

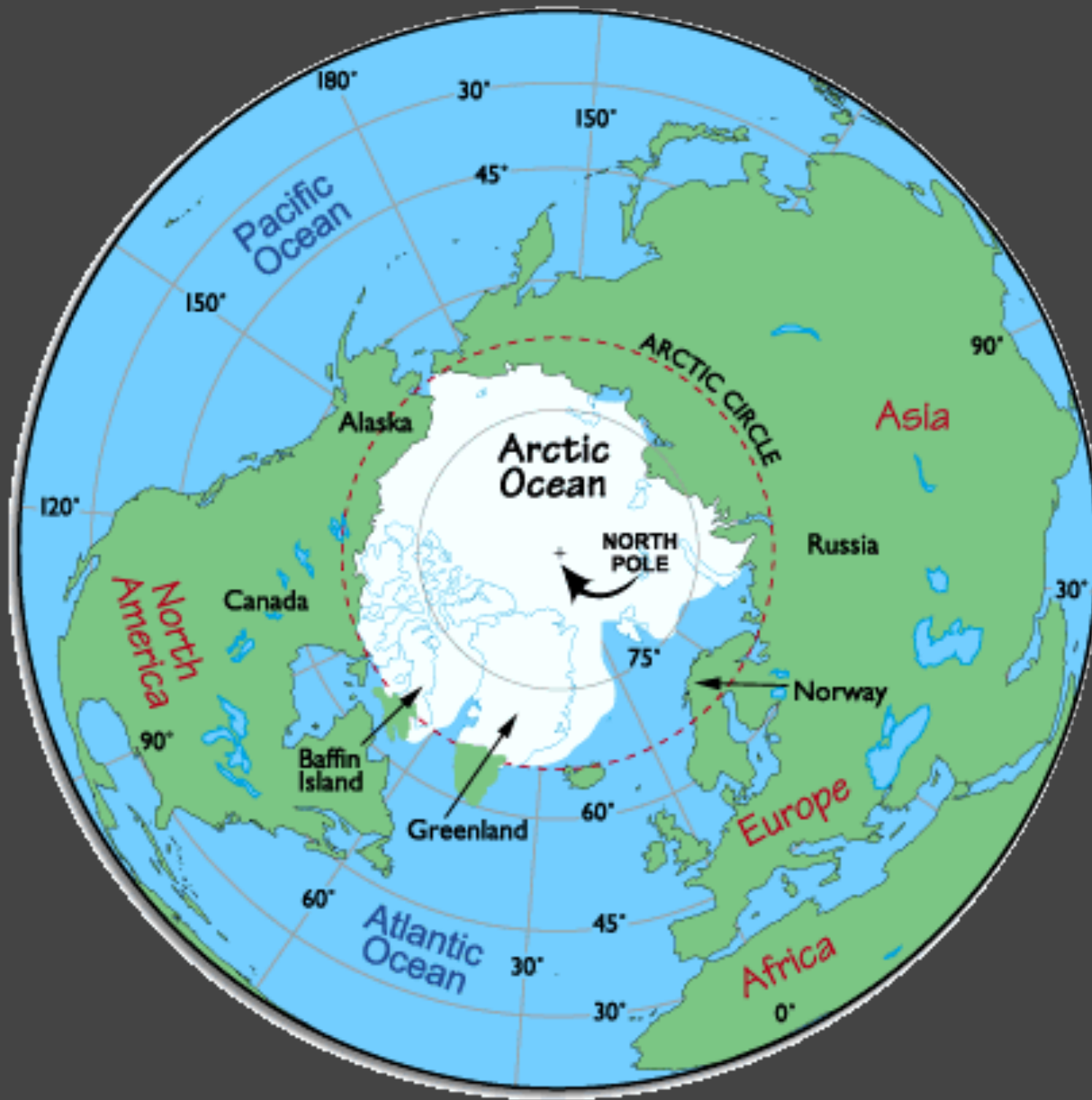
# Early Inuit Printmaking

Dennos Museum Center  
Docent Training  
11/8/2011

*Our art helps us understand each other. Our art will help us not to forget how our ancestors lived for we do not live that same way today.*

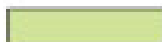



~Kananginak Pootoogook,  
Cape Dorset, 1976

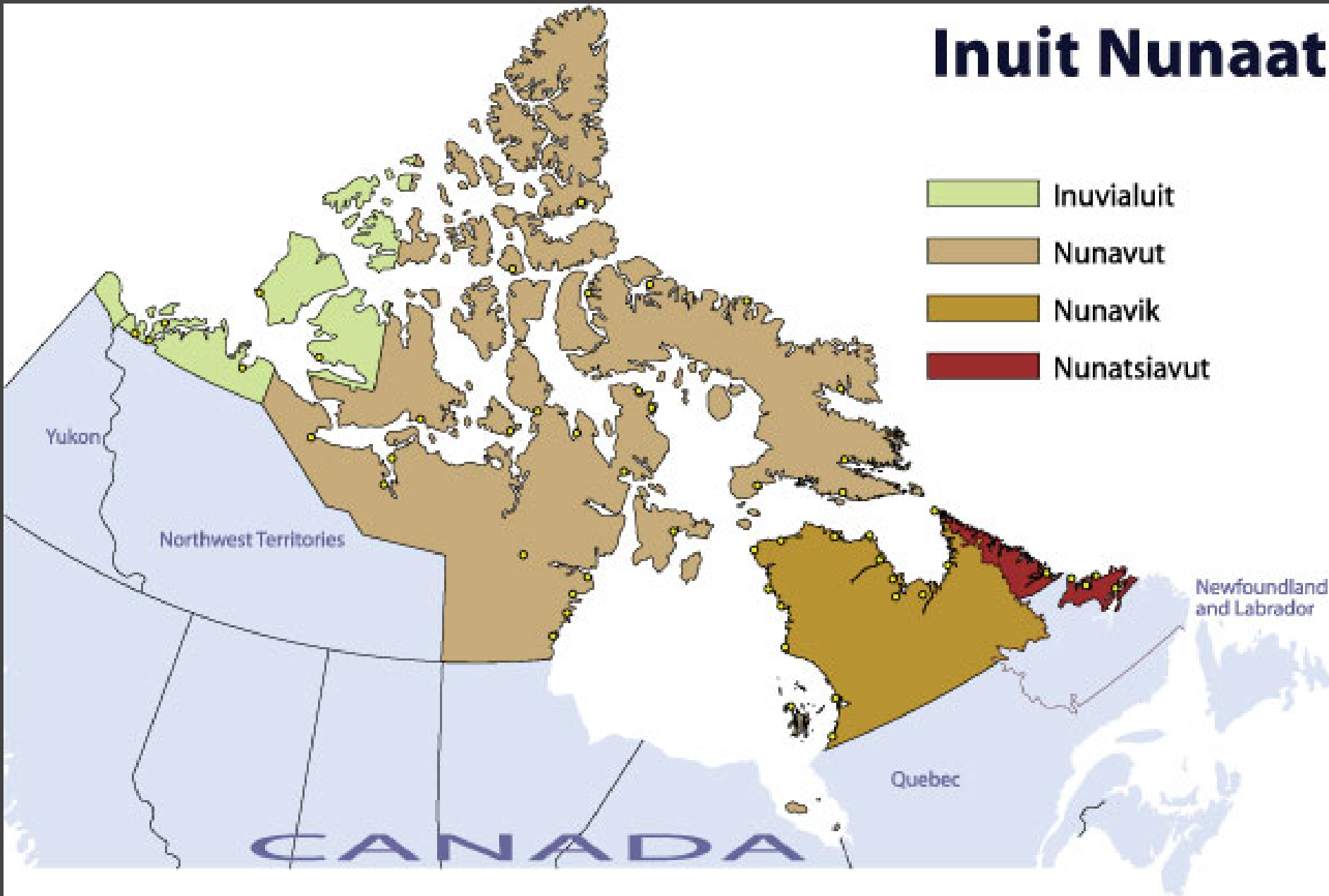
# Summary of last week's content





# Inuit Nunaat

-  Inuvialuit
-  Nunavut
-  Nunavik
-  Nunatsiavut



# From late 1880s through early 1960s

- 1880s - 1920s
  - Whaling
  - Illness
- World War I & II
  - Fox, whales, caribou
- Cold War
  - High Arctic relocation program
  - Air bases
- 1953
  - ~40 permanent Hamlets established
- 1960s
  - Illness - TB
  - High Schools - led to political action



Arctic  
Ocean



Canada

United States

Atlantic  
Ocean

Pacific  
Ocean





# Cape Dorset - Kinggait



# Canadian Handicrafts Guild

1906 The Canadian Handicrafts Guild is declared a non-profit organization

The Guild's objectives were as follow :

- Encourage, preserve, improve and stimulate Canadian crafts throughout the Dominion.
- Prevent the loss and degradation of crafts.
- Encourage the practice of crafts by making it an honourable and lucrative profession.
- Help artists and artisans by maintaining a market for them throughout Canada and abroad.
- Foster public awareness about the importance of this art form.

# Canadian Handicrafts Guild



- In 1939, Inuit art was added to the Guild's preservation mandate, and the Indian and Eskimo Committee was formed.
  - Continuous poor hunts over the previous few years caused the living conditions of the Inuit to deteriorate.
  - The Indian and Eskimo Committee suggested that craft-related work be prioritized.
  - Guild worked with the Canadian Department of Resources and Development to create arts and crafts programs in the north

# Canadian Handicrafts Guild



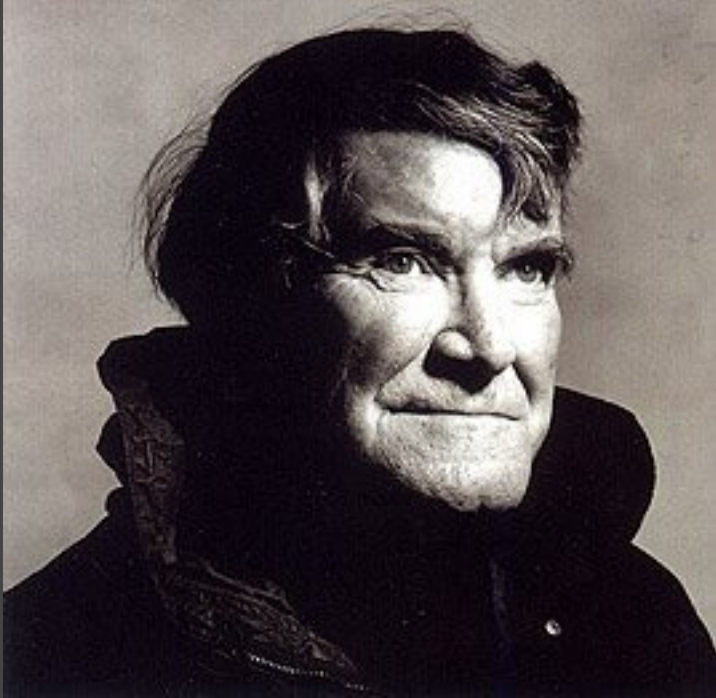
- 1949 – The first Inuit art show and sale held in southern Canada
  - James Houston (representative of the Guild in the Arctic) went to live and travel in the Great North. During his travels, he acquired Inuit sculptures. The exhibit was held on November 21, 1949, in Montreal, at 2025 Peel Street.

# Canadian Handicrafts Guild



- 1949– 1953 Prosperity of the Inuit industry
  - The period between 1949 and 1953 marked the beginning of what would become a prosperous industry, whose sales figure now amounts to millions of dollars.
  - During the first few years, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Guild worked hand in hand.
- Near the late 1950's, a movement called the Inuit Cooperative was created in the North. Today, these cooperatives have their own distribution channels in the South.

# James Houston in the Arctic



- Began in 1948 to develop a formal marketing structure for Inuit Art
  - stone and ivory sculpture
  - basketry
  - sewn handicrafts
- Skin pictures
- Houston wanted to develop a more suitable graphic art format that would be a better fit in the existing art world
- He helped to develop a printmaking and other craft studio in Cape Dorset



# 1955 memo to Ottawa



Houston was exploring...

"successfully introduc(ing) a graphic art of native concept as they have in the Congo or Haiti to the Inuit in the North."

# 1957

- Studio began printing paper gift cards
- Houston reported to the Guild that "it is still too early to report on the craft experiments at Cape Dorset"
- Relief blocks made with stone as well as linoleum floor tiles glued onto wood backing
- stencils cut from sealskin and discarded x-ray film, then artists almost exclusively used paper impregnated with wax

- *Three Caribou*, 1957, K.

Pootoogook, one of the first prints made in Cape Dorset Studio





# 1958

- Cape Dorset printmakers assembled collections that were published in editions of 30
- 13 of the prints were sold at the Hudson Bay Company's department store in Winnipeg
- Casual sales of "experimental" prints continued into early 1959 at Canadian Handicraft Guild outlets
- Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources put a temporary halt on the distribution of prints
  - wanted to market to higher-end galleries rather than department stores
  - wanted to focus on annual collections
- Fall, Houston went to Japan for 3 months to study Japanese printmaking techniques

# Houston in Japan

- Three months
- Un'ichi Hiratsuka - famous woodcut teacher
- Learned about technique, artists, tools, paper, etc.
- Very influenced by Mingei movement (revival of Japanese folk crafts)
- Returned to Cape Dorset in 1959 with examples of Japanese prints, tools, paper

# Japanese Print Influence on Inuit Printmaking Program



- Use of name seals - chop marks/hankos developed for each artist, printmaker, and community
- Style - emphasis on black ink on white background (quarter of 1959 collection)
- *Urazaishiki* technique - incorporating a warm background into a woodblock print without muddying the black image

# February, 1960 - First official collection of prints released



- Pudlo, Cape Dorset Studio, 1961
- The print program was very successful and the Cape Dorset Print studio puts out collections of prints each year
- Artists have expanded from the initial stonecut and stencil prints to many other printmaking techniques
- Print programs spread across the Canadian Arctic to other communities, such as Baker Lake, Povungituk, Rankin Inlet, Pangnirtung, etc.

# Meanwhile...in Michigan...



- In 1953 James Houston solicited support from his friend, Eugene Power, who was born in Traverse City, to help import Inuit art into the United States.
- Power, who owned and operated University Microfilms in Ann Arbor, established a non-profit gallery in Ann Arbor called Eskimo Art Incorporated to import the work.
- He encouraged the Cranbrook Institute of Science to host the first exhibition of Inuit Art in the United States in 1953.

# Okay, and then...

- In 1960 Wilbur Munnecke of Field Enterprises in Chicago, who was on the board of Eskimo Art Inc., gave Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City a small collection of sculptures and prints to sell.
- Bernie Rink, NMC's library director, used proceeds from the sale to purchase some of the work to start a collection of Inuit Art at Northwestern Michigan College.
- The College became the first authorized site in the United States to sell Inuit Art, and proceeded to have a sale each year
- In 1991, the opening of the Dennon Museum Center at NMC provided a permanent gallery for the collection and opportunities for programming



# Now...

- The Denmos holds the second-largest collection of Inuit Art in the continental United States



**BREAK!**

or maybe video...



# Film

- Kenojuak: Eskimo Artist
- This documentary shows how an Inuit artist's drawings are transferred to stone, printed and sold. Kenojuak Ashevak became the first woman involved with the printmaking co-operative in Cape Dorset. This film was nominated for the 1963 Documentary Short Subject Oscar®.

# Gallery Exercise

In the Inuit Gallery, look for the following and discuss:

- Examples of early printmaking
- Influence of Japanese Prints
- Works related to the following themes:
  - Whaling
  - Hunting
  - Illness
  - Contemporary Life in Arctic
  - Traditional Life of Inuit (pre-contact)