
Pitsiulaq Qimirpik

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THE JAVA PROJECT | 252 Java St #100, Brooklyn, NY 11222

Pitsiulaq (Pitseolak) Qimirpik (born 1986) is a multimedia artist based in Kinngait, Nunavut and a second-generation carver. Kinngait has been self-dubbed the “Capital of Inuit Art.” This Inuit village boasts a unique artistic community where 22% of its labor force is engaged in the arts. Its cooperative print programs, inspired by Japanese ukiyo-e workshops, were established in the 1950s to help artists generate income by blending traditional art forms with contemporary techniques. Annie Pootoogook, Pitseolak Ashoona, Shuvina Ashoona, and Kenojuak Ashevak all worked within these cooperatives.

At age 13, Qimirpik began carving as his father’s (Kelly Qimirpik) apprentice. His work employs traditional Inuit carving methods to create sculptures that appear both contemporary and historical. The artist’s visual lexicon draws inspiration from a diverse range of sources: Christian imagery, Inuit spirituality, nature, and popular culture. Qimirpik often incorporates elements from cartoons and video games, with references to iconic franchises like the Simpsons and Super Mario Brothers appearing throughout his work. His stone figures often carry delicately articulated antler iPods, with cable earbuds, for example. In Qimirpik’s sculptures and drawings, the theme of transformation emerges as a recurring and powerful motif, echoing its significance in the broader context of Inuit spirituality. Works like *Shaman Riding Sedna* references the Inuit goddess of the sea, whose fingers transformed into seals when they were chopped off by her father—before a blow to her head sent her to the bottom of the sea where she communicates with all ocean life.

Inuit sculpture has a historical precedence predating the arrival of Western colonizers. Traditionally, carvings were figurative, drawing inspiration from the natural world and Inuit religious ceremonies. Meticulously crafted by hand, they were fashioned from materials such as whale or walrus ivory and horn. Prior to 2020 Kinngait was named Cape Dorset—a reference to the Dorset culture who established a distinct ethnic identity around 600 BCE. From this point on, the Dorset peoples produced a substantial body of figurative sculpture using diverse media. The Dorset peoples occasionally depicted animals in stone and on tusks, using incised lines and scraffito to represent their skeletal structure. They held profound ritual significance as amulets or ceremonial objects—a tradition continued in Qimirpik’s recent sculptures like *Friendly Robot* (2023).

This exhibition is the artist’s first in New York. His work is in a wide variety of Canadian collections, both public and private.

PETER
KELLY