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Nov. 3, 2006

Public only: (212) 514-3700

Inuit Carvings of Animals, Stories and Spirits Opens at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York

A traveling exhibition of more than 80 Inuit carvings depicting families, animals, stories and spirits will open Saturday, Nov. 11, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in New York, the George Gustav Heye Center. "ItuKiagâtta! Inuit Sculpture from the Collection of the TD Bank Financial Group" comprises midcentury works from throughout the Canadian Arctic and will be on display until Sunday, Feb. 4, 2007.

"ItuKiagâtta!," a Labrador Inuktitut phrase meaning "how it amazes us," presents many works created by Inuit artists from the 1950s and 1960s—a period of great upheaval for Canada's indigenous Arctic communities. With the collapse of the fur trade and the mandatory enrollment of Native children in government schools, families moved to towns and hamlets and had to abandon their nomadic traditions. Without other opportunities available, many hunter-trappers became renowned artists by developing carvings and other works for sale.

The elegant shapes and graceful modeling of these tabletop-sized works depict different aspects of Inuit life. Personal histories and observations are shown in works such as Joe Taliunili's (1899?-1976) "The Migration," which illustrates the journey made by the artist's family in a makeshift boat. Other works show Inuit traditions and lifeways, such as Akeeaktashuk's (1898-1954) "Hunter with Harpoon" and an unknown artist's composite carving of an igloo, complete with miniature occupants, tools and utensils. Representations of animals can be found throughout the exhibition, including Louis Oksokitok's (1926-2003) "Flying Geese," "Musk-ox" by Kananginak Pootoogook (b. 1935) and Pauta Saila's (b. 1916) formidable "Bear."

TD Bank Financial Group, which marked its 150th anniversary in 2005, began assembling its Inuit art collection to mark Canada's centennial in 1967. The original collection contained sculptures, prints, drawings and ceramics, by artists from across the Canadian Arctic, with an emphasis on the period between World War II and 1967. The collection now includes 610 works.

“ItuKiagatta! Inuit Sculpture from the Collection of the TD Bank Financial Group” was organized and circulated by the National Gallery of Canada. The exhibition has appeared at the National Gallery of Canada, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the Edmonton Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The National Museum of the American Indian is the final venue for the exhibition.

The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian’s George Gustav Heye Center is located at One Bowling Green in New York City, across from Battery Park. The museum is free and open every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Thursdays until 8 p.m. Call (212) 514-3700 for general information and (212) 514-3888 for a recording about the museum’s public programs. By subway, the museum may be reached by the 1 to South Ferry, the 4 or 5 to Bowling Green or the R or W to Whitehall Street. The museum’s Web site is www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

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