada and the Idea of North*, Sherrill Grace analyzes Canada's idea of its own northernness as the product of “a plurality of ideas of North that are in constant flux yet are persistent over time, across a very wide field of endeavour, and are capable of being isolated for analysis” (2002, xiii). Because my project understands Arctic sovereignty and Inuit art appreciation as interdependent sites of knowledge production, my dissertation embodies an ethos of intertextuality, based on the premise that the exhibition catalogues are located within a larger textual and ideological apparatus that extends beyond the gallery walls. The catalogues' approach to contextualizing exhibitions is not unique to the WAG, nor to Inuit art; however, these texts—unremarkable, perhaps, alongside other catalogues—are

uniquely relevant for grasping the many forms taken by Canada's ongoing efforts to establish a hold over the Far North. These are not stand-alone texts, existing in a vacuum, but components of a wider discursive formation that contributes and responds to the (Canadian) South's view of the North, and its own place therein. This leads me to a note on citation: my aim is to analyze the WAG catalogues in terms of the discursive formations that they contribute to, not to condemn individual gallery workers, or the gallery itself, for how they approach Inuit art and / or culture. Therefore, rather than identifying who authored a given essay in an exhibition catalogue (which is often, but not always, the exhibition curator), I refer to the catalogue itself. I take the inspiration for this approach from Clare Hemmings, whose study of feminist journals uses a similar "citation tactic" (2011, 3) in order to establish "narrative similarities" between stories (5).

Notwithstanding the fact that the gallery and its workings as an institution are not exactly the focus of my study, insights from the field of critical museum studies are crucial for reading the WAG Inuit exhibition catalogues as cultural texts. This project also builds on scholarship involving the larger cultural context in which museums operate—specifically, critiques that are attentive to the various sites across which the tendrils of settler colonialism in Canada stretch. In this sense, my project is expansive, in that it aims to include a range of criticism in order to develop a broad sense of how Indigenous dispossession works in Canada. Accordingly, I draw on the work of Indigenous scholars that illuminates and problematizes colonial recognition and inclusion, and their role in perpetuating settler-colonial violence, but which also identifies and celebrates the ethical and agential responses of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Allen 2000; Battiste 2013; Byrd

2011; Byrd and Rothberg 2011; Coulthard 2014; Hunt and Stevenson 2017; Palmater 2015; A. Simpson 2014, 2016, 2017; L. Simpson 2017; Todd 2017; Tuck and Yang 2012). On the other hand, my project's sightline is extremely narrow: it is attentive to the particularities of Arctic sovereignty, as a way to understand how settler colonialism works in the context of the Far North. Whereas the state's agenda in the South has been to physically displace and politically marginalize Indigenous peoples, in order to make room for illegal settlements, the state's approach to the North has been to facilitate ownership rather than occupation. The fact that the government is not interested in spreading its dominion by evicting Inuit and implanting Qallunaat communities in the Far North—at least at this point—is reflected in Canada's current approaches to proving Arctic sovereignty, which treat Inuit prior occupation of the Far North as the basis for the federal government's dominion.

Remote Control: Governing the Arctic from a Distance

Dating to the 17th century, Britain's interest in the Arctic fur trade was in line with prevailing imperialist logics that drove the seafaring nations of the time, whereby much of the world was seen as simply waiting to be claimed, often by whatever means were deemed adequate by those doing the claiming. Forts and ships were used to establish a British merchant and military presence in the Arctic territories throughout the late 17th and early 18th century. During the height of French colonial activity in New France, Charles II of Britain issued a royal charter, in 1670, that granted territory to British fur traders seeking to capitalize on goods in the "New World." The charter included all lands

abutting the waterways that flowed into Hudson Bay, commonly referred to as Rupert's Land, so named after a cousin of the King who was active in the fledgling fur-trading company. The processes that spawned the Hudson's Bay Company were a model of efficiency—and of questionable logic—insofar as they epitomized how Britain could expand its realm with minimal effort or expense. The charter allowed for the company—not yet known as the HBC—to establish trade infrastructure, but did not encourage colonization or settlement (Grant 2010, 76; Jenness 1964, 12). Although its mandate was constrained, it nevertheless made a show of British control (Grant 78-9), demonstrating what is referred to in international law as effective occupation. This concept is crucial for the study of the WAG's catalogues as it clarifies the symbolic and performative elements of asserting ownership and thereby establishes how dominion might be asserted from a distance.

Sovereignty is “the ability of the state to exercise recognized rights of exclusive jurisdiction within a territorially delimited space” (Griffiths 2009, 3); to that end, effective occupation is the main condition that must be met in order for a nation's sovereignty to be deemed legitimate, at least from an international perspective. Generally, Canada is viewed as having adequately demonstrated jurisdiction over the Arctic, which the nation-state took over from Britain in the mid-19th century, although such demonstrations must be repeated, as effective occupation is subject to standards and socio-political contexts, both of which are constantly in flux (Head 1963, 200; 225-26). The history of the 19th and 20th century in the Far North is thus a history not of *settlement* per se, but of Britain, and then Canada, repeatedly performing a sufficient degree of

oversight and input, both through material developments like infrastructure as well as the implementation of policies and regulations. Of course, imperial nations like Britain refrained from entertaining the idea that Indigenous peoples may have already demonstrated a long-standing effective occupation before the British arrived—at least not to the degree that such a consideration made them question the validity of their own incursions into unceded lands.⁴ Hence, Britain and its proxies gave little thought to Inuit wellbeing, let alone their territorial or cultural rights (Grant 2010, 81). Occupying the Arctic had symbolic significance throughout the 19th century. Rather than being useful for commerce, mapping the Arctic and charting a course to the East were maneuvers for acquiring “national glory and honour” (Grant 2010, 104; see also Robinson, M. F. 2006, 28).

In 1870, HBC transferred control of Rupert’s Land to the fledgling Dominion of Canada, two centuries after acquiring their charter from the British monarchy. HBC lands became the North-West Territories (NWT) (now called Northwest Territories, less a portion expropriated for Nunavut) (Grant 2010, 135-6). A decade later, Britain transferred the Arctic Islands to Canada, disregarding challenges by the United States, particularly over Ellesmere Island (166; 168). Much like today, the 19th-century Canadian public presumed that the Far North was inherently part of Canada. However, despite feeling that it had a natural claim to the North, given its proximity on maps and the long history of

⁴ Canada has a unique status vis-à-vis the colonial legal frameworks typically used to validate European discovery and ownership claims. The 2014 Supreme Court decision for *Tsilhqot’in Nation v British Columbia* found that the Crown’s sovereignty is not based on *terra nullius* but has to contend with the “*dui generis* nature of Indian title.” Hence, the state has a responsibility to proceed with adequate consideration for pre-existing Indigenous rights (Bickenbach et al. 2018, 350).

British occupation and travel throughout the Arctic, “Canada by 1880 had become a large nation bounded by three oceans but with scant population, no navy to protect adjacent waters and only rudimentary infrastructure to cover the newly acquired lands” (Grant 2010, 8). This scenario called for strategies that required minimal resources and could be enacted from a distance, while being substantial enough so as to convince the world that Canada had laid sufficient claim to the Far North. The federal government chose to use its national police forces to demonstrate a Canadian presence in the Arctic, starting at the end of the 19th century (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, 18). The police force served, essentially, as mascots of Canadian effective occupation, executing a “variety of administrative tasks such as postal service, issuing of licences and collecting customs duties” (Grant 2010, 202). To a similar end, Canada deployed ships to the Northern Arctic, and later into Hudson Bay (Zaslow 1971, 263) and instituted “laws of particular concern to its Arctic regions” (MacDonald 1950, Ch. 3, pt. II, sec. 1, b.; sec. 1, d., quoted in Kikkert and Lackenbauer 2014, 296-97), to assert governmental authority.

Canada essentially saw two options for how to administer to Inuit in the first half of the 20th century: keep interventions to a minimum in order to reduce government expenditures, or assume responsibility for Inuit and incorporate them into the nation more fully. Leaving aside the question of whether the federal government felt that it *should* take responsibility for the wellbeing of Inuit, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a case called *Re Eskimos*, ultimately decided that the state *would* do so. In 1939, on the question of whether Inuit fell under federal or provincial jurisdiction, the Court ruled that Inuit were, in fact, included in the definition of “Indian” laid out in the *Indian Act* (1876)

(Jenness 1964, 40; Backhouse 1999; Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, 6-7). The decision assigned the federal government responsibility for providing healthcare and education services to Inuit. Somewhat fortuitously, at least for the state, taking responsibility for Inuit was starting to make economic sense, especially as doing so allowed the federal government to redouble its efforts to relocate the inconveniently mobile Inuit to settlements. The government was becoming more involved in developing resource extraction in the Far North, and such projects required a stable and sedentary workforce (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, 10).

Of greatest relevance for my project from the above overview is the fact that the early-mid 20th century, beginning in the 1930s, marked a transition from a type of care that was a *consequence* of effective occupation (i.e. government workers making provisions for Inuit with whom they came in contact during the process of establishing a southern presence) to exercising care as a *condition* of effective occupation—in other words, demonstrating responsibility *for* and responsivity *to* Inuit in order to ensure a more robust dominion over Inuit territory. Canada still had to fulfill many of the same conditions as the seafaring nations of previous centuries. However, judicial decisions like *Re Eskimos* (1939), international scrutiny, and acts of political agency by Inuit increasingly required that Canada demonstrate a more holistic sort of occupancy, rather than simply proving presence (Grant 2010, 227)—something akin to stewardship. Providing services for Inuit was one way Canada constructed the Arctic as always already belonging to the settler nation (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, 14). Still, the number of people in the Arctic who were from abroad was rising. These visitors were seeing first-

hand the lack of government support for Inuit, and many of them pressured the government to intervene (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, vi). Canada needed to demonstrate that it was supervising and “developing” the North in order to guarantee its dominion in the Arctic, which increasingly meant proving that it was providing for the Arctic’s occupants—an internationally-recognized form of social development. All the while, the federal government’s near-total disregard for Inuit viewpoints was becoming increasingly untenable. In 1952, Eskimo Affairs Committee debates about how to secure Inuit welfare quickly expanded to consider how such efforts might likewise bolster Arctic sovereignty (Grant 2010, 319). All the while, Cold-War military activity brought flight tests that terrorized human and non-human residents alike, making life in the Arctic frequently and unpredictably unpleasant. This time period also featured research projects that included the dynamiting of glaciers. Many Inuit, none of whom had been consulted, “thought they were being bombed” (306).

While including Inuit in the decision-making processes that affected their daily lives was out of the question, by the 1950s Canada had begun to see Inuit as potentially useful as proxies for establishing sovereignty in the High Arctic, a region in which the US had expressed interest (219-20). The government called for an “experiment,” the first stages of which took place in 1953 (320). It involved the RCMP moving Inuit families from Inukjuak (Port Harrison) to Grise Fjord on Ellesmere Island and Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island. The government used a combination of coercion and misinformation to facilitate the relocations. Beyond the fact that they simply did not want to leave their homes, many Inuit relocated by the government were in poor health and unsuited for

travel. Once in the High Arctic, they found an inhospitable and unfamiliar climate, few food sources, and almost no viable companions for procreation, due to their isolation; all the while, state conservation rules severely restricted large-game hunting (RCAP 1994, 87-89)—hardly the best conditions for building a community. Today, while Inuit have received an official apology from the federal government, they are still waiting for the state to adequately address the forced relocations.⁵ That the state was driven to pursue such a calamitous strategy highlighted Inuit’s increasing strategic importance for the federal government, as well as their usefulness for helping southerners navigate the Arctic. Southern governments depended on Inuit, with their knowledge of the land, to institute defense measures in the North. In particular, the Canadian Rangers program used “traditional Inuit survival skills and knowledge to assist Canadian and American defence personnel in Arctic operations” (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, 15), while the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) enlisted Inuit “Special Constables” to maintain good relations between the police force and locals (19). Having Inuit in defence and policing positions helped demonstrate the federal government’s effective occupation of the North, insofar as Canada was technically present in the Arctic—or present *enough*—while also making strides to support Inuit, mainly by providing them with employment.

In the 1970s, Canada’s Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) had become focused on “the northern environment with due consideration to

⁵ Pauline Wakeham contends that both the relocations and the State’s statements of regret regarding the strategy bolster state sovereignty: “while the 1953 and 1955 relocations were spurred by the Cold War scramble for Arctic control, the 2010 apology... was transformed by the government into an opportunity to reassert Canada’s Arctic claims in an era of global warming that is rendering the region a renewed site of international interest” (2014, 86).

economic and social development” (Grant 2010, 364), which differed drastically from the hands-off approach that the government had once subscribed to.⁶ The state’s attention to development prompted Inuit to express their political agency in the 1980s. However, it was Inuit themselves who pushed the federal government towards negotiating land-claim agreements and recognizing their right to self-determination. They were emboldened by a clause in the new constitution that declared that Indigenous people in Canada enjoy inherent, if vaguely-defined, rights (Macklem 2001). The mid- and late-20th century demonstrated interconnections between resource development and Inuit political consciousness, as organizations like the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) were created to give Inuit a stronger voice with which to respond to actual as well as anticipated incursions, both by the state and by resource-development companies (Grant 2010, 340). The people of the Far North sought to provide input for extraction activities that could impact their homelands and started to seriously weigh the possibility of establishing self-government (370-72). In 1982, the same year that Canada repatriated its Constitution, residents of Northwest Territories reached an agreement about where the borders for a then-hypothetical Nunavut territory might lie (383), prompting territorial and self-government negotiations. The first self-government agreement in the Arctic was the Inuvialut Final Agreement (IFA), in 1984, covering part of the Western Arctic, which

⁶ According to government reports, when fur prices dropped in the first years of the 20th century, the federal government “advocated a traditional, self-sufficient way of life for Inuit” (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, 4). The federal policy was to “encourag[e] Inuit to retain their traditional way of life”; in the mid-20th century, the government was “reluctant” to implement the sort of assimilative schooling system that existed in the South, or to “take a larger role in developing a federal system of education in the North for an Inuit population that continued to live semi-nomadically” (82). The authors frame the government’s hesitance to assimilate Inuit as a benevolent concern for Inuit well-being, but we might also surmise that Inuit knowledge of the Arctic is crucial for non-Inuit to even survive there, let alone to assert authority.

exchanged exclusive use of traditional lands for title and rights (383). Inuit in the Eastern Arctic negotiated The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement (NLCA) in 1993, which came into effect in 1999. In 2006, Inuit in Northern Quebec finalized the Nunavik Inuit Settlement Area (NISA). In 2008, the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (LILCA) was settled, which swapped Indigenous title in exchange for co-management rights (385).

Effective Occupation, Inuit Specificity, and Artmaking as Stewardship

The Canadian government has long approached funding and facilitating the creation of Inuit art as a means for showcasing Canada's distinct national identity, while also striking a balance between limiting government control and sustaining robust market activity in the North. Art programs were introduced in the 1950s against the backdrop of a failing fur trade, as well as Cold War-era military activity in the North (Igloliorte 2009, 129). The art programs were meant to demonstrate effective occupation; to perform stewardship from afar. They also helped Inuit sustain themselves without an overly resource- and labour-intensive intervention on the part of the federal government (BMC 1979, 10; Paci 1996). As a report by the Bureau of Management Consultants (BMC) from 1979 notes, art production and state interest in the Arctic are inextricably tied: "It is no accident that the concept of Canadian sovereignty in the North was developed during the same period as Inuit art" (9). Not only does art production enable the federal government to maintain a moderate yet convincing degree of on-the-ground control in the North, but the art form itself has played a distinct role in symbolizing Canadianness to the world. As Norman Vorano writes in "Inuit Art: Canada's Soft Power Resource to Fight

Communism,” Canadian politicians and civic representatives in the Cold War era frequently gifted visiting dignitaries and British royalty with carvings and prints by Inuit artists. By presenting Inuit art as a symbol of the nation, in the context of the 1950s, Canada demonstrated that it respected and appreciated the forms of art being produced in the North at that time, while also flaunting Canada’s authority and control over the Arctic. From an international standpoint, the government’s casting of Inuit art as fundamentally Canadian “projected a settler nationalist appreciation for the cultural expressions of its northernmost Indigenous people,” but it also “sent a clear message about Canada’s presence in and command over the eastern Arctic, a symbolic gesture informed by the tense geopolitical realignments during an intensifying Cold War” (Vorano 2016, 315). Attention to Inuit cultural production helped to cast—and continues to cast—Inuit art as an exemplary *Canadian* art form. After releasing its most recent Arctic policy, in 2009,

the Canadian government launched a public relations initiative that sponsored events and exhibitions in Europe to promote Inuit art and culture as a means of publicizing the human presence in the Canadian Arctic—a central argument used in support of its sovereign claims. This new public relations policy was a deliberate move to send the world a message that Canada was a responsible steward of its Arctic regions in addressing ecological and aboriginal issues. (Grant 2010, 441)

Canada has repeatedly flaunted its status as a fundamentally northern nation on the world stage with its government-funded touring exhibitions of Inuit art. Inuit art has been a “primary medium through which the image of the northern half of Canada’s sovereign political community has been conveyed to both southern Canadians themselves, and the rest of the world” (Lennox 2012, 3). Beyond its symbolic effects internationally, appreciating Inuit art has engendered meaningful connections between South and North,

encouraging southerners to internalize a sense of belonging to, if not exactly in, the Far North.

Inuit art has multiple, almost miraculous effects, allowing Canada to suggest that it controls much of Earth's northern regions by simply flaunting Inuit cultural expression. Recognizing and supporting Inuit cultural expression are also potentially useful tactics for eliciting Inuit cooperation and demonstrating stewardship, especially now that a warming global climate, which is currently reducing ice cover in Arctic waters, is intensifying the need to establish sovereignty over the Far North (Hassol 2004). Canada is currently "faced with the prospect of increased use of Arctic sea routes and global pressure to designate the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route as international straits" (415). At the same time that Arctic politics are becoming increasingly complicated, especially given the degree to which the settler state must now pay attention to northern Indigenous peoples, in order to ensure the cooperation of those peoples upon whom Canada's claims to prior occupancy rely, a warming climate and increased international interest in northern resources are putting pressure on Canada's ability to assert sovereignty over the Arctic (Shadian 2014; Zellen 2009). While the Arctic might be valuable, maintaining sovereignty through military presence is expensive and often untenable, due mainly to the size of the area in question, as well as its challenging terrain (Grant 2010, 415; Berry et al. 2016). Concurrently, the emergent Inuit political autonomy of the late 20th and early 21st centuries has represented a major shift in the approaches that modern nation-states may take in order to declare ownership over the Far North. Grant writes, "With Inuit land claims agreements now including shared control over land use

and resource management, it became readily apparent that the Inuit interpretation of aboriginal rights included a *sovereignty right* attached to their historic occupation and use of Arctic lands and water, bringing a whole new dimension to the term ‘Arctic sovereignty’” (2010, 386-87 my emphasis). The nature of this “sovereignty right” is ambiguous. Does it reference Inuit sovereignty or Canadian sovereignty? Indeed, this is the very basis of the Canada’s current approach to Arctic sovereignty: exploiting Inuit prior occupancy as a fact that gives legitimacy to Canadian Arctic sovereignty.

Canada’s assertions of sovereignty over the Arctic are based on a combination of “symbolic” and “developmental” sovereignty. The former describes performances of jurisdiction, such as policy-making, overseeing criminal cases, and administering services, with the primary purpose of demonstrating sovereignty to other nations (Morrison 1986, 246; see also Grant 2010, 222). Starting in the Western Arctic, symbolic sovereignty has often been executed by the RCMP, who were called the Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP) in the early 20th century, and who acted as proxies of the state while enforcing Canadian laws in northern communities (Morrison 1986, 247-48). Developmental sovereignty, on the other hand, involves, as the name suggests, developing the Arctic territories. The imperatives of this type of sovereignty required the state to install infrastructure, but also to take responsibility for the social and economic aspects of the lives of the Arctic’s inhabitants—Inuit, to be precise (258). In what ways might supporting Inuit artmaking be viewed as a form of “symbolic” *and* “developmental” sovereignty? Evidence abounds that the nation-state has long been interested in promoting artmaking as a way for Inuit to sustain themselves, thereby

supplying Canada with a way to prove its dominion through supporting art. Consider, for instance, a 1927 report from the Deputy Minister of the Department of the Interior, which proposes

that in the development of the possibilities of the hinterland, particularly in the Arctic regions, the native population is destined to play a very important part. Serious study is being given the problem of providing convenient opportunities for the natives to develop themselves *by practising the handicrafts for which nature has fitted them* and implanting firmly in their minds the necessity for conservation in its broadest terms as affecting not only forest and wild life, but human health, energy, and economic well being [sic]. (10 my emphasis)

The statement implies that Inuit are not knowledgeable about or attentive to conservation, giving legitimacy to government intervention, perhaps to steer Inuit towards a presumably more moderate and sustainable way of life: artmaking, in this case.

By proposing policy that encourages creative production as a key method for conserving Inuit society, the report broadens the conception of what counts as effective occupation-via-bureaucracy to include support for the arts, albeit with words that reflect attitudes about the quality of Inuit art that prevailed at the time—that is, that Inuit produced objects that were craft-like at best, hardly at the same level of aesthetic excellence as European artists (Robertson and Racette 2009, 12). On one hand, the Deputy Minister’s report appears to prescribe curative measures for Inuit whose lives and lifeways have been disrupted by colonial actions, by offering to support their production of “handicrafts.” We can also view this statement as a judgement of Inuit lifeways, which are seen as lacking, and therefore in need of the federal government’s tinkering. Offering support for creative production suggests an interest in “civilizing” Inuit by nurturing skills that can allow them to support themselves in ways that require them to remain

sedentary—and thereby easier to administer to—while also allowing the state to perform its interest in Inuit wellbeing. What is clear is that Canada was starting to view funding Inuit artmaking as a way to ensure the financial well-being of Inuit, while also demonstrating the federal government's stewardship over the Far North, thereby executing a developmental sovereignty in accordance with the dictates of international law.

The equation of development with ownership, with regards to Arctic sovereignty, is worth dwelling on, particularly insofar as it recalls the sort of Lockean improvement logic that works to legitimize settler colonialism. In *Two Treatises of Government*, published in 1698, Locke contends that when nature's ingredients are made useful through cultivation, the product also becomes the property of the individual (and Locke explicitly has only men in mind here). His analysis works to resolve a contradiction whereby individuals can be equal in their liberty while also owning different kinds and quantities of things—essentially extending the boundary of the self, perhaps in a way that looks unequal, through ownership:

Though the Earth and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a 'Property in his own Person.' This noBody has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with it, and joyned [sic] to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property. (185)

In Locke's view, a person has dominion over himself, so when he applies his labours to nature's raw materials, he renders those products proper to himself. They are both owned by him and, in a sense, an extension of himself. Further, not only does a thing's status as property come from its being improved upon, but a thing's value also comes from the

work invested in it: “’tis Labour indeed that puts the difference of value on everything” (195). This ability to claim land as property—through toil and “improvement”—relies on the idea that all individuals are independent and self-determining, born with the right to live freely and to seek sustenance unencumbered. Locke’s conception is based on a unidirectional assertion of authority, with the self-determining person imposing their industry—and perhaps their will—onto the passive other-than-human entity.

Locke’s proposal includes two elements that form the basis for settler-colonial claims to Indigenous lands: first, there are people who are not using their land in the right way—i.e. sharing it, not seeming to cultivate it, or not settling down in one place; and second, a person with the right attitude and proclivity for hard work might claim this land by mixing their labour with it, by making the resource proper to themselves. Locke’s suggestion that development gives legitimacy to ownership claims is of particular relevance for Arctic sovereignty. According to the logic of development-as-improvement, cultivation denotes sovereign authority: “subduing or cultivating the Earth, and having Dominion, we see are joyned [sic] together. The one gave Title to the other” (Locke 1698, 191). Along similar lines, the Canadian federal government can be seen as infusing the Arctic with value; with “developments” like instituting policies and programs that defend the North against outsiders while also recognizing and bolstering Inuit culture (reduced in the above report to “handicrafts”). Such stewardship demonstrates the presence and consequent dominion of the southern government, while producing the Far North and its inhabitants as newly valuable entities from whose existence the nation-state acquires authority.

The notion that supporting Inuit “handicrafts” is a form of stewardship over the Far North appears as a motif in much 20th-century government policy. In fact, stewardship as a way of asserting sovereignty operates in multiple directions. As outlined above, we see the federal government stipulating that the creation and marketing of Inuit art products can help to demonstrate that the settler state is acting as a steward of its northern territories. At the same time, following the 1982 Constitution, Canada was increasingly willing to recognize that Inuit had territorial rights that predated contact, in response to Inuit political activism. In this new context, Inuit were not given ownership over their territories; instead, they were seen as having “stewardship [as] a system of collective ownership” (Shadian 2014, 58). That these parallel modes of stewardship, based on the care of and (apparent) respect for Inuit, supplanted once-ubiquitous forms of Westphalian sovereignty in Canadian geopolitics signalled the rise of a much more flexible and permissive approach to establishing dominion in the Far North. Of interest, then, is the possibility that Inuit artmaking came to be defined as a form of Inuit stewardship, remotely supported by / from the South. Viewing support for art as stewardship allows for us to ask some pointed questions about the relationship between art and cultural identity, including: What is at stake when creating art is to embody Inuitness? Investigating this question is crucial for understanding southern art criticism, particularly seen in the WAG catalogues, which often equates Inuit *art* with Inuit *culture* writ large. If artmaking represents the ultimate in Inuit cultural expression, then the state can provide maximum stewardship—i.e. in the form of supporting culture—while also retaining its sovereign authority.

Casting artmaking as stewardship also shapes the relationship between people and land. As I show in Chapter 2, the exhibition catalogues frequently reduce the North to its aesthetic components, to an abstraction, suggesting not only that Inuit art fully encapsulates the territory and terrain from which the artist hails, but that the landscape *itself* is a work of art. Beyond the objectifying effect of aestheticization, casting the relationship between Inuit and their land as primarily figurative opens up the Arctic to interpretation—a form of conceptual occupation—instantiating a hybridized, symbolic-developmental sovereignty. Aestheticizing Inuit cosmologies ultimately gives legitimacy to the idea that the Far North can be presided over through symbolic acts of dominion, such as supporting the production of art, or, later, taking a laissez-faire approach that allows Inuit to practice economic and artistic autonomy through the co-op system. Further, in mainstreaming Inuit culture as primarily an aesthetic entity, southern art institutions risk casting cultural production as somehow *not* labour. Aside from the fact that producing art and having culture entail all sorts of work, the hegemonic aestheticization of Inuit culture downplays the link between art appreciation and resource development in the Far North. Extracting resources, like oil and minerals, and recognizing the value of Inuit culture production are both lucrative endeavours.

The idea of the Far North as fundamentally aesthetic subordinates the territory to human creative forces, echoing Lockean ideas that “man” achieves full personhood by transforming empty space into “property,” thereby “improving” upon it. The aesthetic emptying out of the Arctic is in line with popular visions of “rich resources hidden below the Arctic landscape” (Buege 1995, 83). This notion derives from travelers who longed

for “uninhabited” lands, and who therefore had to see regions like the Far North as wild and empty (of human presence anyway) in order for their mission to be seen as acceptable. Indeed, the notion of an Arctic wilderness is powerful; it denotes a “clearing; a wasteland, a nest of wild beasts”; wild territories are easily seen as waiting to be claimed, developed, and even, perhaps, transformed into a (settled) home (Bordo 2002, 292). Common misapprehensions about the status of the Far North—that it is uninhabitable, typically—are easy targets for those wishing to challenge Imperialist frontier mentalities. If the Arctic is viewed as “wilderness,” then recasting it as a “homeland,” with reference to Inuit presence, should subvert colonial views of the region as merely waiting for someone to come along and turn it into something useful (Pollock 2009, 74). However, while a commonsensical framing of the Arctic as inhospitable and sparsely populated certainly persists, the degree of attention paid to Inuit cultural production suggests that the South is aware that the Far North is occupied, even being put to so-called good use through such esteemed practices as artmaking and knowledge production.⁷ This awareness does not preclude southerners from viewing the Arctic as a prime location for “development,” suggesting that Inuit presence—even cultural vitality—does not negate the Arctic’s frontier status. A homeland can still be a frontier, especially if advancing settler-colonial agendas of development and “improvement” happens through soliciting cooperation and fostering ambivalent forms of (national) belonging.

⁷ Nancy Doubleday offers a third reading, suggesting that the Arctic’s status as both frontier *and* homeland is a “fundamental dualism” in Inuit and Qallunaat perspectives (2005, 167).

The WAG and its catalogues, in offering a window to the North, are therefore in the company of 19th century Arctic travel writing, which fuelled the imagination of readers back home in Europe with tales of other-worldly lands. Fantasies of ice-covered terrain and impassable waters, cherished by the British public, spawned the “Arctic Sublime”—a genre of literature and painting that elaborated on reports by travelers like John Franklin (Cavell 2008; Duffy 2013, 103; Kjeldas 2017, 43). Likewise, through texts that depict the Arctic as both alluring and dangerous, Canadian national identity has crystalized around a sense of being northern (cf. Grace 2002; Hulan 2002; McGhee 2007). In addition to textual representations, visual culture also allows Canadian southerners to become acquainted with the Far North, from a distance. The Far North’s “romantic imagery is kept alive with the dramatic photographs in coffee-table books and spectacular settings for Arctic film documentaries. Recent representations have attempted to portray the realities of Inuit life, but the impression left in the minds of most southern Canadians is still one of ‘we and they’” (2010, 9; see also Grant 1998, 39). However, representations of Inuit as Other, even romantically so, are often paired with gestures of acceptance and inclusion. Inuit might be exotic and culturally distinct, but they are also familiar: stereotyped as friendly neighbours to those of us who live in the South. How is it that Inuit can be absolutely Other—the primitive against which southern modernity is measured—while also included in and often even emblematic *of* Canada as a whole? As I discuss in Chapter 2, this ambivalent view is not a contradiction; instead, the tension between exotic and ordinary, distant and close, is emblematic of the nature of Canadian Arctic sovereignty, whereby Inuit at once *must be* fundamentally Canadian while also

continuing to embody their cultural distinctness. Southern settlers appropriate Inuit imagery, not merely as gestures of appreciation for Inuit cultural artifacts and artworks, and not only due to a fascination with Inuit exoticness, but as a symbol of the country as a whole. Visions of Inuit and their artworks catalyze a metonymic interplay between North and South, wherein the former is meant to stand in for the latter (lesser so for the reverse). Absorbing Inuit material culture into the visibility of the nation-state imbues the South with a sense of North, providing southerners with a sense of *being* northern without ever having to go to the Arctic. The resulting figurative effect—belonging without being there—is consonant with the federal government’s need to assert a presence in the North and establishes southern dominion while preventing the sorts of excessive expenditures required for military defense. In anticipation of potentially lucrative futures, the South had to get creative—in this case, by celebrating Inuit creativity.

Shifting from Recognition to Belonging

While analyzing the WAG catalogues, I have kept in the front of my mind the relationship between art appreciation, recognition, and the settler nation-state, in search of discursive effects that follow the peculiar logic contained in Canada’s policies around Arctic security and geopolitics. The move towards appreciating and recognizing the value of Inuit art in a way that simultaneously subsumes it under the umbrella of “Canadian art” aligns with the shift, in 2008, in Canada’s foreign policy regarding the Arctic. This shift saw Canada asserting a form of Arctic sovereignty that does not require the eradication of northern Indigenous peoples, as settler colonialism has so often done in the South, but is

instead “rooted, in part, on the presence of Canadian Inuit and other Indigenous peoples in the region since time immemorial” (Lackenbauer and Dean 2016, xxxix). Focusing on the intersection between Inuit art appreciation and Arctic sovereignty has led me to prioritize a few questions: What is at stake in southern art institutions’ tendency to frame Inuit art as both Canadian and Other—familiar and exotic, in other words? What does this ambivalent framing contribute to Canada’s mission vis-à-vis dominion over the Arctic, especially with regards to the specific conditions of effective occupation in international law? How does the WAG’s approach to Inuit art work to facilitate a sense of belonging to the North in its patrons, and in what ways might this “belonging from afar,” as I term it, work in conjunction with the imperative to prove Canada’s effective occupation of the Far North?

I was initially interested in investigating how expressions of the South’s seemingly-ubiquitous admiration for Inuit artmaking encourages Inuit to accept the federal government’s overtures towards official reconciliation and embrace their assigned status as Canadian, which would lend support to the nation-state’s claim that it has a long-standing presence in the North. This approach would have attended to the internalized, psychosocial dimensions of settler colonialism, which Indigenous peoples resist by seeking “release from dependency on the colonial state and regain[ing] [their] independence in every form possible: financial, political, and psychological” (Alfred 2009, 278). Settler colonialism imposes oppressive rules and social systems, but it also works to instill negative forms of self-regard in Indigenous peoples, as a way of undermining Indigenous

communities and governance systems.⁸ Damaged and damaging mindsets are not only produced solely through expressly violent acts, like residential schools, adverse encounters with police, etc. Settler colonialism's psychosocial aspects are also effected through seemingly positive measures, like cultural accommodation and gestures of appreciation (Coulthard 2014). From this perspective, it seems obvious that southerners' apparent respect and admiration for Inuit culture, as emblemized by their veritable preoccupation with Inuit artwork, should work to endear Canada to Inuit. After all, there was a time not long ago when Qallunaat openly described Inuit as "backwards" and in need of civilization, or exceedingly happy and innocent—even childlike. Such attitudes have lingered, compelling many Inuit to deride the infantilizing characterizations to which they have so often been subjected. Inuk Ruby Arngna'naaq, for instance, stridently rejects the stereotype of Inuit as the "sweet smiling peoples of the far North," as featured in an argument with Inuit artist and writer Alooktook Ipellie (Graburn 2006, 153). In fact, to suggest that stereotypes about Inuit are a thing of the past would be naïve.⁹ How could Inuit *not* be seduced by the possibility that the South is ready to see Inuit culture in a nuanced and sophisticated light? Hence, I initially presumed that the concept of colonial

⁸ This is, to a degree, Fanon's point when he explicates the way that the black man comes to see himself as White society sees him (1952 / 2008, 87).

⁹ Recent examples abound. For instance, the 2015 documentary *of the North* by Dominic Gagnon has been widely derided, including by prominent Inuit artists like Tagaq, as promoting derogatory views of Inuit. It is a bricolage of publicly-available footage, including scenes of Inuit drinking, fighting, and having sex. The film has screened at film festivals around the globe. In response to the film, Tagaq has stated, of the director, "It's not his place" (Nakonechny 2015). The double-entendre is telling: that such a project is not appropriate for a non-Inuit filmmaker, which is partly due to the fact that Gagnon has no affiliation with nor ownership over the place – the North – that he purports to represent. In a panel discussion Inuit art scholar Heather Igloliorte noted that "stereotypes and painful imagery and misinformation" continue to impact the daily lives of Inuit and other Indigenous peoples. In an article about the panel, the reporter confirms that Gagnon has never visited the Arctic (Nakonechny 2016).

recognition politics would serve as a model that would allow me to identify the South's admiration as an appeal for Inuit cooperation; a tacit request for Inuit to accept the appreciation of southerners in exchange for identifying as Canadians and not resisting the authority of the nation-state. Or, to play with the double-entendre of the appeal, through recognition, the South launches appeals for Inuit to cooperate, by way of strategies that makes the settler state seem appealing.

I quickly began to sense, however, that critiquing recognition on the basis of its seductive effects would make for a deeply fraught approach, insofar as it seemed certain to lead me to a point where I would simply try to prove that Inuit often cooperate with the objectives of the nation-state because they have been rendered both helpless and complicit through flattery. This line of thinking risks promoting the idea that Canadian authority is antithetical to Inuit political agency. Furthermore, it rests on the assumption that Inuit are unaware of—or naïve about—the problems with engaging, participating, and cooperating with Canada, and therefore ignores the reality of life in the North, wherein cooperation and support are necessary, in many cases, for physical survival. There are problems here, too, from a biopolitical standpoint, wherein the physical health of a population takes precedence, and gives legitimacy to the idea that bodily afflictions like illness and starvation automatically necessitate nation-state intervention—an extension of the white saviour paradigm (cf. Stevenson 2014; Million 2014). Hence, in Chapter 1 I provide a thorough overview of recognition politics and consider its relevance for developing a definition of affirmative culture that adequately encapsulates how art appreciation works to further settler colonialism in Canada. Rather than focusing *solely*

on the effects of recognition politics on Inuit-Canada relations, which would only take my investigation so far—before we even consider all the problems with a settler scholar smugly informing Inuit that they are not making decisions in their own best interest, I instead explore *settler* psychosociality (Henderson 2017), in order to trace the mechanics of belonging, as it functions in Inuit art appreciation. This adapted approach allows me to get at the much more interesting and productive question of what viewing and appreciating Inuit art has to do with the Canadian federal government's desire to extend its domain to include the Far North.

Towards a Theory of Belonging from Afar: Chapter Summary

My first chapter explores the problems that arise when museums acknowledge and attempt to ameliorate their past complicity in promoting and maintaining settler-colonial cultural ideals. To do so, I examine how museums in general, and the WAG in particular, seek out new roles by featuring and celebrating Indigenous cultural production, and thereby facilitating cross-cultural communication and understanding. Of particular interest is the way that the WAG's stated mission takes up language that is characteristic of the recent turn in Canada to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and, though slightly less recent, recognition of Indigenous culture. My first chapter thus gathers the materials for an experiment in a special type of skepticism—skepticism of things that sound and feel good: recognition, appreciation, belonging, and creativity. I am convinced that these kinds of critiques are crucial at a time when many Canadians are (finally) accepting the legacies of the violence that has allowed them to live in this seemingly

peaceful and bountiful land we call Canada. My skepticism of reconciliation and recognition does not represent an original view; Indigenous scholars like Lee Maracle (1996; 2015), Glen Coulthard (2014), Leanne Simpson (2017), Sarah Hunt (2015), Audra Simpson (2007; 2014; 2017), and Pam Palmater (2015) have been at the vanguard of demonstrating how Canada's new desire to dispense recognition, appreciation, and consultation in the interest of "moving forward" actually facilitates the further dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the legitimization of an illegal state apparatus, and is therefore continuous with residential schools and the Indian agent.

Building on this scholarship, I ask what it might mean to consider a southern art gallery's appreciation of Inuit art as deploying recognition, and what the political implications of that recognition might be. To guide my inquiry, I develop a concept that I refer to as "affirmative recognition culture." This term is meant to describe how settler art appreciation operates in our current political climate, wherein the federal government and associated settler institutions offer recognition and accommodation so as to deflect and reframe the concerns of Indigenous peoples, sometimes instead of, or as a supplement to, the more explicitly violent practices that prevailed in the early- and mid-20th century. The resulting interdisciplinary analysis is useful for learning to be critical of institutions such as the museum that are, according to appearances, shedding the racist attitudes that have long permeated Canadian culture. The viewpoints that many such institutions are currently repudiating currently are perhaps best exemplified by the Massey Report, which claimed that "Indian arts... survive only as ghosts or shadows of a dead society" (1951, 239). Such statements relegate Indigenous societies to the past in order to give legitimacy

to the settler nation-state. However, is there a way that accepting and celebrating the presence of vital and adaptive Indigenous art forms, as evidence of Indigenous cultural endurance, work towards a similar end?

I propose that theory on the limits of colonial recognition and inclusion helps identify the political utility of settler art appreciation, which in recent years has evolved, shaking the old habits of viewing Indigenous art objects as “primitive,” of a different kind than Euro-Western creations, and thereby seeming to respond to Indigenous peoples’ request that colonial institutions recognize the intrinsic value of their cultures. Even more insidious is the possibility that Canadian institutions’ repurposing of the language of reconciliation represents an appropriation of Indigenous demands for broader and more substantial forms of redress, like “restitution” (Watts and King 2015, np). Reconciliation discourse is evidence that Canada has misread the map away from colonization in general, and colonial projects like the Indian Residential School system in particular, that Indigenous scholars and activists have charted. However, this dissertation sometimes questions the degree to which we can use Indigenous criticism developed in the South to understand how settler colonialism works in the Arctic. Attention to the specific political resonances of *Inuit* art appreciation requires attending to the unique character of settler colonialism in the Arctic. Whereas an analysis of affirmative recognition politics identifies how colonial recognition politics work through art appreciation in a general sense, this sort of approach will only take us so far in terms of identifying how art appreciation works to facilitate the sort of effective occupation and ambivalent forms of settler belonging that Canadian Arctic sovereignty requires. Hence, I turn back to the IAC

in order to theorize the relationship between art and understanding—a method of promotion that both solicits cooperation and dispenses recognition while also defining art appreciation as a method by which Canadians can gain access to the North by proxy.

What comes into focus when we view Inuit art appreciation as a form of affirmative recognition culture? In my second chapter, I answer this question—which is really a question about the specific nature of settler colonialism’s aesthetic and political relationship to the Far North—by turning to the WAG exhibition catalogues. Through this archive, I assess the gallery’s approach to analyzing Inuit art, to see how it mediates between the art and its patrons, guiding the gallery-going public as they explore the creations on display. I seek to better understand the geopolitical utility of depicting Inuit art as both “exotic” and quintessentially Canadian. Doing so means elaborating on existing scholarship about the nature of Arctic sovereignty, and particularly to draw lines between the logic by which Canada seeks to lay claim to the Arctic, art appreciation, and settler belonging. I thereby propose an expanded conception of what Wilfred Laurier described as “jurisdiction in all directions.” Canada does not seek to settle “from sea, to sea to sea” as its boundaries are now popularly described, recently revised to include the Arctic Ocean.¹⁰ The WAG catalogues, by discussing the ethnographic and aesthetic qualities of Inuit art, instill in gallery-goers and catalogue-readers a simultaneous intimacy and distancing; familiarity and alienation—positions vis-à-vis the North that align with elements of Canadian Arctic sovereignty. Southern citizens are encouraged to internalize the notion that they know the Arctic without actually being there, which is an

¹⁰ See, for instance, the title of DeRocco et al.’s book about the settler nation, *From Sea to Sea to Sea: A Newcomer’s Guide to Canada* (2008).

ambivalent orientation that mirrors the federal government's objective: to establish dominion without occupation.

The ethnographic-aesthetic ambivalence produces a view of Inuit as artistically advanced, while also depicting them in a way that European nations have long viewed Indigenous peoples of the Western hemisphere—as “unsophisticated [...] living in a state of Nature” (Hall 1992, 311)—thereby exoticizing the North and renewing the Arctic's longstanding status as “a place for white men to dream about” (Brody 1990, 29).

Collectors like George Swinton are featured in prefatory essays, waxing poetic about the Arctic as an Edenic refuge where Inuit enjoy a life that modern man can only dream of. In such idealized views of the Far North and its people, patrons catch a glimpse of a life unsullied by the trappings of late capitalism. Such views are not exceptional to the settler-colonial imaginary, which seeks to supplant Indigenous peoples with settlers—the “new Natives.” Instead, a phantasmagoric, ideal colonial past characteristically haunts the settler-colonial now, filling settlers with a yearning to transcend the constraints of time and dwell in a place-time that has been lost to history (McQueen 2011, 248). The catalogues thus depict the Arctic as a place where this ideal past hides, enabling southerners to imaginatively inhabit a primitive, anachronistic Canadianness.

Whereas Chapter 2 focuses on the framing that the WAG catalogues provide for viewing Inuit art, its relationship to place and culture, and the way that Inuit art orients southern settler patrons to the Far North, Chapter 3 attends to a story that repeats across the catalogues about Inuit's move to settlements in the mid-20th century. I argue that the catalogues construct the well-documented transition for Inuit, in the 1950s and 60s

(Marcus 1995; McElroy 2008; Qikiqtani 2014; Tester and Kulchyski 1994), from living semi-nomadically to residing in settlements, as a series of events that was difficult yet ultimately unavoidable. I track how the catalogues present the history of drastic social change in the Far North; from a nomadic life, hunting on the land, to a sedentary way of life in which artmaking plays a central role. Of particular interest is the WAG's depiction of Inuit co-ops as natural, unproblematic sites of Inuit agency; at times, the catalogues seem to conflate the "co-op movement" with Inuit self-government, emblemized by the creation of Nunavut. This formulation has a teleological effect: it promotes artmaking as a desirable substitute for hunting, thereby naturalizing the transition from nomadic to settlement life, and presenting the colonial present in the Far North as inevitable; even predestined.

Suggesting that creating art is a promising, and perhaps more durable alternative to hunting works to memorialize the mid-20th century, not as a time that is characteristic of the settler-colonial project that continues to shape the daily lives of those in the Far North, but as a difficult transition period without which Inuit could not have reached their ultimate destiny as agential, artmaking subjects. The co-ops give direction to a narrative that subordinates loss to hope, thereby casting the (colonial) present as both inevitable and desirable. In fact, Inuit's very nature is meant to predispose them to the current social context. The catalogues regularly depict Inuit as inherently "creative people" (Ryan and Wight 2004, 27) and suggest that their traditions can easily be transferred to an economy based on artmaking, rather than hunting and fishing. This view of Inuit propensity for artmaking frames them as the sole catalysts of the social change that they underwent.

Moreover, the catalogues' characterization of Inuit as naturally suited to a creative economy, alongside their likening of cooperatives to self-government, draws on neoliberal notions of self-sufficiency, promoting the value of individual industriousness and valorizing creativity-as-resilience, while forestalling any need to unthink settler-colonial rule over the Arctic.

The investigation that I execute over the course of the following three body chapters is a response to a lack of criticism focused on points where critical museum studies and settler colonial studies intersect. With the resulting work, I aim to contribute to this as-yet-undeveloped field in two ways. First, this dissertation models an approach to critiquing the forms of settler benevolence that are increasingly at play in the museum and in the art world. Second, I develop approaches for reading exhibition catalogues as a genre, hoping providing vocabulary and strategies for those who wish to pursue a similar study of other institutions in Canada and beyond—the other areas of the settler-colonial apparatus that I have only partially charted here.

CHAPTER ONE

Inuit Art Appreciation as Affirmative Recognition

*You will never make colonialism blush for shame
by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes.
Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (1965, 222)*

Visitors to the IAC portion of the WAG's website are currently treated to an overview of the centre's stated mission, which announces that creations previously housed in the WAG's basement will soon be "visible even from the street," thanks to a transparent outer wall. The centre's "Visible Vault," according to the website, "is where the story of Inuit art and culture begins—where students and other visitors will launch their cultural expedition through the Arctic."¹¹ This statement gives the sense that, by being exposed to Inuit art, southerners may acquire the perspective and knowledge necessary to gain better access to a land that is not only rendered unreachable due to *physical* distance, but also as a consequence of *cultural* distance—a rift that art can help to bridge. The idea that art can form a bridge between North and South is a theme throughout the WAG catalogues. It is made explicit in a catalogue for the 2013 exhibition *Looking Up*, which featured art by non-Inuit influenced by the Far North. The catalogue describes a project under development called *The Bridge*: "While *Looking Up* proclaims the admiration the Winnipeg art community has for Inuit art, *The Bridge* will bring these two communities together in an exchange residency" (Butler 2013, 8). The curator for

¹¹ The website is continually evolving. While I was completing this dissertation, the website began referring to the vault as simply a "glass vault." Other wording around the purpose of the IAC is in flux. For a more stable characterization of the WAG's intentions, see the article published in a 2015 edition of the gallery's circular, *My WAG*, which describes how "the IAC will bring the power and beauty of the North to its neighbours in the South, and change the way our kids learn about the Arctic" (2015, 6).

these exhibitions stepped down shortly thereafter, however, citing a desire to spend more time focusing on his own art (Sandals 2014, np) and *The Bridge* never came to fruition.

The IAC therefore seems to be picking up where *Looking Up* left off. Both projects promote the idea that art can transport visitors, casting appreciation as facilitating a journey *by way of* as well as *to* culture. The IAC website's overlapping of knowledge acquisition with travel evokes an anthropological value system whereby all aspects of the non-Western world are seen as fodder for discovery. Moreover, the statement implies that Inuit cultural expression crystallizes when viewed by southern publics; it is the curation of southern art professionals that will bring Inuit culture into sharpest focus. In declaring that the WAG will no longer conceal the once-hidden parts of its collection, the gallery promotes its eagerness to recognize the value of Inuit art forms, demonstrating that the institution sees the artworks in its collection as worthy of being placed in the centre of Canada's cultural landscape, both figuratively and literally. Through the lens offered by the WAG, the structural violence of settler colonialism is spuriously relegated to the past, overshadowed by the allure of accessing the Far North through cultural and aesthetic appreciation. This framing affirms an affiliation between the South and North that accords with Canada's moves to assert Arctic sovereignty. It depicts Inuit as culturally distinct but ultimately and irrefutably Canadian, and encourages a view of the Arctic as a place that can be explored, understood, and owned from a distance.

Beyond making Inuit culture visible to the South, the IAC seems poised to render Inuit cultural expression *intelligible*—all in the name of “reconciliation,” a concept that has gained substantial social heft in recent years. In its 2015 final report, the TRC

presents Canada with 94 calls to action. They include recommendations that school programs for people working in health care and the criminal justice system foster “cultural competency,” sometimes described as “intercultural competency” (164). The TRC also insists that schools of every level should nurture students’ capacity for “intercultural understanding” (239). Organizations that support Canadian artists and art institutions seem to have taken lessons from the TRC report. Many now use the grammar of official reconciliation when describing their obligations to Indigenous peoples in general, and Indigenous artists in particular. The Canadian Museums Association (CMA) is a national advocacy organization for public and private galleries, museums, zoos, archives, etc., which, according to the CMA’s website, “are dedicated to preserving and presenting Canada’s cultural heritage to the public.” The CMA’s 2017 annual report includes several references to initiatives that they have undertaken, in support of reconciliation. One such initiative involved inviting Senator Murray Sinclair, chairman of the TRC, to give a lecture “on the vital role of museums to tell the truth [about] [I]ndigenous history in this country and to assist with reconciliation” (CMA 2017b, 6). The CMA report acknowledges the TRC’s recommendation that the federal government allot funding to help the association review policies and practices within museums, to ensure that they are complying with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the TRC report also calls on the government to collaborate with Indigenous peoples and the CMA with the purpose of establishing “a dedicated national funding program for commemoration projects on the theme of reconciliation” (CMA 2017b, 6).

That museums are attempting to revise their practices in accordance with a widespread movement to reckon with the legacies of colonialism is indisputably a noble and well-intentioned goal. However, “reconciliation” increasingly appears as a term that lacks substance. In referencing one another, the CMA and the TRC create somewhat of an echo chamber, wherein the concept of reconciliation gains momentum but not meaning. The WAG’s references highlight official reconciliation’s rhetorical force, but do little to clarify what reconciliation might mean beyond recognizing the value of Inuit culture. A 2016 special series produced by the *Winnipeg Free Press* entitled Inuit (He)Art cites Stephan Borys, the WAG’s director, who expresses a desire for “the Inuit voice” to be foregrounded at the IAC. The IAC is a larger project than “just...delivering the art...It’s about telling the story of an isolated people whose history—how they’ve lived, how they’ve struggled, how they’ve survived—has largely been told in the images produced by their hands and imported south, not by their voices. Which is why the mission of the Inuit Art Centre is grounded in the spirit of reconciliation” (Turner 2016b). Borys’s statement features a notable conflation between “telling the story of an isolated people”—which might be better conceived of as *listening to* their story—and “reconciliation.” While the relationship between storytelling and reconciling is undefined here, the easy slippage between the two acts is more clearly understood within the logic of *official* reconciliation, as mandated by the TRC. Official conclusions about how Canada might address its violent past, as the late Arthur Manuel highlights, has left the Canadian public viewing reconciliation as a matter of having “an ‘honest conversation’” so that Indigenous peoples and Canadians can “head into the future together hand in hand,”

instead of viewing reconciliation as requiring the settler nation-state to return land and substantially validate Indigenous rights (Manuel and Derrickson 2017, 57). Given the fact that “cultural competency” has acquired political prestige, aesthetic recognition offers an available and expedient tool for the public art gallery to draw on the rhetoric of reconciliation to define its mission. Specifically, by facilitating recognition of the value of Inuit cultural production, the gallery helps Canadian settler publics to come to terms with the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples in general, and Inuit in particular, as well as the nation’s ugly colonial backstory, both of which they previously avoided, in order to foster a new present in which Indigenous peoples and settlers purportedly live in harmony.

The WAG’s IAC mission statement, which appeared on the WAG’s website in 2016, draws on the language of recognition and reconciliation in explicit terms, and seems to espouse the TRC’s suggestion that museums overhaul their “policies and best practices” (2012, 8). Purportedly, the new centre

will be much more than a home for the largest public collection of contemporary Inuit art on earth. It is about rethinking the role of the art museum while providing cultural and historical context for Inuit art and people. The WAG, along with [its] Inuit partners and stakeholders, is at the forefront of a timely cultural renaissance as Canadian society increasingly recognizes the magnitude of Indigenous art and its role in understanding. Everyone has a role to play in reconciliation and the Inuit Art Centre is a way the WAG is contributing to this healing process regionally and nationally.¹²

This statement, entitled “The WAG embraces the North,” signals that the gallery aims to participate in the widespread process of reconciliation currently being undertaken by

¹² The IAC statement has since been removed from the website, but it can still be found painted on the wall of the WAG’s current Inuit section.

institutions across Canada, in line with the TRC calls to action. The gallery does not use the term “cultural competency” per se—indeed, the TRC’s recommendations for Museums and Archives exclude any mention of “cultural competency”; nevertheless, the promotional material for the IAC mobilizes a version reconciliation that operates along axes of recognition and understanding. Specifically, it seems to trade in “cultural competency,” claiming that the gallery will enable visitors to better understand Indigenous people in general, and Inuit in particular, and consequently facilitate reconciliation. The statement’s ambiguous claim that the IAC will provide context “for” Inuit and their culture conflates its patrons’ need for an interpretative framework with which to view Inuit with the idea that Inuit themselves need to be provided with context in order to be better understood. These competing, concurrent meanings imply, paternalistically, that the IAC’s ability for providing context will be a boon for patrons and Inuit alike. At the same time, the assertion that Inuit art has “magnitude” and offers “understanding” traces a line from recognition, through art, to comprehension, which upholds art appreciation as a skill necessary for one to experience a vaguely defined but evidently important revelation about Indigeneity. The WAG thus has a role to play in a “timely cultural renaissance” wherein Canadian society enriches its “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1980) through finally adopting an appreciative stance towards Indigenous art.

I am particularly intrigued by the gallery’s insistence that it is contributing to reconciliation by promoting Inuit art appreciation, in addition to providing space and resources for Inuit artists to work. The IAC statement invokes a brand of art appreciation that aligns with understanding and recognition, imagining that old colonial wounds might

be healed through accommodation, communication, and cooperation alone. Anticolonial scholarship warns against accepting such painless and efficient “attempt[s] at reconciliation... The desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). Is the WAG’s version of reconciliation evidence of an urge to erase rather than to confront problems, and in what way might casting reconciliation as a matter of art appreciation similarly disappear the political and economic forms of Indigeneity of which present-day (non-Indigenous) settler-colonial subjects are wary? The IAC statement offers a sturdy jumping-off point for exploring these questions, insofar as it provides insight into the gallery’s assumptions about the pedagogical and reconciliatory effects of Canadians learning to appreciate Inuit art

It would seem that the WAG is preparing to stage a reckoning *through* recognition, *towards* reconciliation, by performing a new commitment to visibility (and perhaps accountability)—a performance that institutes a break between Canada’s colonial past and a putatively evolved present. In this sense, the IAC is drawing on a discourse that presents reconciliation—what might be viewed as a sort of postcolonial healing (Million 2014)—as a practice of making Indigenous cultures seen and heard. As Audra Simpson (2007) writes, settler-colonial politics and ontologies operate through intelligibility and coherence, defining the “terms of even being seen” for Indigenous peoples (69). The IAC’s stated mission thus prompts questions about what it means for Inuit to become intelligible, and what it means for that intelligibility to be bound up in processes of art creation and appreciation. Valorizing understanding and intercultural exchange also

leaves aside questions of which expressions of Inuit identity, politics, and spirituality members of settler society are prepared to see and hear in the first place. Ostensibly, the WAG is merely offering to help its Qallunaat patrons see Inuit art and hear Inuit voices, thereby facilitating a cultural voyage northwards. This innocuous proposition presumes that appreciation and knowledge-gathering are inherently benign, and therefore have never been part of the systems that official reconciliation is meant to address. By equating agreeable forms of Inuit expression with reconciliation, the WAG risks creating seemingly settled spaces in which settler colonialism can continue to operate unscrutinised.

This chapter constructs a frame for analyzing the WAG's current approach to Inuit art appreciation—most explicitly rendered *in*, but not exceptional *to* the IAC—by first charting how Canada's turn to colonial recognition politics is reflected in art criticism and amongst art-sector workers. I contend that aesthetic recognition relies on powerful notions of Indigeneity as ethnicity and cultural identity rather than as a way of being that is inextricably tied to land. Acts of recognition therefore aim to establish Indigenous identity as a form of difference than can be accommodated by adjusting Canada's cultural character, without disrupting the political and legal authority of the nation-state. Arts-based testimony funded by the TRC exemplifies the constraints imposed under the move towards official reconciliation. In their introduction to *The Land We Are: Artists & Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation*, scholar-artists Sophie McCall and Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill describe conditions that the TRC has put on the sorts of art that get funding, as well as the types of 'reconciliation' that art is meant to actualize. The

TRC provides a platform for only certain artists; it also excludes “land rights or restitution” from conversations about “truth and reconciliation” (2015, 2), thereby placing limits on anticolonial cultural production and discourse. Artistic testimony under settler colonialism—even / especially in the move towards national “healing”—faces myriad ideological and practical barriers. My aim is to map these barriers by paying attention to the relationship between reconciliation and recognition, which are distinct but interrelated modes through which the nation-state works to cast settler colonialism as a thing of the past; as a monster who has long departed even as we continue to grapple with the consequences of its destructive habits, rather than as a set of power relations that continues to structure Canada’s socio-political reality.

Including Indigenous art in a public, institutionalized aesthetics satisfies two liberal ideals: it celebrates the value of art and creativity, while also going through the motions of catering to Indigenous people in a way that avoids upsetting the balance of power between Indigenous nations and settler society. By addressing Indigeneity primarily through art appreciation, galleries ask very little from settler society in the way of discomfort, let alone the radical transformation of settler society, redistribution of resources, and—vitality—the return of land that decolonization demands (Tuck and Yang 2012). The Canadian public is primed to view art as a way forward from anti-Indigenous violence, not as an occasion for dwelling on that violence’s ongoing contemporary effects, and certainly not entertaining the possibility of radically different futures, particularly where the question of land ownership is involved. Likewise, aesthetic recognition offers readings of Indigenous cultural expressions that might be revelatory

and long-overdue, but which ultimately—in the move from invisibility to visibility that recognition promises—accord with the hegemonic exigencies of intelligibility.

Precisely how this frame applies to *Inuit* art appreciation, and thus the IAC, is another matter, however. Inuit art enjoys an exceptional status in the Canadian art world, in that it is widely acknowledged as a recent phenomenon and as a hybrid creative form, and thereby not constrained, at least at first glance, by conventional, damaging notions of authenticity that have been used to discredit contemporary forms of Indigenous cultural expression. Inuit art's unique status parallels Inuit's relationship to the Canadian nation-state, which differs remarkably from how Indigenous peoples in the South are positioned politically. In particular, whereas Canada has long sought the evacuation and eradication of Indigenous peoples in order to make space for settler society, the nation-state actually counts on a continued Inuit presence in the Arctic in order to establish sovereignty. With these particularities in mind, I examine the ways in which the WAG's promotion of recognition and reconciliation anticipates now-established critiques of public art galleries, in order to set the stage for how the gallery's framing of Inuit art accords with the logics at work within Canada's strategy for attaining Arctic sovereignty, further explored in Chapter 2. Recognition is at work in the gallery's approach to celebrating Inuit art; in the seemingly counterhegemonic narrative about Inuit art that the gallery offers; and the gallery's claims to facilitate cooperation between Inuit and Qallunaat. Finally, I consider whether, and with what results, the WAG's approach distills Inuitness to a form of cultural difference, thereby using aesthetic recognition to undercut Inuit political autonomy while also engendering the type of cooperation necessary for Canada to lay

claim to the Arctic. My argument is that *Inuit* art appreciation serves a special function in the current political moment in Canada: it acts in support of settler-colonial politics in the Arctic—especially ongoing assertions of Arctic sovereignty—and produces a sense of certainty in anticipation of the various unstable, but perhaps lucrative futures that the Arctic is imagined as heading towards (Loukacheva 2007, 141; Steinberg et al. 2015, 46; Wormbs 2018, 244)

A Time for Cultural Recognition

The 1951 *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*, commonly known as The Massey Report, states,

The impact of the white man with his more advanced civilization and his infinitely superior techniques resulted in the gradual destruction of the Indian way of life. The Indian arts thus survive only as ghosts or shadows of a dead society. They can never, it is said, regain real form or substance. Indians with creative talent should therefore develop it as other Canadians do, and should receive every encouragement for this purpose; but Indian art as such cannot be revived. (Massey 1951, 239)

The report displays attitudes that many in Canada are now eager to repudiate: that European settlers are inherently superior to Indigenous peoples; that “the Indian” was doomed the instant that Europeans set foot on this continent, and perhaps even before; and, not least, that Indigenous art forms cannot endure cultural transformation. Critics have rightly denounced The Massey Report for its blatantly racist claims about the value of Indigenous art (Trépanier 2008, 8). I have yet to find criticism, however, that takes issue with the suggestion that Canada would, could, or should be improved by accommodating, funding, and celebrating Indigenous art produced within the borders of

the settler state. Instead, inclusion and recognition serve as a ready recourse against derogatory attitudes about Indigenous cultural expression, indicating similarities in the discourses enabled by recognition on one side, and art appreciation on the other.

In 2017, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) experienced a minor scandal when its Canadian-art curator, Andrew Hunter, resigned. His resignation came in the wake of a widely-praised exhibition of Indigenous art at the AGO that he curated called *Every. Now. Then.* Media coverage in the wake of Hunter's resignation suggested that his absence heralded trouble at the AGO, which had shown signs of struggling to remain relevant in recent years. Hunter had been hired in 2013 as "an outlier," according to the *Toronto Star*: "Hunter had been a leader in eroding traditional barriers, demanding marginalized histories take their rightful place alongside official versions" (Whyte 2017a, np). In fact, Hunter leaving accords with his reputation as a curator who is set on reforming the public art gallery—the very reason that the AGO saw him as a valuable addition in the first place. In an op-ed, Hunter declares that his departure was meant to draw attention to "the elitist, colonial roots of public museums" and their bearing on "who controls and is allowed to speak in these nominally 'public' realms" (Hunter 2017, np). He lambastes public museums, insisting that their colonial foundations continue to dictate their operations. Hunter's piece shows how settler colonialism continues to operate in institutions like the public art gallery; in Canada, the museum is a site where "systemic racism exponentially reproduces itself... in order to protect white privilege and power" (Robertson 2015, 117). For instance, public museums have historically promoted the stereotype of the noble savage (Trofanenko 2006, 52)—an idealized and admirable

figure that once lived in a pure state of nature, but has now been erased as a consequence of modernization, urbanization, and industrialization—all modes that mainstream settler culture has tended to view as inherently antithetical to Indigenous lifeways (Brooks 2008, xxxi; Justice 2008, 151). The “noble savage” stereotype gives permission for colonial institutions to conclude that such a figure could never produce art on par with that produced by European counterparts, and thereby dismiss Indigenous cultural production as both inferior and not actually art. Hence, the move to boost institutional recognition of Indigenous artworks, such as by renovating curatorial practices, is a humanizing project, and a central concern of many museum professionals in Canada today. Museum reform is driven by a certain logic: because public museums once wholeheartedly and explicitly promoted the superiority of Euro-Western culture, those same institutions must now take steps to stop perpetuating violent and oppressive views of Indigenous peoples.

Strategies for revising the museum privilege making Indigenous art and culture central to the museum, incorporating artworks and artifacts into their main collections, effectively making space in Euro-Western cultural spaces for Indigenous culture and acknowledging that Indigeneity is not, in fact, a relic of the past but is an identity that has persisted into modernity. Accepting Indigenous peoples in all their modern, artmaking forms overlaps with the “new museology,” whereby museums reflect deeply on how their practices and techniques influence the public, recognizing the responsibilities that come with representing the cultures of others (Alsford and MacDonald 1995; Lorente 2015; Shelton 2013; Silverman 2015). The new museological approaches tend to privilege cultural complexity and community engagement. Cultural *complexity* functions as an

interpretive frame for the museum to understand itself and to resist its tendency towards unidirectional, ethnographic documentation rather than engagement and dialogue, thereby opting for simplification over hybridity and contestation. By privileging cultural nuance and adaptation, museums strive to frame “culture as an interrelated field of actions, objects, places, memories, and consciousness that involves whole communities” (Worts 2006, 128). This view is at least superficially in line with Indigenous scholarship that describes cultural production as interactive and intersubjective.¹³ Moreover, if museums have decided to acknowledge that “real” Indigenous people are still alive, they can then enlist those same people to take up the reins of curation. Widespread acknowledgement that museums should be striving to represent Indigenous art and artifacts better has accompanied a boom in the hiring of Indigenous curators and the staging of exhibitions featuring the work of Indigenous artists (Kreps 2009).

It is important to note that museology is not solely the domain of the West. For instance, as Bryony Onciul writes, Siksika (Northern Blackfoot) have their own curatorial traditions, with practitioners who acquire “particular knowledge and expertise that enable them to care for material culture and cultural knowledge on behalf of the wider community” (2015, 120). In fact, managing cultural artifacts is one way in which Indigenous peoples like the Blackfoot have worked “to maintain their tangible and intangible culture and heritage since time immemorial” (120). Niitsitapi epistemology differs from Western museology in seeing sacred objects as living beings, as well as in

¹³ Daniel Heath Justice’s concept of “kinship criticism” (2008), which recommends collaborative and responsive modes of reading that do not reproduce parochial conceptions of Indigeneity, and particularly not of Indigenous literary production, exemplifies this point.

honouring knowledge by restricting its circulation rather than presuming that free access is always beneficial, to name but two points of departure (120). While museums are increasingly declaring their commitment to “engagement” as an antidote to an incipient cultural chauvinism, institutional and social parameters within which museums operate, as well as issues with translation (131) and museums’ “residual practices” mean that there are “very real limits to what can be made possible through engagement” (124)—a fact that does not typically have much bearing on conversations about museums engaging the people whom they represent. The “traditional museum form[s]” that are hard to escape include a fixation on objects; using universalizing, imprecise, or even incorrect terminology; encouraging commodification and voyeurism in visitors; and failing to consider how the museum and its concomitant logics guide self-representation (127). Participation has practical limitations, too: often, Indigenous communities have neither the time required to participate in museum projects nor the resources needed to obtain important pieces, given that artefacts are often priced in the hundreds of thousands of dollars (125-6).

The new prominence of Indigenous art in contemporary Canadian collections could herald a sea change in how the nation conceives of itself, particularly given the role of the public museum in constructing Euro-Western settler nations. Public museums like the WAG grew “out of a desire to engage individuals with a pride in civic and national character,” and have played a “pivotal role in formulating a national identity, primarily through categorizing and classifying knowledge through displaying objects” (Trofanenko 2006, 51). At the same time, cultural objects become copies of themselves “under the

authority of the museum” (49). While they are meant to *represent* culture, they also project and enshrine ideas about what the cultures on display look like, supporting the role of the museum as an arbiter of cultural difference. Today, however, museums are attempting to shed their role as “protector of ... Eurocentric heritage” (49). The proper place of Indigenous art in Canadian galleries and art museums has been at the heart of discussions about how to develop an official national cultural identity since the mid-20th century. For example, the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples (TFMFP) was a joint effort of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the CMA. It formed as a result of the “Preserving Our Heritage” conference, in Ottawa, November 1988, which itself was a response to the boycott of *The Spirit Sings* exhibit at Calgary’s Glenbow Museum in 1988. The boycott was spurred by the Lubicon Cree’s condemnation of the exhibit’s sponsor, Shell Oil, but also due to concerns about artefacts on display, including the mischaracterization of supposed Haudenosaunee artifacts. The TFMFP released its final report in 1994, detailing policies and principles for museums to follow, including guidelines for consulting with Indigenous peoples and stakeholders when collecting and exhibiting Indigenous artefacts and art. The task force ultimately helped to activate a wider movement in colonial museology in North America; it was in operation when the United States ratified the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990.

While adapted museological methods surely have benefits, museum scholars still tend to weigh the need to dismantle the museum’s institutional allegiance to settler colonial projects against their sense of responsibility to the institution—a responsibility

that is evident in declarations that museums are eager to change their ways, bolster Indigenous culture, and instill settler society with a better understanding of Canada's First Peoples. Prominent museum theorist Ruth Phillips (2011) claims that, while Indigenous peoples and people of colour have often been "marginalized and / or exoticized" by state and private actors who *fund* museums, museums themselves actually challenge "modernist universal values" and validate "diverse cultural traditions" (185). She recalls that, in the 1980s, international debates regarding curating and appropriating Indigenous art turned to Canada for discussions about power and representation (11-12) (including those that both led and responded to a boycott of *The Spirit Sings*). Phillips downplays public museums' flaws; instead, she contends that they have "tremendous revelatory power" (16), and even argues that the controversial Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67—an exhibition that is now widely viewed as evidence of broad, interconnected systems of racism and cultural imperialism operating in Canada—actually represented the beginning of 'Indigenizing' Canadian museums, insofar as it exemplified a laudable "activist spirit" (16). The idea that the museum's benefits are irrefutable requires that onlookers view "indigenizing" the museum as an act of good faith; the problematic representational practices that museums continue to use should be perceived as errors and missteps rather than structural components of the museum-institution, ultimately forgivable in the name of experimenting with how best to adjust mainstream views of Indigenous cultural difference.

It is to be expected that museum scholars like Phillips would dismiss the idea of dismantling the institution in order to find pathways towards decolonization, often

suggesting that Indigenous peoples participate in and benefit the public art museum. Phillips maintains that “indigenization” is a beneficial form of “hybridization” that bolsters political viability and spurs sociality through cultural exchange (14). She maintains that productive museology in a “pluralistic world” requires a “respectful process of negotiation and compromise” (21). Likewise, Douglas Worts proposes that museological practices that highlight adaptation and interactivity are particularly useful for the Canadian context, insofar as they help the institution accommodate the “emergent metaculture” produced by the nation-state’s multiple “communities” (2006, 129). Museums must take a balanced approach, evidently, striving for inclusion and pluralism. In this way, the institution ultimately defers to the dictates of official multiculturalism, satisfying mainstream Canada’s desire for liberal inclusion, and fulfilling the requirements of the Canadian government, which allots funding to museums based on the degree to which they support and preserve Canadian national heritage (Robertson 2006, 194).

The new museology is potentially radical and endlessly capacious: not only might it engage the public and reveal how the cultural meanings that are attached to objects can exceed their immediate representational values, but it can even invoke a “larger ecological perspective that encompasses personal and collective well-being for human and non-human actors” (Worts 2006, 141). Of course, a museum that strives to make space for the non-human seems particularly progressive, not least because it thereby resists Eurocentric, anthropocentric views of land and non-humans as things that can be rendered as property, which place “man” at the apex of a species-based hierarchy. Still,

what such readings downplay is the degree to which museums might still work to support oppressive power relations that reach beyond the realm of cultural production, even—and perhaps especially—when they promote intersubjectivity and cultural fluidity (Boast 2011, 57). This is the precise function of reform within colonial institutions: to simultaneously accommodate and contain. The museum’s *new self-reflexivity* and self-positioning as a contact zone “has become a major justification within the museum community for their ongoing relevance and even right to maintain their vast colonial collections” (60), which speaks both to the lucrativeness of amassing art and the difficulty of surrendering the colonial compulsion to collect exotic things. Museums are “asymmetric spaces of appropriation. No matter how much we try to make the spaces accommodating, they remain sites where the Others come to perform for us, not with us” (63). They might support “dialogue and collaboration,” but their practices consistently suppress “oppositional discourse” (64). The IAC is a model of the tactics that characterize the reformed colonial museum: to acknowledge and contain. These functions accord with the methods of reconciliation politics. Museum reform and reconciliation both mobilize many of the same mainstream ideas about what justice for Indigenous peoples looks like—in particular, justice in the form of cultural inclusion and appreciation.

Inclusion and the Culturalization of Indigeneity

Why take issue with an art gallery aiming to include Inuit art in Canada’s aesthetic profile—and, even more, to use this acknowledged cultural equality as grounds for facilitating interactions between South and North? This question gestures to the social and

political ramifications of inclusion and visibility, particularly as they operate in the context of Canadian settler colonialism. We might recall the (first) Trudeau government's infamous *White Paper on Indian Policy* (1969), which sought to replace the collective rights of Indigenous peoples with the individual rights that all Canadians are meant to enjoy. The policy responded to widespread debates in the 1960s and 70s between politicians and in the mainstream media about the place of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Holmes 2010, 48). The *White Paper* defined Indigenous peoples as citizens with equal rights *as Canadians*, and proposed repealing the *Indian Act* in order to encourage Indigenous people to participate more fully in Canadian society. "By abolishing a piece of legislation that identified aboriginal peoples as special or distinct, the Trudeau government sought to reconceptualize aboriginal peoples as liberal individuals with the same freedoms, equalities, and opportunities as non-aboriginal Canadians" (49).

Trudeau's policy was hardly a naïve attempt at establishing more equitable relations between Indigenous peoples and Canada. Rather, it sought to mandate national unity in Canada as a way to resist the influence of the United States (Holmes 2010, 48-9), and to pave the way for the constitutional conferences of the 1980s. However, even though Trudeau was recommending abolishing *The Indian Act*, which is widely viewed as one of the most racist pieces of active legislation in the world (Manuel 2017 and Derrickson, 64),¹⁴ Indigenous activists understood that the policy was really a strategy for imposing "equal" status that would negate *Indigenous* rights, and especially Indigenous rights on terms designed by Indigenous people. Indigenous leaders and politicians

¹⁴ To underscore this point, South Africa modeled aspects of apartheid on Canada's *Indian Act* – especially the concept of "status Indians" (Poppewell 2010).

recognized the stakes of Trudeau's move towards revoking Indigenous peoples' "special" status, and thus fought the policy vehemently; their dissent helped lead to the insertion of Section 35.1 in the *Constitution Act* (Canada 1982), which recognizes the inherent and treaty rights of Indigenous peoples. Constitutional reform allowed for dialogue about the structure and substance of including Indigenous peoples in the constitution, but its form meant that it re-legitimized the authority of the nation-state to develop policy that dictates the lives of Indigenous peoples and sought to marginalize the worldview of the myriad Indigenous nations impacted by the *Act* (Battiste and Henderson 2000, 202).

Canada's actions in the years leading up to and following the repatriation of the Constitution suggest that the nation-state has 'evolved' in response to Indigenous activism, increasingly using the complementary strategies of suppression and accommodation (Coulthard 2014). This tactic reaffirms settler-colonial authority by subordinating what the Constitution refers to as "inherent" Indigenous rights to the primacy of equal, individual rights (or at least to Canadian identity as primarily white and English). Indeed, the individualizing and atomizing effects of settler politics cannot be overstated: as Coulthard notes, colonial recognition politics is particularly aimed at enacting a "significant decoupling of Indigenous 'cultural' claims from the transformative visions of social, political and economic change that once constituted them" (52). In other words, cultural recognition exacts multiple forms of individualization and atomization. It distills and simplifies *Indigeneity*, rendering Indigenous cultural practices coherent to the nation-state only insofar as they are detached from political and economic autonomy. Moreover, cultural recognition individualizes *Indigeneity* and undercuts collective modes

of being, framing Indigenous peoples as connected by shared, distinct cultural characteristics, but ultimately and fundamentally the same as all other citizens of the settler nation.

From a Eurocentric perspective that privileges individual freedom, equality hardly seems like a controversial concept. As Kim Tall Bear reminds us, though, speaking in an episode of the podcast *Media Indigena*,

Indigenous peoples are not equals; our rights or their rights go beyond the rights of citizens. They have the rights of citizens, but they also have rights as Indigenous peoples that go back to treaty rights; rights to resources; and cultures and identities are mutually constituted with particular places, so you can't have protection of culture and identity without having protection of land and water, and Indigenous rights to those lands and waters. So I worry a lot about settler governments wanting to cordon off Indigenous rights into the culture and identity box, or the culture and language box. It's a way to frankly not deal honestly and straightforwardly with resource issues. (Harp 2018)

Imposing Canadian “equality” on Indigenous peoples is an act of redefinition that violates Indigenous people’s distinct political and social identities, particularly with regards to ties between people and the places with which they are in relation. The concept of culture is often used to define Indigeneity as an ethnic identity that Canada, with its liberal multicultural facade, can easily incorporate. “By concentrating on culture rather than politics,” as Renée Hulan argues, “very real inequalities in power can be softened” (2002, 18). Equality subordinates Indigenous rights to a form of “cultural citizenship,” a term encapsulating how members of a liberal democracy can be culturally different, but are ultimately defined by their status as citizens (Rosaldo 1994, 402). However, cultural difference cannot ever substantially challenge the authority of the nation-state. In fact, Canadian multiculturalism protects the hegemony of the nation-state by generating,

according to Graham Huggan, a “willfully aestheticizing exoticist discourse” that papers over structural inequality and demonstrates “respect for the other as a reified object of cultural difference” (2001, 82). The nation can accommodate aesthetic variations in its citizenry, insofar as such variations exist apart from such areas as military might, economic structures, political conventions, legislative capacity, etc. Beyond compartmentalizing cultural difference, nation-state affirms its authority by demonstrating that it can accommodate internal difference, meaning that internal variation actually helps to bolster settler-colonial sovereignty. Consequently, non-Indigenous people can disregard Indigenous peoples’ sovereignty, as well as their “right to govern” (Simpson 2007, 101). Indigenous people need not disappear per se, in this context. Instead, they are made less troublesome, reduced to a cultural or racialized form—a type of ethnicity that is now severed from place.

As Tall Bear notes, recognition politics, whereby the nation-state dismantles and disregards Indigenous rights, are tied to a particularly Euro-Western conception of identity. This worldview sees culture and identity as something that you “carry in your body,” rather than as being fundamentally constituted through a relationship with community and land (Harp 2018). Whereas culture is seen as loosely rooted in a collective experience, cultural *identity* sublimates primarily in the self. Cultural redress can therefore be enacted through making the individual whole once more, such as healing by rediscovering one’s mother tongue, or pursuing self-care through creative cultural endeavours (cf. Blodgett 1977a, 32; Butler 2013, 21; Vorano 2011, 11). In one brochure, former WAG curator Jacqueline Fry is quoted as saying that, “for the Eskimo as for other

ethnic groups, pride in work well done cannot be distinguished from pride in one's own identity" (Winnipeg 1986, np). The idea that everyone is merely an individual whose cultural identity can be realized as self-actualization accords with Canadian multicultural ideals, which approach "ethnic and racial difference as a question of 'identity' rather than of history and politics... [and] translate alterity as cultural diversity, treating difference (a relation) as an intrinsic property of 'cultures' and as a *value* (a socially 'enriching' one), to be 'represented' as such" (Bennet 1998, 4). Recognizing and celebrating Indigeneity as cultural difference under liberal multiculturalism—what we might call "settler boutique multiculturalism," to adapt Stanley Fish's term (1997, 378)—ultimately gives cover for the inscrutable authority of the nation-state by diminishing the complex, collective nature of Indigenous lifeways.

Museum reform in the TRC era appears predicated on a presumed nexus between cultural inclusion, understanding, and social justice. These overlapping projects rely on the idea that education is the antidote to anti-Indigenous thought. However, while the colonial nation-state encourages what we might describe as ignorant—and, certainly, racist—views of what it means to be Indigenous in general, and Inuit in particular, narrow views of Indigeneity cannot be reduced to one single erroneous perspective which can then be cured with a dose of enlightenment. Such logic exacts a "culturalization of politics," framing political and economic inequality as a problem of cultural intolerance (Zizek 2007) and identifies inclusion and understanding as pathways towards equity and justice. Relying on the transformative potential of revelation misunderstands settler-colonial ontologies, which do not simply hold derogatory views, but instead cherish the

idea that Indigeneity is a form of cultural difference that can be harmlessly absorbed by the settler nation. This definition goes beyond promoting negative stereotypes about the nature of Indigenous peoples, instead circulating through complex modes of (mis)recognition (Taylor) and idealization (Hall). As Aileen Moreton Robinson (2015) maintains, settler-colonial institutions “insist on producing cultural difference in order to manage the existence and claims of Indigenous people” (xvii), thereby interpellating Indigenous peoples as culturally distinct in ways that ensure Euro-Westerners unequitable access to resources and political power.

How do those who wish to promote Inuit art as worthy of recognition by Canada avoid conflating the appreciation of Inuit art with justice *for* Inuit, thereby reaffirming normative views of Inuit identity as cultural difference and redefining decolonization as a project that simply calls for enhancing cultural recognition? Widespread definitions of social change, vis-à-vis settler-Inuit relations, as something that can be enacted through fundamentally colonial institutions like the WAG, as well as curatorial conventions that are fundamental to the institution, ultimately give settler institutions authority to set the terms by which they will accept Inuit *as properly Inuit*. Indigenous peoples under settler-colonial rule are perpetually called upon to assert their identities in accordance with the conditions that the state establishes for them to gain recognition as culturally distinct in meaningful ways, which often means complying with colonial ideas about what counts as Indigenous difference. Such processes of identity clarification help to reinforce the social structures of settler colonialism. In her study of Indigenous peoples working to have the Australian government recognize the legitimacy of their cultural practices, Elizabeth

Povinelli (2002) writes that “by inspiring subaltern and minority subjects to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity; in the case of Indigenous Australians, a domesticated, nonconflictual ‘traditional’ form of sociality and (intersubjectivity),” emerges, allowing Australians to expect Indigenous peoples to “perform an authentic difference in exchange for the good feeling of the nation and the reparative legislation of the state” (6). Recognition takes a heavy toll insofar as it requires performances of “authenticity” in exchange.

As Lisa Brooks writes in *The Common Pot* (2008), colonial notions of what counts as an authentic Indigenous person have contributed significantly to Indigenous oppression: the mainstream preoccupation with “questions of authenticity” presumes that adaptation and evolution are “concomitant with a complete loss of Native identity,” which elides the fact that Indigenous communities have always been in the process of cultural change. Such notions “are based on a temporal model of culture in which the most ‘authentic’ is that which exists only in the precontact past,” meaning that modern forms of Indigeneity are either presumed sullied or can only be encountered through artefactual evidence (xxxi). This is the titular *Imaginary Indian* that Daniel Francis (1992) describes: a phantasmagoric figure that has never actually existed but which nonetheless gives shape to settler society. The view of Indigenous peoples as hollowed out by modernity supports the notion that contemporary Indigenous peoples are defined primarily by their supposed *cultural* difference: supposedly, *real* “Indians” can only exist in the past because they had lifeways that made them incompatible with colonial social and political systems. In the culturalizing tale of Indigeneity, it was the Europeans

imposing “civilization” in what is now North America that created a radical social and governmental chasm, disregarding Indigenous jurisdiction, and consequently, eradicating Indigenous political systems. The repression of Indigenous governance and autonomy now appears as a *fait accompli*, taken for granted. All non-colonial governance systems have been rendered invalid, so all colonial subjects must inhabit identities that comply with the current internally-diverse but ultimately unified system. Indeed, adequately identifying how culturalization furthers colonial violence is a challenge: doing so means interrogating seemingly benign and benevolent discursive framings of Indigenous peoples as characterized by cultural difference.

Settler colonialism is a particular form of historical and political violence, in that it must first *create* the target of its assault in order to work: “Indigenous North Americans were not killed, driven away, romanticized, assimilated, fenced in, bred White, and otherwise eliminated as the original owners of the land but *as Indians*” (Wolfe 2006, 388). “The Indian” is an illusory but nonetheless influential identity category. Settler colonialism uses this impossible, sometimes vilified, sometimes idealized figure to define Indigenous identity. This impossibility of “the Indian” is not an accident: “the Indian” creates a standard for authentication that can never be met. Its elusiveness is a major factor in settler colonialism in North America. Canadian settler society cannot exist without the notion that there is a category, the “Indian,” that pre-existed contact, but has always already been doomed. Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd observes that the notion that Indigenous peoples no longer exist in modern times clashes with “the very present and ongoing colonization of [I]ndigenous lands, resources, and lives” (2011, 6). While the

persistence and resilience of Indigenous people under colonialism is a cause célèbre, discord between pastness and presentness / presence helps to reproduce settler-colonial social relations, which have always worked through process, negotiation, and perhaps most of all, meaning making. The colonial present is assured not simply through top-down exertions of power; rather, it features “competing cacophonies of race, colonialism, and imperialism that enjamb settlers, arrivants, and natives into a competition for hegemonic signification” (12) as they rally to be recognized in accordance with the normative semiotics of the nation-state. It is this enjambment that re-entrenches the primary terms by which a subject achieves recognition as such.

The concept of “the Indian” is crucial for understanding settler colonialism’s machinations, but it also marks point where the views of Indigenous peoples that are constitutive of settler colonialism depart from the view of *Inuit* promoted by the WAG, at least at first glance. The Wag catalogues, for instance, allow Inuit more nuance in their history and identities than has typically been afforded other Indigenous peoples. Inuit are seen as no less “real” for driving snowmobiles and, more recently, making art that does not conform to conventional understandings of what Inuit creative production looks like (i.e. soapstone sculpture).¹⁵ Moreover, the catalogues do not interpret southern influence on the Inuit market as a sign that Inuit culture has been hopelessly tainted by the interventions of Qallunaat. This generous perspective is evident in the catalogues’ repeated references to the evolution of Inuit art and to the notion that Inuit artmaking is a

¹⁵ In the introduction to a 1987 catalogue, *Winnipeg Collects*, current curator of Inuit art Darlene Wight notes that “alternative” forms of Inuit art like textiles were once “overlooked” and only recently had started “gaining the recognition they deserve” (Wight 1987, 5)

relatively new phenomenon, which does not lead the catalogues to suggest that it is somehow less inherently Inuit. Instead, Inuit art is seen as, in the words of a guest curator, “a self-defined twentieth-century hybrid art form, intensely poignant and rich in contrast to the more popular image of ‘Inuit art’ as primitive, exotic, ethnic production as defined by Western-trained curators and scholars” (Bouchard 2000, 13). Catalogues dating as far back as the 1970s sought to celebrate examples of Inuit art that are quintessentially northern *despite* displaying evidence that the creators had undergone processes of “acculturation.”¹⁶ Indeed, tracking how the South has shaped Inuit art is the very purpose of the exhibition *Looking South* (Blodgett 1978b), which goes so far as to suggest that works exhibiting a southern influence are *more* authentic because they present a sophisticated account of Inuit adaption, which has often been actualized through intercultural engagement. Rather than defining Inuit as trapped in the past, or essentially “primitive,” the catalogue’s introductory essay recognizes the complex and fluid nature of art-making—if not life more generally—in the North. The WAG catalogues, however, do not solely privilege the creative individual over communal identity. Instead, they tend to acknowledge individual identity while also including depictions of community life, to explore how collective identity comes to bear on the creative work of individuals.

The catalogues’ claims are nevertheless troubling insofar as they veer towards

¹⁶ One notable exception is Qallunaat collector Bessie Bulman, whose holdings have repeatedly been shown at the WAG. The 1973 catalogue for *The Bessie Bulman Collection* reports that Bulman was aware of “new forms of expression” – such as “non-objective or ‘abstract’ works” – but largely omitted them from her collection. Then-curator Jacqueline Fry explains that Bulman was suspicious of Inuit works that reflected the influence of the South: “There is no doubt that she was not personally attracted by the ‘modern looking’ forms so foreign to her pictorial sensitivity. But more than that, she mistrusted them because they seemed to be based on purely white influences” (Fry 1973, np).

overemphasizing the role of outsiders in the emergence of Inuit creative production that can be recognized as such by southerners. The introduction to *Looking South* acknowledges that Inuit created art objects in the 19th century, “including toys and magico-religious items of ivory, bone, wood, and, rarely, stone.” However, it was not until the 1940s, with the arrival of Houston and the patronage of the Canadian Crafts Guild that art collecting by southerners began in earnest (Blodgett 1978b, 4). An artist as well as a government agent, Houston is a common example the catalogues draw on; his early recognition of the aesthetic value and commercial potential of Inuit art has become mythologized in art historical accounts of the North in the 1940s. Jean Blodgett, Curator of Eskimo art at the WAG from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, reminds visitors that “essentially all art now made by the Inuit is indirectly influenced by us since it is made to be sold to southerners rather than to be retained by the Eskimos themselves” (4). Can we really say, though, that southern influence on Inuit art was “indirect,” especially given the many instances when the South sought, with determination, to exert authority over artmaking, certainly, but also over virtually all elements of life in the North? This view of Inuit and their contemporary material culture privileges hybridity and adaptation, thereby offering an “evolved” view of Inuit culture—one that demonstrates “cultural competency,” even—while awarding Inuit a double status as both culturally distinct and fundamentally Canadian. In deploying intersecting forms of recognition, the catalogues imagine a beneficent relationship between the South and Inuit, in a form that affirms a normative, culturalized definition of Inuit identity.

Colonial Recognition Politics

How do ideas about how Canada and its public institutions might *do recognition* better—especially when it comes to recognizing Indigenous peoples—stand up when we consider that settler colonialism proliferates through existential anxieties about the very stability of settler-colonial claims to space (Black 2017; Mackey 2014)? At stake is the possibility that, as Jace Weaver (1997) contends, settler colonialism operates by inviting Indigenous peoples to align their conceptions of self with hegemonic ideals (20); to render their self-definition intelligible, in other words. Indeed, contemporary settler-colonial politics in Canada very much have to do with Indigenous peoples attempting to be seen and recognized—what we might refer to as Indigenous intelligibility. Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson (2007) writes that settler-colonial politics and ontologies define the “terms of even being seen” for Indigenous peoples (69). What conditions must Indigenous peoples meet in order to be intelligible to the settler-colonial state? Popular notions of what Indigeneity looks like often do not match actual Indigenous people living in Canada (and beyond) today. Are the terms of recognition capacious enough to accommodate something approaching the full spectrum of experiences and perspectives of Indigenous peoples? It is perhaps first important to note that the Canadian nation-state’s willingness to recognize the ongoing *presence* of Indigenous peoples seems actually quite radical if we recall that less than a century ago the federal government was engaged in a vicious and violent project of outright genocide of peoples who had become somewhat of an inconvenience for Canada. Today, then, should we not celebrate the fact

that the nation-state has (supposedly) surrendered its violent and racist tendencies in favour of reconciliation and recognition, particularly as this renovated form of settler politics seems to accept that Indigenous peoples are here to stay? Problematizing Canada's gestures of recognition and accommodation is difficult if we judge them solely in terms of whether the nation-state is successful in its efforts to accommodate cultural difference.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Indigenous assertions of sovereignty helped to bring about a major shift in how the Canadian nation-state conceived of its relationship and responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. This shift was epitomized by a nod to inherent Indigenous rights in section 35.1 of the Canadian constitution, when it was repatriated in 1982. According to Coulthard (2014), this constitutional recognition heralded a new era of settler politics, one that deploys recognition as a tactic to supplement the oppression, violence, and exclusion that had once formed Canada's *modus operandi*. Coulthard argues that, today, Canadian colonial rule is produced through

a relatively diffuse set of governing relations that operate through a circumscribed mode of recognition that structurally ensures continued access to Indigenous people's land and resources by producing neocolonial subjectivities that coopt Indigenous people into becoming instruments of their own dispossession. According to this view, contemporary colonialism works *through* rather than entirely *against* freedom. (156)

The Canadian nation-state will recognize Indigenous difference if it appears in forms that do not threaten Canada's authority to preside over the lives and lands of Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, because the constitution is designed to maintain the preeminent authority of Canada, it offers insufficient protection for modern day Indigenous people who are persecuted and penalized for attempting to retain access to traditional practices,

often on traditional lands (Switlo 2002, 135). Indeed, for many Indigenous peoples, recognition is perhaps less of a concern than the immediate violence and coercion they continue to encounter (Hunt 2015; Nichols 2014).¹⁷ Nevertheless, Coulthard's insight that settler colonialism is not only visibly oppressive but also works through accommodation and persuasion is can help us identify and assess the political ramifications of cases where settler institutions in general—and art galleries like the WAG in particular—adopt the sunny rhetoric of appreciation and reconciliation.

Throughout its Inuit exhibition catalogues, we find the WAG enacting recognition of Inuit culture in two ways: the catalogues' very attention to the details and value of Inuit culture serve as a *demonstration* of cultural recognition; and the catalogues also make *explicit* reference to the recognition that Inuit art has attracted. Recognition has, according to the *Keewatin* catalogue, enabled Inuit to gain public attention beyond the Arctic. Published in 1964, the catalogue uses the language of recognition to explain the significance of southern appreciation of Inuit art. The fact that southerners are willing to spend money on Inuit art "signifies recognition. Recognition of their art has brought to the Eskimos, not only in Keewatin, a decided improvement in their relationships with the

¹⁷ An important concern with Coulthard's theory has to do with the fact that focusing on the state's recognitionist tendencies might mean downplaying those elements of state power that continue to operate through violence and coercion. Sarah Hunt makes an argument along these lines, which Coulthard acknowledges in a discussion about how Indigenous women's voices must be privileged. It is they "who are in the best position to gauge the crushing material reality in which they live and the means by which they will eventually emancipate themselves from it" (95). Coulthard's response affirms, for me anyway, that his central contention is not primarily that the State operates now through persuasion rather than through violence; instead, his theory privileges "the methodological importance of 'turning away'" from colonial recognition and inclusion, and is therefore aimed at inspiring Indigenous peoples to a "collective theoretical *self*-affirmation" (2016, 95).

rest of the world. While they may have considered themselves to be the only strong and true men, the sense and meaning of the word Inuit, their name for themselves, they must also have felt they were being pushed out of the world. Not so now” (7). Artmaking allowed Inuit artists an opportunity to achieve agency amongst southerners: “For the first time in their experience, the Eskimo learned to stand up and speak his mind, in some part, to the white man” (WAG 1964, 12). The catalogue notes that Inuit art creation, and especially the art’s recognition by southerners, represented the “smash[ing]” of “social barrier[s]” (13).

It is primarily in these early catalogues that the WAG most plainly expresses the social importance of Inuit having their work recognized by southerners. More recently, a privileging of recognition is *implicit* in the catalogues’ repeated reference to the role of southern actors in initiating a southern market for Inuit artworks. In these cases, the catalogues celebrate the act of recognition itself, which ties the newly-recognized art to the capacity of the settler traveler-artist *to* recognize it. For instance, *Keewatin* points to Houston’s capacity to recognize “the great artistic talent” of Inuit as a crucial factor in the emergence of Inuit art in southern Canada. According to William Larmour, a bureaucrat from the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources (DNANR), who provides the introductory essay for the catalogue, the Montreal exhibition “was the start of the recognition of these Eskimo carvings” (WAG 1964, 1). Houston continues to make appearances in WAG exhibition catalogues, such as in *Ningiukulu Teevee: Kinngait Stories* from 2017. Houston’s influence on the evolution of the Inuit art market is unquestioned; however, the catalogues’ sustained deference to his insight promotes him

as hero and a saviour in the story of Inuit artmaking in the 20th century, whose vision and dedication to Canadian art in general, and Inuit art in particular, enabled Inuit to both improve and capitalize on their creative production (Wight 2006, 16). In *Keewatin*, Houston “inspired [the people of Baker Lake] to work” (WAG 1964, 2), whereas in *Povungnituk*, he is an explorer whose discoveries led to Inuit freeing themselves from the oppressive cycles of the fur trade (Blodgett 1977c, 8). In *Port Harrison / Inoucdjoua*, an exhibition featuring work from the very community where Houston first encountered Inuit artmaking, Houston himself writes of being moved to appreciation, reminded of ancient works that he once viewed in Paris that were “carbon-dated from that early era of man’s art 15,000 years ago” (Blodgett 1977b, 8). Houston purportedly acted as a midwife to bring Inuit creative production into being, as indicated by the title of the essay that outlines his influence: “The Birth of an Art Form” (Wight 2013), such as with his experiment to see whether the people of South Baffin Island would take to carving (WAG 2010, 11); Houston is also credited with later enacting further adaptations in Inuit artmaking, such as when he founded a printmaking program in Cape Dorset, in 1957, bringing methods that he learned while studying in Japan (Vorano 2011, 2).

Houston was most heroic, reportedly, in his efforts to “modify the existing categories of value in the art world” which “helped establish new standards of taste and patterns of consumption among collectors” (Vorano 2011, 38). Not only did he *recognize* the intrinsic appeal of Inuit art, but he also shifted the terms upon which the South viewed art, thereby allowing for Inuit art to become intelligible to those whose recognition mattered most. This narrative of disrupting the value systems that once excluded Inuit and

Inuit cultural production downplays Houston's complicity in dictating the terms upon which Inuit could attain cultural recognition. In fact, Houston actively encouraged Inuit to produce art that aligned with southern notions about what "real" Inuit cultural production should look like, such as by distributing a pamphlet called *The Eskimo Handicrafts Book*, which included images of recommended carvings and materials, to maximize artworks' appeal to southerners. The catalogues minimize Houston's role in the book's distribution, informing readers that he was required to do so lest he lose the government funding necessary to support "expensive Arctic travel" (Wight 2006, 14). Whether explicitly or implicitly, then, the WAG catalogues define Inuit agency as something enacted through having the value and quality of Inuit creative products *recognized* and *nurtured* by southerners. Inuit culture is thus afforded a remarkable degree of adaptability; however, how we are to understand Inuit culture is clarified through recognition, which casts it as, primarily, a form of aesthetic difference that gains coherence in the gaze of the South.

Recognition as Reconciliation

The modes of recognition on offer from the WAG align with the dictates of official reconciliation, insofar as they present reconciliation-minded citizens with a ground for attaining "cultural competency." Appreciation is regularly framed as not merely an act of recognition, but as having relevance *for* reconciliation. For instance, at the time when the TRC was preparing to release its final report, the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) responded with funding for various projects by Indigenous artists under a new program entitled "(Re)conciliation." According to the CCA's website, the initiative

“promote[s] artistic collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, investing in the power of art and imagination to inspire dialogue, understanding and change”—language not unlike that used on the IAC website. Absent official guidance from the CMA, beyond a vague desire for change, art institutions nevertheless frequently use the language of reconciliation to discuss the social and political value of Indigenous art creation, seeming to draw on a discourse made available by the TRC, as well as by a broader desire amongst Canadians to move beyond the more explicit horrors of colonization. The link between recognition and reconciliation is partly dependent on the concept of “cultural competency” espoused by the TRC, and how the concept is interpreted within settler art-industry circles. To recall, recognition works to cast Indigenous peoples in terms of an atomizing, compartmentalized cultural difference and not as existing within and in relation to complex and wide-spanning social and political formations. On top of that, official reconciliation has taken the stance that healing and unity—notwithstanding the problems intrinsic to those very terms—can best be attained through fostering capacity within settler institutions to better appreciate Indigeneity through the paradigm of cultural difference—the very paradigm that helps to prop up settler-colonial worldviews in the first place.

The concomitant rhetorics of recognition and reconciliation are explicitly at play on the IAC website, especially the section entitled “CONCEPT: A Place of Reconciliation.” The site proposes that while “Canada searches for roads to meaningful reconciliation, we all have a role to play. The Inuit Art Centre will open new paths to healing as it connects North and South, and brings us together to meet, share, create, and

understand.” The statement promotes widespread appreciation of Inuit art, as a means for attaining reconciliation. On its face, the statement centres on inclusionary language: “we all have a role to play.” The phrase has a cooperative ring, vaguely implicating a range of participants: it could mean all Canadians, both settlers and Indigenous peoples, policy-makers, art-industry-workers, and art-lovers of all stripes. In its privileging of equality, the statement draws on a spurious idea that everyone is equally complicit in the settler-colonial present, which downplays the uneven way in which privilege is distributed in Canada. We all have a role to play, but we also have to play nice. Moreover, the statement implies those who are unwilling to participate in the “therapeutic fallacy of ‘reconciliation’” (Simpson, A. 2017, 23) are shirking their shared responsibilities to the future of the nation-state. The statement suggests that everyone has a responsibility to use the skills or position that they have in order to facilitate reconciliation. It also addresses Inuit and Qallunaat as equal on the playing field of reconciliation. The first part of the statement implies that its “role” is limited—it works in the realm of art, not politics or law—which the second part overrules, offering instead the idea that encountering Inuit art is actually *the* method to establish reconciliation. It is the hitherto-undiscovered panacea for all of settler colonialism’s wounds. This lofty claim hinges on the reconciliatory character of art appreciation, gently prodding patrons to develop competency in their view of their culturally-distinct Inuit compatriots. This logic is in keeping with the notion that settler colonialism is located in the actions of individual actors, and can thus be

remediated by nurturing enlightened, decidedly non-racist citizens, and teaching individuals about one another.¹⁸

The reconciliation rhetoric deployed by the WAG naturalizes Inuit identity as primarily a form of cultural difference that patrons can encounter through viewing Inuit artworks. Implicit in this notion is the idea that art can connect southerners to northerners, allowing for the former to identify *with* the latter, such that healing and unity can (finally) be achieved. “Cultural competency” emerges from a cosmology that privileges empathy and insight, supposing that collapsing the difference between self and Other will open space for harmonious engagement. As Derrida shows, the politics of acknowledgement and apology enable gestures of non-identification, insofar as they serve to distance the acknowledger from those whose suffering they are acknowledging. This is the “paradox of the relation to the other”: that “the more you identify with the other, the better you feel his suffering as *his*: our own suffering is that of the other. That of the other, as itself, must remain the other's” (1976, 190). Aiming to simply become competent in knowing how to view Indigenous cultures stands in for the types of meaningful rememberings and engagements that could precipitate a substantial transformation in Indigenous-settler relations. In encountering the destructive sociological effects of settler colonialism, well-meaning settlers risk reinscribing that suffering as ultimately beyond comprehension.

¹⁸ My line of thinking here is inspired by Leanne Simpson’s essay “#ItEndsHere: Colonial Gender Violence” (2014), which shows that colonial gender violence works structurally to cast humans and non-humans as commodities and “natural resources,” so that they can be exploited. The idea that imposed social relations work structurally to allow the acquisition of land clashes with typical views of gender-based violence as the work of bad actors who can be punished accordingly. As Audra Simpson writes, instances where settler colonialism becomes visible through violent ruptures are quickly processed through the carceral logic of crime and punishment: colonial violence “is an individuated, judiciable act – justice can be served” (2016, 4).

Moreover, the view of art as providing insight and fostering compassion takes as a given the idea that insight and understanding are useful for establishing equity and dismantling oppressive social structures. To draw on the lessons learned in Roland Barthes's analysis of French colonialism in North Africa, the WAG's overtures to the reconciliatory force of art appreciation represent colonization's "impotent lament which *recognizes* the misfortune in order to establish it only the more successfully" (1979, 104).

Reconciliation invites engagement and disclosure in the name of understanding, based on the "fiction" that Indigenous peoples and settlers once existed in "equanimity"—a state to which we now must return, rather than confronting the settler-colonial project as one based on exploiting and dispossessing Indigenous peoples (Garneau 2012, 35). Such disingenuous or partial efforts at decolonization can undercut more substantial possibilities for cooperation and justice: "The desire to *reconcile* is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9 my emphasis). The rush to reconcile with Indigenous peoples privileges closure over substantial redress, exonerating settlers from dwelling in the power relations that underpin their claims to place. Reconciliation works to move Canadian society forward in a way that reinforces recognizable genres of the speaking subject. Rinaldo Walcott (2011) argues that official reconciliation in settler-colonial nations like Canada serves to give legitimacy to a Euro-Western version of the human: a form of subjecthood that accords with settler-colonial sociality. "[T]he struggle to be human is one conditioned by the terms upon which European discourses could both be internalized and turned upside down to produce them

as subjects worthy of being considered Man, if only tangentially so” (347). Official reconciliation appropriates an entrenched desire amongst many Indigenous people to be recognized as fully human—a natural response, given that colonizers have often rationalized invasion by claiming that Indigenous peoples were less than human. Official reconciliation therefore utilizes longstanding conditions for recognition and intelligibility, such that when Canada asks Indigenous people to demonstrate that they are sufficiently agreeable so as to be reconciled *with*, their agreeability is in line with hegemonic forms of humanity that run counter to traditional, “prefigurative” forms of self-determination. These counterhegemonic, autonomous expressions of Indigenous lifeways, which are typically anything but agreeable to the settler nation-state, draw on well-established yet adaptable practices and ways of knowing in order to imagine radically transformed futures (Coulthard 2014, 159). In the context of art appreciation, colonial recognition similarly invites Indigenous people to prove their humanity by engaging in and producing forms of cultural expression that are amenable to the settler-colonial project.

Art creation is an ideal means for actualizing official reconciliation: it invokes forms of Indigeneity that can be accommodated by settler institutions like the public art museum—a cultural coming together, wherein settler patrons and civilians can see eye to eye with Indigenous people. (Re)conciliation is outside of CCA’s other suite of grants, which funds art projects by Indigenous individuals and associations under the banner, “Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples” (Canada 2015). According to the council’s website, the program is meant to follow and affirm the CCA’s guiding principles, which include a commitment to “support

and uphold the principles of reconciliation, articulated through the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.” Simultaneously, the Council proposes to “recognize the distinct and unique place of First Nations, Inuit and Métis artists in Canada as creators, interpreters, translators and transmitters of an inherent Indigenous cultural continuity, as well as unique contributions made to Canadian cultural identity.” The Council situates reconciliation alongside recognition, suggesting that artistic cultural expression can facilitate unification, while also bolstering Canadian culture. Moreover, it executes a contradictory move, simultaneously asserting Indigenous cultural difference (“distinct and unique”) while also applying Canadian (i.e. “universal”) social and aesthetic standards. The Council’s depiction of the effects of Indigenous art thus epitomizes Pauline Wakeham’s characterization of official reconciliation, which by “purportedly promoting cultural rapprochement” actually “works to secure a belief in a national imaginary of Canadian civility that overwrites ongoing power asymmetries and gross inequities” (2012, 210). The idea that Canadian cultural identity can house a variety of Indigenous peoples—of which Inuit identity is but one—effectively encourages a mainstream view of Inuit as depoliticized, and fits neatly with Canada’s image as a nation that accommodates cultural diversity. Recognizing Indigenous art and funding its creation are well-trod pathways towards the sort of reconciled future that Canadian settler society is willing to concede.

Affirmative Recognition Politics and Inuit (He)Art

By encouraging widespread displays of appreciation for Indigenous cultural

production in general—and especially *Inuit* cultural production, as this chapter will later explore—the nation-state and the public institutions that it funds are exonerated from “undertak[ing] the actions required to transform the current institutional and social relationship” that facilitate the ongoing marginalization and oppression of Indigenous peoples, and ensure dominion over Indigenous lands (Coulthard 2014, 121). Anne Whitelaw writes, “For Aboriginal works to obtain aesthetic value under these [normative] terms would require a complete reinvention of the notion of the aesthetic and, more importantly, a reassessment of First Nations societies as themselves having value” (2006, 204). The desire to change aesthetic categories is one thing, but what is at stake in this easy slippage between modifying aesthetic categories and improving the collective experience of Indigenous peoples? The sort of change that Whitelaw describes seems to accord with the current era of colonial recognition politics. As Yellowknife Dene political scientist and Marxist theorist Glen Coulthard persuasively argues, in his ground-breaking book *Red Skin, White Masks*, Indigenous peoples in Canada are increasingly asked to identify with the prevailing conception of Indigeneity as a form of cultural difference that is seen as largely irrelevant to questions of land and resources.

Coulthard’s work reveals that Canadian settler colonialism is skilled at subverting and reframing Indigenous demands for the return of stolen lands, access to political autonomy, and for Canada to fulfill its treaty obligations. Canada’s “institutionalized accommodation of Indigenous cultural difference [is] reconcilable with *one* political formation—namely, colonial sovereignty” (2014, 66). Recognition is insidious: by using it, the settler state appears to respond to the demands of Indigenous peoples while actually

maintaining its authority. In short, Coulthard has offered well-honed tools for dissecting settler-state benevolence, as well as for developing subsequent analytical frames—frames, say, for capturing how settler institutions deploy recognition in order to engage Indigenous people, not only the grounds of cultural difference, but in terms of cultural expression and creative production. My claim is that such maneuvers—reframing political demands as requests for aesthetic appreciation—are characteristic of an affirmative recognition culture at work, whereby settler society, in line with Herbert Marcuse’s concept of affirmative culture (1968), offers big-C Culture as a substitute for political and social autonomy, leveraging the supposedly liberatory effects of aesthetic enjoyment.

While I see it as crucial, both ethically and intellectually, to refer to Indigenous scholars on the question of how settler colonialism impacts Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous scholarship has also been vital for helping me to think through the problems explored in this chapter and beyond. Marcuse, for instance, worked in Europe, from a Marxist perspective—one of Coulthard’s main areas of expertise, in fact. He nevertheless provides what I see as especially useful tools for examining the ways in which art’s affirmative capacity and recognition’s seductive pull intermingle, thereby cohering as a frame for conceptualizing and critiquing settler-colonial art appreciation. Marcuse’s theory explained the place of art and beauty in sustaining the pervasive inequities experienced by citizens of the ‘bourgeois epoch’ in mid-19th century Europe. This time saw the rise of new ideas about ties between “necessity and beauty, labor and enjoyment.” Beauty and pleasure were increasingly seen as available to *all*, including those in the

laboring classes (93); however, this supposed availability accompanied an ideological separation of the ideal from prosaic existence. Marcuse writes that, for supposedly ‘ordinary’ folks, “the good, beautiful, and true are transcendent” to a life based on a “commodity form” that “continually renews the poverty of class society” (90).

Essentially, “social antagonisms” (99) persist, abetted by the seductive but unfulfillable promise of beauty, or at least what affirmative cultural conceives of as beautiful.

What Marcuse termed “affirmative culture” intertwines with and bolsters colonial recognition politics. Affirmative recognition, which centres on “the beauty of art,” is not a pathway into a more equitable future; instead, it helps to strengthen and extent “the bad present” (1968, 118). Culture and its aesthetic expressions are both soothing in the promises that they make, and cruel to the degree that they ultimately facilitate social inequity. Here, Marcuse’s claim is especially consonant with Coulthard’s critique of cultural recognition, in that it reveals how affirmative recognition defines art and beauty as detached from the messy, earth-bound concerns that constitute daily life in the “factual world.” Not only does equal access to culture *not* lead to social equity, but the former actually restricts access to the latter. The ideal realm anesthetizes, without absolving, the problems and promises of the lower, material life: “The ontological cleavage of ideal from material values tranquilizes idealism in all that regards the material processes of life” (93). Affirmative culture tells of an “eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed.” This world is “essentially different from the factual world” but it proffers itself as available to “every individual for himself ‘from within.’” The realm of beauty and pleasure, as defined by affirmative culture, exists beyond and *in*

spite of material impoverishment; it persists because it requires no “transformation of the state of fact” (95). By extension, settler artistic appreciation, which often frames aesthetic recognition as the pinnacle of decolonial or reconciliatory action, has political expediency for settler colonialism in Canada, in that it encourages Indigenous peoples to accept denuded forms of cultural recognition.

The TRC report suggests that establishing harmonious Indigenous-settler relations requires that settler subjects increase their “cultural competency” —the type of suggestion in response to which liberal multicultural states like Canada are adept at reforming. Fostering cultural expression—in the fundable, non-political sense of culture that is currently at the forefront of colonial recognition politics—enacts a cruel optimism, to use Lauren Berlant’s term. Cultural recognition is the “object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility [but] actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or people risks striving” (2011, 2). Affirmative culture in the context of settler-colonial recognition politics has added significance for Indigenous peoples. Not only are they encouraged to find freedom in art and beauty at an individual level, but the prevailing hegemonic privileging of cultural recognition requires them to aestheticize—and thereby to neutralize—what might otherwise be radical calls for justice. Affirmative recognition culture belatedly acknowledges the inherent value of Indigenous art, while simultaneously requesting that subjects of colonial oppression seek a more equitable future in the realm of the aesthetic ideal. This contributes to powerful views of Indigenous identity as a form of cultural difference rather than as a capacious and complex way of being that has economic and political ramifications. Promoting the

decolonial effects of art plays into the idea that decolonization is a type of self-actualization. Indeed, because colonization typically violates Indigenous people's sense of self, theorists often insist that decolonization must include "the reconstruction of the self" (Anderson 1994, 6). Affirmative recognition culture works in support of much-needed but ultimately limiting forms of self-actualization. Moreover, in the service of settler colonialism, it works not only through nourishing the individual, thereby constraining what liberatory action looks and feels like, but through a highly mediated brand of *cultural* actualization.

Historic, hegemonic attitudes towards Indigenous art reveal much about the significance of Canadian galleries recognizing the intrinsic worth of Indigenous creative production. Numerous postcolonial and Indigenous scholars have rightly condemned European attitudes towards art produced by North American Indigenous people. Critics often identify a pervasive lack of proper arts funding as a major, if not a primary, obstacle to revitalizing Indigenous lifeways (Trépanier and Kelly 2011, 54). This focus is linked to the fact that, as Graeme Chalmers (1995) writes, "Often we have seen First Nations' art acknowledged as crude handicraft, which, if it got condescending recognition at all, was relegated to corridors and dark spaces" (118). A modern sensibility exists that equates viewing Indigenous people as "savage" or "uncivilized" with viewing their artworks as craft (inexpensive; created by artisans rather than by artists) instead of as inherently, aesthetically, and therefore universally valuable (117). From this perspective, rejecting colonial views means adopting a proper stance on the quality of Indigenous art. If a lack of appreciation for Indigenous culture is presumed, in this formulation, to be the prime

injustice of settler colonialism, it would follow that art and culture are the ideal venue for soothing tensions between Canada and the Indigenous peoples who reside therein.

Critical analyses of settler art appreciation tend to approach aesthetic categories as the remnants of outdated colonial attitudes, to the point that it begins to seem as if tying up the loose ends of colonialism—located firmly in the past, of course—merely requires that we delegitimize Eurocentric and exclusionary ways of viewing Indigenous art. For instance, in her analysis of how the National Gallery of Canada has displayed its Indigenous art collection, Whitelaw’s central critique is that the gallery’s practices “conform to Western conceptions of aesthetic interest” (2006, 198), and so prevent Indigenous art from disrupting the artistic and historical teleology presented by the gallery. Surely we should, following Whitelaw, accord proper respect to Indigenous art; and why not rejoice when settler societies seem committed to surrendering racist views on the value of other cultures? However, as Pam Palmater asserts, “Anyone who believes that reconciliation will be about blanket exercises, cultural awareness training, visiting a native exhibit at a museum or hanging native artwork in public office buildings doesn’t understand how we got here” (2018, np). Focusing on creative expression reproduces the sense that Indigeneity is best characterized as cultural difference, and casts reconciliation as a trivial endeavour, or even an exciting opportunity to gain access to exotic cultures that were once viewed as either hopelessly uncivilized or long-extinct. Moreover, overemphasizing the liberatory effects of appreciating and respecting Indigenous art elides the ways in which settler-colonial politics actually operate *through* learning to better regard Indigenous art.

Interrogating colonial recognition politics means working out ways to challenge “liberal aspiration[s] for a world where conflict does not exist across epistemic and deontic communities,” which is a different question than asking if liberal democratic modernity is sincere in its aspirations (Povinelli 2002, 12). In other words, the settler-liberal democracy’s purpose is to maintain a veneer of harmony by soothing and contain anti-colonial and / or Indigenous dissent. Hence, according to Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, confronting and dismantling settler-colonial social and political structures means moving beyond metaphor and symbolic action. The question of what colonization *is* must be answered “with attention to the colonial apparatus that is assembled to order the relationships between particular peoples, lands, the ‘natural world’, and ‘civilization’” (21). As part of the colonial apparatus, in what ways, then, does the Qallunaat art world frame appreciation as decolonial in nature—or something that at least takes on the guise of having decolonizing *intentions*—thereby enacting a “significant decoupling of Indigenous ‘cultural’ claims from the transformative visions of social, political and economic change that once constituted them” (Coulthard 2014, 52)? One clue is that the Canadian art world shies away from a structural, material analysis of Indigenous-settler relations, too busy pursuing a phantasmagoric postcolonial ideals—a vision of a post-colonial society where substantial political differences no longer exist, and people can revel in their various cultural identities, all while enjoying equal treatment as citizens of the nation-state. This sort of liberal equality cherishes the idea of bringing into the light that which was once concealed by settler colonialism. It is a form of government that encourages its citizens to confront the fact that Indigenous cultural difference has

survived myriad efforts of eradication and assimilation, while not actually having to make sacrifices, like surrendering stolen land, which cannot be substituted with demonstrations of cultural acknowledgement. Accordingly, the IAC's "Visible Vault" represents an amenable evolution, apparently intended to be unrecognizable from the gloomy, out-of-the-way halls to which Indigenous art was once relegated. The gallery's strategy vis-à-vis its hitherto-concealed collection demonstrates a form of aesthetic recognition politics; the move implies that the gallery now sees the artworks as worthy of being central to Canada's cultural landscape.

Setting culture as the terms of engagement satisfies beneficiaries of settler colonialism, who long to imagine resolving settler-colonial conflict as merely a matter of improving settler appreciation *of* and Indigenous opportunities *for* cultural expression. This perhaps explains why political debate and resistance become suspiciously more accommodating when relocated to the realm of art and culture—an idea certainly present in mainstream coverage of the IAC and its mission. In 2016, the *Winnipeg Free Press* produced a poster for "Inuit (He)Art," a multi-part profile of Inuit art set against the backdrop of the forthcoming IAC. Over an image of an Inuktitut sits a quotation from the series' author, Randy Turner: "There is no doubt the WAG's new Inuit Art Centre will be a bold, beautiful building. The bigger challenge is ensuring the voices of the Inuit—their stories of struggle and survival—are clearly heard." The poster indicates that the series will be split into two parts. Part 1, called "Northern Stars," will present art objects, "not just [as] pieces of art," but as "stories—some thousands of years old—spoken by hands" (Turner 2016a). For Part 2, called "Raising their voices," the poster suggests that the IAC

“will be about people, not just things they create” (Turner 2016b). The IAC may feature Inuit “voices,” but the forms of expression hosted by a public art museum are necessarily of a type that is suited to the mandate and capabilities of the institution. The public art museum plays a structural role in settler colonialism, not as an institution that can reasonably be expected to find better ways of working towards decolonization, but which earnestly promotes cultural appreciation as having extraordinary transformative powers. Settler-colonial institutions like the WAG amplify Indigenous voices, so long as those voices come in the form of art, produced by people who express their political and social visions through aesthetics. Surely Indigenous art is not politically irrelevant, nor is it unable to enact real and lasting change in Canada’s social landscape. Rather, art’s political potential risks being diluted as a consequence of settler-colonial power relations reconsolidating along the well-worn, uncontroversial vectors of art appreciation and cultural celebration.

How does the idea of Inuit art serving as “Inuit Voice,” as the IAC website proposes, further the colonizing processes of recognition and culturalization? To answer this question, we might consider what the term “Inuit voice” means, and how this intelligible vocality overlaps with the framing of cultural difference that recognition politics relies on. In simple terms, we might define voice as personal expression, the capacity to state one’s views. Having a voice is also to have a political platform—to influence the decisions that have an effect on one’s life. Or, voice may refer to a sort of individual expression that evidences cultural difference. This view of an ethnicized voice affirms personal expression that facilitates the social and political recognition and

inclusion of the culture whose qualities the speaker embodies. Hence, if one's art is meant to serve as one's voice, then the art itself is most accurately viewed as a spokesperson—a vehicle that best expresses the ideas and values of a culture, but which also embodies those ideas and values. In the case of the IAC, for instance, the aesthetic contributions of Inuit artists stand in for Inuit vocality. The pun used by the *Winnipeg Free Press* in the title of its special coverage of the IAC points to how the Canadian public is meant to view Inuit cultural expression. Combining “Inuit art” with “Inuit heart”—indicated by printing “art” in red—conflates artistic production with the essential nature of a people. In offering to celebrate Inuit culture through recognizing Inuit art, as a pathway to reconciliation and healing, the IAC equates Inuit self-determination to the forms of cultural expression that can be accommodated by the public art gallery. Art and art creation are presented as sites of cultural expression and engagement; Inuit are meant to find their voice by making art, enhanced by the fact that their work is now accommodated and supported by a reformed settler-colonial art gallery. This view of voice has political consequences, if simply to encourage the gallery to reform its curatorial practices to be more inclusive; more generous in their aesthetic judgements; more self-reflexive, but only so far as to examine how the gallery might improve to better support a more accommodating nation-state.

Disciplined by Arctic Sovereignty

If Inuit voice is subject to settler-colonial frames of intelligibility, then how do the dictates of Arctic sovereignty *discipline* subjects, shaping how they interpret and engage in discourses around the North and its cultural products? In other words, what are the

disciplinary constraints that exist in accordance with an increasingly valuable Far North? How do the constraints of settler-colonial intelligibility shape how Inuit art gets talked about in the context of reconciliation, which also happens to be a context in which Canada is continuing its efforts at asserting Arctic sovereignty? One way to approach this question is by considering how Arctic sovereignty and reconciliation work as disciplinary apparatuses. Disciplinary is an apt concept for assessing the effects of the WAG, via the IAC, representing and interpreting Inuit culture in a way that makes it useful for expediting broader, official manoeuvres towards reconciliation. Disciplines enact a type of power that is fundamentally distinct from sovereign power—what Foucault describes as the “Leviathan” model of power:

[D]isciplines may well be the carriers of a discourse that speaks of a rule, but this is not the juridical rule deriving from sovereignty, but a natural rule, a norm. The code they come to define is not that of law but that of normalisation. Their reference is to a theoretical horizon which of necessity has nothing in common with the edifice of right. (106-7)

Disciplines and the discourses they nurture are based on codes of normalisation that are not immediately oppressive or violent; instead, they have a soft touch and are often invisible. Discourse works in much the same way as the unspectacular, invisible, yet virtually inescapable violence that gives shape to society, which Žižek refers to as “objective violence” (2008, 12). The constitutive disciplinary effects of power are gentle, persuasive, even experienced as “natural.” Discipline is crucial in both its noun and verb form: disciplines function by disciplining subjects—through discourse, as well as by the practices that are proper to the discipline. Concurrently, subjects speak (and practice) disciplines into being. Like recognition politics, disciplines construct and adjudicate

knowledge through atomization, not simply by separating legitimate forms of knowledge from illegitimate ones, but by perpetually transforming, assimilating, and adapting disparate knowledge forms through variable processes of inclusion and validation. Much in the same way that colonial recognition bifurcates ‘culture’ from ‘politics,’ disciplinarity aids in the discursive circulation of knowledge and power, by establishing which expressions of knowledge are coherent by virtue of falling within the boundaries of a discipline.

Audra Simpson’s work on ethnographic refusal responds to the fact that the settler nation’s willingness and ability to acknowledge and engage with Indigenous people is always already constrained by what settler society considers intelligible. Settler-colonial politics and ontologies define the “terms of even being seen for Indigenous peoples (2007, 69). To follow Simpson’s thinking, if the Canadian settler state is primed to only recognize those expressions of Inuitness that accord with its intentions vis-à-vis the Arctic, then what might public institutions like the WAG be legitimizing as intelligible in its celebration of Inuit culture? In other words, how do Canada’s parallel agendas—to accommodate Inuit culture in the name of reconciliation and its goals for the Far North—come to bear on the forms of Inuit cultural and political expression to which Qallunaat are prepared to pay attention? I find Dave Woodman’s 2015 book, *Unravelling the Franklin Mystery: Inuit Testimony* has something to say in response to the above questions, insofar as it says a lot about what it takes for Inuit to become intelligible, in the Harper era and beyond. The book’s thesis is that Inuit knowledge has long held the truth of what “really” happened to the ill-fated Franklin expedition, especially with regards to one of the two

wrecked ships, the *Erabus*. Implicit to Woodman's investigation is the idea that anyone hoping to gain a complete picture of the Far North *must* turn to Inuit knowledge. As Woodman writes, "For those who require demonstration of the value of Inuit history the recent discovery of *Erabus* is undoubtedly the most visible and tangible confirmation" (xvi). Of course, the book's very existence relies on a readership that very much needs a "demonstration" that Inuit knowledge has worth. The discovery of the *Erabus* casts a fraught light on Inuit knowledge, retroactively assigning value to the freshly-confirmed testimony.

Whatever the "true" nature of Inuit knowledge and cultural expression, it is clear that they have both accrued a certain disciplinary coherence as an effect of their usefulness to nation-state interests. Inuit knowledge is especially intelligible when perceived as acting in support of the stories that give substance to Canadian national identity. The Franklin story is one of unity between Canada, European explorers, and Inuit; according to Woodman, the disaster was "an event that resonated throughout both European and Inuit history, and was a central narrative to the European opening of the Arctic" (xx). Similarly, then, Inuit art is becoming increasingly intelligible for the sake of reconciliation *and* for Arctic sovereignty—both "settling" initiatives that are facilitated by affirmative recognition culture. This context has a disciplining force, influencing interpretation and rendering assertions about what Inuit art is and does more or less valid. Whereas settler-colonial narratives of exploration and discovery form the ligaments of Inuit intelligibility, the mainstream privileging of recognition and appreciation ties to the WAG's drive to render Inuit art visible. The IAC's glass vault embodies the colonial

desire to finally *see* and *embrace* the forms of cultural expression that the nation state once ignored, in a way that casts the culture that produced it as intelligible—in the form of art, specifically.

The discourse of Arctic sovereignty is formed through multiple and intersecting sorts of value: the value envisioned in a future Arctic, and the value of Inuit cooperation. The frameworks through which Canada comes to understand itself as having dominion over the Arctic also assign disciplinary coherence to Inuit cultural production, thereby absorbing Inuit perspectives into Canada's multicultural epistemological and ontological framework, and effectively enlisting Inuit support for rendering the Arctic *Canadian*. Hence, as the Arctic's international importance continues to increase, with ballooning concerns about climate change and the possibility of political discord with other northern nations, to what degree might mainstream views of Inuit art maybe be guided by its potential political utility? For instance, how might Arctic sovereignty influence how reconciliation rhetoric functions when applied to Inuit-settler relations? When the TRC equates "cultural competence" with reconciliation, it validates, implicitly, the idea that misguided colonial actions, such as the High Arctic relocations, were really a sort of "misrecognition" (Taylor 1994)—a case of the federal government and its proxies not viewing Inuit as properly human or as having complex cultures and political systems—rather than as a calculated and ongoing initiative to exploit them in order to take assert dominion over their land and resources, while simultaneously asserting the dominance of Euro-Canadian lifeways. Hence, however much the IAC seems like evidence that the WAG is working to adopt a novel approach to Inuit art, in accordance with (re)new(ed)

relationships between Canada and Indigenous peoples more broadly, we should note that the WAG has long been engaging in this mode of talking about Inuit art. Perhaps surprisingly, the language of appreciation, insight, and engagement is evident in over half a century of exhibition catalogues produced to accompany Inuit art exhibits at the gallery. Hence, heightened attention to Inuit art and its role in reconciliation currently on display at the WAG constitutes part of a far-reaching discourse regarding Inuit art and what it has to say to people in the South.

CHAPTER TWO

Our Art, Our Land: Theorizing the Interplay between Ethnography and Aestheticization in the WAG's Inuit Exhibition Catalogues

In some ways, the WAG takes a conventional stance vis-à-vis what Inuit art reveals about Inuit culture. The notes found in their catalogues promote the artworks on display as offering a window onto lifeways in the North, thereby implying that art directly represents some essential cultural truth. Art, in this framing, holds meaning insofar as it embodies the historical and cultural context that produced it (Clifford 1988, 224). Further, it expresses knowledge, and can therefore impart understanding to those who encounter it. If Inuit art has representational and educational qualities, then it is likewise worth celebrating for its capacity to bestow cross-cultural insight. This view of art is predicated on the idea that Inuit are ultimately exotic: a different culture that we in the South can access through their material culture, but whose lifeways can never be fully inhabited. The purported documentary function of Inuit art thereby implies a substantial difference in worldviews between Qallunaat art patrons and Inuit—a difference that merits an ethnographic investigation, perhaps to sate the curiosity of southerners. At the same time, the WAG offers a view of Inuit art that presupposes that Inuit and non-Inuit art patrons are very much the same, based on their shared experience of aesthetics. This aestheticized view of Inuit art does not fully do away with the documentary definition of Inuit art; rather, the aesthetic reading nuances the ethnographic reading, often by identifying artworks that qualify as universally excellent, such as by reading the fidelity with which

an artwork depicts Inuit culture as a standard of aesthetic excellence. Gallery-goers are encouraged to view Inuit art in terms of its aesthetic qualities, its skillfulness partly determined by its ethnographic expressiveness. Discussions of individual works attribute the fidelity of a representation to the delicacy and variety of “incised lines which cover [a] bird’s body” (Blodgett 1979, 14) for instance, or suggest that a print’s layout allows the artist to more faithfully render a hunter in action (17). An artwork’s ethnographic capacity—its accuracy, and therefore its ability to convey a sense of being in the North—is only as robust as its aesthetic qualities, and the inverse is also true. As the catalogue for *Eskimo Narrative* maintains, the more aesthetically excellent a work, the more “meaningful and intelligible” it is (Blodgett 1979, 3). I contend that it is in this way that the catalogues negotiate between facilitating understanding of Indigenous cultures in the name of “cultural competency” while simultaneously recognizing the value and quality of Inuit creative production.

The interplay between exotic and mundane, unknowable and familiar has discursive effects vis-à-vis the dictates of official reconciliation. Furthermore, the catalogues’ ambivalence actually mimics the dynamics of the legal conditions that Canada must meet to convincingly assert Arctic sovereignty. In particular, Inuit art appreciation works towards nurturing a somewhat contradictory sense of belonging amongst art patrons, pertaining to the regions that Inuit art hails from, and which Inuit art represents. This form of belonging is specific to the Arctic—a region that settler society in the South aims to own but not occupy. The imperative to own from afar is acquiring new urgency, as these days, laying claim to the territory makes increasing economic sense

(Grant 2010, 10), not least because of the fact that spiking temperatures predict easier passage through the ice-filled waters. The Arctic has long been viewed as playing a central role in Canadian society, particularly in terms of its role in constructing a sense of national identity and belonging (Graburn 1986; Grace 2002; Hulan 2002), but globalization and a shifting climate have, especially for northern nations, recently highlighted “the importance of the circumpolar world as an area for inclusion and co-operation” (Canada 2000, 1). For Canada, questions about how best to lay claim to the Northwest Passage are particularly pressing, with the United States and the European Union attempting to define the waterway as an “international strait” (Carnaghan and Goody 2006, 3). Warming Arctic ice also heralds a future where the vast oil and gas resources in the region will be less onerous to access (6). An open Arctic means improved access to untapped oil and gas, which the US Geological Survey estimates represent “a quarter of the world’s undiscovered energy resources” (Reynolds 2005). In addition to offering new pathways to a bounty of oil and gas, warming waters could mean the development of “[l]ucrative fisheries,” increased “access [...] to the Arctic’s gold, silver, iron and, importantly, diamonds” (Crawford et al., 2008, 5). Government and corporate excitement over the opportunities afforded by a more accommodating Arctic passageway accompanies concern that ship traffic would bring an increase in oil spills, which is particularly worrying given the ecological fragility of the region (5-6).

In the meantime, in order to assert a claim to the Arctic that will be recognized internationally, as fulfilling the dictates of effective occupation (Carnaghan and Goody 2006, 4), officials must do more than simply refer to maps and identify precisely where

Canada ends and international waters begin (6). Rather, the federal government must fulfill a number of conditions: demonstrating “supreme [...] authority” over Arctic regions, as recognized in international law; acting in accordance with the nation-state’s “responsibility” to maintain a presence; and recognizing and supporting Indigenous “stewardship,” with Inuit “use and occupancy” intended to denote a long-standing Canadian presence (2). Inuit presence in the Arctic is therefore seen as an opportunity to assert a distinctly Canadian sovereignty, and in fact, Inuit often emphasize the political value of their unique role in the nation-state politics in order to highlight Canada’s responsibilities. In an opinion piece entitled “Inuit: the bedrock of Arctic sovereignty,” then-president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Mary Simon (2007) writes, “Inuit are, and expect to remain, the permanent majority population of the Arctic. This is helpful for Canada when defending claims of sovereignty against other nations.” Simon makes this claim in order to insist that the federal government must address social inequity in the Arctic (e.g. high suicide and tuberculosis rates) to fully guarantee its claims to the North. She also suggests that Canada can “impress outsiders with the creativity and practicality of our domestic policies,” indicating that Arctic sovereignty hinges on how Canada is perceived on the world stage.

While many Canadians might be surprised to learn that ownership over the North is not their birthright, it turns out that sovereignty is something that must be repeatedly established, through a process that seems to be without end. This is because soliciting international recognition of sovereignty is critical. Any “unilateral declaration of sovereignty must be followed by treaties or tacit recognition to become credible.

Otherwise, it is considered ahead of the law” (Grant 2010, 13). The requirement that sovereignty be repeatedly proven is made clear in Canada’s Northern Strategy, introduced in 2000 but realized in policy form by the Harper Conservatives in 2008. Harper’s official Northern Strategy followed a 2007 Speech from the Throne, which introduced a “four-pillar strategy” featuring an interest in bolstering Inuit wellbeing, alongside emphases on environmental science and resource development. The Strategy was, in Harper’s words “a comprehensive vision for a new North, a Northern Strategy that will turn potential into prosperity for the benefit of all Northerners and all Canadians” (Canada 2008a). The inchoate Strategy was more clearly defined in the *Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy*, which the Department of Foreign Affairs released in 2009, the same year that the government published an official version of the Strategy as *Canada’s Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future* (CBC 2009, np). Objectives of the Strategy were later executed with a number of projects and policies, such as the *Economic Action Plan 2013: Jobs, Growth, and Long-Term Prosperity*, which provided resources for initiatives in Northwest Territories (NWT), Yukon, and Nunavut to help develop housing and infrastructure, and to fund ecological-protection projects.¹⁹ A precursor to the Northern Strategy was *The Northern Dimension of Canada’s Foreign Policy* (NDCFP) which was released in 2000. It highlighted the government’s interest in addressing environmental and social challenges, emphasizing cooperation over the militaristic and adversarial approaches that predominated in the Cold War era (Lackenbauer and Dean 2016, xxviii-xxxiv; Griffiths et al. 2011, 227). Paul Martin’s Liberal government adopted the

¹⁹ See the publication *Achievements Under Canada’s Northern Strategy, 2007-2011* for a comprehensive list of the projects funded under the Northern Strategy (Canada 2011).

NDCFP's interest in the human and environmental aspects of northern security. However, whereas the early version of the Liberal's Northern Strategy prioritized Indigenous well-being and input into decision-making processes that would impact their lives (Lackenbauer and Dean 2016, xxix), later concerns about climate change and the degree to which it would lead to increased international interest in the Arctic prompted the government to develop a policy, in 2005, that was more oriented towards conventional security interests, with somewhat less emphasis on supporting the wellbeing and soliciting the cooperation of Inuit and other northern Indigenous peoples (xxx-xxxi). The Liberals were ousted by Harper's Conservatives before they could fully execute their security policies for the North, but the ideological connections that Martin's government had established between security and sovereignty remained through the Harper regime (xxxi).

The Strategy was criticized for lacking in specific details, a flaw that could slow resource development projects and not properly enable Inuit input (xxxvi). At the same time, the document gained coherence as it helped give meaning to other foreign policy endeavours, both by Canada and by other northern nations, and gave Conservative party members an initiative to rally around. Negotiations for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2007 represented such an instance; the meetings had implications for defining boundaries between international and domestic waters (cf. Riddell-Dixon 2017), and the resulting agreements were thus viewed as acting in conversation with the Northern Strategy (xxxvi). Moreover, the Northern Strategy is a political artifact, an emblem of a burgeoning global interest in the North that was sparked by climate change,

as well as the Conservatives' interest in recasting Canada in terms of ideals traditionally associated with the Party, such as militarism and economic development (Lackenbauer and Dean 2016, xxvi). The Strategy is thus part of the discursive formation that casts Canada as a northern nation. As Steven Chase reports in a *Globe and Mail* article from 2014 entitled "The North: Myth versus reality in Stephen Harper's northern strategy," Harper's focus on the Arctic suggests that the region is a potent source of "myths and narratives" that enhance Canada's aura as a northern nation.

As a text, the Strategy has a strong narrative drive, especially in terms of the role that it gives both Inuit and southern Canadians in the drama of establishing dominion over the Far North. The Northern Strategy website states,

With 40% of our landmass in the territories, 162,000 kilometres of Arctic coastline and 25% of the global Arctic—Canada is undeniably an Arctic nation. The Government is firmly exercising our sovereignty over our Arctic lands and waters—sovereignty that is long-standing, well-established and based on historic title, international law and the presence of Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples for thousands of years.²⁰

The version of Arctic sovereignty evoked here depends upon a confluence of evidence, working along spatial and temporal lines: Canada can be said to claim the North due to its physical placement alongside the Arctic territories, backed up by the fact that Indigenous peoples, who are now considered part of Canada, have long called the Far North their home. The fact that Canada must provide a résumé to recommend itself for the job of Arctic guardian belies any idea that Canada's claim is "undeniable." Indeed, the assertion itself points to the performative nature of Arctic sovereignty: in the act of speaking of its dominion, dominion seems to materialize. However, my project is generally unconcerned

²⁰ <http://www.northernstrategy.gc.ca/sov/index-eng.asp>

with whether or not Canadian sovereignty is “real.” What counts is the fact that Arctic sovereignty is never fully or finally proven; it is processual, practiced. One consequence of this is that Canada must repeatedly perform its own northernness, which it frequently does by encouraging Inuit to self-identify as Canadian, thereby appropriating and exploiting Inuit prior occupation, as well as urging southerners to internalize a sense of belonging to—if not so much *in*—the Far North. This paradoxical, proxy belonging offers ways into understanding the place of Inuit art appreciation in those political endeavours that rely on Inuit prior occupancy. The WAG catalogues, for example, evoke a form of belonging that is similarly performative and perpetual; it is a belonging that seeks affirmation but is never complete.

This chapter identifies how the logic undergirding Canada’s claims to Arctic sovereignty, explicitly laid out in the Northern Strategy, articulates with prevailing approaches to appreciating art made by Inuit, which the WAG’s catalogues frequently promote as the ideal, requisite method for achieving a better understanding of Inuit culture. This is not a straightforward task, particularly as there are complex tensions produced by the catalogues, such as when they oscillate between viewing Inuit art as a window into Inuit culture—what I see as an ethnographic approach—and viewing Inuit art as fulfilling universal standards—or an aestheticizing approach. The WAG was one of the first public art galleries to pay serious attention to Inuit art, and their catalogues have long offered forms of cultural understanding, through ethnographic analyses premised on a residual curiosity regarding Inuit otherness, but also via aesthetic assessments that downplay potentially meaningful examples of cultural difference. On one hand, then, the

WAG frames Inuit art as a direct portal into Inuit culture, entirely representative of a distinct way of life, albeit one that is ultimately not completely knowable. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, the gallery characterizes Inuit art as exhibiting universal aesthetic qualities that are found across time and throughout various—typically Western—cultures. The WAG thereby models an ambivalent interpretive mode, inviting gallery-goers to adopt a stance that combines different and potentially dissonant methods for understanding and appreciating the Inuit-made artworks on display at the WAG. The resulting position enables an anthropological view of Inuit as culturally distinct, and therefore ethnographically interesting, but only in a non-political sense. Concurrently, the catalogues frame Inuit as people who produce art that is equal to that of any other culture, thereby collapsing Inuit into a universal aesthetic paradigm, and ensuring that Inuit are contained under the umbrella of the multicultural nation-state.

The political effects of Inuit art promotion, of which we see a sample in the WAG's catalogues, extend beyond Canadian liberal multiculturalism, which incorporates difference in order to ultimately institute governmental homogeneity (Mackey 1998). In addition to casting Inuitness as a form of benign cultural difference, Canada must incubate non-Inuit subjects who will come to conceive of Inuit art-forms, worldviews, and lifeways, to name but a few fetishized aspects, as simultaneously foreign but also central to Canadian identity. Hence, patrons that view Inuit art in this way—as culturally exotic but universally excellent—acquire status as “exalted subjects” (Thobani 2007) of the colonial nation state, insofar as they maintain a viewpoint on the relationship between Inuit and Canada that aligns with the anachronistic, ambivalent stipulations of Arctic

sovereignty. The subjectifying force of the WAG's approach to Inuit art appreciation suggests that there are political ramifications to the WAG's project, which casts Inuit as both absolutely Other, as well as fundamentally—even quintessentially—*Canadian*. The catalogues' contradictory view on the nature of Inuit art frames the Arctic as a space that can be inhabited by proxy—by first rendering the region as unhostile, casting any present or future conflict between Inuit and the settler nation-state as a matter that can be resolved in terms of cultural appreciation; and then facilitating symbolic access to the North, through emphasizing the representational capacity of the art produced there. The WAG's ambivalent framing enables settler Canadians to establish a sense of similarly ambivalent belonging: of not necessarily belonging *in* the North, but *to* the North. Patrons may establish insight into the lives of Inuit through their material culture, and also lay claim to the art through universal and homogenizing aesthetic standards, while, on the other hand, viewing Inuit lifeways and the Arctic as ultimately uninhabitable and exotic. This confluence of interpretations frames the Arctic as a space to be claimed but not settled. The catalogues do not simply use language that is similar to that which Canada invokes to express fealty to Inuit culture, thereby executing a political maneuver aimed at staking a claim to the Arctic. Rather, the gallery actively fosters settler subjects whose ideological and imaginative views of the North accord with the requirements of Arctic sovereignty.

The Contextualist Protocol in Inuit Art Appreciation

The WAG's 2016 mission statement for the IAC showcases prevailing ideas about the relationship between art and an anthropological view of culture, insofar as viewing

and appreciating the art of other cultures can convey knowledge about and foster understanding of those cultures. James Clifford (1988) writes that Western art institutions, particularly since the turn of the 20th century, have tended to classify cultural objects in their holdings as either “cultural artifacts or as (aesthetic) works of art” (222). These classifications—the artifact and the work of art—typically form part of the “modern art-culture system” (223), wherein objects are deemed “authentic,” either as works of art or as cultural objects. And the “inverse... occurs whenever art masterworks are culturally and historically ‘contextualized’” (224). In other words, objects are presented as cultural artefacts rather than art per se when they are treated as spatially or temporally periodized—rooted in a particular space or time (224-225). Conversely, art objects are defined as such when museums display them according to “‘formalist’ rather than ‘contextualist’ protocols” (224). The formalist mode of classification is limited and includes contestation, but “generally speaking the system still confronts any collected exotic object with a stark alternative between a second home in an ethnographic or an aesthetic milieu” (226). In the context of Canada, museums have tended to slot Indigenous material culture into the category of craft, thereby framing Indigenous peoples as “marginalized, premodern people, whose identity is tied to objects from which the public understands ‘culture.’” (Trofanenko 2006, 99). Casting art objects made by Indigenous people as craft—ethnographically interesting, but valuable only as trinkets—has been one way that Canada has minimized the relevance of Indigenous culture and rendered Indigeneity less visible. In response, getting colonial institutions to acknowledge that Indigenous art should be viewed as such has been one of the main fronts for

decolonial action.

Regardless of whether they explicitly identify Inuit cultural products as objects that exhibit universally excellent qualities, and thereby qualify as “high art,” or as folk objects whose purpose is limited to the time and place in which they are used—as curiosities as opposed to art objects—the WAG’s Inuit exhibition catalogues, almost without exception, approach viewing Inuit art as an occasion for coming to a contextualist understanding of Inuit culture, such that they often demonstrate characteristics of an anthropological analysis. The WAG mounted an exhibition, *Eskimo Sculpture: Selections from the Twomey Collection*, in 1972, intended to highlight the “evolution” of contemporary Inuit art, which included not only sculpture—a staple of the Inuit art market—but also drawings (Crandall 2000, 198). The accompanying catalogue’s introduction states that Inuit art represents a “material culture” that has “one central aim: a homogenous effort to master the conditions of survival... This proof of a dynamism and talent that triumphs over the harshness of a forbidding environment *is best shown* in Eskimo sculpture, printmaking and drawing” (Fry 1972, np, my emphasis). Here, the catalogue blatantly characterizes Inuit art as not only the product of Inuit culture, but actually offering an exemplary representation of Inuitness (the proposition that Inuit art demonstrates qualities of resilience and creativity that are inherent to Inuit is something that I explore further in Chapter 3.) Other catalogues make similar claims, explicating a link between art and culture that is so strong as to allow the former to act as a window to the latter. In the 1977 *Port Harrison* catalogue, Inuit artist Paulosie Kasadluak contributes a short essay in which he reports, “What we show in our carving is the life we have lived

in the past right up to today. We show the truth” (Blodgett 1977b, 21). Art, purportedly, directly relates to the veracity of an artist’s experiences. Moreover, as Kasadluak’s reference to “we” suggests, Inuit art *in general* serves as a representation of an experience shared amongst Inuit as a collective, implying that Inuit art encapsulates characteristics that are shared across a culture, and does not simply represent subjective or individual experience.

The introduction to *Eskimo Narrative*, an exhibition from 1979 featuring pieces that “‘narrated’ something about Inuit life” (Crandall 2000, 236), similarly describes the art on display as a conduit into Inuit life, claiming that “simply by depicting what is familiar and traditional to them, the Eskimo artists tell us about themselves, and they show us life in the north” (Blodgett 1979, 3). The repeated reference to showing and telling—revealing and conveying—emphasizes the representational qualities of Inuit art pieces. And invitations for viewing Inuit art through an ethnographic lens are not only found in mid-Century catalogues. One essay, based on an interview with the artist Napachie Pootoogook, and reproduced in the catalogue accompanying a 2004 exhibition of her work, describes how the Inuk came to the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative to sell drawings. The essay emphasizes that these drawings depicted her life, as well as Inuit culture more broadly, reporting that “with each new group of drawings delivered to the Co-op, the artistic and ethnographic significance of Napachie’s work became more and more apparent” (Ryan and Wight 2004, 11). Similarly insisting upon the “documentary” qualities of Inuit art, an essay from *Creation and Transformation* (Wight 2013) describes an artist who “captured the essence of [Inuit] stories in sculptures, drawings, and prints;

he also recorded hundreds of them, thus preserving this vital aspect of Inuit oral history” (38). This ethnographic interpretation is echoed in the 2016 catalogue for a solo exhibition of Oviloo Tunnillie’s work, which maintains that Tunnillie’s art helps gallery goers to “gain an appreciation and understanding of not just her life and accomplishments, but of contemporary Inuit life” (Wight 2016, 10). Readers are thereby invited to see Inuit artworks as providing direct insight into the reality of Inuit culture as a whole.

Povungnituk (1977) similarly highlights the ethnographic character of Inuit art—its direct relationship to Inuit culture, in other words—but it takes farther the notion of art’s documentary capacity:

Since their desire is to be understood as Eskimos, their emphasis is on the realistic portrayal of real things. The challenge is to make these things look, and *feel*, as real as possible. It is almost as if they are grounding their identity by carving and re-carving the reality of existence as they have seen and feel it to be. Indeed, to criticize the work of Pov artists, is to cause them to question the validity of their whole existence. When their life is right, they believe, their carving goes well. (Blodgett 1977, 14)

The catalogue builds on the idea that the art on display has “communicative aspects” (14) as well as “ethnographic interest” (16), suggesting that being able to represent Inuit culture through art is actually vital to the very culture that the art is meant to encapsulate. The assertion that an artwork’s representational characteristics derive from the artists’ need to depict the “familiar and traditional” (1979, 3) implies that there is something automatic about the ways in which Inuit artists reveal details of Inuit life to the viewer—an echo of Houston’s description of artworks from Inoucdjoua as “spontaneous expressions of life” (Blodgett 1977, 9). This characterization casts the artist as a conduit

through which expressions of Inuit lifeways travel unbidden, bypassing consciousness and eventually materializing in the form of art. Notwithstanding the fact that this treatment of Inuit art downplays the artist's creative agency, such characterizations of the relationship between life, place, and art suggest that viewers of Inuit art are receiving an unfiltered view of the very essence of Inuit culture. At the same time, by declaring that art both embodies and enacts Inuit selfhood, the catalogues enact an affirmative recognition of Inuit culture, encouraging patrons to conclude that Inuit should see art-creation as a form of self-actualization. This not only reinforces the assumption that Inuit worldviews are tightly bound to the art that they create, but frames access to art-creation as a necessary and sufficient condition of Inuit wellbeing, as well as an adequate substitute for political sovereignty.

The ethnographic view of Inuit art espoused by the WAG is based on the idea that cultural production primarily serves a “documentary” approach to simply record and preserve “human thought and experience” (Williams [1961] 2002, 57). The catalogues suggest that Inuit art offers ethnographic insight into the culture of the people who *produce* it—a culture that the art is seen as directly depicting. Working on these two levels—form and representation—Inuit art supposedly epitomizes Inuit culture: it is the “best” example of Inuit “dynamism and talent” (Fry 1972, np). The catalogues, in cases such as these, assess Inuit artworks as excellent, but only insofar as they represent Inuit culture with fidelity. At the same time, an ethnographic stance on Indigenous art reproduces archaic settler-colonial dynamics of seeing and being seen. It naturalizes and obscures the ways in which such a framing encourages non-Indigenous gallery goers to

view Indigenous peoples through an antiquated frame, objects of curiosity from which knowledge can be gleaned, not creators of culture or producers of knowledge.

Art as a Bridge

Inuit art can certainly be viewed as an element of Inuit culture—at least insofar as Inuit people certainly make art—but is this the same as saying that Inuit art is representative of Inuit culture? As noted in Chapter 1, a settler-colonial state that operates through a politics of recognition has much to gain by casting Indigeneity (and, in the case of northern geopolitics, Inuitness) as a form of cultural difference rather than as encapsulating political and economic autonomy (Coulthard 2014, 66). Liberal multiculturalism prioritizes cultural difference while “fragment[ing] the unity of Indigenous worldviews into the distorted perspectives of arts, science, and culture” (Battiste and Henderson 2000, 40). This is a similar process to what Slavoj Žižek describes as “the culturalization of politics,” wherein political and economic inequality are seen as a problem of cultural intolerance (2007, np). In purporting to facilitate cultural understanding, the WAG is not only claiming to foster better relationships between Inuit and southerners. Nor is it simply executing an act of recognition tailored to appease necessary political allies, although it certainly does this, pursuant to the dictates of Arctic sovereignty. Rather, the gallery’s framing of Inuit art as embodying Inuit culture allows gallery-goers and catalogue-readers alike to attain a glimpse into the North. Art functions, therein, as a window—a technology of (in)sight; it is meant to act not merely as a metonym for Inuit life, but as a *microcosm* of Inuit life. In the WAG’s telling, moreover,

art works as a portal in multiple ways, going beyond simply offering insight into Inuit culture, to move patrons northwards.

Ningiukulu Teevee, a 2017 catalogue for the exhibition of the same name, proclaims that the IAC “will be a bridge and a gathering place—a community hub for exploration and advancement, enabling artists from north and south to meet, learn, and work together” (10). For the WAG and for others, Inuit art creation has the capacity to bring the North and the South together, not only in the sense that it brings different art-making communities together, but also through the (almost literal) transporting effects of the art itself. Recent catalogues have acted upon the WAG’s interest in facilitating intercultural communication and collaboration, finding shared interests between Inuit and non-Inuit communities. For instance, in *Looking Up*, one artist states, “My connection to the North is via imagination. Since I’ve never visited the North I can only imagine what it must be like... Since I don’t know any Inuit artists personally, my connection to the Inuit art community is because of their art. It’s offered me a glimpse into their myths, stories, dreams, daily lives, and individual and collective imaginations” (21). What are the social and spatial implications of treating Inuit art as a conduit into Inuit culture, and of seeing art analysis as an occasion for ethnographic revelation? How does viewing Inuit art as both bridge and window, transporting patrons and endowing them with insight, relate to settler-colonial efforts at establishing dominion over the Far North?

Along the same lines of proposing that Inuit art represents Inuit life, the WAG’s ethnographic analyses offer readers and viewers an access to place, by way of culture. Inuit art, in the WAG’s telling, can be both a technology of seeing and a technology of

moving; a window and a bridge. Art can “build bridges” between cultures, enabling solidarity and good feelings, creating a site for communication and exchange. Building bridges serves as an analogy for reconciliation, satisfying a need for people to connect with one another. Here, we might consider the title of *Looking Up*, which is noteworthy in its double meaning of looking *towards* the north with looking *up to* the North, which situates the Arctic as an object of attention, as well as something of a mentor—all rendered in rosy tones, inviting us to gather that “things,” once bleak, are finally “looking up.” Emphasizing Inuit art’s capacity for both moving people and bringing them together also allows it to be popularly viewed as adding a number of things to Canada’s efforts at solidifying its ownership over the Arctic. In particular, southern art galleries celebrating the value of Inuit culture, symbolized and made material in art, may have the effect of endearing the nation-state to Inuit, whose cooperation Canada’s claims to Arctic sovereignty rely upon. More compelling is the possibility that art *from* the North, which is meant to serve as a conduit *to* the North, fosters in southerners a sense of “being there,” and even a sense of belonging, that does not require patrons from the South to actually travel to the Arctic (although the art certainly may inspire them to do so, and all the better for a nation-state that might want its citizenry to internalize a sense of being northern).

The catalogues address the materiality of Inuit art in a way that resonates with the gallery’s stated interest in becoming a “bridge” to the North, particularly insofar as the artwork’s material dimension facilitates access to place. The substance that the art is made from serves as a piece of place, much like a souvenir; and, by developing a sense of understanding *about* the pieces’ materials, the reader / viewer—a gallery-goer who, in

accordance with official reconciliation, might be eager to read Indigenous material culture in a way that demonstrates an affinity for “cultural competency” —achieves a better sense of Inuit culture and place. The materiality of the art furthers understanding, and thereby putatively enables non-Inuit to overcome the epistemological biases that they bring to the gallery. It is this second function of a piece’s materiality that elevates the gallery’s mission above merely displaying art that functions like a souvenir. This is crucial, given that an artwork’s distinct relationship to place—and especially artwork by non-Western people—has tended to qualify it for status as a work of craft or folk-art according to Western standards. In fact, souvenir pieces—which Inuit art pieces have traditionally functioned as (Auger 2005, 132-33)—have typically been viewed as having lower status than even ethnographic objects, meaning that “at best they find a place in exhibits of ‘technology’ or ‘folk-lore’” (Clifford 222-23). Art-industry workers depicting materiality as a way of accessing place is typical of souvenir culture in general, and in normative approaches to interpreting Inuit art in particular. As Emily Auger writes, in *The Way of Inuit Art*, “Like most souvenirs, Inuit carvings make perfect gifts for adults or children, are genuine products of local people and, in addition to symbolizing a place and people, are often an actual piece of the local rock” (2005, 133). A piece of folk art, whether acquired through travel or as a gift, serves as a piece of place—oftentimes almost literally so.

Port Harrison / Inoucdjoua includes an oft-cited essay from which readers learn that, as part of the carving process, artists are responsible for locating and retrieving their own materials; it laments the fact that “people in the south do not understand that the

first—and, often, the hardest—part of making a carving is finding the right kind of stone and prying it out of the frozen ground” (Blodgett 1977a, 16). In “Nothing Marvellous,” from the same catalogue, an Inuit artist describes being frustrated with southerners’ lack of awareness about the process of making a carving: “Summer or winter, each brings its own difficulty in obtaining the stone... You have to think of where the stone comes from and the problems one goes through getting it out. The problem of locating it in the first place and the distance one has to carry it” (21). Readers thereby get a sense of being in the North, via insider knowledge that operates in relation to the distinctly placed nature of the art itself. The labour involved in finding, transporting, and processing stone is essential to carving, but the nature of the stone itself—inseparable from the places in which it is found—is crucial for creating the art pieces in the first place. By including information pertaining to the lived realities of artists—who have to work with difficult substances that are found only in the North—the catalogues give gallery goers a sense of “being there.” They also offer a lesson on Inuit life—providing an occasion for non-Inuit to attain “cultural competency,” in other words.

Rankin Inlet / Kangirlliniq describes the relationship between pottery materials and place while recalling how artists began using local clay, “finding in its groggy texture and natural terra-cotta appearance, a reference to their own land, their own history” (Driscoll 1980b, 32). Materiality—the physical elements that make up a place—enables artists, according to the catalogues’ interpretation, to create pieces that best exemplify the unique qualities of their home—pieces that will later tell stories about that place to those southern viewers who care to learn. *Belcher Islands* notes that artists utilize the stone’s

natural features to accentuate aspects of a given piece, but the stone also presents its own “inherent beauty” (Driscoll 1981a, 46), with one artist reporting, “Soapstone is really hard to get here in Pangnirtung. ... If there was soapstone available in Pangnirtung, we artists could carve different kinds of images. Instead, we do drawings of what we have seen and what we have learned” (Driscoll 1982, 16). The catalogues thereby impart knowledge about place, while also foregrounding that land has a profound influence on the final form that art takes. At the same time, by highlighting the relationship between place and materiality, the catalogues risk casting the artworks on display as souvenir-like. Of more relevance for my argument, however, is the degree to which the gallery’s emphasis on a material’s source actually frames the artworks on display as conduits to the North, thereby ascribing to them the ability to *move* viewers, both in the emotional and the geographical sense of the word.

Despite Inuit art’s observed ethnographic function, however, reconciliation culture insists that Canadians, who once had the bad habit of viewing Indigenous art as craft-like or as folk art (Morphy 2001, 46), now recognize the value of Indigenous culture and cultural production so that the nation-state and its citizens can eliminate any residual colonial tendencies. This novel view of Indigenous artmaking is evident in renovated curatorial practices. According to Phillips, curation at the end of the 20th century was shaped by “increasingly effective [Indigenous] activism and the growth of diasporic communities,” which demanded that museums and other settler institutions adopt more inclusive and evolved perspectives on Indigenous culture, and therefore challenge Canada’s “traditional construct as a settler nation rooted in French and British colonial

histories” (2011, 5). Discourses of the role of art appreciation in reconciliation identify Europeans’ prior denigration of Indigenous art and cultural production as a primary node of colonial intervention. Consequently, an ethnographic stance on Inuit art is, to some extent, in tension with the gallery’s aim for reconciliation, insofar as it approaches Indigenous culture in a way that appears to mimic modes of viewing Indigenous people that are now widely seen as inappropriate. Viewing Indigenous material culture through an ethnographic lens requires viewing it as craft-like, which is commonly seen as the same thing as judging it unworthy for inclusion in art galleries. Indigenous scholars have also written extensively about the damage done by outsiders insisting on adopting an ethnographic stance on Indigenous people. Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson, in *Mohawk Interruptus*, writes that social scientists utilize an “ethnological and ethnographic eye,” which they use to read Indigenous cultural products as “evidence” of past traditions, in anticipation of “an imminent *cultural* death” that, rather inconveniently, has never arrived (2014, 98). The ethnographic gaze fixes its object. It pursues evidence, so as to catalogue the existence of people. In doing so, it fixes them in time, in opposition to the presence of the ethnographer and their (usually, Euro-Western) culture, therefore giving legitimacy to the idea that those being documented exist primarily in the past. The ethnographic stance, in addition to naturalizing the role of Euro-Canadians as the main bearers and creators of knowledge—which implicitly demotes Indigenous people to objects of study—also supports a view of Indigenous lifeways as reducible to artifacts, thereby casting Indigenous peoples as always already disappeared.

So how does the gallery’s ethnographic stance on Inuit art operate in the context

of official reconciliation, at a time when the Western art world is said to be coming to terms with the “great embarrassment” of viewing Indigenous art as “primitive” (Morphy 2001, 37)? One possibility is that promoting Inuit art as ethnographic—as a *window* into Inuit culture—actually works in favour of the gallery’s stated mission of fostering *understanding*, in that the art form offers lessons on the particulars of Inuit cultural difference. Further, the TRC and other state-sponsored initiatives valorizing “cultural competency” validates the curiosity of non-Inuit patrons, and even rewards its fulfilment, despite the fact that the move towards better understanding might be antithetical to the ethnographic approach, in spirit. As the following section will demonstrate, the WAG further rationalizes the seeming contradiction between an ethnographic bent and the aesthetic and social enlightenment that the postcolonial art gallery is required to perform by foregrounding the hybrid or syncretic nature of Inuit art, characterizing it not as a product of an original and untouched culture, but as the product of contact, interface and exchange, and dramatic culture change.²¹

The WAG catalogues highlight the spatial and pedagogical aspects of Inuit art’s materiality—what it has inherited from its place of origin—which has two significant effects in the era of affirmative recognition culture: first, such an interpretation defines Inuit art as a piece of a place; second, it risks reducing northern places to a piece of art.

²¹ As I will discuss in Chapter 3, one consequence of this characterization is that it acknowledges cultural change while glossing over many of its *effects*, emphasizing the degree to which art production could adequately replace practices like hunting and trapping, as well as following nomadic lifeways, that had survived into the middle of the 20th century, and even later in some communities.

The Far North's materiality is dramatically rendered *as art* in a description of the snow in Arctic Bay, which compares the surface of the land to sculpture:

A foot stamped upon it leaves no impression on the wind-sculptured surface. Sculpture is in the mountains which rise behind the settlement and ring the bay of sea ice, sculpture which changes its form as the sun changes its position. Sculpture is in the form of the frozen seal lying upon the side and in the skull of the polar bear. Sculpture is in the shape of the hunter as he waits by the iglu [sic], in the dogs as they wait by the komatik. (Blodgett 1986, 15.)

At the same time that art can be seen as a piece of the North, the above statement recommends that we see the North as a work of art. The catalogues thereby reveal that the realm of art-as-documentary overlaps a discursive zone delineated by the principles and language of aestheticization. This equation has the effect of rendering the Arctic as art-like, and thus significantly less real, evacuating it of substance. Universal aesthetics open up the North to interpretation. This is one of the ways, perhaps, that the “aesthetic anesthetizes” (Camille 78) visitors' relationship to the North: by framing it as an ephemeral space best conceptualized as a work of art rather than as a vibrant and very real place occupied by people who are culturally unique, to be sure, but who also have political and social dimensions that far exceed the realm of art.

Seeking the Ethnographic in the Aesthetic

The WAG's attention to the aesthetic qualities of Inuit art, rather than its ethnographic utility, nevertheless provides ethnographic “insight.” Viewing Inuit art along these often-dichotomized registers concurrently has social and political resonances. My claim here is that the aesthetic view of art can offer ways for reading art ethnographically. This is not simply to imply that art operates as a universal, shared

language, and can thus reveal shared experiences of the world that are not culturally, or even geographically specific. Instead, as the catalogues suggest, one of the characteristics that determines whether a piece of Inuit art is aesthetically excellent is the degree to which aesthetic techniques are seen to convey an experience of Inuitness. Gallery professionals are attuned to the aesthetic characteristics of pieces, naturally, but the approaches they take for discussing and assessing a piece's aesthetic components—such as noting what the piece's technical details tell viewers about the culture and place from which an artist comes—have peculiar resonance with Canadian settler-colonial society's orientation towards Inuit and the Arctic. While Inuit art objects' ethnographic qualities and their *materiality* make them interesting as souvenirs *from* and *of* the North, their *aesthetic* aspects are likewise presented as inextricable from the lifeways that a piece depicts.

Found throughout many of the catalogues are instances when the curator appears to advance an ethnographic reading *by way of* analyzing a work's aesthetic qualities. We might consider the claim, from the catalogue for *Inuit Myths, Legends & Songs*, that illustrations, whether offered “in a literal or a more abstract manner... provide the viewer with an extraordinary insight into the cultural history of Inuit” (Driscoll 1982c, 7); or recent references to aesthetic techniques that transform “stories into expressive works of art, with minutely described details organized into sophisticated compositions that powerfully convey ideas and emotions beyond the written words” (Ryan and Wight 2004, 29). Descriptions accompanying drawings and carvings that depict hunters and hunting illustrate how catalogues mix aesthetic considerations with insider accounts of Inuit life,

thereby offering a sort of ethnography-via-aestheticization. As Blodgett notes in a discussion of *Bird* by Aisapik Quma Igaiju for the exhibition *Eskimo Narrative*, “The artist has painstakingly duplicated the different types of feathers with the delicate and varied incised lines which cover the bird’s body” (Blodgett 1979, 14), whereas a later description for *Hunter with Sealskin* by Aisa Ajagutaina Tukala features a lengthy paragraph that describes how hunters would make floats to buoy and create drag on seals once they have been harpooned, but then closes by discussing the artist’s technique: “The hunter’s stance and agility in balancing his load indicates that it is cumbersome, but not heavy” (17). Such readings suggest that a deep understanding of Inuit lifeways can be located in the aesthetic details of Inuit art. This view of aesthetic excellence clashes with the Western tradition, wherein ‘high art’ has typically been “idealized rather than realistic” (Auger 2005, 130). However, the WAG catalogues take a different approach to the aesthetic value of Inuit art. While they gesture to its universal qualities, suggesting that it exhibits techniques that are found throughout the world or depicting experiences shared between cultures, they also judge the artwork’s aesthetic qualities by way of its ethnographic or representational effect.

In the above cases, an artwork’s ethnographic capacity—its accuracy, and therefore its ability to impart a sense of being in the North—is only as robust as its aesthetic qualities, and vice versa. Indeed, as *Eskimo Narrative* ascertains, the more aesthetically excellent a work, the more “meaningful and intelligible” it is (Blodgett 1979, 3). The catalogues—even ones that came before 1982, and certainly well in advance of the TRC final report—thereby model approaches that are useful for navigating the current

Canadian art world, wherein museums are increasingly expected to balance between facilitating understanding *of* Indigenous cultures in the name of “cultural competency” and recognizing the universal value and quality of Indigenous art forms. Rather than characterizing the artworks as entirely and universally excellent, then, which would perhaps define them as excessively non-contextualist, or having an essential meaning that does not depend on time period or on place, the WAG catalogues suggest that Inuit artworks are most ethnographically revealing when they are aesthetically excellent. In other words, ethnographic details are conveyed through aesthetic details. If representative and contextualist works’ referents are most effectively conveyed through aesthetic *techniques*, then Inuit aesthetics might be viewed as a vehicle for ethnographic information. Qallunaat gallerygoers can then glean information about Inuit, not only through explicitly or straightforwardly ethnographic accounts—art as a realistic representation, a direct line to a specific culture, and therefore somewhat in the realm of folk art, for example—but also through aesthetic appreciation. This alternative framing allows the gallery to anticipate and deflect the sorts of criticism that one can imagine could and should be levelled at colonial art galleries—many of which have long failed to accept Indigenous art *as art*, after all—and thereby publicly recognize the value of Inuit art, while still framing it in accordance with settler society’s desired orientation towards the Far North.

Aestheticization as Individualization

Ethnographic or primitivist analyses frame non-Western art objects as the creative

output of a group rather than as pieces made by individuals, and many of the WAG's earlier exhibition catalogues suggest this sort of approach. Earlier introductions, which were either written by one of the WAG's first directors, Ferdinand Eckhardt, or Jacqueline Fry, the "curator of Non-Western Art" who produced the Inuit exhibitions in the 1970s, often stressed the "folk" nature of Inuit art. The Settlement Series—a set of exhibitions that ran from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, each featuring the work of one art-producing community, rather than centering the talent of individual artists—exemplified the primitivist approach.²² The WAG's eventual turn to focusing on individual artists is often described as a sign that the institution has evolved in line with a broader trend towards seeing Indigenous art as aesthetically superb, while also appreciating the difference between individual artists (Crandall 2000, 314). That said, the WAG seems to have actually become attentive to the work of individuals long before a broader shift towards Canadian museums finally displaying Indigenous art in a way that shows Indigenous people as fully-formed and complex individuals. In *Eskimo Narrative*, for instance, Blodgett observes that technique and approach vary from artist to artist: "the works included in the exhibition illustrate the variety of individual approaches and style in the art of the Inuit" (1979, 3). The WAG produced a simple, one-page brochure for their John Kavik and Mark Emerak exhibition, which straddled 1981 and 1982. The brochure characterizes Emerak's art as in line with traditional Inuit life, reporting that it "reflects the crude and primitive life of his youth. In his drawings Emerak remembers the

²² The series featured 7 communities: Port Harrison / Inoucdjoua (1977); Povungnituk (1977); Repulse Bay (1978); Rankin Inlet / Kangirlliniq (1981); Belcher Islands / Sanikiluaq (1981); Eskimo Point / Arviat (1982); Baffin Island (1983). The series spanned the tenure of three curators: Jacqueline Fry, Jean Blodgett, and Bernadette Driscoll.

events of his past and makes specific reference to them. Primarily he draws scenes depicting the hunting and feasting of his people, though some of his drawings represent the more violent aspect of life in this period, recording deaths, fights, and murders” (Driscoll 1981, np). While the write-up includes elements of an ethnographic reading, it is largely interested in biographical details. The catalogues’ attention to the distinct and unique personhood of artists fulfills a necessary requirement of postcolonial enlightenment: that Euro-Western cultures should come to see Indigenous art as the product of individual talent and imagination rather than as craft or folk art.

Later catalogues explicitly promote viewing Inuit art as the work of individuals, rather than a products attributable to a culture or community, products representing the output of a collective. The 2013 exhibition catalogue *Creation and Transformation: Defining Moments in Inuit Art* features the biographies of two collectors who were foundational to the popularization of Inuit art in the mid-20th century; in addition to being two of the first in the Canadian art world to amass private collections of Inuit art, they “were interested in individual Inuit artists rather than anonymous creators of ethnic art form” (Wight 2013, 9). This demonstration of derision for past tendencies, which often ignored the individual identities of artists, is characteristic of the WAG’s later catalogues. Although the form and content of even the most recent catalogues do not entirely shed their ethnographic stance entirely, the WAG nevertheless departs from ethnography by spotlighting the work, as well as the biographical details, of individual artists. For example, an essay entitled “A Woman’s Life” for Oviloo Tunnillie’s solo exhibition describes her childhood, and even gives a family genealogy, not only for Tunnillie, but

for the family of the artist's first husband as well (Wight 2016, 17-20); later, readers learn that aspects of Oviloo's art are not commonly found in Inuit art, such as depictions of nudity (48). Such sentiments are echoed in the catalogue for *ItuKiagatta! Inuit Sculpture from the Collection of the TD Bank Financial Group*, which claims that "excellence was the guiding principle behind all purchases. Pieces were selected on their artistic merit, as opposed to ethnological grounds. In the process, *many individual artists were represented in depth*" (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 18 my emphasis). This attention to individual difference is noteworthy because it rejects more conventional, primitivist readings of Inuit art, and instead casts works of art as the product of an artist with a relevant and valuable perspective, capable of producing aesthetically noteworthy pieces. Their work is made even more noteworthy, indeed, by seeming to differ from pieces produced by individuals whose identities are subordinated to the name and general characteristics of their respective community.

According to the foreword for *Out of Tradition*, 1989 was the time for galleries and the public to finally "look at Inuit artists as individuals, not as anonymous components of an environmentally-defined collective" (Wight 1989, 2). Such statements favour individual identity over collectivity, which raises questions about the nature of the relationship between individualization and cultural universalization: in particular, what might be the discursive and political effects of viewing Inuit artists as individuals? Moreover, what happens in terms of nation-state politics when patrons view Inuit art as universally excellent? In proclaiming that the gallery has reached a point in history where it must cease viewing Inuit art as the product of a community, the catalogues imply that

the WAG has a responsibility, as a prominent institution in the world of Inuit art, to adopt a more ‘evolved’ attitude towards Inuit artists—one that incorporates them into broader aesthetic traditions. As *Out of Tradition*’s foreword demonstrates, the gallery responds to this responsibility in a way that *Canadianizes* Inuit art: “As part of its long-term commitment to the exhibition and interpretation of Inuit art, the Gallery’s role is to exhibit the work of young and emerging artists and to examine that work in the context of Canadian art” (Wight 1989, 2). This philosophy of art appreciation defines the work of individuals as fundamentally Canadian, suggesting that the identity of Inuit artists—especially those whose work exhibits universally excellent traits—are less defined by Inuit’s collective relationship to one another as to their place within Canada.

The above statement from *Out of Tradition* advances a notion that casting Inuit art as universally valuable means viewing it as “Canadian art,” thereby conflating being recognized based on principles of aesthetic quality with being included under the banner of the nation-state. Individualization works to collapse Inuit with other Canadians—a process that resonates with the need of the nation-state to establish that it has prior occupancy in the North, by way of its citizens. What is perhaps more significance, then, is the way that featuring the efforts of an individual is, in many ways, the same as recognizing their work’s aesthetic value. Here, the WAG’s catalogues echo previous and ongoing efforts amongst colonial authorities to interpellate Indigenous peoples as individuals, who can therefore be rendered as subjects of neoliberal, capitalist regimes. Individualization has long been a strategy for facilitating assimilation in Canada. In 1890, the Commission of Indian Affairs wrote that Indigenous peoples must be taught

“individual responsibility” in order to break them of their communalism and land-based practices. This sort of individualization was required for the state to alienate Indigenous peoples from their lands with greater ease (Canada 1890, 165). Such efforts also serve as evidence that the fledgling nation-state hoped that Indigeneity lifeways would eventually fade, to be replaced with so-called Canadian values.

Aestheticization and Coequality

What are the ramifications of the WAG’s tendency to universalize and idealize Inuit lifeways when discussing Inuit art? The Inuk-written introduction for *Cape Dorset: Selected Sculpture from the Collections of the Winnipeg Art Gallery*, for instance, suggests that the exhibit has a “message” for those in the south: southerners should “slow down ... enjoy nature and simplicity as we do. Learn from adversity and benefit from the wisdom it affords. Tranquility speaks for itself” (Ryan 1975, np). Of immediate notice is the way that this statement invokes the possibility that people from the south might assume northern ways of viewing time and space. It situates the North and South on one timeline, defining northerners and southerners as ultimately the same, and suggesting that those in the South only need adopt the simpler life of Indigenous peoples in order to solve the effects of modernity. *The Inuit Amautik: I Like My Hood to be Full* similarly collapses Us with Them / South with North, gesturing to a common alienation from nature: discussing animal relationships is increasingly difficult because “we no longer are in harmony with nature and therefore can no longer talk as we could if we and nature were in total unity” (Driscoll 1980a, 24)—one of the many tragedies of modernity, the

catalogue suggests. *Eskimo Sculpture Selections from the Twomey Collection* works to liken Inuit to southerners, writing that the Twomey collection “mak[es] obvious the talents of Eskimos, as artists of our times and personal representatives of a culture that is, like ours, in crisis” (Fry 1972, np). The precise nature of this “crisis” is left unclear; the idea that the South and North are sharing an experience that is characteristic of the contemporary moment seems of greatest importance than actually detailing the precise nature of modernity’s supposed deprivations. Art, in this formulation, allows southerners to see “the talents of Eskimos,” as well as to recognize them as inhabitants of the modern present, presumably just like other Canadians.

The idea that Inuit have tools that can be used by non-Inuit societies to improve their lives evinces a universalist attitude about Indigeneity of which postcolonial scholarship tends to be critical. Stuart Hall observes that Europeans often idealize Indigenous people as “unsophisticated [...] living in a state of Nature” (1992, 311), a state of being that makes them simple, peaceful, and easy to govern. Whereas the “noble savage” is meant to embody an early stage of a process that also “led the West to its high point of refinement and civilization,” its counterpart –the “ignoble savage”–follows a separate path that leads away from civilization, meaning that they have no place in modern society (311-12). In line with the “noble savage” stereotype, the catalogues read Inuit as models of an ideal life, still connected—if a bit precariously—to nature. Despite having been diminished by becoming more modern, they supposedly have knowledge and practices that can help Westerners shed the deprivations of modernity. An essay in *The Inuit Imagination*, for instance, maintains that southerners and Inuit have similarly been

affected by modernization, contending that “the central problem of our time is the loss of values under the influence of scientific inquiry and relative morality. We are all engaged in the difficult task of reviving meaning in outmoded and incomplete models of reality” (Seidelman and Turner 1993, 161). In line with the “noble savage,” the catalogues promote the universal value of Inuit practices and worldviews in order to cast Inuit culture as one that resides on a universal evolutionary timeline along with all other humans. The narrative of the primitive and the modern (and especially the modern who wants to return to a state of nature) subordinates the particularities of Inuitness to the capacious and unifying category of the human. Accepting Inuit into the universal, human community can still contain echoes of the infantilizing and paternalistic tones that have long been used to frame Indigenous peoples as childlike and pre-modern. One major Inuit art collector reports, in the same catalogue, that an exhibition’s “parts—images and ideas—come from the world of Inuit stories and oral traditions. They beckon us to share with the Inuit their understanding of the World or Existence, not through reason but through myths and legends, just as we in our childhood gained an understanding of our own world through fairy tales and stories,” and which “modern youth receive... through tapes and television” (8).

Inuit stories offer one solution to the “crisis” supposedly afflicting Inuit and non-Inuit alike, with *The Inuit Imagination* surmising that southerners—a vaguely defined, but presumably white, educated, etc., “us”—might discover misplaced elements of a shared human experience: “When spoken in the right way, there is a magic power in the songs and stories of traditional Inuit life... They help us to recognize opportunities to transform

ourselves, to revive our understanding of the core of our human identity” (207). Similarly imagining Inuit traditions as conduits to a more perfect past, the brochure for *Multiple Realities: Inuit Images of Shamanic Transformation*, from 1993, is particularly compelling in its description of pre-contact Inuit life as a “paradisaal state” (WAG 1993, 1). This reference to the prelapsarian and the Edenic reiterates entrenched and productive colonial stereotypes like the noble and ignoble savage. *Multiple Realities* seems to be playing with what Graham Huggans calls the “anthropological exotic” by elaborating a “world of difference that conforms to often crudely stereotypical Western exoticist paradigms and myths (‘primitive culture’, ‘unbounded nature’, ‘magical practices’, ‘noble savagery’, and so on)” (2001, 37). Depicting Inuit in a way that associates them with paradise—and especially a paradise that one might access if one could only learn to properly appreciate Inuit culture—distracts from the fact that settler colonialism operates structurally, through a multifaceted, repetitive suppression of Indigeneity (Wolfe 2006, 390). Specifically, the catalogue’s reference to paradise likens colonialism to the biblical “fall” —humanity’s eviction from a state of innocence—and thereby advertises the Arctic as a spiritual destination with universal appeal, but to which all are ultimately denied access.

According to Clifford, “In the early twentieth century, as *culture* was being extended to all the world’s functioning societies, an increasing number of exotic, primitive, or archaic objects came to be seen as ‘art.’ They were equal in aesthetic and moral value with the greatest Western masterpiece” (1988, 235). Non-Western cultures were consequently revalued in two main ways: admittance into “the imaginary museum of human creativity and, though more slowly, to the actual fine arts museums of the

West,” and anthropological discourses conceiving of humans by “drawing evenhandedly from among the world’s authentic ways of life... Art and culture, categories for the best creations of Western humanism, were in principle extended to all the world’s peoples” (235; see also Mullin 1992). Accordingly, comparing Inuit artists to Western artists seems an almost automatic, and certainly uncontroversial way to express respect for art previously viewed as ‘primitive’, and thereby define Inuit culture as equal with Euro-Western cultures.

In the catalogue for *Looking Up*, the curator writes that, while he is not “an expert in the field of Inuit art,” he hopes that the exhibition “serves to celebrate contemporary Inuit art equally with contemporary art” (Butler and Dumontier 2013, 14). His statement pairs well with his position as an expert in contemporary art, not as a specialist in Inuit art like the two most recent specialist curators, and certainly not as a “Curator of Non-Western Art” like Jacqueline Fry, who curated the Inuit art exhibits prior to the 1980s. The WAG’s choice to assign an Inuit exhibition to a generalist accords with the institution’s shift towards viewing Inuit art as equal with non-Inuit art. However, it is not only in recent catalogues that we find the proposition that Inuit art is akin to other highly-regarded, often European-made artworks. In fact, while exhibits from the 1960s were especially likely to frame Inuit art as the work of collectives rather than of individuals (Crandall 2000, 176), the early catalogues also regularly offer small nods to the aesthetic superiority of select Inuit works, even those pieces that appear entirely representational. The catalogue for *Eskimo Carvers of Keewatin, N.W.T.*, from 1964, for example, declares that there can be “no doubt that the naïve bird of a Baker Lake carver is much more

expressive than the creation of a sophisticated sculptor who masters all realistic details” (WAG 1964, 2). Despite their tendency to read Inuit art through an ethnographic lens, the catalogues frequently promote the intrinsic aesthetic value of Inuit art pieces, such as by assessing them against non-Inuit works of art. A catalogue for a 1977 exhibition featuring the work of Karoo Ashevak compares Ashevak to popular Western artists like Henry Moore, which “raises a particular issue regarding Ashevak—the question of his relationship with Eskimo art. Certainly Ashevak was an Eskimo who produced art,” on one hand, although art critics often “single out Ashevak and distinguish his art from that of his fellow Inuit” (Blodgett 1977a, np). Later, the author attributes this response to Ashevak’s work to his work’s “universality” (np), a gesture that aims at flattery, but actually risks defining other Inuit art as mostly uniform, by setting it against the exceptional universalism of Ashevak’s talent.

In fact, Ashevak is not the only Inuit artist whom the WAG’s catalogues compare to Henry Moore, nor is he the only artist whose work is deemed so accessible as to signify universality.²³ A 1981 catalogue likewise describes artists from Rankin Inlet /

²³ Comparisons to Euro-Western artists abound across the archive. The catalogue for a Settlement Series exhibition focusing on Eskimo Point (Arviat) includes an essay that expresses respect by aligning Inuit and European artists. It reports that art from Eskimo Point is “sometimes quite raw, and even crude, yet beautifully mellow, in the sense of the guttural but gentle sounds of a Louis Armstrong; or the poetry of William Blake; or the calvaries of the Bretagne; or Cycladic art; or the caves of France and Spain” (Driscoll 1982b, 13). Later, the catalogue describes one artist as “the Brancusi of the North” (14). This universalization and comparison with Euro-Western art is repeated in *Uumajut*, in an essay entitled “Animals: Images, Forms, Ideas. A White Man’s View.” It describes traits of Inuit art and life as “reminiscent of the heraldic and metaphoric creatures in Western medieval art, and, even more so, of Romanesque and Gothic manuscripts and architectural decoration” (Driscoll & McGhee 1985, 40). A curator’s essay for *The Inuit Imagination*, “Qaudjaqdjuq., Lumak and Kiviung” proposes, “Every mythology can be interpreted as an imaginative history describing the journey of a people through time... In western literature, paradigm examples are the Odyssey, Exodus and Don Quixote, among many others” (1993, 129).

Kangirlliniq, such as John Tiktak, whose work “has elicited comparisons to the work of Henry Moore,” and further collapses the difference between Inuit and European by comparing Tiktak, Kavik, and Arlu with “Brancusi, Giacometti, and Moore” (Driscoll 1981, 41). A guest essay in *Baker Lake Prints and Print-Drawings* gives a universalizing take on Baker Lake art, starting with a reference to Henry Moore, whose work “identifies a common human vision running through the many geographical and historical periods of man’s attempts to communicate through the medium of the visual arts. Moore comments on the natural response of any gifted artist anywhere and at any time to discover similar forms of expression in a common human visual language” (Driscoll 1982a, 13). Such statements represent the pinnacle of aestheticization / universalization, insofar as they affirm that Inuit art and Western art are alike in both their aesthetic qualities and in their wide relevance. The idea of a shared “visual language” suggests that Inuit art utilizes aesthetic principles that transcend cultural difference—a notion prized by official discourses of reconciliation and “healing” in Canada. Western and Inuit art forms are thus cast as similarly unbound, neither by time nor place, permitting art patrons to view Inuit art as non-contextualist, while casting Inuit spaces as vacant and accessible, as well as ultimately irrelevant for asserting a meaningful distinction between North and South.

Art as Universal Language

By viewing Inuit art in terms of its aesthetic qualities instead of as folk art, the gallery frames Inuit art’s aesthetic qualities as expressing themes and styles shared across cultures. The WAG catalogues frequently draw on this pervasive (and persuasive) notion

that art creation is a shared language that allows for intercultural communication, and perhaps even identification—or, as one reports, that Inuit and Western artists can all “discover the possibilities for visual structure which exist in the language of drawings” (Driscoll 1981b, 13). Much of the catalogue for *Looking Up* is comprised of a series of interviews with the (non-Inuit) artists whose work is on display. Therein, Winnipeg artist Simon Hughes reports, “Instead of seeing Inuit art as something very distant and ‘other’ to my life, I feel a kinship to these artists as fellow producers who get their feelings and observations out on big sheets of paper and tack them up in museums” (Butler and Dumontier 2013, 20). The catalogue, *The First Passionate Collector*, featuring pieces from the collection of Ian Lindsay, and which was the first WAG exhibition overseen by the gallery’s current Curator of Inuit Art, includes an essay from the collector titled “A Look Back at the Early Days: Some Personal Thoughts,” which discusses how “[Inuit] artists touch the concerns of other people everywhere. With minimal symbolism requiring little or no interpretation, and with equally little or no prior knowledge, Eskimo art engenders instantaneous and universal appreciation” (Butler and Wight 1991, 24). The art, seen in this way, offers heightened access to understanding, not only due to its ethnographic qualities—its purported Inuitness, as well as its representational and material relationship to place—but also due to its wider, transcultural coherence. We might consider how this characterization of art as a universal language works to conceal, elide, and erase those elements of Inuit experience, identity, and lifeways that are not accessible to southerners, and which, more importantly, might have more political relevance if permitted to become visible.

The catalogue for *Looking Up* maintains that the exhibition highlights “connections between two art communities with idiosyncratic histories who mythologize, share stories, tell jokes, and capture their landscapes through the common language of art” (Butler and Dumontier 2013, 12). In the same catalogue, Winnipeg artist Paul Robles continues the theme of art’s universality, writing that select works from the North “seem to resonate with [his] current life situation,” in addition to speaking to the “universality” of “the human condition,” and causing him to “think of creativity as ‘borderless’... The act of sharing ideas, both negative and positive, will only lead to further self-development, discovery and, hopefully, a better understanding of the world we live in” (21). In *Eskimo Narrative*, Blodgett writes that the artist’s techniques are of great interest; not simply *what* is being depicted. Here there is overlap between techniques used by Inuit artists and other artists, non-Western and Western alike. “Thus, although the subject may sometimes be alien, the means of expression generally are not” (1979, 3). Such depictions of Inuit and non-Inuit communicating through art tend to rely on a disregard for difference, or at least a form of universalization that subordinates difference to the shared and homogenizing language of aesthetics, not to mention the exigencies of self-discovery and knowledge-acquisition mobilized by the individualizing discourses of neoliberal and settler-colonial politics. While the idea that art is a universal language effectively inducts Inuit artists into the category of art proper, as opposed to art-as-craft, casting art as a universal language is another way that aestheticization operates to negate difference. The idea of Western and Inuit art sharing an aesthetic axis maps onto the idea of a universal humanity that the catalogues also espouse. Rather than viewing Inuit art as artifacts of the

past, we get claims Inuit art is “quite timeless” (Butler and Dumontier 2013, 22), which defines Inuit art as existing out of time, out of history, free of historical baggage. The art in this view is also somehow placeless, while paradoxically still very much accruing value based on its relationship to place. This, of course, resonates with the idea that the Arctic is somehow “imaginary,” less real, and thereby inhabitable by proxy, such as through imaginative and creative engagement with Inuit culture.

To be recognized as aesthetically important means being inducted into the aesthetic value system promoted by the WAG. This recognition prioritizes the broadening of aesthetic categories, on the basis “that Inuit art should be accorded the same respect as other types of artwork created in Canada” (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 22), as the catalogue *ItuKiagatta!* insists, regarding TD Bank’s corporate collection of Inuit art. Artists are largely on board with achieving mainstream appreciation, and their words can often be found in catalogues, challenging entrenched ideas about the superiority of European artistic output, and demanding that patrons view Inuit art on equal terms with Western art. In an artist statement for his 2001 solo exhibition catalogue, Abraham Anghik Ruben reminds readers that European art authorities have long held “the opinion that art was an entirely European creation and further, that only those of European ancestry could possibly create and aspire to this noble activity” (Anghik and Wight 2001, 12). Such critiques of settler colonial, racist, and otherwise exclusionary forms of art appreciation and institutional practices more broadly are important and necessary, although these take-downs of once-common views of Inuit art also provide contemporary settler art patrons with an unenlightened strawman, in opposition to which they can flaunt

their own virtue. Hence, art galleries should certainly celebrate the value of art by Indigenous people, as well as highlighting how they tell stories about their lives and experiences through creative production. However, what the catalogues conceal, with their recognition of aesthetic value, is the degree to which the forms of recognition, appreciations, and acknowledgment that they dispense encourage viewers of Inuit artworks to disregard their particularities, effectively flattening the place from which they come. At stake is the possibility that the catalogues' extended descriptions of Inuit art's universality contribute to prevailing ideas of the Arctic as somehow unreal and open to interpretation. It is already typical for non-Inuit to approach the North as "not so much a region as a dream: the dream of a unique, unattainable and compellingly attractive world" (McGhee 2007, 10), both longed after but ultimately unreachable. As Grace demonstrates in *Canada and The Idea of North* (2002), "North" is often treated less as an actual place than as an ontological invention, an empty vessel for southerners to fill with meaning—and to gain a distinct national identity in the process, no less.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that we would be better off viewing Inuit art as entirely place-based and particular—a reactive ethnographic stance that falls back on "contextuality." A better starting place for unsettling how we in the South discuss Inuit material culture, I suggest, is to first become better attuned to the nature, characteristics, and effects of the processes that allow for Inuit art to be received as universally valuable. Given the proliferation of cultural products that take the Arctic as their theme, combined with its far-off-ness, it is easy to view the Arctic as primarily a "discursive formation" (Grace 2002, 15) that at once produces and is produced *by* subjects who identify with a

sense of being northern. In this sense, then, universalization through aestheticization, as well as collapsing difference through comparison, contributes to the prevailing notion of the North as a *tabula rasa*, while simultaneously rendering Inuitness as a form of culture that can be accessed through artmaking and art appreciation. Once again, Inuit art is made into a bridge, both between cultural worldviews, and between the North and South.

Viewing Inuit art as aesthetically excellent opens up the North by making the place to which the bridge provides access less substantial, thereby eliding the degree to which the people who live there are tied to their environment. Moreover, we might consider how insisting on the similarities between Inuit and Western artists brings the Arctic to southerners, not so much by offering access to the North as by diminishing the differences between North and South, thereby making the South more northern.

The Ethnographic / Exotic and the Universal / Canadian

What are we to make of the ambivalence between Inuit as absolutely Other—a cultural curiosity—and Inuit as ultimately familiar and knowable—part of the artistic community, in other words—that we see reproduced in the WAG’s discussions of Inuit art? This interplay between what Clifford calls “nonethnographic admiration” (1988, 228) and ethnographic insight is especially apparent when catalogues alternate between a focus on a community’s creative output and the work of individual artists. The catalogue for *Rankin Inlet Ceramics* (Shirley and Wight 2003) introduces an exhibition that is organized by location and material, with less emphasis put on artists’ identities. *Art & Expression of the Netsilik* (Wight 2000) wavers between a folk structure and a

universalist structure: it is organized by community but with an emphasis on the biographies of individual artists. In the case of the exhibitions that feature pieces from private collections, such as the Jerry Twomey collection (Fry 1972; Wight 2003), as well as the aptly-named Faye and Bert Settler collection (Blodgett, Enright, and Wight 2004), the collectors' decisions about how to order the pieces, in combination with the WAG's curatorial strategy, determine an exhibition's organization. Indeed, the broad appeal and social importance of the Arctic and Inuit culture are the reasons for the very existence of the gallery's Inuit collection: Inuit's distinct position—simultaneously distinct from as well as a part of Canadian culture—is surely a primary reason for displaying Inuit art in the first place. Hence, the catalogues are continually pursuing two projects at once: paying homage to the universal qualities of an individual's work and its accessibility to non-Inuit—an aestheticizing approach, in other words—while the rationale behind the act of exhibiting itself suggests that art is meant to tell viewers something about the place where it came from—an approach that is decidedly ethnographic.

The WAG catalogues regularly emphasize that Inuit art, despite its exotic qualities, fosters a sense of national identity in Canadians; these examples also represent some of the catalogues' most dizzying rhetorical twists. In the catalogue for *Keewatin*, (now former) WAG director Ferdinand Eckhardt writes that "Eskimo art is Folk art," but it also "shows a strong tendency towards differentiation and greater individuality. Eskimo art should be considered like any other art. I am not hesitant to say that among Eskimo art are some of the more gifted Canadian sculptors" (WAG 1964, 2-3). Later, a major collector, George Swinton, will echo Eckhardt's sentiments when he describes Manasie

Akpaliapik as an “outstanding Canadian sculptor who also happens to be an Inuk” (Swinton 1991, 43). The catalogue for *ItuKiagatta!* likewise seeks a balance between national inclusion and cultural distinction by suggesting that TD’s art collection is both a symbol of the Bank’s appreciation for other cultures, but also a symbol of the institution’s Canadianness (21). In the catalogue, the then-President and Chief Executive Officer of the TD Bank Financial Group describes Inuit art as a “distinctly Canadian style of art, which beautifully relays the culture, history, and artistic talent of Canada’s most northern territories” and “represent Canada’s rich heritage and future” (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 7). Later in the catalogue, the reader learns that the TD’s collection has “inspired respect and recognition among the international art community, and national pride, for an indigenous art form that has come to hold an important place in the Canadian identity” (15). Inuit’s malleable multiple positionalities vis-à-vis the Canadian nation-state are even evident in the identification tools used by the gallery. In the catalogue for *The Stafford Collection of Inuit Sculpture* (Wight and Stafford 2012), an exhibition mounted as part of the WAG’s Centennial in 2012 (Crandall 2000, 7-8), for example, didactic panels include an artist’s community, while also identifying them as “Canadian”; a typical didactic panel might read, “Canadian (Rankin Inlet),” for instance.

What are the overarching political and social factors that provide for exhibition catalogues characterizing Inuit art as folk art—firmly in the contextualist protocol—but also as “like any other art,” and, in the case of the best pieces, fundamentally Canadian? How can these seemingly opposing claims exist alongside one another? In fact, statements that allow Inuitness and Canadianness to exist simultaneously might seem

internally contradictory, if not ultimately meaningless, if not for the fact that their logic hinges on the same amorphous and capacious notion of Canadianness that is necessary for establishing a sense of ownership over the Arctic amongst southerners. A better question might be, then: What does the WAG's parallel ethnographic and aestheticized readings of Inuit art have to do with Canadian identity? Does the catalogues' use of modes of analysis that are in tension actually help to facilitate a certain view of Canadian identity, and in what ways might that identity formation parallel discursive and ontological practices pertaining to Canadian Arctic sovereignty? Perhaps the WAG's discursive Canadianization of Inuit art is an example of how, in an ethnographic "form of culture collection... diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, detached from their original temporal occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement" (Clifford 1988, 231). If so, what can we say about the fact that the catalogues effectively renarrativize Inuit art so that it signifies exoticness while also contributing to hegemonic ideals regarding what Canada looks like?

I suggest that we view the catalogues' perpetual waverings between ethnography and aestheticization, and between exoticness and Canadianness, as something that does not necessarily need to be resolved, but as a force that is actually endemic to appreciating Inuit art in the late-20th and early-21st century. On one hand, the most obvious explanation for how ethnographic and non-contextualist appreciation can coexist in the catalogues is the fact that art galleries in general have adopted a more nuanced perspective on *all* art, in line with a new museology that is self-reflexive and challenges normative categories, like the ones that Clifford identifies. In the context of Canada, however, we might give more

weight to the fact that the gallery's paradoxical view of Inuit art, in many cases, operates through the logic of liberal multiculturalism. Indeed, liberal multicultural logic is evident in dominant conceptions of the Indigenized museum. Phillips, referencing museum "indigenization," writes,

I also use the term to refer to a characteristically Canadian model of pluralist negotiation that arises from a unique history of interaction among Indigenous peoples, French and English colonizers and settlers, and diasporic immigrant communities. Such negotiations often privilege a pragmatic capacity for compromise, on the one hand, and, on the other, a case-by-case approach that acknowledges the uniqueness of individual communities and their needs. (2011, 10)

Such museum criticism envisions a limited version of "indigenization" that rests on the notion that Indigenous peoples can live in harmony with settlers, all under the banner of the nation-state. This version of reform exemplifies "Eurocentric perspectives on culture, cultural analysis of differences, cultural policies, and cultural industries," which promote inclusion, but "often weaken pluralism rather than empower diversity" (Battiste and Henderson 2000, 14). Reforming museums so that they might shed their established colonial tendencies, based on the ideals of liberal multiculturalism, relies on ideas of cultural difference that ignore the political and economic dimensions of Indigenous sovereignty, and disregard more substantial, possibly radical approaches to decolonizing museums. Liberal multicultural ideals also let us view Inuit culture as ethnically distinct, in a way that still allows it to be comfortably incorporated under the umbrella of Canadian national identity.

Another possible factor that allows for aestheticization and ethnography to exist together in contemporary exhibition catalogues is the degree to which such a formulation

mimics the conditions that Canada must fulfill in order to claim sovereignty over the Arctic. In terms of southern governments staking a claim to the North, approaches to Inuit art that cast it as fundamentally Canadian but also, somehow, absolutely alien, map onto the settlement-by-proxy notion of Arctic sovereignty that has long been favoured by the Canadian nation-state. Indeed, the relationship between Inuit and Canada differs starkly from that between other Indigenous nations and the settler nation-state, partly due to the fact that Canada is not so much interested in actually colonizing the Arctic in any conventional sense, but still must establish the North as an incontrovertibly *Canadian* space. Governing the Arctic from a distance, without establishing colonies per se, has precluded southern governments from aiming to eradicate Inuit cultural practices, as was the aim with assimilationist policies executed elsewhere—the Indian Residential School system being the most prominent and wide-spread of such initiatives—on the basis that Inuit rely on their knowledge systems to survive in the Arctic, but also because southern trade, hunting, and military missions long depended on Inuit knowledge of how to live on the land and how to navigate Inuit society (Campbell 2013, 37). Contextualizing the WAG's catalogues accordingly reveals that ambivalence between ethnography and aestheticization in regards to Inuit art appreciation is actually characteristic of the current relationship between Inuit and Canada—in addition to the fact that appearing to finally and fully appreciate the real value of Inuit art serves to demonstrate Canada's reconciliatory stance vis-à-vis its settler-colonial history and Indigenous peoples more broadly. Such ambivalent framings have relevance for the relationship between art and place, moreover, insofar as discursively casting Inuit as both Other and Canadian frames

the Arctic as culturally rich but politically vacant, and thereby open to various forms of infiltration, including southerners internalizing an ontological claim to the North, but also more concrete forms of infiltration that include southern governments implementing policies without adequate consultation and consent, as well as incursions by resource extraction companies.

Depoliticization through Culturalization

Celebrating the distinct nature of Inuit creative production and lifeways while simultaneously subordinating Inuitness to an overarching Canadianness has resonances with a depoliticizing liberal multiculturalism in Canada. The idea that culture can transcend politics, and perhaps even the ugly histories wrought by politics, is exemplified by the curator for *Looking Up*. He writes, “We were attracted to [Inuit art] for the stories, sense of play, the imagination, and the colours—we weren’t even aware of residential schools, etc., then. I think it’s ok to just look at the art as art alone” (Butler and Dumontier 2013, 27). Who is included in this “we?” The curator’s statement interpellates the reader, drawing them into the email chain through which the artists in the exhibition communicated, and which the catalogue reproduces. Not only does the catalogue deny that the exhibition is an occasion for readers to learn about Arctic politics, but an ignorance of settler-colonial violence actually appears to be a prerequisite for one to be included in this group. The catalogue invites readers to identify with a view of Inuit art as apolitical, which compartmentalizes art production from issues of Arctic governance and resource development, as well as from settler-colonial history. Recognizing aesthetic

excellence, such as by emphasizing a piece's technique and narrative qualities, allows the gallery to cast Inuit art as merely a form of "cultural expression," and therefore bracket off art's contributions to Inuit political and economic life, while also constraining its possible impact on settler society. The WAG's view of Inuit art aligns with prevailing ideas of Canada's inclusion of otherness, which celebrates aesthetic difference while actively disregarding more holistic and meaningful forms of cultural, social, and political difference (Mackey 1998, 18). Such multiculturalism typically works to naturalize English (and to some degree, French) Canada *as* Canada proper, thereby erasing the more violent means by which it became so. "[O]ther cultures become 'multicultural' in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture" (15). This process relies on discourses of the multicultural and the universal wherein culture is open to interpretation, while elements that appear to have nothing to do with a normative idea of culture are disregarded.

The WAG's brand of Arctic multiculturalism frames Inuitness as cultural difference, in part by enabling southerners to demonstrate their recognition and appreciation of their northern neighbours. The gallery's catalogues repeatedly acknowledge the actual value of Inuit cultural traditions, which demonstrates the gallery's cultural savvy, and invokes a particular type of informed and insightful viewer. In so doing, they naturalize culture as the prime site for remediating colonial violence—or even as an occasion for ignoring colonial violence, as with *Looking Up*'s insistence that Inuit art should be thought of as apolitical. This denuded view is not incompatible with the catalogues that provide a historical view of Inuit culture. Indeed, the WAG catalogues

frequently describe Inuit life in the 20th century, including tales of interactions with traders and travellers, as well as periods of illness, like the now-notorious tuberculosis outbreaks that displaced thousands of Inuit to hospitals in the South and drastically altered the social makeup of many northern communities (cf. Butler and Wight 1991, 29; Karetak-Lindell 2001, 20; Seidelman and Turner 1998, 113; Wight 2017, 15-16). These history lessons reveal that the catalogues must negotiate between demonstrating and facilitating “cultural competency,” which prioritizes understanding, and the move to universalization, requiring the WAG to counterbalance historicization with an aesthetic reading of Inuit cultural expression.

The WAG also enacts the above negotiation by deferring to an enlightened view of Inuit culture’s capacity for adaptation, taking pains to advise its patrons that Inuit art is not static, or even ‘traditional,’ but the product of evolution and cultural exchange. Catalogues like *Holman: Forty Years of Graphic Art*, from 2001, stress that viewing Inuit art properly means accepting its status as an art form in flux. They offer warnings against viewing Inuit art incorrectly, as with one finger-wagging reference to a case when an artist’s work was rejected by the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, because it exhibited undue “southern influence” (Wight 2001b, 16). Similarly, exhibitions like *Looking South*, from 1977– from which, presumably, *Looking Up* takes its name—have “featured art inspired or influenced by the southern or non-Inuit culture” in the interest of repudiating the popular notion that “Inuit and their art had not been affected by acculturation” (Crandall 2000, 277). Rather than disregarding works that display southern influence, the catalogues take care to detail the nature of such influence, due to “the influence of

southern expectations on Inuit art” (Wight 2016, 48). By refusing to denigrate hybridity, the catalogues reject the preoccupations of a more problematic past. The curators thus flaunt their cultural competence, going beyond simply acknowledging that southerners have had an influence on contemporary Inuit art to actively highlight that influence as a desired characteristic of the genre. .

It is useful to consider the pedagogical purpose served by the catalogues’ approach to interpreting Inuit art. By redefining the values assigned to artworks that are distinctly *hybrid*, the curators implicitly disparage those whose art appreciation has drawn on antiquated models of cultural authenticity, thereby inviting gallery goers, but also all the Canadian public more broadly, to take a more enlightened stance vis-à-vis Inuit art. The catalogues thereby encourage gallery goers to acquire knowledge about the factors that led to Inuit artists being influenced by southerners, without having to see that outside influence as compromising the authenticity of their work. This is a necessary change in attitudes, undoubtedly. Nevertheless, by teaching patrons that Inuit culture has always been in flux, the gallery incorporates, appropriates, and revises conventional but important critiques of settler-colonial attitudes, especially those that challenge commonplace ideas about Indigeneity as “real” only when it is fixed and unchanging (cf. Simon Ortiz’s canonical essay, “Towards a National Indian Literature”). The gallery’s recognition-based approach to Inuit art demonstrates the limitations of criticism that challenges problematic ideas about cultural authenticity. Moreover, as I discuss in the following section, settler psychosociality evidently has a role to play in these seemingly-evolved, but fundamentally colonial, approaches to art appreciation. The catalogues’

framing of Inuit art as ethnographically revealing but also universally excellent (aestheticization) reinforces otherwise contradictory notions of Inuit art as representative of Otherness *and* an art form that exemplifies Canada. This second framing, as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, operates through calling forth a particular form of ideal settler subject, and creating a type of Canadian subject who sees themselves as being *of* the Arctic, even though they are not *in* the Arctic.

Aesthetic and psychosocial dimensions of settler belonging

Affirmative recognition culture, a concept developed in the previous chapter, acknowledges and incorporates Inuitness in a way that actually works in support of Canadianness, rather than disrupting or challenging it. But despite claims that Inuit art brings the Arctic “home” for southern Qallunaat, the normative appreciation of Inuit art that the WAG promotes does not simply function as a straightforward mode of establishing familiarity and belonging. Rather, Inuit’s simultaneous otherness and familiarity operates as an apparatus for expressions of Canadian identity, insofar as southerners feel both entranced by, as well as familiar with the North, by encountering Inuit art. *Looking Up* tells readers,

We have many connections to the North—isolation, climate, strong art communities, plus we are all Canadian of course—but none of us have actually been there. Personally, I feel that Inuit art is a part of me, but I feel guilty saying that because my connection comes out of a relationship to Inuit artistic output, as opposed to the geography and the people themselves. (Butler and Dumontier 2013, 19)

Art production facilitates “kinship” in much the same way that Canadianness is meant to encapsulate multiple cultural identities—our famous “cultural mosaic.” In the case of art

production, importantly, difference must first be constructed as aesthetic or cultural in nature: art does not merely help people overcome cultural difference; instead, one's cultural difference emerges when one creates art, as well as when one's culture is represented aesthetically. When the curator for *Looking Up* claims that Inuit art is "part of" him, readers ascertain that viewers who perceive both the non-ethnographic and the ethnographic qualities of Inuit art undergo a process of self-recognition. Better understanding Inuit art, in other words, means better understanding oneself. The northern Other is collapsed into the southern Self through the logic of consumption. The manoeuvre is reminiscent of bell hooks's contention that White people experience pleasure by "eating the Other," whereby the White subject feels that they can acquire, through personal encounters, the characteristics of an exotic Other, who is seen as a representative of difference rather than as a fully-formed and complex person. The subject is transformed when they encounter the Other, and especially by the experience of exoticness found therein, while the social context within which such encounters occur remains unchanged (25). *Looking Up* likewise hints at a prevailing notion of Inuit art as a means of self-discovery for settler viewers. The renewed sense of self brought about by encountering art from the North is also a method of self-actualization: viewers of Inuit art are changed, and therefore become more fully themselves, in a way that aligns with Canada's relationship to the Arctic. Specifically, in looking at a piece of Inuit art and perceiving Canadian identity and the North in it, the gallery goer is meant to recognize themselves as more fully Canadian.

Fully conceiving of how national ideals are instilled in gallery goers requires turning to the strong relationship that exists between the status of the subject and their aesthetic perspective. What Jacques Rancière calls “the distribution of the sensible” (12) illuminates the ties between power, aesthetics, and what is rendered perceivable. For a creation or “mode” of creation “to be qualified as falling within the domain of art [...] it is first necessary for its subject matter to be defined as such” (2004, 32). Aesthetic politics “revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (13). Aesthetics and the viewer—the sensed and the sensor—are mutually constituted. Hence, the instance where a viewer of art discerns its ‘true’ qualities is “the moment of the formation and education of a *specific type of humanity*” (24, my emphasis). The museum facilitates such informed viewing. It establishes the right conditions for “the legitimate consumption of legitimate works, the aptitude for taking a specifically aesthetic point of view on objects already constituted aesthetically,” and celebrates people who admire exceptional objects that, to the untrained eye, appear “ordinary or even ‘common’,” which distinguishes those with cultural capital from those without (Bourdieu 1980, 243).

If the gallery provides a cultural education and demonstrates its “cultural competency” with its parallel ethnographic and aesthetic analyses, the discursive frameworks that it draws on likewise evoke “cultural competency” as well as a sense of ownership over the Arctic in catalogue readers and gallery patrons alike. The WAG’s role in subject-formation relates to the way that museums teach patrons how to view art in the

right way—both in the sense of proper art appreciation, and in a way that aligns with the institution’s larger project. Viewing art in the ‘right’ way is construed as having both intellectual and moral aspects. Cultural, not political, recognition is promoted as the sanctioned response to the ethical question of how to respond to prior denigration of Inuit culture. In terms of affirmative recognition culture, the WAG invites its visitors and readers to view Inuit art in a way that recognizes the value of Inuit culture while not undercutting the authority of the Canadian state. In particular, acting as an ideal settler subject means viewing Inuit art in a way that demonstrates ethnographic understanding as well as aesthetic appreciation. Learning these techniques has myriad rewards, such as a sense of (settler) certainty (Mackey 2014) about Canada’s status as owner of Arctic lands, both by naturalizing Inuit as Canadian and casting Inuit “as cultural rather than political entities” (Hulan 2003, 18), and by mobilizing a recognition of Inuit difference aimed at eliciting cooperation from those Canadians who just happen to be Inuit.

Catalogues frequently assert that cultural knowledge—an ethnographic understanding—is a prerequisite for understanding Inuit art. Indeed, the gallery’s catalogues serve to foster such a combination of understanding and appreciation, by illustrating Inuit culture for readers and gallery goers alike, as well as demonstrating aesthetic analysis. Implicit in this pedagogical approach is the notion that the gallery has the authority and knowledge to function as an arbiter of culture that is savvy and competent, indispensable in its capacity for disseminating useful information. Nevertheless, in the raw stories and gestures to Otherness, we get a sense of the limits of knowledge from the outside—a simultaneous familiarization / defamiliarization that

aligns with Canada's need to foster in its citizens a sense of belonging associated with the North, but without a desire to actually settle the North in any material sense. To this end, many of the catalogue's ethnographic passages do not just simply impart knowledge but actually alienate and familiarize the reader simultaneously. *Eskimo Narrative* discusses a carving entitled *Louse* (c. 1960) by Davidualu Alasua Amittu in a striking example of how catalogues promote art as a form of cultural education that is only partially accessible: "Although insignificant in size, the common louse was a ubiquitous and not inconsiderable element in the traditional way of life, as seems to be indicated by its size and posture here. Several sculptures in the Gallery's collection portray the subject of a mother delousing her child. Lice were often eaten after they had been picked out of the hair" (13). As people who, in a stereotypical representation of "backward or primitive" people, have a place in their culture for eating insects (Ponzetta and Paoletti 1997, 327), Inuit are thus cast as absolutely Other and absolutely unknowable—an exoticness that exists in tension with other instances where the catalogues describe Inuit as fundamentally Canadian. For the settler reader-patron, who is become at once familiar with and alienated from the Far North, belonging in / to the Arctic appears here as an open-ended process akin to the project of attempting to attain knowledge about an ultimately unknowable people—a people whose simultaneous absolute exoticness and absolute Canadianness serve as the logic behind displaying their artworks in the first place, after all.

The catalogues' investigatory purpose comes to the fore in the prefatory essays for *Early Masters: Inuit Sculpture 1949-55*, a catalogue whose theme seems designed to

highlight the gallery's detective skills. The exhibition was the culmination of a project that saw the curator visiting the Arctic; there, she conducted a series of interviews with the hope of determining the identity of artists whose works were hitherto unattributed. Prior to the exhibition "116 of the Gallery's 177 sculptures dating from 1949-1955 were by unknown artists" (Wight 2006, 9). Whereas previous collectors and experts in the field had been unable to attribute the work of Pilipusi Novalinga, for example, gallery professionals had "no doubt" about the identity of the carver. The conclusions made by the gallery as to the artists' identities are supported by analyses of the carvings under question, and reinforced by the curator's own intensive archival research (39). Highlighting that the investigation has improved mainstream awareness and appreciation of Inuit art creation, the catalogue reports, "It is gratifying that this carver can now be considered among the 'early masters' of this period" (40). Indeed, the feat is cast as almost an act of heroism. The WAG is not only documenting mastery but helping to identify just who should be considered masterful, which has the effect of identifying the individual and particular qualities of a given piece, and thereby defining it in terms of aesthetics.

Through revealing the names of "early masters", the WAG's investigation ostensibly strives to remediate the damages caused by past lackadaisical approaches to attribution taken by non-Inuit collectors. This includes an artist whose "Inuktitut name, Aqiattusuk" was, in the view of the curator, once "unknown to collectors. His early carving did not receive the recognition it deserved either, as discovered during research for this exhibition" (2006, 93). The catalogue's discussion about the value of the

investigation is not merely a boast. Instead, they condemn the HBC for its failure to document precisely who created certain works, which is cast as not properly caring about the individual identity of Inuit artists, akin to not appreciating their work. The Hudson Bay stores were the sole purveyor of Inuit carvings prior to the 1960s (Auger 2005, 101-2; Blodgett 1977c, 13-14; Mitchell 1996). By repudiating the HBC, the gallery effectively positions itself in opposition to a colonial history characterized by paternalism against and depersonalization of Inuit, exemplified by the stores' inconsistent naming practices. In so doing, the catalogue casts the HBC's failure to properly document artists' identities as an expression of *non*-appreciation, on the basis that unnamed works like Aqiattusuk's deserve "recognition," both of their creator and of their aesthetic value. Unearthing the "real" identities of Inuit artists is undoubtedly a worth pursuit; however, in so doing, *Early Masters* highlights the cultural capital accrued by the gallery in rightly attributing the works in their collection to individuals rather than to an art-producing community, or even to Inuit as a whole. Further, the catalogue also distances the gallery from colonial history by foregrounding the negative impact of HBC on Inuit in general and artists in particular. This catalogue thus exemplifies how the gallery's discursive practices often risk defining colonial violence as merely a failure to appreciate culture—to view it from the right sort of perspective, thereby foreclosing other possible avenues for conceptualizing Inuit lifeways, as well as forms of remediation and redress that do not rely on normative forms of cultural savvy. This is not to say that such research is trivial or unnecessary. Instead, I suggest that we pay attention to how the gallery's remediation of past oversights functions in the context of a colonial recognition politics that works, in

part, by claiming that the violences of settler colonialism are located entirely in the past, which artistic recognition might then ameliorate. Such analyses, which disavow the ignorance of institutions that have now been lost to history,²⁴ and thereby distinguish between past and present settler subjects, map rather conveniently onto liberal settler teleologies that are directed by notions of healing and reform (to be discussed in Chapter 3).

The gallery confirms its “cultural competency” by demonstrating that it can read Inuit art in a way that makes it relevant not only for art appreciation but also for other forms of cultural knowledge, both tantalizing and satisfying the curiosity of non-Inuit patrons. Seidelman and Turner’s introduction for *The Inuit Imagination* similarly emphasizes the gallery’s role as cultural arbiter. The curators acknowledge that the meaning behind Inuit symbology, which includes magical and monstrous images of “winged creatures, mermaids and grotesque animal forms,” is likely not readily apparent to outsiders (1993, 10-11). Whereas ordinary gallery goers are sure to be confounded by the depictions that they encounter, the catalogues promise to impart to readers and patrons alike the knowledge required for viewing the works properly. The curators directly state the importance of appreciating art for acquiring Inuit “cultural competency”: While “admirers of Inuit art” are not necessarily bothered by their inability to apprehend meaning, the curators believe “that attempting to understand the sources of the Inuit imagination will deepen the appreciation of its expression in art.” Stories, interpreted correctly, are “the key to unlocking this imaginative world” (11), thereby promising

²⁴ The HBC is still with us, of course, as a department store; moreover, trading posts can still be found, in various revised, if somewhat diminished, forms.

access to a land that is, once again, not one to be found or encountered, but to be discovered through imagination and invention.

The privileged viewer must see the cultural significance of Inuit art while also taking note of its aesthetic value. The catalogues praise the collectors, many of whom the WAG relies upon for its exhibitions, by emphasizing that collecting Inuit art requires being able to see art in a special way. Collections are described as “a tribute to the vision and dedication of the man who collected the art” (Wight 2003, 7), such that the catalogues cast collectors as having special insight and fortitude of character. The catalogues often characterize collectors as being driven by an irresistible urge towards gathering and preserving art objects, stemming from a deep instinct about Inuit art’s inherent quality. (Intellectual understanding, usually to do with the ethnographic details of Inuit life, comes later.) For instance, one director’s foreword describes how the collector Bob Stafford got “‘got carried away’ in the manner of many art collectors before him, and spent twenty years purchasing and refining his preferences as his knowledge grew” (Wight and Stafford 2012, 7). In a catalogue from 2008, which features contributions by renowned Inuit writer and activist Zebedee Nungak, the collector Henry Winrob recalls sensing that Inuit art would “impart to a household a touch of ‘Canadianness’” (Nungak and Wight 2008, 9) but being unsure how to begin collecting, given that he had no experience with “fine art history in general or in ethnic or Inuit art specifically.” He ascertained, “I had to begin to look, to learn to see. My eyes had to expand the bounds of their receptivity in ways that I could not yet imagine” (9). One introduction for an exhibition of pieces from The Faye and Bert Settler Collection reports

that collecting came naturally to the (somewhat ironically-named) family (Blodgett, et al. 2004, 9), with the late Faye Settler recommending, “The only thing you can do is keep questioning and that’s how you eventually learn” (18). Pieces are said to “reveal themselves best to the careful observer,” and the best collectors have an “eye that [is] not satisfied with” the “conventional” (Wight 2003, 36). Indeed, the artworks, according to curators, have “fascinating subtleties [that] reveal themselves to the patient observer” (48)—and, ideally, that observer is a Canadian.

By lauding collectors’ purportedly unique insight in this way, the curator is surely intending to flatter the people who the gallery relies upon for their many of their exhibition, in order to help secure continued access to their collections, for future exhibits. In addition to the cynical motives for such praise, holding up those who have the patience and knowledge to view Inuit art properly as models of ideal patronage has the effect of inviting readers and gallery goers to reflect upon their own perspective on Inuit art, asking whether they (we) have the vision necessary to view Inuit art in the “right” way. Indeed, how, and to what effect, is a capacity for such insight presented as a prerequisite for gallery-goers to become better Canadian subjects? The catalogues cast the insight of the Inuit art collector as a form of patriotism. The preface for *The Jerry Twomey Collection* recalls a time when the titular collector had to find a new home for his collection. He “was determined that his unique collection should remain in Canada, preferably in Winnipeg” (Wight 2003, 7). The catalogue thereby confirms that the work on display is, indeed, Canadian, in addition to spotlighting the cultural savvy of the city of Winnipeg. But an anecdote by Twomey himself, which appear in the same catalogue,

perhaps best demonstrates how aesthetic insight qualifies one for ideal settler subjectivity. He recalls the Canadian painter Lawren Harris, before he became famous as a member of the Group of Seven,²⁵ bringing sketches of Lake Superior to Twomey: “I think I bought 2 of them for \$160. Now they’re \$19,000 apiece. My definition of intelligence is recognizing the obvious just a little ahead of the other guy. [Inuit] carvings that I paid \$80 to \$100 are now \$5,000 to \$10,000. It was so cheap and so obvious” (14). Twomey’s account is included as a way to showcase the collector’s aptitude for selecting excellent works, Inuit or otherwise. It does so in a way that collapses collecting Western art with collecting Inuit art and equates a failure to appreciate Inuit art’s aesthetic qualities with an ignorance for now-canonical Canadian art. By casting Inuit art as quintessentially Canadian, even modern, Twomey satirizes out-of-date views of Inuit as ‘primitive’ while also deferring to the fact that aesthetically-excellent works are necessarily within the domain of the universal. Perhaps most salient to the story is the collector’s sly insight into the *actual* value of Inuit art. Troublingly, his boast echoes frontier tales about pioneers who build their fortune on land that they once acquired for a pittance from Indigenous people who, we are meant to infer, were destined to lose it because they failed to understand its full potential. The anecdote frames art interpretation as a moral pursuit and a form of hard work, while presenting the ideal settler as someone who sees the “real” value of a thing and therefore deserves to acquire it. By recognizing visionary settler subjectivity, the catalogues promote the same frontier logic with regards to Inuit cultural expression that drives southern attitudes about the Arctic: as both empty and full of

²⁵ The Group of Seven was a consortium of Canadian painters, working in the early- and mid-20th century, best known for their highly stylized landscapes.

possibility.

Conclusion

In the context of the colonial museum, the cultural capital awarded to colonial subjectivity proliferates through settler art appreciation. In adjudicating between art that is aesthetically valuable versus art (-as-craft) that tells stories about different peoples, the colonial eye derives authority from its ability to approach an ethnographically-ordered pile of cultural objects and identify the pieces of art nested amongst craft objects—the “‘best’ and ‘worst’ pieces” (Torgovnick 82). Therefore, in the context of settler colonialism, a gallery-goer’s capacity for proper appreciation is a quality of ideal settler citizenship, meaning that the version of cultural insight that the WAG’s catalogues prize actually fosters “nationals,” who, by exhibiting those traits that are prized by the nation, become the intended beneficiaries of Canada’s wealth and prestige (Thobani 2007, 11). In the case of the WAG, visitors who adopt an appropriate perspective on Inuit art—as both exotic and familiar, ethnographic and aesthetic—are thereby cast as ideal settler subjects. In part, this process of subject-making is made possible because the sort of viewpoint on Inuit art that the gallery promotes is in line with the prevailing liberal multicultural doctrine, which celebrates difference while actually erasing it (Mackey 1998, 18), in the name of English (and to some degree, French) Canadian cultural homogeneity. Acknowledging Inuit ethnographic difference by evoking the principles of universalizing aesthetics is one way in which Inuit “become multicultural.” The WAG encourages its visitors to adopt the sort of normative view of culture as an aesthetic rather

than political or economic formation, a view that has tended to support the sovereignty of the Canadian nation-state, insofar as it casts Indigenous peoples as culturally different but not as having distinct and / or feasible political and economic systems. These privileged viewers are asked to take seriously a documentary view of Inuit culture, whereby coming to an understanding of art is akin to understanding the people who made it, and vice versa. At the same time, the gallery's frameworks seem to acknowledge that access to a total understanding of Inuit lifeways—complete familiarization, in other words—is impossible, partly due to the ultimate unfamiliarity of the territory. A viewer might conceive of approaching a full understanding of the place, but, as with Arctic sovereignty and the repeated performances of effective occupation that it requires, such an understanding is necessarily elusive. Developing a proper orientation towards the Arctic is a process of becoming, a project that is never complete.

CHAPTER THREE

Art is the New Fur

The IAC website features a statement introducing the *Winnipeg Free Press* special, Inuit H(e)art. It reports “that the Inuit’s often painful period of colonization, which gave birth to the modern art form, has left lasting scars and a fierce will to persevere.”²⁶ Upon reading this introduction to the *Free Press* series, I was struck by its evocation of rhetoric that aligns colonial meddling in the Arctic with the rise of modern Inuit art. At the same time, it constructs the transition for Inuit, in the 1950s and 60s, from living semi-nomadically to residing in settlements (Marcus 1995; McElroy 2008; Qikiqtani 2014; Tester and Kulchyski 1994), as a series of events that was difficult yet ultimately unavoidable. The visceral imagery of birth and labour symbolizes colonization as a painful but unavoidable process of generation, and which was perhaps even predestined, if we turn and look back at it, given that it gave us contemporary Inuit art (and, as this chapter will elaborate, the social arrangements and infrastructure that have accompanied it). In fact, most of the WAG’s Inuit exhibition catalogues, in their prefatory notes and curator essays, contain at least a passing historical reference to the artworks on display by drawing on the same well-worn tale of social change offered by the *Free Press*, whether the exhibition in question included Inuit artifacts, early pieces, or examples from the “Contemporary Period” and beyond.²⁷ The analyses contained in the

²⁶ The website is frequently updated and revised. At the time of writing, this description appears on the main page of <http://inuit.wag.ca/> in the icon for a subsection titled “STORIES.”

²⁷ The Contemporary Period of Inuit art refers to works created after James Houston “discovered” Inuit artmaking and introduced it to the South, and roughly covers the late 1940s to the mid-1980s (Shirley and Wight 2003, 7).

catalogues answer an unspoken request that the gallery account for the fact that Inuit lifeways have transformed drastically since the early 20th century. I am curious about how the catalogues' attitude towards this change fits discursively with the settler state's current approach to the Arctic, as elaborated in the two previous chapters.

Affirmative recognition culture, of the sort defined in Chapter 1 and 2, has a teleological quality. Artmaking and art appreciation appear in narratives about the recent history of settler-colonial politics in the Arctic, which effectively naturalizes the arrival of a perplexing and contradictory moment: the colonial present. This term refers to the fact that contemporary settler colonialism in Canada disguises its own machinations by fabricating a “transition from an authoritarian past to a democratic present,” seeming to “situate the abuses of settler colonization firmly *in the past*” (Coulthard 2014, 22).

Modern settler colonialism is uniquely able to deny its own continuance into the present, which allows it to operate with more force. In this chapter, I read the WAG catalogues through the lens of a critical framework on settler-colonial temporalities, inevitability, and futurity. I draw out some of the ways that the WAG catalogues construct colonialism in the Arctic as solely a phenomenon of the past, often by characterizing the current social and political reality in the Arctic as predestined. In the first section, I track how the catalogues describe the social changes that Inuit in the mid-20th century underwent, during which artmaking gradually came to supplant hunting and trapping as a major economic driver, and interrogate the catalogues' insistence that Inuit art now serves as a suitable, if not entirely desirable, alternative to life on the land. To that end, the second section explores how the WAG's exhibition catalogues narrativize Inuit co-ops, and cast

art-production and marketing as unproblematic sites of Inuit agency.

My primary aim is not to interrogate how the emergence of the co-op system as a site of Inuit agency has helped elide the workings of settler colonialism in the late 20th century. Rather, my focus is aimed at how art-appreciation literature like the WAG catalogues depict the co-op movement, often by drawing on colonial temporal logics, of the sort that I detailed in Chapter 1. I then move on to ponder how these temporal logics ratify the catalogues' somewhat peculiar likening of the Inuit co-op movement to the creation of Nunavut. Indeed, the catalogues frequently suggest that co-operatives allowed Inuit to escape damaging government programs that once determined the course of their lives; further, this new form of economic autonomy laid the foundations for later self-government agreements—particularly the Nunavut Land Claim Agreements (NLCA). The catalogue for *ItuKiahatta! Inuit Sculpture from the Collection of the TD Bank Financial Group*, for example, declares, “The establishment of the co-operative system was an essential first-step in giving Inuit control over the local economy,” and then ties this autonomy to the creation of Nunavut (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 11). The co-ops are meant to symbolize Inuit's supposedly inherent affinity for self-government, or a limited sort of political autonomy under the authority of the Canadian nation-state. The catalogues' likening of marketing art with self-government allows us to use the substantial literature on the problems and limitations of Indigenous self-government in general, and Inuit self-government in particular, to interrogate the way that the WAG characterizes Inuit autonomy in the art market.

Surely the emergence of a creative economy in the Arctic was beneficial from any

number of perspectives. In *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey* (2009), which the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funded as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), Inuit art scholar Heather Igloliorte emphasizes that the creation of a southern market for Inuit art helped create alternative economies for Inuit. "Under [James] Houston's guidance, the industry quickly grew into a viable economic substitute for the rapidly declining fur trade" (119). Today, there is an "emergent socially conscious art [that] is indicative of the increased ability of Inuit to reflect upon and respond to the multiple stressors of contemporary life" (120). Igloliorte indicates that the creation of art represents and enables cultural survival, while the subject matter depicted serves as a testament to individual resilience. "The power of visual art to speak across linguistic, cultural, and generational divides presents an opportunity for artists to tell these stories to a broad audience and to support the continued strengthening and revitalization of the national reconciliation process" (122). While artistic expression could certainly provide a way for individuals to retain a strong sense of self, and art can and does at times bolster cultural vitality, here I am also interested in the way that art-creation's purported powers get mobilized when (predominantly white settler) art professionals in the south express their appreciation for Inuit art.

Narrativizing the Transition to Artmaking

In 2014, the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC)—sometimes referred to as the Inuit Truth and Reconciliation Commission—published a report on the resettlement and

migration of Inuit in the mid-20th century. The commission describes Inuit giving accounts of the intergenerational impacts of being relocated, either through state projects, with little or no consultation with those being relocated (12), or when decreasing access to food and supplies left them little choice but to move to settlements. Resettlement, removal, and forced migration were enacted for a range of reasons, such as to establish outposts, in collaboration with the HBC, to establish a Canadian presence by proxy in the High Arctic, or, ostensibly, to protect Inuit from starvation (Tester and Kulchyski 1994, 218). Settlement life was also offered as a way to blunt the detrimental effects of residential school, with one government report suggesting that families moving to centralized communities “allowed children to attend school while living with their parents, rather than in a residential school or hostel” (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, 61). Consequently, between 1950 and 1975, Inuit in what is now the eastern portion of Nunavut went from living nomadically, across over one hundred hunting territories, to being almost entirely located “in the present twelve hamlets and one city” by 1975 (Qikiqtani 2014, 13).

Resettlement now might appear to have been executed uniformly, given the current arrangement of Inuit communities, but it was rarely straightforward. One resettlement frequently led to another, as the State shuffled families around, experimenting with different population configurations. Un-coerced migration also took place, as Inuit increasingly found it easier to acquire resources in Qallunaat settlements—what the QTC refers to as Canadian “enclaves”—amidst a dwindling fur trade. Regardless of the context, however, “Inuit were moved because the government

generalized that all Inuit were semi-nomadic hunters who could live anywhere in the Arctic. It neglected the subtle nuances of regional identity, differing seasons, terrain, linguistics, wildlife, geography, food preferences, technological adaptations, and survival strategies” (16). Resettlement initiatives were informed by a truly injurious misreading of Inuit lifeways. Inuit have had a lot to say about the impact of resettlement on their lives. Inuk Rosemarie Kuptana writes, “The settlement of Inuit in hamlets has resulted in many people being unskilled in hunting and the ways of life on the land. And this settlement was government policy. This policy has resulted in a society which is resettled with some of the amenities of the south but also in a society devoid of the economy which sustained it.” Kuptana aligns the forced resettlements with residential school, arguing that both endeavours were intended to ensure “that the traditional ways would not be transferred to a new generation. It can be argued, therefore, that on-going government policy and actions are working to deprive the Inuit of a basic right to life” (2013, 12).

The WAG catalogues certainly attend to the fact of mid-century social change among Inuit. However, the stories that they tell about the transition from nomadic lifeways to settlement life frequently seem as if they are *really* describing an evolution from living on the land to artmaking. This narrative reveals how southern institutions’ perspective on art, as a cultural and economic booster for Inuit, naturalizes the pre-eminence of the colonial present in the Far North and locates settler-colonial exploitation and violence in the past, partly thanks to the illustrious position now occupied by Inuit art. In other words, celebrating the present economic role of Inuit artmaking in the wake of dramatic and often traumatic social reconfigurations is a mechanism of affirmative

recognition politics. The place of art-production in Inuit's evolving economy is both a historical fact and a narrative device. This means that it is possible to acknowledge that texts from a variety of sources, like the federal government, art scholars, and Inuit themselves, are, in one sense, merely providing an account of events that once occurred, and continue to occur. At the same time, we can also view these accounts as doing *work*. One way that these accounts work is by tying the emergence of organized commerce around Inuit art-production to an overarching settler-colonial teleology, along which the Far North is said to have progressed, and through which we are meant to understand the present state of affairs in the Arctic as predestined and desirable. In Chapter 1, I argued that hegemonic views of the liberatory potential of cultural expression elicit an affirmative recognition response; in the context of settlers striving to validate their sense of ownership over the Arctic, of *belonging from afar*, this recognition celebrates Inuit's creative production, while simultaneously constructing artmaking as their primary mode of political agency, by virtue of the fact that it can be accommodated by the settler nation-state. Here, I further explore the political utility of locating Inuit autonomy in aesthetics in order to demonstrate how the catalogue's storying of the past casts the colonial present as a natural outcome of Inuit's innate orientation towards an economy based on artmaking.

The valorization of aesthetic, pseudo-political autonomy interacts with the notion of colonial inevitability to create a field of legitimacy around the Arctic colonial present. In other words, the seeming benevolence and inevitability of an art-based economy "settles" the question of whether life in the Arctic might have turned out otherwise. A catalogue essay from Arctic historian Marybelle Myers (Mitchell) appears in a 1977

Settlement Series catalogue for a Port Harrison exhibition. In it, she discusses the history of art creation and the development of co-ops in Inoucdjouac and nearby Povungnituk. She describes how once-scattered Inuit moved *en masse* to the settlement at Port Harrison. “Not as dependent upon hunting as formerly and not content to be separated from their children, the *inevitable* move away from the camps and into the settlements began” (“In the Wake of the Giant,” quoted in Blodgett 1977b, 14 my emphasis). George Swinton expresses something similar, in “Memories of Eskimo Point 1967-1979,” from *Eskimo Point*, although he does suggest that something important can be lost during drastic social change. He closes the essay by writing, “[S]omehow I can’t imagine that the spirit and the traditions of Eskimo Point are ‘going for good.’ But then perhaps ‘inevitable progress’ really is inevitable. We must wait and see” (Driscoll 1982b, 19). In the catalogues’ telling, social change under settler colonialism is processual, never finished, always in the middle of “going for good,” keeping alive the sense that Inuit might once have fully disappeared, but not yet. This unrealized eventuality is somehow also left as inescapable, regardless of whether it is desirable. It is inchoate and imminent, transforming us into helpless bystanders who can only “wait and see.” The catalogue downplays relationality and responsibility. It interpellates a particular settler subject; one who observes without being required to act, unimplicated and helpless to intervene. Indeed, this idea that there is nothing to be done is born of the idea that all humans are contained in a single history, which merely unfurls as intended. This sense of a shared and unavoidable destiny exonerates those who benefit from unequal social relations in general, and Canada’s occupation and exploitation of the Far North in particular, from

imagining history otherwise. Helplessness is thereby recast as hopefulness, passivity turned to optimism—at least insofar as those who accept the inevitability of the present do so with a sense of relief.

Much like Swinton's comment, which casually conflates the disappearance of Inuit cultural traditions with "progress," colonial rhetorics treat the present as a natural product of history. In turn, these rhetorics give form to the approaches that settler society adopts for dealing with inconvenient histories. Official reconciliation policies seek to relegate settler colonialism to the past, which helps to elide its contemporaneous effects. Reconciliation rhetoric thereby undermines its own purported objective: to enact decolonized social relations in the present. The resulting colonial "positing of a single purposiveness or *telos* of the human species" (Nichols 2013, 166) deigns to shuttle us from a violent past to a supposedly unified, equitable present, while effectively eliding alternative visions of reconciliation—what Erica Lee terms "worlds that should have been" (2016, 19)—in favour of acknowledging and sealing off the past. Colonial teleologies thereby cast the present as predetermined, inexorable. Further, the logic of colonial inevitability favours reform over radical change and forecloses hitherto unimagined possibilities. The colonial present is cast as a machine with which we can tinker, but which is too complicated to rebuild. In "Interrupting Inevitability: Globalization and Resistance," Amy Skonieczny proposes looking for "dual histories," in order to complicate and revise the parochial, *ex parte* historical narratives that reproduce existing social hierarchies (13). Accounts that insist upon multiple, amorphous, and divergent histories might also help to counter the rhetoric of inevitability.

Amplifying multiple perspectives on history, whose myriad possibilities have never been extinguished, poses a serious challenge to Euro-Western universalism. Euro-Western Judeo-Christian philosophy, according to Vine Deloria Jr., views time as universal, based on the sense that all cultures are on a pathway towards Christianization. This philosophy evidently mistakes Christianity for modernity, opting to tell

the history of humankind ... [as] a rather tedious story of the rise and fall of nation after nation, and the sequence in which world history has been written shows amazing parallels to the expansion of the Christian religion... Indeed, world history as presently conceived in the Christian nations is the story of the West's conquest of the remainder of the world and the subsequent rise to technological sophistication. (2003, 108)

Deloria's critique is compatible with Coulthard's critique of Marxist, and especially Marx's concept of "normative developmentism," which conceived of all cultures as destined to evolve along the same lines. Coulthard points out that such ideas of a singular, shared societal outcome has been used as one of the driving rationales for installing settlements and bringing Indigenous peoples (2014, 152), such as the "laggards" in what is now called North America, to their final destination—"civilization" (Chakrabarty 2000, 7)—often through the imposition of violent and exclusionary gender norms and property regimes (Simpson, L. 2014, np; Morgensen 2010). Evidently, the inevitable still needs to be carefully managed.

Acknowledging, apologizing for, and seeking to move forward from a violent past might seem like admirable objectives, but they are also methods by which present-day settler colonialism reinforces settler dominance: "Embracing its shameful frontier history allows the nation to begin bit by bit to unbind itself from the memories and hopes once associated with that history, and allows the nation to get on with its business, find new

ideals and images to identify with” (Povinelli 2002, 56). The charismatic forward momentum of settler colonialism institutes a break between the past and present, creating a progress narrative; in the shadow of this narrative, stories that reference settler colonialism as a *present* concern, as ongoing and alive, are rendered incomprehensible. The settler state is willing to entertain land claims and recognize “past colonial violence,” but its actions “remain driven by assumptions about ‘moving on’ from a colonial past to a post-colonial present” (Strakosch 2016, 19). In this way, the colonial present references the past as well as the future, insofar as “the eventual legitimacy and stability of the settler-colonial project is always-already assumed” (Strakosch and Macoun 2012, 53). Latter day settler colonialism is perhaps eager to mimic the Devil, whose greatest trick was, in Baudelaire’s telling, to convince the world that he did not exist.

In tracing how the catalogues attempt to narratively settle the fact of violent displacement in the Arctic, we might be tempted to view Canada as haunted by these histories. At stake, however, is the possibility that such a perspective “further entrenches settler colonial fantasies of Indigenous absence that operate and absolve non-Native peoples, living on stolen Native lands, of this original sin” (Medak-Saltzman 2015, 16). Indeed, ghosting Indigeneity—spuriously relegating it to the past—has long been central to settler accounts of how “Aboriginality” figures in Canada’s development as a nation. By recognizing Indigenous peoples in ghostly form, settler society has internalized “a sense of linearity and succession” (Cameron 2008, 384), an antiseptic take on history that casts colonization as inheritance rather than as violent dispossession. Instead of viewing Inuit as the *source* of haunting, to extend Danika Medak-Saltman’s advice on how to

conceptualize postcolonial haunting, we would be better to consider how settler-colonial haunting marks the contradictory logics that underpin North American society (2015, 16). This is a way of locating settler-colonial violence in the present, thereby subverting the teleologies of empire. Indeed, rather than naturalizing the colonial present, haunting can nevertheless be profoundly *unsettling*. In particular, this is because haunting, at least in Avery Gordon's use of the term, demands action. Haunting "is an emergent state: the ghost arises, carrying the signs and portents of a repression in the past or the present that's no longer working. The ghost demands your attention. The present wavers. Something will happen. What will happen of course, is not given in advance, but something must be done" (2017, 209). At the same time, recognition-based responses to the past colonial violence that continues to haunt the present demonstrate that the sorts of action that become available, perhaps in response to a sense of being called to an as-yet undefined sort of action, will also be shaped by a presiding social and political context that aims to reproduce the conditions of its own existence. This is particularly true in the case of the colonial present in Canada, wherein undermining Indigenous political agency and sovereignty over land—the ultimate violence that, in fact, lives on in the present—is formative and constitutive of the settler-colonial nation-state.

Inuit artmaking offers an appealing focal point for a settler society attempting to develop a sense of certainty regarding its claim to the Arctic. Many of the WAG's Inuit exhibition catalogues leverage the values associated with art, and the relationship between art and culture, to support the idea that drastic social change in the Far North was unavoidable, at least by making it more appealing in retrospect, unburdening those who

might otherwise have fretted about the way things have turned out. Art and the rhetorics surrounding its creation and usefulness conceal their own teleological mechanisms. The qualities associated with art are both slippery and sticky, in that they are both hard to grasp and readily transferred through association. For instance, art is frequently described as being predisposed to evolution, as demonstrated by many of the art scholars and anthropologists' writings that are featured in the exhibition catalogues. These essays, in looking at social change in the Arctic through the lens of art, cast past change as having been inescapable, even when they are referring to the future. This is what is at play when we encounter Stanley Zazelenchuk writing positively about artmaking in Rankin Inlet: "What is the future of stone carving in Rankin Inlet?... Outwardly the future looks dismal. Yet in the broader art context there is every reason for hope. Undoubtedly there will be change, but change is always with us. As one who has lived and worked in the North, I remain optimistic" (Driscoll 1980b, 28-29). Of course, Zazelenchuk is writing about artmaking and not life in the Arctic more generally. Nevertheless, his optimism hinges on a link between Inuit's willingness to embrace artmaking and their ability to survive into the future. Zazelenchuk's anxious and ambiguous turn to hope opens space for what Roger Simon calls "hope without consolation," whereby depictions of settler-colonial violence might make "an unanticipated claim that may interrupt one's self-sufficiency, demanding attentiveness to another's life" (2006, 188). The art collector's wavering between worry and hope suggests that we might yet come across artmaking that has failed to sustain Inuit, culturally or economically, and which might then rupture the gallery's idealized vision of the present. This rupture could thereby require settler art patrons to see

themselves as having a responsibility to Inuit that cannot be fulfilled by simply learning to view Inuit art better. However, Zazelenchuk's final, decisive turn to a normative hope that is oriented towards the sustaining power of artmaking seems to foreclose the effects of such a potential failure, which could otherwise highlight the need for a broad range of measures to address settler colonialism in the Far North.

By discursively tying Inuit survival to art, along with the promises and possibilities that come attached to it, the catalogues afford Inuitness a preemptive idealized status, unmoored from present material conditions. According to Blodgett, artmaking is a natural transition from life on the land, as it draws on some of the same skill sets associated with traditional Inuit life. She writes, "The visual capabilities developed by the Eskimo women in making garments without the aid of a pattern and in designing decorative motifs for these garments are now put to use on their wall hangings, as are their technical sewing skills. Tuu'luq agreed that making caribou clothing has helped her with her sewing of hangings" (Blodgett 1976, np). The curator's analysis of Tuu'luq's work references traditional practices—here, by sewing clothing from caribou hide—that involved skills which the artist could similarly use in crafting textiles. It is not clear whether Tuu'luq now has less occasion for making hide garments; more important is the implication that were she no longer required to make clothing, an art-based economy would ensure that her talents be put to good use. In this telling, Inuit are naturally predisposed to creative endeavours, regardless of what form those endeavours might take.

In addition to suggesting that artmaking extends the skills associated with Inuit lifeways, the catalogues frequently emphasize that a natural link exists between Inuit lifeways and art, claiming that Inuit are inherently “creative people” (Ryan and Wight 2004, 27). Through the catalogue for *Keewatin*, readers learn that Inuit are a “sensitive and talented people” who have been struck by an “apparently burning interest for creativity” (WAG 1964, 3), and the catalogue posits that the future production of work is assured, on account of Inuit’s “formidable courage and tenacity” (10); and from *Baker Lake Prints*, we learn that Inuit creativity comes from a “heightened visual sensitivity and spatial awareness,” while their “traditional lack of concern for sequential time also contributes greatly to the immediate wholeness” showcased in many of the images—qualities that the catalogue refers to as a “truly Eskimo contribution” (Driscoll 1982a, 16). An essay in *The First Passionate Collector: The Ian Lindsay Collection of Inuit Art* points out that contemporary Inuit art as a category is itself the product of creativity, insofar as art produced for a southern market was a creative response to encounters with the South. It even suggests that retooling their artworks for collectors from the South derives from an inherent “flexibility and resourcefulness often noted by anthropologists” (Butler and Wight 1991, 34). *Rankin Inlet Ceramics* includes an essay attributing the Rankin Inlet ceramics program to Inuit “vision” and creativity, stating, “Nothing like this could have ever happened in the South” (Shirley and Wight 2003, 51). A subsequent essay, entitled “A Strong Sense of Spatial Reasoning,” references Inuit’s perspective, which it then depicts as inherently artistic. The essay marvels at the supposedly inherent qualities of Inuit artists, noting that the author is “amazed at the ability of Northern people

to see objects and animals at long distances... The ability to correctly ‘read’ what is in front of you is also a factor in working with three-dimensional form, whether it is clay or stone. These are abilities which Inuit bring to their creative efforts that make them some of the world’s most naturally gifted artists” (54).

Indeed, many Inuit artists are in agreement with the WAG’s views on the ties between Inuit lifeways and artmaking. The late Inuit artist Alootook Ipellie thinks about hunting alongside art. In his collection of illustrated short stories, *Dreams and Nightmares*, he describes his own “creative drive,” and recalls his childhood, when elders “taught [him] that patience was a human virtue. A prerequisite to acquiring the skills of a successful hunter was the ability to wait perfectly in dead silence, for long period of time” (1993, viii). Much like the WAG catalogues, Ipellie claims that Inuit are “artistically inclined” because their “skillful hands” for “fashioning all their hunting gear and the clothing needed to survive fierce winters” has readied them to adapt to “today’s artistic demands” (xv). In this telling, it really does seem like Inuit have been particularly positioned to *be artists*. The juxtaposition of art with hunting here suggests that being on the land in the Arctic is not just the subject of Ipellie’s art, but is interwoven with the same things that drive him to create. This insight, which views art and life on the land as complexly entangled actually runs *counter* to the atomizing and compartmentalizing impulses of recognition culture. At risk with the *catalogues*’ depiction, nevertheless, is that it downplays the seriousness of the losses experienced by Inuit in the mid-20th century by suggesting that Inuit are uniquely and infinitely adaptable—an echo of the logic that once drove the State relocation projects—while also implying that Inuit can

actually become more fully *themselves*, if allowed to express their cultural identity through art.

The catalogues' narrativization of the mid-20th century in the Canadian Arctic relies on an idea of creativity that elicits settler readers' certainty about the inevitability of the colonial present. Creative economy critics such as Sarah Brouillette and Angela McRobbie observe that the work of the creative practitioner seems inscrutable and capacious, presumed to have endless, if unrealized value, by virtue of its mysteriousness and unpredictability, and therefore making the concept of creativity useful to neoliberal and laissez-faire capitalism. Creative work embodies a paradox: it is said to offer material sustenance while also seeming to materialize beyond the reach of money, apparently the product of a magical, lucrative individual talent. Creativity is "at once newly valuable to capitalism and romantically honorable and free," according to Brouillette (2014, 4). A boon to neoliberal values of individualism and self-sufficiency, the creative economy situates the creative practitioner as the source of their own prosperity; at the same time, neoliberalism can exploit the ephemeral idealism of creative production. In the same way that art and beauty take up the slack of social and economic disparity, as Marcuse has identified, creativity affords individuals access to seemingly aspirational ways of life, while precluding the need to transform the existing social landscape upon which creative work happens. Many of the WAG catalogues espouse creativity's multivalent effects, such as *Eskimo Point*, which discloses that Inuit are committed to artmaking—"a commitment that brings not only economic rewards but also the more elusive rewards of personal gratification and satisfaction in one's creative power" (Driscoll 1982b, 37). The

ideals around artmaking subordinate economic security to self-actualization. This emphasis on the self frames the individual as the source of their own prosperity, responsabilizing the creative Inuk by deferring to “the value of hard work” and potentially committing them to “constant activity,” to extend McRobbie’s critique of the creative economy (2016, 12). The resulting efforts are swiftly undercut, however, by the state’s inability or unwillingness to adequately address the damages done by settler colonialism in the Far North.

The concerns I am raising are not entirely about whether or how Inuit get paid for their work, or not exactly in the way that McRobbie outlines, as a call for proper compensation for creative workers. Rather, I am interested in how the idea of Inuit’s supposedly *inherent* propensity for creative pursuits (i.e. artmaking) naturalizes the transition from life on the land to settlement living, and subsequently gives legitimacy to a seemingly reconciled present that is still fully colonial—a settler “move to innocence” par excellence (Tuck and Yang 2012, 10). The discourse around Inuit artmaking exerts teleological effects that surely influence how adequately Inuit are compensated for their work, such as by imparting a sense that Inuit are infinitely adaptable to a range of scenarios, and thus do not require substantial social supports. As I discuss in subsequent sections, with reference to self-government, the idea of creativity as an ideal form of adaptability puts responsibility on individuals for (re)establishing their wellbeing in the face of drastic social change. The rhetoric of inherent creativity promoted by the WAG emphasizes the innate resilience and adaptability of Inuit, while identifying artmaking as the source of their capacity to adjust in response to a variety of challenges. Moreover,

there is an element of inevitability in characterizing Inuit as inherently creative, insofar as this characterization locates the forward movement of time towards the current moment *in the very nature of Inuit*. The current (colonial) present always existed in Inuit, in this framing; it was merely waiting to be brought out through their creative actualization.

Art Substitutes

Problematizing the role of artmaking as an economic or cultural replacement for hunting, trapping, fishing, etc. risks leading us towards various myopic ideas about the distinction between traditional and modern Inuit culture—a dichotomy upon which the WAG catalogues, to the gallery's credit, hardly ever fall back. Hence, we are better to interrogate how the catalogues narrativize the transition from hunting to artmaking as both unavoidable and desirable. The supposed inevitability of this transition seems to hinge on the appeal of artmaking, which extends into the catalogues' celebration of Inuit aesthetic autonomy, or the ability to make art in the fashion of one's choosing and sell it at whatever price one likes. The degree to which this promotion of aesthetic agency discursively sidesteps political autonomy is another matter. Indeed, aesthetic autonomy is remarkably compatible with settler-colonial ontologies vis-à-vis the capacity of the nation-state to accommodate various forms of cultural difference, while also nurturing individualized, capitalist subjects. Aesthetic autonomy's public appeal and its usefulness to the settler-colonial culturalization of politics help to explain why readers might readily embrace the idea that an economy rooted in artmaking was always already immanent in the mid-20th century.

According to Larmour, “One fact, however, must be obvious. The world was too much with the caribou hunters. Life and the pursuit of food left little time for the pursuit of happiness if that, in part at least, is to be found in the creative arts” (WAG 1964, 11). Such claims showcase the sort of prejudices that have long been used to legitimize the view that “primitive” peoples must be made “civilized,” and that Euro-Westerners are just the people to do it. And Larmour is not alone in characterizing artmaking—not to be mistaken with the production of folk art or crafts—as a practice more closely associated with civilization and leisure. In an essay for *Baffin Island*, Qallunaat art professional Gabriel Gély maintains that Houston brought “the beleaguered Inuit people a timely option in their quest for economic survival” (Driscoll 1983, 22) when he helped foster a southern market for Inuit art. Life was difficult, according to Gély, thanks to “the tyrannical demands of the traditional dog team. Their life style, as dictated by a subsistence economy, did not leave much time for leisure and the lofty pursuit of art” (23). Similarly, *Povungnituk* (1977) includes an essay noting that making art, such as carvings, “provided the Eskimo people with a commodity whose advantages over seasonal, expensive and chancy dependence upon game are self evident [sic],” and allowed Inuit an alternative to the unpredictability that came along with hunting white fox, the market for which could no longer support hunters and their families (Blodgett 1977c, 13).

Rankin Inlet Ceramics insists that art production was a “happier” form of “creative thinking” than other misconceived options offered by the federal government in the wake of declining production at the local nickel mine, which included a failed attempt

at establishing a factory for producing canned seal and whale meat (Shirley and Wight 2003, 8). Such framings of the recent history of the Arctic cast art as the best option in a situation that was lamentable but could not be avoided. Still, the catalogues suggest that Inuit have not always viewed making and selling art as an ideal substitute for life on the land. Horn, who once managed the Sanikiluaq Co-op, reports that carvers were often not proud of their work, seeing carving as “not as bad as welfare, but not as good as going hunting or getting a job.” It was a widely-held sentiment that “White people buy carvings to help the Inuit,” rather than because of their intrinsic worth or appeal (Driscoll 1981, 11). There are also cases when artmaking is described as a default, or an alternative for other forms of labour that become untenable, as described in the brochure for *John Kavik / Mark Emerak* (Driscoll 1981, np). There, readers learn how Kavik took up carving after the federal government resettled his community in the 1950s; Utqusiksalimmiut, Kavik’s people, were driven to the new community by starvation. The new settlements had a nickel mine, but Kavik was physically unfit for the work, so he took up carving instead (np). The catalogue for *Eskimo Point* simply states that “Inuit began to make money from their carvings then, and this was good because there was no other way to make a living” (Anoe, qtd in Driscoll 1982b, 9). These blunt depictions address the complexities of histories; in their messiness, they have a ring of truth to them, even if they do little to disrupt the sense of inevitability also imparted by the stories in which making and selling art is depicted as the preferred, superior, and obvious alternative to life on the land. More frequently, though, the catalogues approach the turn to artmaking as a revelation, or at least a practice that is faithful to “authentic” Inuit lifeways.

Despite the ongoing, multi-sided debate about how well art works as an alternative to living from hunting and trapping, of greater relevance for my analysis is the way that the catalogues depict artmaking as an improvement on previous Inuit sustenance practices, insofar as creative pursuits are both the source and product of extra time, which casts art as both the cause and product of social change—and ultimately desirable. Not only is art seen as a suitable replacement for nomadic living, but settlement life is actually identified as a *precondition* for artmaking, which catalogues frequently frame as a fait accompli. The introduction for *ItuKiagatta! Inuit Sculpture from the Collection of the TD Bank Financial Group*, which accompanies a touring exhibition that stopped at the WAG in 2005, reports that it was not until “Inuit *gave up* their semi-nomadic way of life to settle in communities... that many of them became artists” (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 10 my emphasis). In this framing, Inuit could never have come to produce art, and especially not the type of bulky and varied forms held dear by the southern art market, if they never moved to settlements. Moreover, the suggestion here is that Inuit social change was a form of relief, of happy *surrender*—a *giving up*—rather than the result of a multi-faceted and determined project on the part of the state. The view of settlement life that the catalogues carve out is idealized and antiseptic, and implicitly dismisses Inuit accounts of being moved to centralized communities. In this context, creative production stands in not only as a privileged source of income, but as an acceptable way for Inuit to express their culture, absent the nomadic way of life that once made Inuit so difficult to govern (Sengupta 2015, 142).

The catalogue's generally sunny equation between autonomy and artmaking is characteristic of affirmative recognition culture, which emphasizes that self-actualization can be found through art and beauty and suggests that decolonization can be achieved through better recognition of the value of Indigenous cultural expression. In the case of the Inuit exhibition catalogues, there is some ambiguity regarding who exactly benefits from the circulation of Inuit art: southerners have their status as good Canadians confirmed by taking a proper stance on the cultural production of the Far North; Inuit have the value of their art recognized, as (meagre) compensation for the violences of settler colonialism; and the nation-state gets to pretend that settler colonialism is a thing of the past, thereby acquiring status as equal parts enlightened and post-colonial. In their tale of the move to settlement life, the WAG catalogues privilege cultural production while suggesting that other, non-artistic forms of industry are antithetical to Inuit self-actualization. Robert Williamson, in an essay for the Settlement Series exhibition *Rankin Inlet / Kangirlling*, writes that the new resource extraction economy in Rankin Inlet had a negative impact on the creative output of the residents:

And in the mining town, the old creative contexts—family and land and cosmic cadences that all in nature lived by—came to mean a little less each month ... Living with the group of southern men whose values, needs and culture were so different, many came to feel their culture stood for very little, then or for the future. So they lost their confidence to draw upon the finest source of creativity. (Williamson in Driscoll 1980b, 14)

Williamson's depiction does more than demonize resource extraction and cast the colonial present as the result of a loss of Inuit self-confidence. It also reconciles two disparate ways of life, through a generous definition of creativity: the supposedly inherent creativity of a harmonious, traditional life on the land, and the creativity of artmaking,

whereby artists could experience and express elements of life on the land while actually living in Canadian “enclaves” (Qikiqtani 2014, 16). Artmaking is made to stand in for life on the land; indeed, the two are seen as virtually the same. This equation frames Inuit art as a beneficial, even preferred, replacement for other and prior sustenance practices. It identifies social change as a problem not for society, but for creative work, thereby framing settler-colonial violence as *aesthetic* or *cultural* violence. In wondering whether creative expression can be recuperated, Williamson suggests that the most significant violation that has occurred against life in the Arctic might be the impact that engaging with Southerners had on Inuit *creativity*. In fact, Williamson’s phrasing harkens to the ideals that Marcuse castigates in his suggestion that restoring self-confidence through access to the ephemeral ideals of life—in this case, culture—is the most effective elixir for an inequitable social and political reality.

At the very least, artmaking is treated as having offered an alternative to nomadic lifestyles, meaning that it acquired special value once the federal government began executing its resettlement projects. For instance, the brochure for a Harold Qarliksaq retrospective highlights how art stepped in as a substitute for fading lifeways, noting that the artist began drawing as part of the crafts program that the federal government had introduced “to provide employment for Inuit forced off the land”—a program that was, as in many cases described throughout the catalogues, supported by sympathetic southerners who oversaw such programs (WAG 2001, np; see also Wight 2003, 79). Here we get a history, certainly; it is also a narrative shaped by artmaking’s tragic but ultimately beneficial role as a replacement for a purportedly always already doomed way of life. The

brochure is characteristically passive²⁸ about the state's drive to make Inuit easier to govern, while also using them as proxies in the interests of demonstrating effective occupation. Rather than striving for a full account of the state's complicity, it emphasizes Canada's good intentions, recalling "starvation [that] caused the death of many Inuit" and "[c]aribou migration routes [that] had changed in the late 1950s" as the reasons for the government intervening, reportedly determined "to avoid further deaths." *Inuit Prints* offers a similarly anodyne treatment of settler-colonial history, stating only that, "[w]ith the market for fox pelts in steep decline, many Inuit began to move away from a subsistence life in camps... and took up permanent residence in the rapidly growing settlements, which offered opportunities for education, healthcare and employment" (Vorano, et al. 2011, 6. The catalogues' rosy characterizations of the benefits of settlements are repeated in recent government reports on the history of federal government interventions in the North (Bonesteel and Anderson 2008, x; 17; 60. These depictions of colonial intervention elide the fact that "centralization of health, education and other government services provision" for recently resettled Inuit was part of the federal government's initiative to consolidate control over the people and resources of the Arctic (Sengupta 2015, 142), and overshadow first-hand assertions like Kuptana's, which maintain that the government facilitated the move to settlements in order to undercut Inuit autonomy, disrupt traditional lifeways, and halt the transmission of cultural knowledge.

If art's affirmative capacity allows readers to accept the (supposedly) inevitable reordering of Inuit lifeways, art patrons are further persuaded to this position by the

²⁸ Thanks to Dr. Amber Dean, for pressing me to not reproduce this passivity in my own descriptions of social disruption in the Arctic.

suggestion that the dissolution of the fur trade allowed for Inuit art to be viewed as aesthetically valuable—as art proper—rather than as handicraft. Wight explains, in a pamphlet for an exhibition from the HBC Collection, that selling art between the 1920s and 1940s—at that time marketed as “handicraft”—was a supplement for fur-trading, merely complementing the more serious business of trapping and selling. It was only after the decline of the fur trade that the pieces began to be traded as works of art (Wight 1992, 1). As I discussed in Chapter 2, creative works have traditionally attained higher cultural capital when they are viewed as art rather than craft, although this calculus is not exactly in line with the WAG’s ambivalent framing of Inuit art, which employs both ethnographic and aesthetic terms. Neither does the HBC exhibit pamphlet undercut the gallery’s nuanced take, considering that it is describing how trading posts perceived the works that they sold, rather than focusing on how the gallery itself would have categorized those works. Nevertheless, the pamphlet is making a point about the effect of changing trade relations on how Inuit culture and the artworks produced therein were understood in the mid-20th century. The reader is left with the sense that, had the fur trade persisted, Inuit artmaking would have remained on the margins of the economy. Readers might conclude that most southerners would never have gained easy and regular access to Inuit art-pieces—presenting an alternative present perhaps too depressing for many Canadian art-lovers to consider.

Artmaking is not simply a desirable substitute for hunting and trapping. In the narrative offered by the WAG, there is something about the capacity of art for preserving the past that soothes and legitimizes violent and coercive social change, thereby

minimizing the otherwise tragic elements of the tale of the Far North. In addition to art's representational capacity, explored in Chapter 2, the catalogues emphasize that art can store moments in time. *The Inuit Amautik*, a catalogue for an exhibition featuring the titular traditional garb of Inuit women, reports,

Undoubtedly, Inuit life has changed radically in the last twenty or thirty years. Yet, this is precisely the period of time during which Inuit art has flourished. It is through the work of contemporary Inuit artists that we as outsiders are offered a means of seeing and understanding the traditions, values, variety and humour of Inuit life. Through sculpture, drawing, and printmaking, we are given an insight [sic] into the past and the changing present. (Driscoll 1980a, 20)

In this framing, art encapsulates and preserves culture—a conception of history wherein art is meant to enable the journey from the mid-century to the contemporary. Readers are encouraged to see the art on display as not only holding a historical instant—something that once happened, one time—but an unbounded, yet past, epoch, characterized by a specific way of being in the world that has gone dormant. The capacity of the art on display to preserve the past is tied to its ambivalent nature, at least in the view of the gallery. Thanks to art's presumed benevolence, coupled with the idea that art bolsters the understanding that “we as outsiders” have of Inuit culture, the catalogues offer a virtually seamless narrative about mid-20th century social change in the Arctic: one in which the decline in hunting, trapping, and nomadic life butted up against a concurrent boom in art-making. Readers get a sense of this from an essay in *The first passionate collector*, which reports that the speed of change “at the end of the 1940s in Arctic Quebec was breathtaking, and an important catalyst in the process must surely have been the ‘discovery’ of Inuit art and its possibilities in Inuit economic life” (Butler and Wight 1991, 29). Such framings present art as itself an agent of change—as both the catalyst for

the process and the process itself—further naturalizing entrenched settler-colonial relations in the present by suggesting that artmaking, as a creative and economic practice, had its own influence on social changes in the Canadian Far North. Given its role as a supplement to a traditional economy that is supposedly declining naturally, readers encounter art as, at once, the *impetus* as well as the *product* of social change.

Art Preserves

In the story that catalogues tell about the desirability and inevitability of the transition facilitated by artmaking, art preserves the past while allowing those who make art to “move on.” In fact, in this view, Inuit had to “move on”—enjoy the benefits of having more time and energy to create—in order to properly encase the past in works of art. The catalogues encourage readers to conclude that Inuit had to create art to preserve a way of life that was destined to disappear. Art is thus a mechanism of containment and disappearance: it provides Inuit a desirable substitute for prior lifeways, while at the same time preserving them. This idea of art preserving culture so that people can “move on” echoes my argument from Chapter 2, where I interrogated the idea, implied by the WAG’s catalogues, that artworks function as metonyms for culture, serving as both a bridge and window to Inuit experience. In the following section I build on the supposedly direct relationship between art and culture that the WAG catalogues mobilize to propose that the idea of art encapsulating and preserving culture compounds the narratives of inevitability and pastness that give shape to the colonial present. In addition to cushioning the blow of what the official history of the Arctic characterizes as an inevitable, if

somewhat regrettable, process of modernization, as put forth by the catalogues, readers of the catalogues are encouraged to accept that Inuit artworks encapsulate and preserve Inuit's past. That Inuit traditions can survive through new practices seems worth celebrating. Indeed, the idea that Indigenous traditions retain their core values even (especially) in evolved or adapted forms is an important consideration, and is certainly consistent with the work of Indigenous cultural critics.²⁹ However, *Inuit* adaptation has been thoroughly and frequently narrativized in line with colonial fantasies of naturalness, minimizing settler complicity in the factors that have contributed to social change in the Arctic, as well as refusing the possibility that we could have ended up with different versions of the present.

The catalogues are often explicit about how artistic practice and representation work to encapsulate Inuit history, while harmonizing this preserved past with the colonial present. Reading the introductory essays for *Tuu'luq / Anguhadluq*, the catalogue for an exhibition of the work of an Inuit couple, I am intrigued by the fact that Blodgett aligns traditional Inuit practices with contemporary artmaking: "Tuu'luq's subject matter and her technique are directly derived from her previous experiences and activities on the land. She has not only adapted to a new way of life in the settlement[,],she has adapted her particular skills and expertise to new forms of expression" (1976b, np). The catalogue naturalizes the idea that an economy centred on Inuit artmaking exists on a continuum

²⁹ Simon Ortiz's essay "Towards a National Indian Literature" and *Red on Red* by Craig Womack are two foundational elaborations of this argument. See also Mi'kmaw feminist scholar Margaret Robinson's somewhat iconoclastic essay "Veganism & Mi'kmaq legends" (2013), which suggests that Mi'kmaq legends provide a philosophical basis for a vegan lifestyle, complicating the idea that vegan ideals must be intrinsically anti-Indigenous.

with life on the land; more than that, though, it proposes that art represents Inuit life, insofar as artists depict traditional experiences through their work. For instance, Blodgett writes that some of Tuu'luq's hangings depict human-nonhuman interactions, "much as the Eskimos themselves lived in harmony with the animal and spirit world in the past" (np). Later, she observes that Anguhadluq's "spontaneity of expression evokes the instinctual and quick reactions of the big-game hunter and with him we relive the traditional Eskimo life on the tundra" (np). The brochure for the Harold Qarliksaq solo exhibition (WAG 2001) is similarly effusive about the way that artmaking aligns with the subtle skills that allowed Inuit to live on the land, noting that "[Qarliksaq's] use of two orientations evokes a sense of the vastness of the land and movement through the land by a migratory people who changed campsites frequently" (np). In *The Inuit Imagination*, guest curators Seidelman and Turner discuss how communities were emptied of people when tuberculosis epidemics hit. In the early 1990s, people began resettling original communities: "attempting to recapture part of their authentic culture, it is not surprising that much of the art produced there has been inspired by the narrative tradition" (1993, 113). The curators recommend that readers view the relationship between contemporary art and pre-1950s Inuit lifeways while considering the adaptability and fluidity of culture, Inuit or otherwise. Focus should be "on the cultural meaning of the new forms in contemporary Inuit society," suggesting that traditional values can persist in contemporary aesthetic forms (143).

A catalogue for an exhibition of Baker Lake artists emphasizes the importance of carvers to Inuit cultural vitality: "Over the past thirty-five years, the Baker Lake carvers

have played an important role in preserving and revitalizing Inuit culture” (Bouchard 2000, 5); later, collector John K.B. Robertson adds, “The Inuit of today are no longer dependent upon the materials provided by nature, but this new sophistication in material things has done little to destroy the rich heritage of myth and legend, that is to say, belief, which in Inuit art is the silent but eloquent witness to a long and perhaps indestructible tradition” (16). Art, in this telling, is both a supplement and a bystander, silent but also eloquent, somehow, which demonstrates the multiple purposes that art is meant to serve. Thanks to its rhetorical flexibility and feel-good character, Inuit artmaking serves as one of the discursive axes upon which the colonial present turns. In “My Ideas Come from Up in the Air,” Inuit artist Lypa Pitsulak describes how artmaking evokes and contains the past, hinting at its myriad meanings and effects: “I also do drawings of the Inuit and how they used to live. That way the true Inuit way of life can be seen more clearly through drawings and carvings. When you do these drawings, it really reminds you of that way of life. The picture might look like just a drawing, but in my mind it is following the old Inuit way of life and how they used to live” (Driscoll 1983, 13). Later, she elaborates that “it is the artists who still live according to the old Inuit way of life who can help other people to see and hear what the old Inuit way of life was like” (17). Pitsulak’s characterization suggests that art preserves Inuit culture in three ways here: the artworks themselves represent elements of “the old Inuit way of life”; the artworks evoke Inuit lifeways by reproducing “that way of life” for art patrons as well as for Inuit more generally; and, finally, artists who create in accordance with Inuit traditions thereby represent and enact Inuitness through their work. As the catalogue *Napachie Pootoogook*

notes, exhibitions offer a glimpse of artists' experience of the mid-century transition, enabling visitors, in the case of Pootoogook's exhibition, "to gain insights into the life of an Inuit woman who experienced the dramatic social, economic, and religious upheavals that occurred in the Canadian Arctic in the 1950s" (Ryan and Wight 2004, 9). Hence, artists who create preservational work serve multiple purposes, *enshrining* the past while also *reminding viewers of that past*—both ways in which the artist is said to retain their own identity as Inuit.

In *Keewatin*, Larmour declares that a "collection of [Inuit] carvings represents an achievement all the more poignant when the environment in which they were created is remembered" (WAG 1964, 11); the suggestion here is that art can enshrine the North so that it might be recalled with fidelity. Regardless of Larmour's intent, by emphasizing the ability of artworks to enshrine the past, this catalogue and others like it uncritically identify what Clifford terms the "salvage paradigm" (1989, 73) at work in many of the collectors' projects. One such pamphlet notes that the Abbotts, whose collection is featured in the corresponding exhibition, intended "to collect works which depicted the traditional everyday life of the Inuit—before this life passed from memory" (WAG 1980, np). The grammar of this sentence is intriguingly ambiguous. Did the Abbotts collect works that preserved an Inuit way of life that has otherwise already been forgotten? Or was the Abbotts's intention to collect art to guard against an immanent forgetting, which perhaps has yet to occur? Following the WAG's casting of the preservational qualities of art, are we meant to conclude that the Arctic is something that will one day need to be remembered, or is the catalogue simply noting that the artworks recall a time that is

already gone? Further, can art preserve the past, while also allowing settler-colonial society in Canada to *seem* to address, while actually compartmentalizing and trivializing, ongoing violence—and even future violence?

What is crucial is that the preservational qualities of Inuit art also give it a forward drive, allowing Inuit to leave the past behind. For example, Craig Wells, in *Pangnirtung Printmaking: Heritage and Survival*, reports that the exhibition

seeks to recall with fond memory... an historical past for which printmaking now provides an important, permanent record of this people's unique way of seeing their world... Although the legacies of an earlier era have diminished significance today, they are still ingrained in the culture and creatively expressed in the prints by the Inuit of Pangnirtung who seek to communicate their ancestry within a contemporary life full of future concerns. This is both the heritage and survival of Pangnirtung. (1993, 1)

The strategy of celebrating preservation in the context of cultural change reflects a framework, often associated with early-20th century anthropology, in which objects associated with a “lower” or “weaker” culture are retained as artifacts, in response to the fact that Inuit culture is presumed bound to disappear, at least in the eyes of the cultures that hope to dominate it. Clifford once observed a similar tendency in

many ethnographies and travel accounts [that] continue to be written in the style of *après moi le deluge*, with the exotic culture in question inevitably undergoing ‘fatal’ changes. We still regularly encounter ‘the last traditional Indian beadworker’, or the last ‘stone age people’. The salvage paradigm, reflecting a desire to rescue something ‘authentic’ out of destructive historical changes, is alive and well. It is found in ethnographic writing, in the connoisseurship and collections of the art world, in a range of familiar nostalgias. (73)

The Abbotts, at least in the pamphlet's telling, seem to be articulating popular ideas about Inuit authenticity and the way that the drastic changes of the mid-20th century threatened Inuit culture. The collectors' insistence that art ensured the cultural survival of Inuit is

founded in reality, of course. At the same time, the rationale behind their collecting reveals a romantic longing for an imaginary pre-contact Canada inhabited by the always already doomed Native—one of settler colonialism’s cherished founding fantasies. More to the point is the fact that salvage collection practices indulge the Canadian settler art-lover’s “familiar nostalgia” for a culture whose so-called true character is being eroded, and, consequently, will at some point only be available through art. Tasking art with salvaging culture allows ethnographers and art patrons alike to ignore our own complicity, both in the material processes that violate the culture that they idealize—like occupying stolen land and state-licensed resource extraction—but also in the settler discourses of benevolence and inevitability that naturalize existing social relations.

More recent catalogues have turned from documenting the creative adaptations of Inuit *communities* to focusing on how *individuals* have experienced changes in the Far North, as well as how art helped them navigate the new social terrain on which they found themselves. The introduction to the solo exhibition for Abraham Anghik Ruben (Anghik and Wight 2001) describes how the artist’s “[l]ife on the land” ended when he went to residential school in Inuvik. This was a “painful period” when he was “incapable of surviving in the Canadian mainstream and lost to his native language and cultural roots.” The catalogue then suggests that creating art enabled him to bridge the divide between himself and Canadian culture while continuing to maintain contact with Inuit culture, beginning with taking art classes in Alaska (6). On one hand, the catalogue exemplifies a general tendency towards describing artmaking as a positive outcome that outweighs the enormous, often destructive impact of settler colonialism in the Far North,

thereby permitting art patrons to view southern intervention in the Arctic as a “painful period” that has thankfully passed. This is not the only teleological formulation at play in the introduction, however. Indeed, the concept of “roots” has particular connotations for thinking about time, identity, and inheritance. In the catalogues, the term is used to reference an archaic Inuit essence to which those in the present are connected. As the catalogue for the touring exhibition, *Our Land: Contemporary Art from the Arctic* maintains, “Inuit art is nourished by its ancient cultural roots,” allowing that modern forms like printmaking and photography are informed by past artistic endeavours like dancing and carving (Peabody 2004, 22). Roots delineate ancestry, as well as an unbroken connection between one’s history and one’s current being and place in the world. In the view of the catalogues, art re-establishes the roots of Inuit culture—the link between their past and present—as well as the Inuit artists who create works that generate such roots. Inuit artmaking forges roots, establishing a connection with place while also signifying succession. Inuit art thus works to bolster prior occupancy, which resonates with the Northern Strategy. Not only that, but settler art patrons might establish a retroactive sense of rootedness through art appreciation. This anachronistic belonging from afar actualizes the sort of magical thinking that the federal government’s policy for Arctic sovereignty relies upon: namely, that insofar as Inuit have been in the Arctic for thousands of years, then so, somehow, has Canada.

The catalogue for the solo exhibition *Ningiukulu Teevee: Kinngait Stories* describes how the artist’s “visual vocabulary... results in artworks that preserve a treasured history while forming a significant contribution to Canadian art” (Wight 2017,

24). Hence, the catalogue suggests that art encapsulates a time that is now gone, allowing Inuit and non-Inuit to see and understand past lifeways, while safely containing them. In addition to suggesting that artworks can contain culture, this characterization also has a temporal effect, endorsing the idea that life in the Arctic has progressed, thanks to art's capacity to preserve the past. Inuit culture is allowed to be an "indestructible tradition" (Blodgett 1986, 16) largely *because* it persists within the testimony of creative expression. To understand the significance of the received preservational capacity of Inuit art, we should recall the requirements that Canada has to fulfill in order to establish a claim over the Arctic. It is incumbent on the nation state to establish prior occupancy by acknowledging that Inuit have long resided in the Arctic. For the nation-state to identify an established right to the space requires it to align itself with Inuit—whether by making Inuit essentially Canadian, or by instilling in southerners a sense of having a longstanding and legitimate affective claim to the North (and by extension to Inuit themselves). As discussed in Chapter 2, collapsing Inuit art under the banner of a universal aesthetics serves to cast Inuitness as a form of cultural difference that can be accommodated by Canadian multiculturalism (culture and economics) and nation state sovereignty (government). The reference to a preservational art form that contains the past while contributing to Canada's cultural landscape serves a similar function—with the added feature of naturalizing the idea that Inuit and Canada share a future. Moreover, viewing Inuit art as simultaneously Canadian *and* preserving an ancient, almost exotic culture assigns a veneer of antiquity to the Canadian nation state, at least regarding Arctic occupancy. In other words, celebrating Inuit art and its capacity to preserve the past

allows southerners to retroactively cast Inuit art as always already Canadian art, and thereby to define Canada and Canadians as always already having a claim to the North.

In short, art appreciation works to naturalize Inuit's transition from living on the land to living in settlements. The temporal qualities of Inuit creativity, in the catalogues' telling, also go beyond the works of art themselves, to include the act of artmaking, as well as the processes through which Inuit use artmaking to support themselves. The critical framework that allows insight into how art interpretation works to legitimize a settler *telos* is similarly useful for interpreting the stories that the WAG catalogues tell about the political and economic structures surrounding Inuit artmaking, such as the Arctic co-op movement. Of particular interest is how the catalogues frame the movement, advancing the idea that Inuit *political* autonomy can be most effectively achieved through *aesthetic* autonomy, in terms of exercising control over the forms that creative production takes, as well as how Inuit creative work is marketed and sold.

The Arctic Co-op Movement

Lou Hammond Ketilson and Ian MacPherson have produced perhaps the most comprehensive histories of the Inuit co-operative movement. They explain that co-ops started in the 19th century, in Eastern Canada, to support the burgeoning dairy industry, moving to the West at the start of the 20th century (Hammond Ketilson 2016, 422). In the Arctic, co-operatives served a purpose unique to the North, facilitating the consolidation of government authority: "The government of Canada was particularly interested in establishing permanent communities because it was concerned about sovereignty issues.

The development of [co-operatives] can also be seen at least partly as a way that the federal government encouraged southern forms of stability in the Arctic regions” (MacPherson 2009, 61; see also Tester and Kulchyski 1994). Notwithstanding their early usefulness to colonialism in the North, today most of the co-ops found in the Arctic are “multipurpose” stores that supply remote northern communities with a range of goods and services, from groceries to financial products (Ketilson 2016, 437-38): “Most Arctic co-operatives... engage in a variety of activities, including the marketing of crafts, the repair of snowmobiles, the operation of hotels and local airports, and the organization of tourist activities” (445). These co-operatives

had their beginnings during the late 1950s and expanded rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s, in large part because of the efforts of public servants in Northern Affairs and other ‘southerners’ aware of, and committed to, co-operative development. The co-operative approach has proved to be very popular in the Arctic and increasingly in the North generally. (440-1)

The Arctic co-operatives now comprise two federations: Arctic Co-operatives Limited (ACL), serving Nunavut and Northwest Territories (NT), and la Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau Québec (FCNA), in Nunavik. The federations provide the benefits of a large, unified organization in terms of operating efficiency in the market, but also bring the concerns of their members to the federal government, thereby bolstering the political agency of people in the North (442).

Whether or not Inuit had the capacity to oversee their own art market was a subject of debate amongst southern bureaucrats and art workers in the mid- and late-20th century. The minutes of a 1982 meeting at the Conference for Curators and Specialists who work with Inuit Art document some obvious conflict about what it means for Inuit to

be involved in decisions around the marketing of their art. At one point, Swinton comments on the paternalism of the Inuit Art Council, deriding the fact that southerners have the final say about which pieces are approved for sale, and arguing that “there is a gravity towards Ottawa which [he thinks] is unhealthy” (Canada 1983). The exchange reveals a tension between meeting members regarding whether they should decentralize control over the Inuit art market. This question seems to inform other debates, particularly those regarding whether Inuit are capable of making decisions about governance in the Far North more broadly. In response to Swinton’s concern, Virginia Watt opines that Inuit have shown no drive for planning and organizing. Instead, they are “indifferent to [the Council’s] entire endeavour. Their attendance has been virtually non-existent, no matter who we have invited... What I am saying at this point is that if the Inuit are capable of doing that”—presumably making decisions about art production and marketing—“themselves then I, as an Eskimo Arts Council member for eight years, would have to see evidence of that. So far I have not seen it” (27). Given this remarkably paternalistic and repugnant assessment of Inuit capacity, is it not worth celebrating the fact that Inuit have managed to wrest control over the marketing of their artworks from southerners, while also achieving autonomy from southern companies like the HBC? Perhaps; but we should also consider the stakes of framing Inuit’s induction into a market economy, wherein art plays such a central role, as the pinnacle of Inuit social cohesion and political agency. We might ask, to what degree have mainstream views of Inuit aesthetic and market autonomy—best emblemized by the Inuit co-op movement—been

influenced by the idea that Inuit engagement with State art-marketing projects is equal to Inuit *political* capacity?

The WAG catalogues frequently reference the development of co-ops in the North. Such accounts tend to characterize the co-ops as enabling Inuit to exert control over their lives and their communities; these stories reference Inuit's ability to freely participate in the cash economy, but are ultimately about art-production and marketing. The transition from fur to art is *related to* but not *the same as* the emergence of co-ops. Likewise, the idea that aesthetics offers autonomy dovetails with the catalogues' depiction of the co-ops. These ideals are bolstered by the WAG catalogues' likening of the Inuit co-op movement to the creation of Nunavut, which saddles Inuit autonomy in art-creation with the problems and possibilities that come with self-government in Canada. The northern co-ops are an actual system providing much-needed services to northerners; they also function as a flexible and accommodating signifier, ready to be assigned any number of purposes. How does the catalogues' storytelling about the co-ops infuse the co-op system with meaning, and how does this meaning build upon entrenched and powerful values pertaining to creativity and self-government?

Thus far in this chapter, I have argued that the catalogues muster the rhetorical influence of art-creation in a way that evokes a sense that colonialism in the Arctic was always already certain. Of course, given the fact that it is, after all, an institution dedicated to art, the WAG's catalogues should be expected to focus on the place of art in the co-ops, and downplay the co-op's other functions, like serving as an outfitter, and even as a bank. However, as the ACL website indicates, the marketing of arts and crafts is

one of the co-op system's primary aims: the organizations first stated objective is to "provid[e] the highest long-term return for arts and crafts through the promotion and marketing of member produced products."³⁰ Beyond the ACL, art plays a central role in the story of the co-op movement. For instance, officials have claimed that Inuit lamps made from limestone became works of art thanks to the encouragement of missionaries, which led to the birth of the Holman Eskimo Co-operative" (Mitchell 1996, 172). As for artists, co-ops oversee the marketing of their work and help ensure that they receive optimal returns for their time and talents (Hammond Ketilson 2016, 448). The co-ops have played, and continue to play, a major role in the commercialization of Inuit art. A productive interplay exists between the economic autonomy of the co-op system and artmaking. Thankfully, the WAG catalogues offer the means for such an analysis.

A number of the catalogues discuss individual co-ops (Driscoll 1983; Wight 2001), while others reference the co-ops as a general, monolithic movement (Butler and Wight 1991; Winnipeg 1992; Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005; Wight 2013). One of the earliest references to co-ops is in the 1977 catalogue *Povungnituk*, which recounts how the titular community was created from "a conglomerate of traditional camps," whose residents had to relocate when members of their family were sent southwards for Tuberculosis treatment (7). The effect was the creation of a purportedly "cosmopolitan" community wherein a newly-formed co-op enabled cultural survival and political agency:

In the social sphere, [Inuit from Povungnituk] have adapted with seeming ease to co-existence with the white community, taking what they can use from the newcomers but never losing their knowledge of and respect for the old culture. They were one of the first groups of Eskimos to adopt the cooperative mode of

³⁰ <http://www.arcticco-op.com/about-acl-mission.htm>

business and, in recent years, the Povungnituk people have begun to assert themselves politically...” (Blodgett 1977c, 7)

The WAG mounted an exhibition in 2013 to celebrate the gallery’s Centennial and to demonstrate its “pivotal role in documenting the development of Inuit art” (Wight 2013, x). As its title, *Creation and transformation: defining moments in Inuit art*, indicates, the exhibition purports to present pivotal instances in the history of art from the North. One of these moments is “The 1960s: The Rise of Inuit Co-operatives”—a chapter that glosses the move to settlement life and the role of the art market therein: “In the 1960s Inuit-owned co-operatives were established across the Canadian Arctic to support the expanding arts and crafts industry. The arts provided employment to many of the people who had recently given up”—that term again!—“a migratory lifestyle and moved into settlements” (Wight 2013, 59). Once again, art is cast as a celebrated substitute for life on the land. In this case, however, the co-ops serve a discursive function, whereby they further facilitate the much-lauded transition. The catalogues’ depiction of the co-ops treats the move to settlements as a *fait accompli*, and thereby naturalizes the transition from nomadic to community existence. Moreover, the place of art in the co-ops provides an element of cultural relevance, encouraging readers to view the stores as vital sites of Inuit expression (culture / art) and autonomy (art / economy). Not only do the co-ops allow Inuit to generate revenue, but they ensure that local artists have authority over the types of artworks that they create, which multiple catalogues reference, including *ItuKiagatta!* (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 11). In terms of affirmative recognition culture, the discourse surrounding the co-ops constructs artmaking as decolonial liberation, and enlists aesthetic independence as a benign form of political and economic agency,

through a generalized valorization of market autonomy.

The catalogues frequently claim that co-ops establish a connection between Inuit cultural expression, creative independence, and economic autonomy. The catalogues' understanding of the *co-ops* deploys language that the gallery has already developed to conceptualize Inuit material culture for settler patrons. The assertion that co-ops facilitate creativity, economic autonomy, while also enshrining "cultural history" invokes and reproduces concomitant ideals of Inuitness as a form of cultural difference that is best expressed through and preserved—not to mention commodified—in art. The catalogues weave a rhetorical thread between land, creativity, innate talent, culture, and autonomy, inviting readers to consider that Inuit were perhaps destined to evolve from life on the land by achieving self-sufficiency and spending the present making and marketing art. They therefore draw on prevailing ideas about the value of art, and implicitly dismiss the fact that Canadian colonial authority benefits from the artistic and economic evolution in the Far North that the catalogues celebrate.

Some catalogues even go so far as to suggest that co-ops embody the essence of Inuit identity. *Povungnituk*, for instance, declares, "The Pov co-op has always thought of itself as a cultural unit, using economics to further their development as *Inuit*, the people. The co-op has obviously filled an emotional need of the Pov people and how fascinating it would be, although possibly beyond human scope, to trace this need to its origins in Eskimo-prehistory" (Blodgett 1977c, 13). On one hand, the catalogues suggest that Inuit art makes life less tragic. It preserves Inuit culture so that people of the Arctic could inhabit a present evacuated of daily cultural practices. The reference to an "emotional

need” goes beyond a core Inuit identity, instead implying that developing and running a co-op system offered entry into modernity, allowing Inuit a means for achieving a more sophisticated form of intellectual, creative sustenance, beyond the prosaic demands of physical survival. The co-ops are also supposed to derive *from* a core Inuitness, suggesting that the co-ops actually have their own roots in, as *Povungnituk* speculates, the ancient Arctic. It might be too much to claim that the catalogues are offering a fantasy wherein the co-ops serve as a link between the past and present, which could retroactively cast the Arctic as always already the jurisdiction of the modern Canadian nation-state. At the same time, such depictions of the co-op as an institution that has inherent ties to Inuit culture reveal a desire for a version of Inuitness that provides outsiders a sense of belonging predicated on a shared connection to the North—one that is simultaneously a connection to the past.

The beginning of what is commonly referred to as the “Contemporary Period” of Inuit art, which began with James Houston’s fabled arrival in the Far North and the subsequent launching of a southern Inuit art market in Montreal (Shirley and Wight 2003, 7), coincided with the start of radical social upheaval for Inuit in the Canadian Arctic. Stories that focus on the value of Inuit art at the time of transition figure settler colonialism as a moment, around the middle of the 20th century, when Inuit moved en masse to settlements, during which the HBC took control of the new Inuit art market. Against this narrative, art serves two roles: as I have already explored, it allows for Inuit in settlements to support themselves now that they are not able to live off of hunting and trapping as they once did; and autonomy in artmaking and the art market, through a

nascent co-op system, enables Inuit to shake free from the constraints imposed by southern companies—namely, the HBC.

In the catalogues' framing, Inuit artists unseating HBC control coincides with the decline of the fur trade, another way in which they naturalize the transition from hunting and trapping to artmaking. The catalogue for works from Inoucdjouac (Port Harrison)—which was also the first community featured in the Settlement Series—states that the community's mainly-Anglican residents tended “to view the co-op movement as a ‘Catholic Conspiracy’.” They were persuaded to incorporate a co-operative after “an abrupt cessation of carving purchases by the HBC” (Blodgett 1977b, 15). As the HBC's purchasing was “erratic” and contingent on the availability of fur, founding a cooperative enabled residents of Inoucdjouac to develop a stable market for their carvings, which had become a major part of life in the community (15). In the same way that the drop-off in fur trading purportedly enabled the rise of artmaking, the withdrawal of the HBC and the emergence of Inuit economic self-sufficiency rely on dwindling fur sales. Here again we get a colonial teleology, wherein art and the co-ops serve as shining proof that the colonial present was always already inevitable.

Houston, in an introductory essay for *Port Harrison / Inoucdjoua*, recalls traveling to the North, and observing the way that the HBC took advantage of Inuit carvers. In Houston's telling, he meets the Hudson's Bay Company manager to discuss purchasing Inuit carvings. At the time, money is not being used in the eastern and central Arctic, so they decide upon a “future credit between Hudson's Bay House in Winnipeg and any H.B.C post to which [he] might travel” (Blodgett 1977b, 9). This means that Houston will

purchase tokens from Hudson's Bay House, and then use them to buy carvings directly from Inuit. The artists could then use these tokens to buy goods at an HBC trading post. (9)—a pretty good arrangement for the HBC. *Povungnituk* claims that co-ops were a natural next step after James Houston first enabled Inuit to sell their art in the South, suggesting that "[t]he inception of the Sculptor's Society in Povungnituk"—the model for later co-ops—"was, perhaps, the greatest innovation since Houston's discovery of a new product and a new market for Eskimos. His visits to the area in 1948-1949 provided the Povungnitungmiut [residents of Povungnituk] with an alternative to dependence upon the white fox," and an Inuit-run consortium of sculptors that later formed the foundation for the co-ops subsequently gave them "an alternative to dependence upon the Hudson's Bay Company" (Blodgett 1977b, 8).³¹ In the narrative offered by the catalogues, resisting the HBC exists on a continuum with the decline in the fur trade and the transformations of the mid-20th century discussed in the previous section. If the HBC is the villain in this tale, then Houston is the hero, rescuing Inuit from an unworthy overlord, and valiantly removing obstacles to Inuit aesthetic autonomy and southern art appreciation.

The story of Inuit using the co-ops to shake free from the HBC's monopoly on

³¹ References to the fact that the HBC played a role in preventing Inuit from participating in a cash economy do seem intended to elicit a degree of antipathy in readers, albeit one that is hard to reconcile today, given contemporary viewpoints about capitalism as antithetical to an authentic Indigenous existence. Interestingly, Houston's nod to the injustices done by the HBC, with regards to the inequities of the barter system, rejects such a potentially problematic view. Indeed, addressing Inuit's move to a cash economy is tricky. Surely there is something to be said about social problems that coincided with the turn to a cash economy, let alone those that were caused by it. Critics who have taken issue with Indigenous people in general, and Inuit in particular adopting a cash economy have failed to acknowledge how their critiques derive from colonial ideals about Indigenous purity, and thus reproduce colonial notions of authenticity (cf. Mitchell 1996).

creative products is one told by a variety of actors working well beyond the pages of the WAG catalogues. A 2008 report on the Federation de Co-operatives de Nouveau Quebec, for instance, states that co-ops are uniquely ubiquitous in the North: “residents are four times likelier to belong to a co-op than other Canadians. Co-operatives have been warmly welcomed as providing the Inuit with a way of getting away from the HBC monopoly and gaining control over some of the commercial activity in the country's North” (Canada 2008b). I am not interested in refuting this claim, or other claims about the centrality of co-ops to the contemporary life of many northerners; I take these as given. Rather, I propose that the dominant narrative about Inuit co-ops, in which the HBC plays a leading role, albeit as the antagonist, contributes to the idea that settler colonialism was an event from which the North has moved on. Moreover, the catalogues cast this “moving on” as the outcome of Inuit artmaking. The HBC acts as a jumping-off point for Inuit aesthetic autonomy, thereby establishing a discursive foundation for the unavoidability of the colonial present.

A number of studies of Indigenous co-operatives describe them as, variously, inherently conducive to Indigenous ways of life (Curl 2012, 5), and as organizations “utilized by Indigenous communities as agents of decolonization, self-determination and revitalization of communal Indigenous ways of being” (Sengupta 2015, 122), despite once being used as tools of overt colonial control. In fact, Inuit involved in running co-ops maintain that they accord with past sustenance practices. Bill Lyall, former president of the ACL and an Inuk who has been a vocal proponent of co-ops, states that Arctic co-ops have been rooted in Inuit traditional practices since their inception: “Arts and craft

production, fur harvesting, and commercial fisheries are examples of the traditional activities were the basis of the early co-operatives” (quoted in Fairbairn and Russell 2014, 219). However much co-ops can be viewed as beneficial, though—insofar as they return control to Inuit communities, seeming to foreclose undue settler meddling—such characterizations do not address how co-ops operate within discourses of neoliberal responsibilization. Specifically, as components of a responsibilization initiative, to extend Wendy Brown’s critique of governmentality in *Undoing the Demos*, co-ops “make individual agency and self-reliance (regardless of means, social position, or contingencies) the site of survival and virtue,” giving the impression that governments are being judicious in their interventions, supposedly so as not to undermine individual autonomy (2015, 131). The catalogues’ casting of making and selling art as not only forms of self-sufficiency, but actually as a sort of governance regime, discursively eliminates the need for federal support, thereby exempting the nation-state from fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities. Co-ops thus have much in common with federally-supported self-government agreements, which assign limited governmental authority to Indigenous communities, and in which Inuit were some of the first participants.

Storying Nunavut as Aesthetic Autonomy

How is reading art also a way of reading Indigenous self-government? One way to approach this question is through existing criticism that problematizes land-claim and self-government agreements. Such criticism might then offer tools for critiquing the catalogues’ framing of artmaking and art-marketing as Inuit autonomy—a framing

brought into focus when the catalogues compare the Arctic co-op movement to Inuit self-government. At times, the catalogues actually make the comparison between the co-ops and Inuit self-government explicit, such as when they liken the co-op movement to the creation of Nunavut. I am particularly interested in how the catalogues define autonomy in both instances—self-government and artmaking. What do critiques of self-government in general, and Nunavut in particular, offer that can help us interrogate the WAG catalogues' references to co-ops, which frame market autonomy as political agency par excellence? Indigenous scholars tell us that self-government agreements offer concessions in response to Indigenous requests for autonomy and self-determination, instead assigning governmental duties much like those assumed by municipalities, all in the name of facilitating a de facto extinguishment of Indigenous rights, in the interest of establishing “certainty” (Blackburn 2005). Co-ops follow similar lines, in that they are operated by and benefit Inuit; they also allow Inuit to control the form that their artworks take, as well as how they are marketed. Co-ops thus encapsulate multiple layers of creative and culturalized autonomy. The catalogues' likening of self-government to the co-ops further affirms this discursive formulation, generating a symbolic interplay between the constrained rights of self-government and the delimited autonomy of aesthetic and market autonomy. We should then consider how aestheticization of Inuit political autonomy works as a form of de facto extinguishment, actualizing, much like self-government and land claim agreements, a form of “settler certainty” (Mackey 2014) in ownership over the Arctic?

Contracts like the NCLA, in the WAG catalogues' telling, have provided the occasion for Inuit to exercise control over how their culture is represented, and how their cultural products are sold; such control, supposedly, is proof that the colonial state is loosening its hold on the Far North, and thereby signifies the region's postcolonial status. According to the catalogues, the co-ops were "an essential first step in giving Inuit control over the local economy," and eventually led them to express a desire for autonomy in governance (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 11). Self-government and the co-op movement are parallel and overlapping ways for Inuit to achieve autonomy; they are also symbolized by and actualized through artmaking and selling. Co-operative ownership and self-governance do not simply look alike, however: rather, they exert similar discursive effects. Specifically, the catalogues frequently draw comparisons between co-ops and Inuit independence more broadly, setting up the co-op system as a stand-in for political self-determination. This metonymy supports the colonial present by naturalizing the transition from fur trading to art-making, while locating Inuit autonomy solely in practices that can be easily accommodated by the settler nation-state. I see critiques of self-government as useful for addressing the WAG's approach to the place of artmaking and co-ops in the mid-20th century transition. Specifically, minoritization casts Inuit as cultural curiosities embedded in the Canadian mosaic, while the responsabilizing discourse of self-government and the co-op movement imply that Inuit are responsible for their own destiny, and that cultural expression, framed within a market economy, is the best way for Inuit to "take charge of their lives." The transitive qualities of Inuit art and

the aesthetic autonomy enacted by the co-ops provide for a form of settler certainty not unlike the quasi-extinguishment policies enshrined in present-day land-claim agreements.

The federal government began negotiating land claims agreements in 1974, after the Supreme Court of Canada determined that settler occupation of Indigenous lands did not mean that Indigenous peoples had (have) relinquished title (McConville 2017; Wonders 2003, 244), with the landmark case, *Calder et al. v. Attorney General of British Columbia* (1973). Land-claim decisions since 1974 have often included self-government agreements—most notably the Nisga’a agreement that resulted from the *Calder* decision, and the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en joint assembly from 1977. Whereas land-claim agreements are provided for by the Supreme Court, the self-government agreements enacted by land-claim processes are allowed for on the basis of recommendations by the Special Committee of the House of Commons on Indian Self-Government, whose 1983 report recommended that the federal government begin negotiating self-government agreements with Indigenous bands (Wherrett 1999, Section B). Land-claim agreements represent a positive turn in Canada’s recognition of Indigenous peoples, in that they concede that Indigenous peoples’ land rights did not terminate upon “contact,” and that title pre-dates the colonial state. However, self-government—practically and discursively—has turned out to be a limited concept that poses problems to the sociopolitical autonomy of Indigenous peoples (as well as Inuit in particular, as I detail later, with reference to Nunavut).

Self-government agreements undermine Indigenous resurgence efforts by both requiring and enacting the culturalization of Indigenous peoples. According to Janice

Switlo, self-government agreements effectively transform Indigenous peoples into “a minority group possessing minority rights in Canada,” without distinct governance practices or sovereign rights (2002, 116). Self-government agreements also represent a compromise that a number of Indigenous scholars describe as incompatible with Indigenous worldviews. Battiste and Henderson write that the very concept of “self-government” is a problem; it is “an imposed and inanimate idea. It was not similar to an Aboriginal and treaty rights clause; it was an introduction into Eurocentric imaginability surrounding power and government. All we had to do was imagine how we were going to govern our communities and limit the regulation of our lives by the federal and provincial governments” (2000, 203). Instead of conferring independence, self-government agreements subdue or erase Indigenous conceptions of property and relationship to land by subordinating Indigenous beliefs and lifeways to settler-colonial epistemologies and legal systems, making Indigenous cultures more amenable to the nation-state (Switlo 2002, 117; see also McKay 2002, 29). Self-government provides a lens that is useful for scrutinizing southern art appreciation, especially from art professionals and institutions that approach Indigenous people in general, and Inuit in particular, as minority interests subordinated to the authority of the nation-state. Moreover, mainstream views of the co-op system—where “creative talent” and “economic independence” collide (Driscoll 1982a, 11)—seems to support the idea that Inuit aesthetic autonomy naturally correlates with Inuit economic and political autonomy, which limits the bases upon which Inuit can gain recognition to the areas of art and culture.

Self-government agreements are often criticized on the basis that they facilitate land-transfer and ensure “certainty,” which many legal scholars see as a reformed version of extinguishing Indigenous rights (Blackburn 2005, 587; Mackey 2014, 237). Such contracts are often enacted through treaty negotiations. Even though treaties and land claims negotiated in Canada today no longer include a clause for extinguishing Indigenous rights, the resulting agreements are designed to ensure “certainty,” and often result in something more rigid than extinguishment. In these cases, Strakosch argues, “Aboriginal sovereignty... is ‘given up’ and cannot be re-extracted, and thus the state is finally (re)founded once and for all. This is therefore a mechanism of extinguishment of political difference, and a means to colonial completion,” not just a surrender of land (2016, 20). Self-government agreements, from this view, activate colonial closure, rendering the future more predictable for the settler state and the corporate interests that it courts. The Constitution recognized that Indigenous peoples have inherent but ambiguous rights, meaning that they are perpetually up for negotiation, and thereby delineate a potentially endless set of legitimate claims—an unacceptably unpredictable state of affairs. In response, modern treaties and self-government agreements delineate clear rights, allowing all actors—namely the state, as well as interested private parties, such as resource companies—a degree of certainty as to what they can expect in the future. The concept of certainty resonates strongly with the teleological project I see at work in the WAG’s catalogues. The WAG’s vision of mid-20th-century change pacifies Inuit resistance by presenting the social change that the North has already experienced as both benevolent and inexorable. This way of naturalizing colonial teleologies in the Arctic

establishes a sense of colonial certainty, insofar as the strategy undercuts the other presents—and consequent futures—that might be imagined. Valorizing cultural expression ensures certainty, too; promoting an aesthetic and economic autonomy, along the lines of self-government agreements, precludes potentially more disruptive forms of Indigenous “resurgence,” to use the language of Indigenous scholars like Leanne Simpson (2014, np).

The catalogues claim that achieving aesthetic self-determination and establishing co-ops represented “emancipation” (Butler and Wight 1991, 22), “control” (Lalonde and Ribkoff 2005, 11), and “economic independence” (Driscoll 1982a, 11)—forms of autonomy that make Inuit responsible for their own future, while enhancing the cultural profile of the nation-state. The catalogues’ valorization of autonomy recalls neoliberal ideology by lauding individual freedom as the clearest path towards prosperity. Self-government agreements similarly emphasize the value of Indigenous independence, allowing for a reduction in federal intervention, but only in a limited set of areas, resulting in Indigenous nations essentially functioning as municipalities. Self-government agreements endow Indigenous communities with limited powers in exchange for a reduction of funding, allowing the nation-state to abandon its fiduciary responsibilities to Indigenous communities while its own sovereignty remains intact. This is the very hallmark of neoliberal self-sufficiency: mobilize a discourse of responsabilization, disguised as “freedom,” in order to reduce the state’s duties and, therefore, the state’s expenses. Moreover, offering self-government agreements as self-determination proper implies that Indigenous communities are meant to take responsibility for their own

futures. Specifically, the colonial self-government paradigm mobilizes a “boot-strap” discourse, without consideration for how life under settler-colonial rule has shaped the psychosocial, economic, and political realities of Indigenous peoples. *Neocolonial* responsabilization rhymes with the neoliberal ideologies that nation-states use to rationalize cutting social funding and implementing policies that boost the wealth of the already very wealthy (Duménil and Lévy 2004), in that it issues “appeals for freedom and liberty” (Harvey 2007, 25), to which aesthetic expressions of cultural vitality and individual creativity are the most effective and intelligible responses.

The identified limits of Indigenous self-government in Canada suggest that it operates along some of the same lines as affirmative recognition. Both self-government—a constrained political autonomy—and affirmative recognition—a limited and limiting sort of aesthetic autonomy—recognize and nurture forms of cultural difference that do not substantially disrupt the workings of the settler-colonial nation-state, nor challenge its authority, especially in terms of allotting land and overseeing the distribution of resources. The HBC has a drastically diminished presence in the North; nevertheless, given their purported, historic success in enabling Inuit to shed the burden of excessive corporate and government oversight, the co-ops remain a model of Inuit autonomy. But the catalogues do not simply depict art and co-ops as examples of self-determination, thereby allowing us to liken co-ops to examples of self-government. In fact, in many cases the catalogues explicitly link Inuit aesthetic autonomy and the rise of Inuit-run co-ops to Nunavut—Canada’s largest, and perhaps most monumental land claim agreement to date. What, then, is the significance of likening Inuit aesthetic autonomy to Nunavut—

often used as shorthand for Inuit political autonomy—and how might the comparison contribute to the colonial present: the idea that colonialism was a single, past event that led to the current, supposedly un-colonial, and certainly-inevitable present?

Inuit's demands for Canada to acknowledge their right to and capacity for self-determination, as well as to de-centralized decision-making pertaining to the North, culminated in the creation of Nunavut—"Our Land," in Inuktitut—on April 1, 1999. Nunavut was negotiated in the spirit of the 1973 Calder decision that informed other land-claim agreements at the time. Its "creation... paralleled the reform of Canada's constitution and was influenced by existing political culture" (Loukacheva 2007, 31) wherein the settler state had recently adopted the approach of accommodating and recognizing Indigenous cultural difference in order to ostensibly move forward from Canada's more violent colonial past. There is thus a cynical edge to Nunavut, such as the fact that the creation of the new territory allowed Canada to improve its international reputation: "This was particularly necessary since the 1990 Oka Crisis in Quebec had severely damaged Canada's image as a leader in the field of human rights and [I]ndigenous peoples' rights protection" (Göcke 2011, 83). One of the territory's two foundational policies, the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement Act* (NLCA), from June 1993, established Inuit title to over 350,000 square kilometres of land, carved from Northwest Territories (then called the North-West Territories), including mineral rights, capital transfer payments, and input on a series of issues, such as "wildlife management" and "resource management" (Wonders 2003, 345). The NLCA was accompanied by the *Nunavut Act*. Whereas the NLCA benefited Inuit by allotting land title to them, the

Nunavut Act established a form of government that was open to “all Nunavummiut [residents of Nunavut], but with a clear consideration of Inuit values and interests in the framework of public government” (Loukacheva 2007, 50).

In 1981, Peter Ittinuar, the first Inuk to ever be elected as an MP and a prominent proponent of Inuit territorial rights, wrote,

The key to sustained and effective Inuit participation in politics does not lie in further elaboration and consolidation of existing structures, nor in tinkering with existing mechanisms for decision-making. It lies in the formal constitutional recognition of the Inuit’s right to determine their own future to develop the institutions and procedures most appropriate to the expression of their deepest concerns. (298)

Whether the creation of Nunavut fulfilled the objectives that Ittinuar describes, which are oriented towards Inuit self-determination, and enshrine values of independence and unfettered cultural and political expression, remains somewhat unclear. The *Nunavut Act* technically implemented public government, not true self-government. The *Act* established a form of de facto self-government that is potentially impermanent. Specifically, the *Nunavut Act* inaugurated a government that was Inuit by default on the basis that Inuit currently comprise a majority portion of the territory’s political representation; “with Inuit making up 85 per cent of the total population, it is not surprising that fifteen of the nineteen members elected to the first territorial legislature were Inuit” (Wonders 2003, 345). John Amagoalik, the chief commissioner of the Nunavut Implementation Committee, wrote, during the negotiations, that Nunavut would not be “purely Aboriginal self-government because, right from the beginning, we have proposed that Nunavut be a public government where everyone has the same rights and responsibilities” (1987, 68). This explanation does not exactly dispel concerns that the

current government format is vulnerable to the possibility of Qallunaat one day taking over governance of the territory.

The NLCA might not technically be a self-government agreement, instead allowing for “de facto self-government,” but Nunavut is often viewed as such. Moreover, in the vein of *official* self-government agreements, the NLCA and the *Nunavut Act* carve out an autonomous area for Inuit to practice a form of self-determination that is nonetheless subordinated to the authority of the southern centres of power. One of the limitations of the Nunavut Act is that Canada retained “federal ministerial veto” (Loukacheva 2007, 42). Nunavut is “something more than a traditional territory (like the Yukon) and something less than a province,” in that it lacks its “own constitution,” and is therefore “subject to federal legislative authority,” according to Thomas Isaac. “[T]he fact that Nunavut would be ultimately subject to federal jurisdiction seriously curtails Aboriginal (in this case, Inuit) aspirations for self-government” (1992, 399).³² Charles Marcic expresses similar concern that changes to the nature of government enacted by legislation like the Nunavut Act require consensus between Inuit and the federal government. “These federal restrictions create a significantly modified version of *self*-government. The paternalism (or is it colonialism?) bleeds through” (2000, 291-2). Indeed, the federal government’s unwillingness to surrender significant authority to Inuit seems to extend from its historically paternalistic view of people in the North. “The

³² Official self-government agreements do not necessarily entirely preclude other forms of governance. For instance, Kevin Gray proposes that the shape Nunavut takes will follow “participation at the community level as well as higher regional level.” The relative success of Nunavut will depend upon “constituents who are actively involved in their own government” (1994, 303).

federal government, however, seems to be unwilling to grant Nunavut a higher degree of self-government"—such as the responsibilities and roles assumed by provinces. "There always has been reluctance on behalf of the federal government to trust the people 'up there'. The Inuit are still regarded as incompetent to administer the land and resources within the territory on their own and to independently govern their own development" (Göcke 2011, 102). This is a tricky critique. It identifies a real problem—that the Canadian government does not “trust the people ‘up there.’” However, it presupposes that “development” is the intended outcome of achieving self-determination, and thereby prioritizes a predetermined brand of Inuit political agency that might still be constrained by the interests of settler state capitalism, rather than a more substantial self-government based on “Inuit values” (Nielsen 2000, 157). The conceptual limitations of this critique notwithstanding, it still seems important to acknowledge the lack of constitutional authority currently allotted to Inuit, especially as it is indicative of how the nation-state metes out limited forms of responsibility, so that it might retain its own authority.

Ultimately, the *Nunavut Act* and the NLCA have made for a historic event in Canada, wherein the federal government redistributed authority in deference to Inuit activism. Still, the existing structure of Nunavut is problematic, particularly given the limited authority of the territory, as well as the flexible ethnic makeup allowed by the public government structure. If Nunavut is a concession to Inuit, it is one designed not only to assign recognition, but to also institute certainty in the interest of foreclosing other futures in which the state and its corporate bedfellows might not have access to the riches of the North. The WAG catalogues aid in settling the future by occluding the now

thoroughly defined problems of the territory, instead presenting the territorial agreement as an example of predestined and palatable Inuit autonomy. What is happening when the WAG catalogues liken Nunavut to creative autonomy and co-ops? In what ways might linking Inuit control over their own artmaking and marketing through the co-ops with the creation of Nunavut similarly assign some of the same hopes—and consequent limitations—associated with the NCLA to Inuit artmaking? Do the WAG catalogues’ characterizations of Nunavut draw on the formulation of creative expression as political autonomy? In other words, whereby the discursive and political work done by the concept of Indigenous self-government in Canada—and Nunavut in particular—aligns with the affirmative character of (recognition) culture, how might popular views of the work that Inuit art does likewise influence how we think about Nunavut?

Recent WAG catalogues suggest that Inuit art actually embodies the cultural and political autonomy that Nunavut is meant to represent. *Inuit tautuktai (An Inuit Perspective)*, from 2000, tells the usual story of Inuit acquiring control over artmaking standards and marketing strategies as a move away from HBC and federal-government control. The catalogue also connects Inuit aesthetic autonomy with self-government, proposing that Inuit having control over artmaking and art marketing is akin to Nunavut, where “Inuit are no longer relegated to a neocolonial status of exotic ‘other’ in this country. In postcolonial Nunavut, Inuit traditions, knowledge and opinions are openly acknowledged to have equal if not greater value to that of the white dominant culture that has surreptitiously infiltrated every aspect of northern life” (Bouchard 2000, 11). This statement, somewhat incredulous at Inuit art’s status relative to its Euro-Western

counterpart, casually conflates Inuit aesthetic recognition with political autonomy, thereby inviting readers to understand aesthetic autonomy *as* political agency, and imbuing their understanding of Inuit political agency with the qualities associated with affirmative recognition culture (i.e. that self-determination can be attained through art). These assertions are in line with the appearance, in the late-1990s and early-2000s, of instances when the catalogues equate Inuit artmaking with self-government. The relatively recent tendency to describe artmaking with reference to self-government was likely influenced by the creation of Nunavut, but it also represents a strategy for responding to the increasingly public debates and disputes between Indigenous peoples and the settler state. At a time when the political recognition of Indigenous peoples had risen in the Canadian public's consciousness, such understandings of Inuit art helped to shape the conditions under which Inuit political agency should be understood.

In terms of affirmative recognition culture, the catalogues recognize the value of Inuit culture in a way that frames Inuitness as a form of cultural difference, while limiting expressions of political agency to those that do not threaten the sovereignty of the nation state. Perhaps most importantly, the WAG's framing of Nunavut, co-ops, and creative expression as interlocking sites of Inuit autonomy par excellence legitimizes the idea that political agency is a sort of creative self- and / or cultural-actualization. In the catalogues' interpretation of Nunavut, Inuit art both represents and facilitates independence. Their framing of Inuit creative production and its political and cultural significance contributes to the typical neoliberal paradigm wherein reduced government intervention is necessary for society to achieve its full potential. In exchange for the lack of social supports

required by such a system, individuals must accept responsibility for whether or not they manage to achieve wellbeing (Lemke 2001, 203; Pyysiäinen et al. 2017, 216). In the context of settler-colonial governance, however, this sort of responsibilization has long been used as a tool for attempting to spread the individualistic ideals of the nation-state to the Indigenous peoples within its borders, dating to the inception of the Indian Act in 1876. In 1890, for instance, the Commission of Indian Affairs wrote that Indigenous peoples must be taught “individual responsibility” in order to break them from their communalism and land-based practices, thereby allowing settlers to acquire and develop Indigenous lands (Canada 1890, 165).³³ Hence, the story of art as moving Inuit forward to the inevitable, politically-autonomous present that Nunavut epitomizes comes infused with neoliberal and settler-colonial ideals.

Catalogues that now have Nunavut to turn to—an evolution that catalogues from the 1980s could not yet narrativize—retain social supports as an option against which to compare art, while leaving hunting in the past. *Between Two Worlds: Sculpture by David Ruben Piqtoukun* describes the evolution of the Arctic, culminating in Nunavut. “Income from government programs has been a very poor substitute” for living on the land, according to this catalogue. “The founding of Nunavut is changing the outlook of many people who now want to take charge of their lives again. The hope is reflected in the upturned face at the top of the sculpture,” referring to “Nuna,” a Brazilian soapstone and

³³ Thanks to Dr. Rick Monture, who pointed out that artmaking is not a good replacement for hunting because it does not sustain the community in the same way (e.g. through sharing meat). Similarly, the Canadian government’s interest in fostering “individual responsibility” is remarkably consonant with how public galleries like the WAG have turned to the work of individual Inuit artists, thereby characterizing them as unbounded by location or community.

African wonderstone carving from 1995 (Piqtokun and Wight 1996, 23). Here, Nunavut is framed as a preferred alternative to federal-government intervention: without government meddling, Inuit culture can truly flourish. The catalogues use as evidence the works produced in the new political climate, which encapsulate this new autonomy. This depiction recalls an unfortunate past marked by clumsy government intervention, while also sighting an optimistic future, rendered in art. This implicit valorization of self-sufficiency and cultural expression evokes a sense of inevitability, an irrefutable forward trajectory that sweeps everyone into a shared, unavoidable colonial present.

Framing Nunavut in terms of Inuit art, and what such art contributes to cultural agency, bolsters the colonial present by promoting self-government as a beneficial evolution. Nunavut is a compelling case study of how self-government registers in the context of affirmative recognition politics, especially if Nunavut is meant to provide “redress for historic injustices” (Göcke 2011, 100), thereby allowing Inuit and Canada to move forward in unity. However, as Amagoalik, an Inuk and prominent political actor, has reported, the Canadian government has thus far “not lived up to dozens of its obligations” under the NCLA (2012, 39), suggesting that the ground-breaking (de facto) self-government agreement has provided a new staging ground for settler-colonial shenanigans. The catalogues are not interested in assessing the effectiveness of the land claim agreement, and instead frame Nunavut as an unproblematic site of full Inuit autonomy that finally put colonial machinations in the past. Moreover, they depict Nunavut and Inuit art as co-constitutive, inviting readers to view Nunavut as the *product* of Inuit aesthetic autonomy that also allows for *further* cultural expression. The interplay

between art and the idea of Nunavut that readers are presented with has a teleological effect. The art historical discourse surrounding the territorial agreement frames Inuit political autonomy *as* aesthetic autonomy. This framing, like self-government agreements, cauterizes the wounds of the past in the interest of a supposedly fresh future through the neoliberal strategy of responsabilizing individuals and communities, locating self-determination in the ability of individuals to creatively respond and adapt to the “challenges” of settler colonialism.

Perhaps the most explicit example of exhibition catalogues discursively rendering artmaking and Nunavut as co-constitutive is *Our Land: Contemporary Art from the Arctic*, the catalogue for an exhibition which the Peabody Essex Museum mounted in collaboration with the Government of Nunavut. The exhibition came to the WAG in 2016. The catalogue includes a prefatory note by Ronald Irwin, who once served as the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (IAND). He writes,

Over centuries, Inuit culture, in the land we now call Nunavut, has given rise to arts of striking beauty. But this heritage is not frozen. It is alive and vital in the contemporary world. As the people of Nunavut work to achieve their place of equality in the world, they bring their own special culture, creativity, and wisdom with them—and in doing so, further enrich the world’s cultural, economic, and political landscape. (Peabody 2004, 14)

Irwin’s statement is noteworthy, particularly given the preservational quality that it ascribes to Inuit art, as well as its culturalization of Inuit identity—a manoeuvre that works to sustain the Eurocentric character of the settler nation-state through acknowledging cultural difference. Moreover, we should attend to the ambiguity of his reference to “equality.” Aside from the actual *substance* of the term, which is suspect, is Irwin referring to Inuit acquiring equality through having a political voice, as well as their

own territory? Or is he describing Inuit achieving equality by having the value of their art finally recognized and appreciated? This potential for double meaning effectively idealizes the turn to self-government by casting it as a mechanism of cultural expression. As with settlement life once having been the impetus for the shift to an artmaking economy, now self-government is being depicted as a precondition for cultural actualization—in the form of artmaking, naturally.

Conclusion: The Radical Uncertainty of Dependency

Throughout the dissertation, I have made an all-encompassing, somewhat polemical argument against equating a settler institution celebrating, acknowledging the value of, and respectfully engaging with Inuit art with reconciliation, and certainly not with decolonization. What I perhaps neglected is that public art museums like the WAG operate at a nexus between government and the public, responding to and negotiating between federal, provincial, and municipal policies, and the needs and desires of patrons. This is not to say that all actors in this scenario exert equal influence on galleries. Nevertheless, museum theorists contend that we should pay more attention to the agency of individuals within the space of the institution, rather than approaching the museum as a monolithic entity with a singular narrative that is received and accepted uniformly by all who encounter it. Similarly, recognition in settler-colonial politics is the product of complex interplays between official, sweeping directives regarding Indigenous-settler relations, and the myriad on-the-ground, specific encounters in which Indigenous peoples and their non-Indigenous counterparts become entangled (Corcoran 2008, 65). Instances of rupture and contestation within the museum space are exciting and potentially productive, insofar as they represent the possibility of outcomes unforeseen by the museum. Moreover, the forms of recognition that get worked out in museum spaces might eventually sublate into official policies that go beyond gestures of recognition and appreciation, bringing meaningful change. That said, art galleries in general, and the WAG in particular, participate in processes of knowledge production that are subject to the gravitational pull of powerful and complex ideologies: that knowledge equals

understanding; that appreciation equals reconciliation; and that reconciliation is, if not decolonization *as such*, then at least a way for instilling a belief that genuine settler colonialism is something that no longer exists.

At the same time that individual interception might complicate homogenous institutional narratives, conceptualizing the relationship between an art institution's message and the overarching narratives through which a nation comes to understand itself sometimes requires us to speak in general terms. For instance, the WAG's statement on the reconciliatory power of celebrating Inuit art fits into broader conversations in the Canadian public and political sphere about the need for settler society to "reconcile" with Indigenous peoples in the interest of moving forward. We might be skeptical of reconciliation, insofar as it serves to establish "settler certainty" for individual Canadian citizens—an assurance that their place and material security isn't threatened by Indigenous presence. This is why Indigenous peoples have stressed the need for social contexts and material places for engaging in forms of expression that are not reducible to the objectives of reconciliation—spaces that are "irreconcilable in that they do not have a mythology that places [Indigenous people] in previous seamless accord with Settlers or a theory that proposes a future other than one of perpetual struggle with the dominant" society (Garneau 2012, 34). Irreconcilability means leaving open the possibility of contention and dispute; it does not take closure as a given. "There is no end result, no conclusion or assimilation" (38). Garneau presents a vision of an Indigenous sovereignty that retains the right to extend conflict, and to thereby resist closure. Recognition politics and the rhetoric of reconciliation, on the other hand, invite expressions of Indigenous

difference in the interest of unification and moving forward. At stake is the possibility that, while the IAC first appears to function as such a site for irreconcilability, its reliance, in its promotional materials, on reconciliation discourse might also mean that the institution is overly determined by the charismatic pull of closure.

Celebrating Indigenous art allows settler society to move beyond viewing Indigenous people as having “nasty, brutish, short,” lives, as in Hobbes’s characterization of how people can be expected to function without social order, which has been widely used to deride “primitive” or “tribal” people; instead, settler society can now view Indigenous peoples as art-producing, and thereby as having achieved civilization, on par with Euro-Western society. As a tactic that deprioritizes meaningful action and substantial change, this sort of cultural appreciation, particularly in the era of reconciliation, masquerades as proof that colonization is over. Amanda Morris writes, “Fighting back and dismantling the colonial debt requires more than words: this project also requires the persuasive power of physical action and the (re)visioning of traditions” (2014, 254). Tuck and Yang (2012) warn that such rhetorical turns are a frequent threat to decolonizing efforts. “When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future” (3). In the case of affirmative recognition politics, cultural expression masquerades as Indigenous self-determination, whereas art appreciation stands in for decolonization. Canada and its art institutions are now willing to acknowledge settler colonialism, but only as an archaic social arrangement primarily characterized by settlers denigrating Indigenous cultural expression. Therefore, settler

subjects are never asked to pursue uncomfortable forms of decolonization not predicated on seeing Indigeneity as simply a form of cultural difference. Comprehensive decolonization would require settlers to at least consider returning land (Alfred 2009; Tuck and Yang 2012), to accept their own complicity in violence against Indigenous people, understand spirituality and politics as intertwined, not separate, and even learn to regard non-human beings as subjects to which humans have responsibilities, not as things that we own.

In *Mohawk Interruptus*, Audra Simpson argues that colonial views of culture further “the political project of dispossession and containment... work[ing] to contain, to fetishize and entrap and distill Indigenous discourses into memorisable, repeatable rituals for preservation against a social and political death that was foretold but did not happen” (2007, 99). To resist the violence of colonial ethnography—of the desire to know, to capture, and to define—as well as the tainted promise of equality, Simpson recommends a strategic mode of concealment and elision she terms “ethnographic refusal.” Adopting a stance of refusal is a response to “the asymmetrical power relations that inform the research and writing about native lives and politics, and it does not *presume* that they are on equal footing with anyone” (105). What would it mean, then, for Qallunaat to inhabit a more humble, non-inquisitive position on Indigenous art in general, and Inuit art in particular? This might mean accepting that Inuit cultural production has meaning, and perhaps even represents some aspects of life in the Far North, without assuming that art holds meaning that all, or any, onlookers can hope to access. In line with Simpson’s concept, Inuit artists and their work can refuse interpretation, and thereby subvert the

public art gallery's desire to call on Inuit cultural production to align with the future-oriented rhetorics of recognition and reconciliation. Refusal in the realm of aesthetics could have elements of Martineau and Ritskes's concept of the "fugitive aesthetic," whereby Indigenous artists advance aesthetic forms aimed at facilitating Indigenous praxis and which sabotage the settler-colonial apparatus. In a vein similar to that taken by Tuck and Yang, the authors acknowledge that liberating the mind is crucial in order for artists and communities to enter into "*material struggle for decolonization*" (Martineau and Ritskes 2014, iii). This praxis participates in and makes possible "a shared movement away from the enclosures of colonial modernity and into resurgent Indigenous visions of decolonial futures. To destabilize the pervasive mythology of colonialism (and its aesthetics) is to re-constitute and renarrate spaces beyond and elsewhere" (iii). The fugitive aesthetic is based on Gerald Vizenor's term "fugitive poses," mischievous and counterhegemonic modes through which Indigenous people assert their "intrinsic native sovereignty" in settler-colonial contexts (1998, 16). Indigenous art's anticolonial potential lies in its ability to assert Indigenous presence in a way that highlights the discursive contradictions that constitute the logics of settler society, thereby making Canada "incomprehensible" to itself (Henderson 2013). Despite the ways in which Indigenous art can help envision anti-colonial possibilities, a critical study of the political expediency of colonial affirmative recognition is necessary because colonial framings of Indigenous art in general, and Inuit art in particular, might undercut or mute the artwork itself. Art's effects in / on Canadian society are inescapably influenced by interpretation and curation,

not to mention the overarching colonial discourses and contexts that artists and their work must navigate.

Theory cuts both ways: we cannot develop critique without the objects of our analysis. I have an uneasy intimacy with the texts I aim to problematize—a relationship founded somewhat on suspicion and disapproval. But they are invaluable resources, at least because they provide ways for intercepting the colonial and neoliberal resonances endemic to prevailing approaches to analyzing Inuit art. My project is ultimately driven by skepticism—skepticism that the rhetorics around creativity and artmaking are (usually) adept at eroding. Ultimately, then, I see this skeptical project as valuable, at least insofar as it might serve as an anchor against the latter day political projects designed to sweep “all Canadians” into the future, so that we might avoid grappling with the present.

Conversely, however, the catalogues are not everything: they a component of the discourse of Arctic sovereignty, but they are still subject to disruptions in other corners of the discursive formation to which they contribute. For instance, I suggest that the political complexities of Inuit, vis-à-vis their relationship to the federal government, might disrupt the effects of discourses around art and creativity—in particular, the affirmative recognition culture that I have theorized in this project, and its attendant rhetorics. The possibility that an evolving governmental landscape in Nunavut might allow for new forms of political engagement might also lead to radically retooled ways of viewing Inuit art, and thereby catalyze hitherto unpredicted ties between creative expression and political agency. In other words, I want to avoid unintentionally naturalizing the colonial

present by proposing that no futures are possible except for the one predicted by the present that we now inhabit.

While the IAC seems poised to participate in prevailing modes of affirmative recognition politics, Inuit art might nevertheless exert effects unanticipated by settler-colonial institutions. For instance, Inuit art scholar Heather Igloliorte references an "emergent socially conscious art [that] is indicative of the increased ability of Inuit to reflect upon and respond to the multiple stressors of contemporary life" (2009, 120). She indicates that the creation of art represents cultural resilience, while the subject matter depicted serves as a form of individual resilience; hence, individual works teach viewers "much about the power of self-expression to heal and fortify": "The power of visual art to speak across linguistic, cultural, and generational divides presents an opportunity for artists to tell these stories to a broad audience and to support the continued strengthening and revitalization of the national reconciliation process" (122). Notwithstanding the proposed healing and reconciliatory effects of Inuit art, which I have argued are readily accommodated by the existing settler-colonial apparatus, the *political* particularities of Inuit, vis-à-vis Canadian centres of power, means that the nation-state's conventional modes of dealing with Indigenous peoples might not produce the same results in the Arctic. Of course, the differences between and within Indigenous peoples are countless—indeed, the homogenization of Indigenous peoples into one cultural and political group is one of the central mechanisms of settler colonialism³⁴—but thinking about Inuit art and

³⁴ In *The Winter We Danced*, Hayden King notes that disagreements and differences within Indigenous nations are often viewed as evidence of "factionalism." Conversely, King insists that

Inuit cooperation as Arctic resources brings to the forefront two peculiarities in the relationship between Canada and Inuit: first, the particular approach that Canada has taken regarding the assimilation of Inuit; and second, a prevailing and well-documented sense of pride amongst Inuit regarding their unique form of Canadian citizenry (cf. Karetak-Lindell 2013; Powell 2009).

Inuit often express a pride in being part of Canada that is at odds with southern Indigenous scholarship, and especially with the work of Indigenous sovereigntists like Audra Simpson, Leanne Simpson, Pam Palmater, Glen Coulthard, and which responds to the incursions on Indigenous territory and rights that are characteristic of settler colonialism in the South, and thereby takes a necessarily antagonistic stance against the nation-state. Terry Audla, an Inuk and past President of the ITK, describes Inuit as “proud Canadians,” vowing that they “will continue to play [their] part, in asserting the sovereign rights and interests of Canada in the Arctic” (2013, 8). The strength of Inuit self-determination and cultural vitality is not viewed as standing in opposition to Canadian sovereignty; instead, the two are seen as mutually dependent. For Pjuut Kusugak, “Canada needs Inuit. Inuit represent the Canadian Arctic and this representation, this political strength is the claim that the Arctic is occupied by Canadians” (2013, 16). In turn, Canadians have a responsibility to reciprocate for the benefits that the North brings to them: “the Arctic supports many ‘Southern’ families. Their family members will go to the Arctic to work. They will make a great living on jobs that hopefully will one day go to a local Inuk” (17). Being a proud Inuk and a proud Canadian is not a contradiction, but a

such difference-within-unity is a fundamental characteristic of “democracy” (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 152).

possibility that derives from Inuit's unique position in the history of Canadian settler colonialism. Further, Inuit's distinct Canadianness allows for Inuit to hold Canada accountable to the North.

These two peculiarities—Canada's differential policy position on Inuit versus other Indigenous peoples, and a unique attitude towards Canadian citizenship amongst many Inuit³⁵—suggest that exerting sovereign power over the Arctic—a place that is both (supposedly) fundamentally Canadian and absolutely alien to most Canadians—from centres of power (i.e. Ottawa) requires alliances that also risk undermining the claims to place that the nation is perpetually asserting. Canada's need to sustain Inuit cooperation is further complicated by the fact that the worldviews and conceptions that are endemic to the terrain are often irreconcilable with national and international epistemological and legal frameworks. The thought processes required for conceptualizing the territoriality of ice and water is one compelling example of the clash between worldviews that Canada must negotiate. While Canada has long asserted sovereignty over the Arctic, sea ice remains a problem for determining boundaries, and by extension, ascertaining with certainty just what Canada is laying claim *to*. During the summer, the boundary lies “along the shoreline,” while in the winter, it “extends to the edge of the ice.” This fluidity is a problem for the nation-state, not least because the difference between land and open water is the difference between federal and territorial responsibility (Kelley 2013, 60).

Canada's inability to frame its sovereignty with regards to the shifting confines of

³⁵ The late Jose Kusugak, former president of the ITK, famously corrected former Prime Minister Paul Martin on a misconception regarding Inuit identity, stating that “Inuit are not Indians.” Rather, Inuit are “First Canadians” and “Canadian First” (Fraser 2011).

the sea signals the limits of the standards that support and legitimize nation-state certainty. Inuit conceptions of boundaries and jurisdiction, on the other hand, seem exceedingly imaginative insofar as they do not see the amorphousness of the ice's edge as antithetical to sovereignty. Rosemarie Kuptana asserts that international law is also unwilling to recognize Inuit understandings of territory and sovereignty, citing their refusal to acknowledge the existence of the Inuit Sea. Official ideas of sovereignty rely on "the exclusion of Inuit with regard to the Inuit Sea discussions, both by Canada and players from abroad" (2013, 10). UNCLOS, which all nations with territory in the Arctic have ratified or are currently in the process of ratifying, aims to offer a verdict on the status of northern waterways, it does not recognize Inuit approaches to "occupy[ing] the sea" (11). Canada, by contrast, is in a position where it must at least consider such potentially disruptive perspectives in order to ascertain prior occupancy by way of Inuit cooperation. Perhaps accommodating Inuit *art* will likewise expose Canada modes of engagement that cannot be resolved through affirmation, nor through recognition.

On Necessary Regrets

In my comprehensive exam papers, I closed by briefly discussing an artwork by an Inuit artist. This was one of the most satisfying moments I experienced while writing those papers. I took a break from discussing the abstractions of critical theory and humoured myself with a diversion into the realm of art appreciation. I am reminded of the relief and joy that talking about an artwork brought me, even though I'm not an art scholar, except in the very loosest sense of the term, and I sometimes wonder what would

happen if I discussed particular works on their own terms, as the WAG catalogues propose to do. That I don't engage with the countless, fascinating works that the WAG has displayed over the years—and, indeed, which were available to me as images alongside the blocks of text through which I combed the past two years—is a regret that nags me. Beyond space constraints, however, I had many important reasons for not discussing the art and instead focusing on how the gallery and its personnel approach artworks. Mostly, though, I am suspicious of the ready admiration for Inuit art that suffuses the Canadian South. It is this suspicion, really, that came to drive this project, and sticking with that suspicion has meant setting aside the awe that I often experienced when viewing the artworks on display at the WAG, often with much difficulty (and some new grey hairs).

My project's critical stance also means that explaining it to others is not fun. When I tell people that I study how southern art galleries talk about Inuit art, I am commonly met with laudatory declarations: to wit, "Oh, I LOVE Inuit art!" These expressions of unfiltered and automatic adoration come to mind now when I encounter Inuit art in both the most ordinary and the most unusual of places: a family friend's bookshelves adorned with dozens of soapstone carvings; the lawn of the house around the corner, where two inexplicable Inukshuks have been standing guard for years; and, creepily, the basement of the original wing of Juravinski Hospital on Concession Street in my hometown of Hamilton, Ontario, whose hallway is entirely bare save a large, seemingly Inuit-made sculpture of an owl, trapped under glass. No didactic panels accompany these works to explain their presence, nor what they mean to the people who

brought them to their current post. My sense is that their presence in the South speaks to the politics of belonging as much as it does to the aesthetic qualities of the works themselves. This is all to say that Inuit art does not need another fan, although I certainly am one. Besides, cultural critics are lousy at supplying praise. They (we) are better at hunting down and snuffing out insidious sources of joy, as Sarah Ahmed observes; at remaining uncomfortable, and perhaps occasionally issuing a whisper of dissent, virtually inaudible amidst the shouts of celebration.

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