

Pudlo Pudlat

UNTITLED

Pudlo Pudlat (1916-1992)

BY MARION JACKSON



Pudlo Pudlat (1916-1992)

by Marion Jackson, 1998

While landscape imagery is an important and even defining focus for many Canadian artists, the land is integral not just to the art but to the total life experience of Canada's aboriginal artists. Inuit¹ artist Pudlo Pudlat was born on the land in a snow igloo on the southern shore of Baffin Island in 1916 and spent the first five decades of his life hunting, traveling and living on the land in a lifestyle similar to that of his ancestors. As a boy, Pudlo lived with his family in snow igloos in winter and skin tents in the summer, and they traveled on the land by foot or dogteam and along the Baffin coast by open canoe. Survival depended on knowing the land very

Pudlo Pudlat
Untitled, 1978c.

mixed media drawing on paper
(56.1 x 75.4 cm)
SAG 1979.04.01

Photograph by Cameron Heryet

well, on perceiving subtleties of weather, and on understanding the behaviour patterns of the animals they hunted.

When Pudlo was still a young boy, the Hudson's Bay Company² built permanent Arctic trading posts on the southern coast of Baffin Island and encouraged Inuit hunters to exchange white fox and other furs for tobacco, sugar, and manufactured goods such as knives, guns, ammunition, primus stoves, fabrics, and canoes. These newly-introduced trade items became incorporated into the lifestyle of Inuit who

continued to live primarily as hunters on the land but who periodically visited the trading posts to exchange furs for supplies and new manufactured goods. The traditional Inuit lifestyle thus began to change, and it was further altered during Pudlo's childhood by the arrival of missionaries who promoted Christianity in place of old shamanic and animistic beliefs, and by the increasing presence of the R.C.M.P.

By the 1930s and 1940s when Pudlo had grown to adulthood and had gained recognition as a strong hunter, Inuit were still living in semi-nomadic camps



Pudlo Pudlat, *Untitled*, 1978c., mixed media drawing on paper (56.1 x 75.4 cm) SAG 1979.04.01 Photograph by Cameron Heryet

on the land but had become increasingly reliant on trade goods and frequently traveled between their camps and the trading posts. The Surrey Art Gallery's *Untitled* (landscape with two aeroplanes and boat), c. 1976-78 by Pudlo Pudlat, reflects this period of Pudlo's young adulthood when he enjoyed traveling with companions or alone by cargo canoe to the Hudson's Bay trading posts at Cape Dorset and Lake Harbour on the South Baffin Island coast.³ ([map showing Cape Dorset and Lake Harbour](#)) This image depicts the short spring/summer season when coastal waters are navigable. Only a few pieces of purple-blue ice float on the open water, and the land itself is clear except for irregular patches of ice on the coastal hills which are topped by humourously-over-sized plants in full bloom.

Many years later when Pudlo Pudlat was in his 70s and had become recognized as an accomplished artist, he told his life story in preparation for a major exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada and reminisced about traveling by canoe during tranquil spring days such as the one reflected in the Surrey Art Gallery image: "We used to travel back and forth from Amadjuak to Cape Dorset by sailboat before we got motors. ...When we took off for hunting, the wind was blowing. We were using our sails, and they work only when it is windy. It was springtime, duck-egg season, and the weather was nice."⁴

In this image, the tranquility of the natural Arctic landscape is interrupted by the path of two aeroplanes swooping low over the coastal hills. The planes are observed by a hunter (perhaps Pudlo himself) in a canoe rigged with sails. In his reminiscences about his life, Pudlo explained that he first saw aeroplanes and was amazed by them during "the big war" (World War II) when a military airbase was established at Iqualuit. The two aeroplanes in this drawing appear

to be military planes flying in formation, their dark silhouettes and vapour trails creating a spectre of the speed of the modern world juxtaposed against the tranquil natural landscape below.

In the Surrey Art Gallery drawing, as in many other drawings, Pudlo offered his observations of the new technology he encountered during his lifetime. For Pudlo, drawing became a welcome vehicle for personal exploration and expression as well as a practical means for earning an income when he and his family moved into the small settlement of Cape Dorset in 1960. By that time, art advisors from the South and leaders among local Inuit had established the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative⁵ to promote the artistic endeavours of local Inuit and, through the sale of their art works, to provide a new source of income for Inuit in the small settlements.

Pudlo embraced the opportunity to draw and to earn an income from his art. His fascination with modern technology and its impact on the daily experience of the Inuit informed his imagery, and he frequently included planes and helicopters in his drawings and prints. Pudlo's famous stonecut and stencil print entitled *Aeroplane* presents a subject very similar to that of the Surrey Art Gallery drawing. This print generated both controversy and a new appreciation for the impact of technology on the Inuit environment when it was released in southern Canada in 1976. *Aeroplane*, which was reproduced on a Canadian postage stamp in 1978,⁶ depicts Inuit hunters standing atop hills to observe with astonishment the aeroplane flying overhead.

Footnotes:

1. In Canada, the term "Inuit" is used to identify native Arctic people and translates literally as "the people" in their native Inuktitut language.

2. The Hudson's Bay Company was formed in 1670 to promote the British fur trade in lands served by the waters flowing into the Hudson's Bay. Permanent Hudson's Bay Company trading posts were not established in Arctic locations, however, until early in the 20th century with the first Baffin Island post built at Lake Harbour in 1911 followed by a post at Cape Dorset in 1913.

3. Hyperlink to map showing Cape Dorset and Lake Harbour at http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/art/inuit/cis/reg3_e.html, accessed August 2006.

4. Marie Routledge with Marion Jackson, Pudlo: Thirty Years of Drawing, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1990, page 64.

5. The West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative was established in 1959 under the inspired leadership of artist and Federal Administrator, James Houston. When Houston departed from Cape Dorset in 1961, Toronto-trained artist Terrence Ryan took over as arts advisor to the Co-op and continues in that capacity to the present day. With the sustained leadership of dedicated art advisors, Inuit artists of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative have established international reputations for their soapstone sculptures and for the annual collections of limited edition fine arts prints which have been issued every year since 1959.

6. Hyperlink to Cybermuse: http://cybermuse.gallery.ca/cybermuse/search/artwork_e.jsp?mkey=40451 and to Canadian PostalArchiveDatabase: [http://data4.collectionscanada.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=\(pudlat.ANYP.+And+aeroplane.TITP.\)+Or+\(pudlat.ANYI.+And+aeroplane.TITI.+And+null.B742.\)&l=20&d=STMP&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/02011702_e.html&r=1&f=G&Sect1=STMP](http://data4.collectionscanada.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=(pudlat.ANYP.+And+aeroplane.TITP.)+Or+(pudlat.ANYI.+And+aeroplane.TITI.+And+null.B742.)&l=20&d=STMP&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/02011702_e.html&r=1&f=G&Sect1=STMP), accessed August, 2006.

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An Open Book

a catalogue of artworks from the Surrey Art Gallery's Permanent Collection
ISSN 1910-1392 ISBN 978-0-92018-171-3 Published 2007



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