A Concise and Critical Art History of the Northwest Territories

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Abstract

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This thesis offers a comprehensive exploration of the art systems in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and their evolution over time. It investigates how the history of promoting, exhibiting, and funding northern art has significantly shaped the current artistic climate for NWT artists. Through a multi-faceted approach, the research delves into the unique aesthetics of the NWT, examining the impact of materiality, critical craft theory, and the terminology used to categorize art and craft, and how these factors influence the reception of NWT art.

The thesis also analyzes the transformative event of the 1999 division of the NWT and Nunavut territories, which left an indelible mark on all aspects of northern life and played a pivotal role in shaping the visual identity of the North. A unique focus is placed on the development of Inuit art, tracing its historical trajectory and, notably, the findings from the carefully compiled resource, "Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline" (Appendix A), created during the course of this research.

In addition to historical and artistic analysis, the research provides an in-depth examination of the current NWT arts landscape. It investigates the intricate relationships between arts organizations, the local community, and cultural policy, highlighting their collective impact on the contemporary arts scene. Moreover, the thesis offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that NWT artists confront in their creative endeavors within the territory today.

In summation, this thesis offers a nuanced and comprehensive view of the art history and current artistic environment in the Northwest Territories. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the region's distinctive artistic identity, the socio-political influences that have shaped it, and the challenges faced by NWT artists in the present day.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful for the invaluable guidance and leadership provided by my supervisor, Dr. Heather Igloliorte, throughout the entire MA process. From the very first curatorial talk I attended, I have been inspired by her exceptional approach to celebrating northern Indigenous art. Above all, she has taught me how to wholeheartedly and practically support northern artists, including the trick of purchasing beaded earrings right from an artist's ears—a tactic I've successfully used since. Thank you for your unwavering support.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Michelle McGeough for her thoughtful feedback as a thesis reader; thank you for strengthening my arguments with your careful editing. Your insight was instrumental.

My sincere thank you goes out to all Northwest Territories artists and cultural workers. You are like a breeze on a buggy summer day, offering relief and inspiration. I hope that this thesis can stand as an advocacy resource for artists in the territory. My deepest gratitude goes to all those I interviewed or engaged in conversations about NWT art; these interactions formed the bedrock of my research. Notably, I wish to express my gratitude to Alysa Procida, Dot Van Vliet, Erin Suliak, Jennifer Bowen, Johanna Tiemessen, Jonah Cutler, Margaret Nazon, Melaw Nakehk'o, Robin Webber, Ryan Silke, Sarah Swan, Shawna Mcleod, Susan Irving, and Travis Mercredi. Thank you, as well, to Geneviève Duval and the team at La Guilde for understanding the importance of this work.

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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the financial support I received from Polar Knowledge Canada's Northern Scientific Training Program, the Government of the Northwest Territories' Student Financial Assistance Program, the Renata Hornstein Graduate Fellowship in Art History, and the Yellowknife Community Foundation's Wally12million Arts Fund.

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List of Abbreviations

CAP – Canadian Arctic Producers

DIAND – Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

GNWT – Government of the Northwest Territories

GNWT ECE – Government of the Northwest Territories department of Education, Culture and Employment

GNWT ITI – Government of the Northwest Territories department of Industry, Tourism, and Investment

HBC – Hudson's Bay Company

IAF – Inuit Art Foundation

ITC – Inuit Tapirisat of Canada

NWT – Northwest Territories

PWNHC – Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre

RCMP – Royal Canadian Mounted Police

YKARCC – Yellowknife Artist Run Community Centre

YKDFN – Yellowknives Dene First Nation

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A Concise and Critical Art History of the Northwest Territories: Introduction

Clichéd polar bears, northern lights, and dogsleds have long obscured the vibrant contemporary arts scene in the Northwest Territories (NWT), perpetuating a misleading image of Canada's North. Art depicting the NWT found in art galleries often confines the region to stereotypical scenes of sparse white landscapes, primarily for the fascination of southern audiences, or worse, doesn't find a place in galleries at all. As an emerging art historian from Yellowknife, I've experienced firsthand the impact of oversimplified representations of northern life in the art world. This neglect has resulted in a significant misrepresentation, disregard, and exclusion of the Northwest Territories in the Canadian art historical narrative. Consequently, there's a lack of national recognition that truly reflects the depth of creative talent within the central of the three Canadian territories. This is further underscored by the absence of a non-commercial art gallery in the NWT. Moreover, the NWT consistently receives less than one-third of the funding from the Canada Council for the Arts compared to what the Yukon and Nunavut receive (refer to Table 1).[1] Notably, there's also an absence of a comprehensive written history of NWT art. As an emerging art historian from the territory, I couldn't help but wonder: why?

Despite the large geographic separation and ignorance from the Canadian art centres of Toronto or Montreal, NWT artists have continually held their ground by making art in the North, for the North. Two examples of Northwest Territories artists who find ways to propel their practices forward, despite the many challenges experienced by artists in the territory, are Margaret Nazon and Pat Kane. The North has many talented beaders, but Gwich'in artist Margaret Nazon stands out for her uniqueness and acclaimed artistic style. Nazon, an incredible

[1] Canada Council for the Arts, "Recipients – 2017 to Present," https://canadacouncil.ca/about/public-accountability/proactive-disclosure/grant-recipients/recipients-2017-present.

beadworker, is known for the cosmic designs inspired by images captured by the Hubble space telescope, which she has been creating since 2009. Works like *Galaxy Cluster* (2017) (fig. 1), are densely rendered with beads, buttons, and gems to illustrate the vastness of celestial skies. Each piece by Nazon involves thousands of beads stitched onto black velvet often so layered the work becomes three-dimensional. As NWT curator, Sarah Swan, describes, "the result is luxuriant: outer space as a shimmering, velvet-lined jewelry box."[2] Nazon lives and works in Tsiigehtchic, a perfect location to draw inspiration for her artwork. "It's very dark because there's no lights," said Nazon about being on the land as a child with her family, "we would just lay on the snow and look up at the sky."[3] Tsiigehtchic is a primarily Gwich'in community of roughly 180 people, a far distance from the collections her artwork resides in which include Global Affairs Canada, the Canada Science and Technology Museum, and the Smithsonian Institute. Despite the distance, Nazon roots her art in the NWT and she finds ways to connect with other artists, teach workshops and continually produce inspiring artwork.

Pat Kane, another exemplarily NWT artist, is a photographer of Irish-Canadian and Algonquin Anishinaabe descent based in Yellowknife, whose work takes a documentary approach to stories impacting northerners, with a special focus on Indigenous concerns and empowerment. "There is no shortage of incredible travel and landscape photos of Northern Canada," Kane remarked in an interview, yet he argues, "I think they only scratch the surface of what the North really is. I try to offer another perspective, where people and their relationships with the land and with each other are the main story."[4] Kane's 2023 project on northern food

[2] Sarah Swan, "A Beaded Universe." *Galleries West*, February 27, 2018, https://www.gallerieswest.ca/magazine/stories/a-beaded-universe/.
[3] Margaret Nazon, personal communication with author, November 2022.
[4] Pat Kane, "Through the Lens of Pat Kane," accessed July 6, 2023, https://beside.media/through-the-lens/pat-kane/.

security for the National Geographic Society[5] is a hauntingly beautiful example of his relationship-building (fig. 2). This project profiles the impacts that colonization, through the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, has had on the diets of northern Canadians. Kane's images of food find a balance between lovingly highlighting northerner's preferred brands like Red Rose tea, Spam, and China Lily soya sauce while making very serious commentary on the new diet-related illnesses like type 2 diabetes, malnutrition, obesity, and heart disease that were introduced to the North with the readily available grocery products. Kane's work is one of the most honest depictions of the NWT; his focused efforts on strong relationships and his devotion to community come through in his images. In offering a genuine perspective born out of the lived experiences of northerners, Nazon and Kane collectively challenge preconceptions thus breaking away from the conventional stereotypes that depict the North with dogsleds, northern lights, and polar bears. Their art transcends these expected narratives, affirming the Northwest Territories' exceptional talent and diverse artistic practices.

The Northwest Territories has been the subject of many excellent archeology, anthropology, and ethnohistory studies, though the art historical literature is scant. With evidence of such sincere creativity and rich storytelling in the territory, exemplified by visual artists like Nazon and Kane, I couldn't help but wonder why the NWT is not known across the country for its talent. I also ask, why are there so few art spaces for artists to exhibit their work? Why is there so little arts funding to support these fantastic projects? These discrepancies and my passion for fostering the arts above the 60th parallel sparked the overarching question guiding my MA research: How has the history of promotion, exhibitions, and funding of northern art impacted the current climate for NWT artists?

[5] Pat Kane, "Northern food security for the National Geographic Society", 2023. Image accessed on Instagram (via @patkanephoto) on July 5, 2023. Image posted June 7, 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CtM4Z5WPH0o/.

To investigate these questions I have divided this thesis into three sections. In Section I, I begin by describing the unique aesthetics of the NWT. From there, I consider materiality, critical craft theory, and how the terminology used to define art and craft impacts the reception of NWT art. In Section II, I will introduce the 1999 division of NWT and Nunavut territories, an event that greatly impacted all aspects of northern life and shaped the visual identity of the North. It is also in Section II where I will unpack the unique history of the development of Inuit art and the findings of a resource I created during my research: *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* (Appendix A.) Section III is an in-depth analysis of the current NWT arts landscape, including the complex relationships between arts organizations, the community, and cultural policy. Lastly, I will discuss the possible challenges for artists working in the territory today.

In this study, I analyze the contemporary NWT art network as a whole, a network that impacts the lives and careers of both NWT's Indigenous artists and non-Indigenous artists. This thesis largely focuses on the Indigenous aesthetics and artists of the Northwest Territories, because they are the original peoples and ongoing custodians of the NWT's lands and waters, whose artistic traditions and practices long precede the arrival of newcomers.[6] As the arts infrastructures and systems affect all NWT residents (including non-Indigenous artists), what is beneficial to Indigenous artists is beneficial to all artists in the territory. Ultimately, this thesis aims to bring NWT art into the spotlight by highlighting the creative ingenuity that NWT artists possess, sharing the history of artistic development in the territory, analysing the reasons why an entire territory has been excluded from the national arts scene, and considering the next steps for the NWT arts sector.

[6] Dene Nation. "Home: Denendeh Is the Land of the People." Accessed July 7, 2023. https://denenation.com/.

Northwest Territories History and Context

The Northwest Territories is composed of 33 communities with a total population of 45,605[7] people spread over more than one million square kilometres. It is home to five regions including: the Dehcho, South Slave, North Slave, Sahtu, and the Beaufort Delta (fig. 3). There are 11 official languages and three distinct Indigenous groups across the territory: Dene, Inuvialuit, and Métis. It is important to note that the population of the NWT is 50.7% Indigenous, 39.7% of the population is of European descent and 9.6% of visible minorities.[8] This demographic of 50% Indigenous and 50% of all other cultures is different than anywhere else in Canada.[9] According to the Government of the Northwest Territories' NWT Bureau of Statistics in 2018 over 7,583 NWT citizens produced arts and crafts annually, which is 21.6% of the NWT's total population.[10] These statistics show that art-making is vital to a significant portion of NWT residents. This study uncovers how the limited arts funding, exhibition opportunities, and recognition for NWT artists underserves more than one-fifth of the population.

What is now known as the Northwest Territories was settled and developed relatively recently. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), Christian missionaries, and the Royal Canadian

[7] NWT Bureau of Statistics, "Population Estimates by Community and Region As At July 1, 2022," accessed July 6, 2023, https://www.statsnwt.ca/population/population-estimates/bycommunity.php.
[8] "Demographics of the Northwest Territories," in *Wikipedia*, February 23, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Demographics_of_the_Northwest_Territories&oldid=1141044374.
[9] To compare with the other two territories, the Yukon has a population of 23.3% Indigenous peoples, and Nunavut's population is 85.9% Indigenous (of that percentage 84.7% are Inuit.) To put these numbers in national context, for example, just 1.8% of Quebec's population is Indigenous, despite including eleven distinct Indigenous peoples. Quebec is used as an example here due to the relevancy to my professors and colleagues at Concordia University, located in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke.
"Demographics of Yukon," in *Wikipedia*, accessed July 1, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Demographics_of_Yukon&oldid=1162897869.; "Demographics of Nunavut," in *Wikipedia*, acessed May 9, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Demographics_of_Nunavut&oldid=1154033766.;"Demographics of Quebec," in *Wikipedia*, accessed July 4, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Demographics_of_Quebec&oldid=1163399782.
[10] NWT Bureau of Statistics, "2018 Engagement in Traditional Activities," accessed July 6, 2023, https://www.statsnwt.ca/Traditional%20Activities/.

Mounted Police (RCMP) established the first settlements in the mid 19th century, using imposed monetary and educational systems to forcefully centralize the seasonally-nomadic Indigenous populations of the North. In the 1920s and 1930s oil and gold were found in the territory, and thus resource extraction began the legacy of the territory which remains today. The Northwest Territories' economy was established by the fur trade and continues to be fueled by its capitalistic resource extraction, including gold, diamond, and rare earth mineral mining.[11] Yellowknife, (or Sǫ̀mbak'è, meaning "money place" in many dialects spoken by Dene people in this territory),[12] was founded in 1934 and officially designated as the capital city in 1967, located on the traditional territory of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation.[13]

What art historians might today describe as "visual art" has been produced in the NWT since long before European contact. Porcupine quillwork and birchbark baskets are two of the earliest artforms recorded upon contact[14] though many other forms were used since time immemorial including: fishnets, snowshoes, fish traps, willow root/spruce root baskets, birch bark biting, fish scale art, parkas, mittens, moccasins, and other clothing. For the purpose of this study, visual art is defined here to include material objects where skill, care, and attention have been invested to create a beautiful handmade work. As with many Indigenous languages,[15] the 11 official languages of the NWT do not all have one word for the term "art." For example, the

[11] The Honorable Dennis Glen Patterson and The Honorable Patricia Bovey (Deputy Chair) Bovey, "Northern Lights: A Wake-Up Call for the Future of Canada," *Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic*, June 2019, 33. https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/ARCT/reports/ARCTFINALREPORT_E.pdf. 12/29/23 10:29:00 AM

[12] Justina Black, "The Knowledge We Carry from the Land Is Medicine," in *Ndè Sii Wet'aà: Northern Indigenous Voices on Land, Life, and Art*, ed. Kyla LeSage, Thumlee Drybones-Foliot, and Leanne Betasamoake Simpson (Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2022), 160.

[13] City of Yellowknife, "About Yellowknife," April 5, 2022, https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/exploring-yellowknife/about-yellowknife.aspx.

[14] Kate C. Duncan, *Northern Athapaskan Art: A Beadwork Tradition* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1989).

[15] Nancy Marie Mithlo, "No Word for Art in Our Language?: Old Questions, New Paradigms," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1, (Spring 2012).

Yellowknife Artist Run Community Centre (YKARCC) undertook a translation project when creating signage for their mobile gallery[16] in 2019. They received translations for "art gallery" in all NWT languages, though when directly translated, most of the terms meant "art home" or as in Sahtúot'ı̨nę Yatı́: Ası̨ yáetsı̨, datł'é dáawhela k'ə́ (meaning a place where homemade things and paintings are displayed.)[17]

Despite not having a singular word for art in the Western art historical understanding of the term, NWT peoples have been making artful items since time immemorial. For example, a pair of snowshoes might not fit in a Western canonical definition of art, although its creation requires complex techniques and a creative eye to complete.[18] As explained by Lakota art historian, Carmen Robertson, "To make beautiful objects using the highest quality materials and designs that reflect cultural and personal knowledge, spiritual associations and, often utilitarian purpose has always been an integral part of Indigenous artistic aesthetics."[19] To ornately make a functional object beautiful demonstrates that Indigenous peoples in the North had the time and resources to go beyond mere survival. The detail and care placed into NWT artworks then and now express a quality of life rich with abundance.

While other art forms including music, performance, dance, film, and literature are equally important in the NWT, for the purpose of this study I am focusing exclusively on forms of visual art. All forms of artistic expression shape how the NWT is interpreted and represented, but for the sake of brevity and due to the unique history of visual arts in the North, my research

[16] More on YKARCC's mobile gallery project in Section III on page 48.
[17] Translation by elder Sarah Cleary in 2019. Shared in personal communication with President of YKARCC, Sarah Swan on August 1, 2023.
[18] Carolyn Dean, "The Trouble with (the Term) Art." *Art Journal* 65, no. 2 (June 2006): 24–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2006.10791203.
[19] Carmen Robertson, "Clearing Paths," in *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art*, edited by University of Regina Canadian Plains Research Center., Carmen Robertson, and Sherry Farrell Racette. University of Regina Publications, Canadian Plains Research Center, (Regina, Sask, 2009), 9. http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/g4/12/780889772267_21061tc.pdf.

is focused on visual material culture. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all artists from the NWT for providing such fertile ground to explore, whether included in this thesis or beyond its narrow parameters, and I hope to continue writing about and expanding my research on NWT artists in the past, present, and future.

Methodologies for Understanding Northwest Territories Art Histories

In contemporary academic scholarship it is understood that each researcher brings their perspective, knowledge, and lived experiences to their work and this informs the research at every step. As Cree scholar Dr. Jeffrey Paul Ansloos writes, "Identity is a foundation to anti-oppressive research because it gives contour to a researcher's way of being in the world. How we understand *who we are* often shapes *how we are* in our research."[20] Thus, to explain my positionality and how it shapes this thesis: I am a white settler from Sǫ̀mbak'è on Chief Drygeese Territory, in Denendeh[21] (Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.) I am a 6th generation Canadian settler on my father's side of Irish descent and my maternal grandparents immigrated from the Netherlands to Ontario in the late 1950s. My parents met in Yellowknife and have lived there for over 35 years. I feel very lucky to have grown up along the rocky shores of Great Slave Lake and I identify as a white northerner. How I have come to understand life in the Canadian North has a significant impact on the ways I make sense of my knowledge production and my responsibilities as a researcher. Being raised in Denendeh shaped my perception and I am very grateful to have

[20] Jeffrey Paul Ansloos, "'To Speak in Our Own Ways About the World, Without Shame': Reflections on Indigenous Resurgence in Anti-Oppressive Research," in *Creating Social Change Through Creativity: Anti-Oppressive Arts-Based Research Methodologies*, ed. Moshoula Capous-Desyllas and Karen Morgaine (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 7, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52129-9_1.
[21] Denendeh means the "Land of the People" in many dialects spoken by Dene people in the NWT. It is widely used in place of "Northwest Territories." Dene Nation. "Home: Denendeh Is the Land of the People." Accessed July 7, 2023. https://denenation.com/.

created so many of my formative memories on the territory of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN), while also acknowledging the complications of this perspective as a white settler scholar.

It is because I grew up in Denendeh that I feel indebted to work in conversation with Indigenous scholarship to address the goals of Indigenous movements of resistance, resurgence, and refusal. As outlined by settler arts scholars, Leah Decter and Carla Taunton, "As a white settler, it is vital to examine the ways one is implicated; how one fits into settler colonial histories and the shifting, yet pervasive, dynamics of settler colonialism and white supremacy in the present."[22] Through my research I offer to take on a share of labour in bringing productive decolonial change to NWT arts systems. I acknowledge that I inherently benefit from a system of oppression that disadvantages Indigenous peoples. I am complicit in systems of settler whiteness, even as I work to use my privileged positionality to contribute to my community by working in solidarity and allyship. Thus, I deliberately chose to centre Indigenous knowledges in my research by looking to Indigenous scholars, curators and artists like Dr. Heather Igloliorte,[23] Candice Hopkins,[24] Lee-Ann Martin,[25] Tania Willard and Peter Morin,[26] Mandee McDonald,[27]

[22] Leah Decter and Carla Taunton, "An Ethic of Decolonial Questioning: Exercising the Quadruple Turn in the Arts and Culture Sector," in *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada*, ed. Heather L. Igloliorte and Carla Taunton, Routledge Companions (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023).
[23] Heather L. Igloliorte and Carla Taunton, *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada*, Routledge Companions (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023).
[24] Candice Hopkins, "How to Get Indians into an Art Gallery," in *Making a Noise: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community*, ed. Lee-Ann Martin et al. (Banff: Banff Centre, 2004), 193–205.
[25] Lee-Ann Martin, "Negotiating Space for Aboriginal Art," in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, ed. Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg, Paper / Canadian Ethnology Service 135 (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002), 239–46, http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1406/2004445989-d.html.
[26] Peter Morin, Tania Willard, and BUSH Gallery, "Issue 136: Site/Ation," *C Magazine*, Winter 2018, https://cmagazine.com/issues/136.
[27] Mandee McDonald, "Indigenous Land-Based Education in Theory and Practice," ed. Hayden King, *Yellowhead Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University* A Yellowhead Institute Special Report (January 2023).

Dr. Glen Coulthard,[28] and Margaret Kovach.[29] Through their scholarship and practice, I have learned the importance of reciprocal relationships, caring for the land, and understanding the devastating impacts that colonization has had on Canada as a whole, and the North more specifically.

Scholarship specific to Northwest Territories arts is limited and predominantly written by scholars not from the North. I turned to the etic perspectives of academics including Abra Wenzel,[30] Kate Duncan,[31] and Judy Thomson[32] to expand my literature review of NWT art history ensuring to account for a diverse and complete breadth of scholarship. The North as imagined by outsiders and the North as experienced by its inhabitants are two vastly different places politically, culturally, and socially.[33] So, whenever possible, I have integrated texts by northern voices, as I most strongly believe that northern research should be in northern hands.[34]

Sarah Swan, a Yellowknife-based curator, arts writer, and president of the Yellowknife Artist Run Community Centre, has dedicated much of her writing and volunteer efforts to addressing the issues with NWT arts structures. Swan paints an invaluable, delicate, and hyperlocal depiction of northern creativity through her writing and advocacy[35] that will leave

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[28] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
[29] Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, Second edition (Toronto ; University of Toronto Press, 2021).
[30]Abra Wenzel, "Circling COVID: Making in the Time of a Pandemic," *Anthropologica* 63, no. 1 (2021): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.18357/anthropologica6312021350.
[31] Duncan, *Northern Athapaskan Art*.
[32]Judy Thompson, *Women's Work, Women's Art: Nineteenth-Century Northern Athapaskan Clothing* (Gatineau, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization ;, 2013).
[33] Renée Hulan, *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*, 29 (Montréal ; McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 4, https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/400282.
[34] Morgan Moffit, Courtney Chetwynd, and Zoe Todd, "Interrupting the Northern Research Industry: Why Northern Research Should Be In Northern Hands," *Northern Public Affairs* 4, no. 1 (December 3, 2015).
[35] Sarah Swan, "In Defence of Art from Small Places," Galleries West, December 28, 2020, https://www.gallerieswest.ca/api/content/4c918610-3ffa-11eb-8a4d-1244d5f7c7c6/.; Sarah Swan, "Different Strokes," Maisonneuve, April 8, 2022, http://maisonneuve.org/article/2022/04/8/different-strokes/.; Sarah Swan, "Taking a Shot at Art in the Northwest Territories," Galleries West, September 6, 2021, https://www.gallerieswest.ca/api/content/5d174f42-fcba-11eb-add4-1244d5f7c7c6/.

permanent impressions on the NWT arts sector. Swan's articles were some of the first sources I read while starting my research and are always helpful when I return to them again. Because there are so few published materials on the subject of NWT art, I refer countless times to public media sources such as CBC News, UpHere Magazine, and Cabin Radio. I am grateful to these corporations for their dedication to northern journalism and for filling the gap in NWT arts reporting.

To undertake this research requiring both archival research and oral histories, I conducted both semi-structured interviews and unstructured conversations with NWT artists and cultural workers from each of the five regions. Quotes, personal anecdotes, and comments from these interviews and conversations are incorporated throughout this thesis. I do not want to speak on anyone else's behalf, so whenever possible I have chosen to incorporate the artists' voices with direct quotations as part of my larger goal of foregrounding the artists in this work and contributing to the empowerment of northern creativity. Understandably, due to the personal nature of an interview, and in the efforts of maintaining a reputable career in the NWT's close-knit arts sphere, some of the interviewees wish to remain anonymous. I cannot stress enough the impact that these conversations have had on my research. Opaskwayak Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson stated that, "It is the forming of healthy and strong relationships that lead us to being healthy and strong researchers […] the research process may also build or strengthen a sense of community. Through maintaining accountability to the relationships that have been built, an increased sense of sharing common interests can be established."[36] It is with this intention that I spent time creating and building relationships with NWT artists and arts administrators to ensure that I represented a complete and nuanced depiction of the history of arts in the territory and

[36] Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 86.

what it means to be an artist living and working in the NWT today. Throughout this process I ensured to engage in relationship building by meeting with artists over coffee, attending northern research fairs, conducting phone interviews, buying artwork from emerging artists, sharing opportunities with artists, attending community art events and art critique nights, meeting with board members of YKARCC, and visiting the art collections at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. I extend my deepest gratitude to all those who I interviewed or talked with about NWT art; these conversations formed the bedrock of this thesis.

To begin my research, I outlined the history of arts promotion and development in a timeline: *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* (Appendix A.) which I expand upon in Section II. Using sources from the NWT Archives, this method was used both for my own personal interest as a way to clarify my research findings, but it was also created to be a resource for northern artists and historians. This approach symbolizes the reciprocity inherent in my research, aiming to contribute something meaningful back to the community. By documenting histories in *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* (Appendix A.) I aim to demonstrate the many efforts to promote NWT arts throughout the past century. As explained in the timeline, influential artistic movements stem from the territory, the most unique technique being caribou or moose hair tufting developed in the Dehcho (Fort Providence.) This thesis research, and with it *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline,* is the first assembled, concise documented NWT art history.

Section I. Tufting, Five Petal Roses, and Shacks: The Visual Identity of the Northwest Territories

As there is no Northwest Territories art history book to turn to, when I began this research, I felt as though I was starting from square one. I started with some foundational questions: How does one define NWT art? How is it different from, or similar to, Yukon art or Nunavut art? A territory as geographically large and culturally diverse as the NWT, has a colourful and expansive art practice to reflect the varied realities of NWT existence. Geographically, each of the NWT's five regions span broad areas of the North, making transportation and connection challenging. The Indigenous peoples of these distinct regions each speak different languages and have their own customs, traditions, and aesthetics. Culturally, the 50/50 split between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents means that there are multiple artistic movements in conversation with each other. Due to cultural diversity, varied geography, and the relatively recent process of colonization, defining NWT art is not confined to a singular category. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic amalgamation of culture, tradition, politics, and creative expression linking the past and present, that cannot be explained by the limitations of one specific label or genre. In explaining Northwest Territories arts through six main aesthetics,[37] my intent is to illustrate the unique essence that characterizes the NWT (there are of course many forms of creative expression not listed here). This thesis argues that the NWT is defined by its iconic Indigenous aesthetics, motifs, and methods including: rich traditions of hide tanning, porcupine quillwork, the Delta braid, the five petal rose, and moose hair tufting. Lastly, I argue that settler and Indigenous artists alike, represent their understanding of life in the NWT through imagery of the landscapes, the people, and the ramshackle architecture. I focus largely

[37] As Northwest Territories art defies categorization into a single formulaic style or medium, I employ the term 'NWT aesthetics' to encompass the customs, principles, and techniques that underlie and guide the artwork. Each aesthetic I outline describes a distinct artistic method, motif, or approach used in the NWT, often tied to a specific region or cultural group. These six categories are broad, sweeping groups designed not to belittle but to document the discernible patterning I have found in my research and illustrate the unique essence that characterizes the territory. It's crucial to acknowledge that the term 'NWT aesthetics' and the subsequent description is entirely subjective, rooted in my data collection and personal experience.

on Indigenous aesthetics because the Northwest Territories is Indigenous land with artistic traditions and practices that long precede the arrival of settlers, although I also include newcomer art practices because they too contribute something distinct to the contemporary visual identity of the territory.

NWT Art in Six Aesthetics

The first aesthetic practice I discuss is hide tanning, a resurgent tradition which is extremely popular in the NWT (fig. 4 and 5.) Caribou or moose hides are a vital material in the North, used for clothing, footwear, bags, and more. The material is strong, durable, lightweight and warm. The process of tanning a single hide can take a group weeks or months to complete. While there are many variations on the following processes, it is given that are many labour-intensive steps involved in tanning a hide. Steps include the ethical hunting, skinning of the moose (being careful to not produce any holes) before soaking, curing, removing the hair and membrane, stretching the hide, scraping, and drying it. Once dried the softening process can begin; the more the hide is scraped and worked, the softer it becomes. A process of smoking the hide over a fire follows as a final step to give it its beautiful golden colour and sweet smoky smell.[38] The importance of hide tanning has been explained by Dene artist, activist, and hide tanner, Melaw Nakehk'o: "Tanning hides is a foundational Indigenous art form. It was [used for] our homes, our transportation, our clothes and, in hard times, our sustenance. It is the canvas of our visual cultural identity," she says, "the smoke smell triggers memories of grandmothers, the sound of scraping reminds us of our aunties working together, and the beadwork and style of our

[38] Sherry Farrell Racette, "Traditional Arts and Media: Resilience and Survivance," in *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art*, edited by University of Regina Canadian Plains Research Center, Carmen Robertson, and Sherry Farrell Racette. University of Regina Publications, Canadian Plains Research Center, (Regina, Sask, 2009), 23, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/g4/12/780889772267_21061tc.pdf.

moccasins represent our nations."[39] In a personal interview with Nakehk'o, she expanded: "Hides are the first canvas, it identifies how we express ourselves and our relations, it's how we are recognized in the spirit world. Tanning hides takes care of you, your physical strength and your wellbeing. You have to keep a positive mindset and work with people. It is a holistically beautiful process."[40]

The second distinguishing feature that NWT Indigenous artists are known for is porcupine quillwork, which is a very difficult and beautiful form of decoration applied to the surface of clothing, birchbark baskets, and other items. Quillwork is a technique practiced for centuries in many parts of North America and was the primary form of artistic expression by Dene women in regions where porcupines could be found.[41] Using porcupine quills gathered from the natural environment reflects the deep knowledge possessed by the Dene peoples who secured their living from the land, and the profound respect in which plants and animals were held.[42] Creating with quills is a meticulous process that takes great skill and patience. Working so closely with animals involves a specific human to non-human kinship relationship, requiring gratitude and a consideration of the life given to this project. After harvesting porcupine quills, artists then wash the quills to remove the natural grease. Quills are dyed using either natural materials (berries, flowers, plants, and lichen) or commercial dyes. Quills can be woven into decorative geometric bands using a bow loom, most commonly in zig-zag and diamond patterns. Embroidery quillwork is sewn directly onto hide, clothing, birchbark, or accessories. Still used today to decorate birchbark baskets, quillwork is also commonly seen in contemporary earring

[39] Melaw Nakehk'o in "Here Is Where We Shall Stay," Pat Kane, Maisonneuve, September 30, 2021, http://maisonneuve.org/article/2021/09/30/here-where-we-shall-stay/.
[40] Melaw Nakehk'o, personal communication with author, December 2022.
[41] Northwest Territories Arts, "Each Quill on Birchbark Tells a Story," NWT Arts, November 25, 2013, https://www.nwtarts.com/each-quill-birchbark-tells-story.
[42] Sherry Farrell Racette, "Traditional Arts and Media: Resilience and Survivance," 23.

styles. Beader Sheena Yakeleya, for example, uses quills to stitch perfect ivory crescent moons onto starry night sky earrings (fig. 6). The angular and congruent nature of quills requires a thorough understanding of both the limitations and structure to the medium. Once an artist, like Yakeleya, masters the technique, the black and white contrast that is natural to quillwork is extremely visually striking

Thirdly, the Delta braid is a distinctive geometric design style used on the trim of parkas in the Beaufort Delta, the northern most region of the Northwest Territories. Each seamstress develops their own personal Delta trim pattern, generally only about half an inch high, used on both ceremonial and everyday parkas.[43] Traditionally made with fur and skins, today the intricate form of appliqué is created with ribbons of geometric patterns made from layers of multi-coloured bias tape and seam bindings. With the introduction of European fabrics and threads, artists incorporated these new materials into their long-standing traditions to embellish their patterns with bright colours. Each Delta braid is unique and tells a story about the history of its artist and how they choose to create this cultural piece of art.[44] Contemporary NWT artists are reinterpreting the Delta trim in imaginative ways. Maureen Gruben's *Delta Trim* (2018) (fig. 7) used moose hide, high-visibility reflective tape, green bubble wrap, zip ties, and Velcro to recreate and amplify her mother's Delta braid pattern 19 feet in length. By mixing both natural (meaning primarily from animals) and synthetic mass-produced materials, Gruben evokes urgencies and intimacies within cultural knowledge, kinship, northern ecosystems, and sustainable material usage. Gruben's *Delta Trim* demonstrates the innovative continuity of traditional art practices in the NWT.

[43] Kyra Kordoski, "The Generosity of Translucence," in *QULLIQ: Maureen Gruben*, ed. Kay Higgins and Kathy Slade (Emily Carr University Press, 2020), 9.
[44] Northwest Territories Arts, "Beaufort Delta Region," NWT Arts, accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.nwtarts.com/region/inuvik.

The fourth aesthetic I highlight is yet another iconic style, the five petal rose motif, which is used by both Dene and Métis beaders across Canada and is extremely popular in the Northwest Territories traditionally and today. The introduction of brightly coloured seed beads in the middle of the 19th century from the Hudson's Bay Company allowed for a flourishing freedom of designs.[45] The previously used porcupine quills required simpler geometric designs, whereas needles, thread, and beads allowed for more organic shapes to take hold, like the five petal rose, and required much less processing compared to the harvesting and dying of quills. By the end of the 19th century, distinctive regional styles had developed reflecting the adaptability, creativity, and innovation of the Dene and Métis beadworkers.[46] Today, artists commonly use a flat beadwork style to sew the five petal rose onto moccasins, clothing, or accessories using a "crouched" technique where beads are threaded and laid in the desired position, and a stitch is made between every two or three beads.[47] Artists continue to explore the graphic rose, reimagining it, for example, with striking neon colours in tight precise beadwork, tufting, painting, or digital media. Erasmus Apparel, a company owned by Dene artist Sarah Erasmus, widely uses the five-petal rose on screen-printed clothing. Listed on her website as the "Dene Rose," Erasmus uses the flower pattern to adorn t-shirts, sweatpants, mugs, hats, and more (fig. 8.)[48] Worn by locals and tourists alike, Erasmus' designs are a fantastic example of how the five-petal rose has come to represent the territory at large.

The last Indigenous-specific aesthetic practice I discuss, a fundamental aspect of NWT visual arts, is caribou hair and moose hair tufting. Tufting is said to have originated in the

[45] Duncan, *Northern Athapaskan Art,* 15.
[46] Northwest Territories Arts, "Each Piece of Beadwork Tells a Story," NWT Arts, November 25, 2013, https://www.nwtarts.com/each-piece-beadwork-tells-story.
[47] Northwest Territories Arts, "Each Piece of Beadwork Tells a Story."
[48] Erasmus Apparel Ltd, "Dene Rose Crewneck Sweater," Erasmus Apparel Ltd, accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.erasmusapparel.com/products/copy-of-dene-rose-crewneck-sweater.

Dehcho (the southern-most region of the territory), around the Bouvier/Lafferty kitchen tables in Fort Providence, by three Métis women: Catherine (Beaulieu) Bouvier, Celine Laviolette Lafferty, and Madeleine (Mrs. Boniface) Lafferty.[49] Originated in the 1920s and 1930s, tufting was said to imitate the yarn punchwork of nuns teaching at the residential school. This technique was quick to spread all across the North and Canada more broadly.[50] The unique process of tufting requires precision, skill, and patience. A single tufted flower can take six to eight hours to make. Once the hair is cleaned, sorted, and dyed, a small group of 15-20 fibres are gathered to make a bundle, and then threaded tightly onto hide, fabric, or birchbark causing the hairs to stand upright into a bristly tuft. The tufts are then trimmed and sculpted into the desired shape.[51] In the 1980s, the Arctic Trading Company in Churchill, Manitoba made a tufting kit generally available to promote and preserve the art of tufting. The final product of the widely popular kit was a single framed floral tufting (fig. 9). As a result, the simplified five-petal flower motif became the standardized design.[52] Tufting is one of the most opulent styles in the NWT created by masterful artists. Robyn McLeod, a member of the Deh Gáh Got'îê First Nation in Fort Providence, is in a new generation of master tufting. McLeod's tufted work is highly contoured and full of strong textures. Each necklace or cuff bracelet is like the topography of a plentiful landscape (fig. 10). She uses floral designs drawn by her grandmother and adds her own personal touch, continuing the stories of her matriarchs through her creations.

[49] Amy Malbeuf, "Apihkêw (s/He Braids, s/He Weaves, s/He Knits)" (University of British Columbia, 2016), https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0305066.
[50] Meaghan Brakenbury, "Tuft Love," Up Here Publishing (uphere, August 2022), https://www.uphere.ca/articles/tuft-love, https://www.uphere.ca/articles/tuft-love.
[51] Northwest Territories Arts, "Each Tufting Tells a Story," NWT Arts, November 25, 2013, https://www.nwtarts.com/each-tufting-tells-story.
[52] Abra Wenzel, "Tufted Caribou Hair Picture," *Otsego Alumni Review* 6 (2017), https://www.theotsegoinstitute.org/uploads/1/3/9/6/139631595/wenzel.pdf.

Finally, the last aesthetic I define speaks to subject matter rather than media or practice, and is relatively new compared to the aforementioned Indigenous aesthetic forms. This newer NWT visual identity evolved with the settlement of white people throughout the territory during the mining boom beginning in the 1920s. Practiced by both settlers and Indigenous peoples today, many NWT artists reference the wildlife, the landscape, and the region in their artwork. Artists such as Jen Walden, for example, vividly paint imagery of bison, muskox, caribou, moose, or ravens (fig. 11). Many artists are also dedicated to depicting the "ramshackle" aesthetics, or informal architectures and detritus, that define life in our northern communities. Images of jerry cans, pallets, shacks, oil drums, or houseboats adorn the living rooms of the north and are found in gift shops in Yellowknife, made in a variety of media. "The northern aesthetic – the edges of ancient shorelines, the ditches full of fireweed, the sprawl of old pickup trucks, skidoos, tires and rusted junk… these rough-hewn haphazard visuals contrast so remarkably with the tidiness and control of dominant art forms like beadwork and moose-hair tufting."[53] Walt Humphries' folk paintings, for example, quirkily depict local Yellowknife culture, life in the bush, his experiences as a prospector, and living in a trailer park. A long-time white Yellowknifer, Humphries has lived and worked in the North since the mid-1970s. Humphries' ingenious cartoon-like paintings depict the Northwest Territories in ways only a local could. *Geophysical Wizzardry* (fig. 12) charmingly shows life in a canvas wall tent when Humphries was running a geophysical survey up near Tundra Mine in 1991. The viewer can almost smell the coffee boiling on the green Colman stove inside the tent. These varied niche interpretations of the territory add to the complete understanding of NWT art as they too define how northern life is represented.

[53] Swan, "Taking a Shot at Art in the Northwest Territories."

The six main NWT aesthetics identified in this section are rooted in rich customary styles passed on through generations of skilled artists and are continually being interpreted. Many Indigenous groups in North America were greatly impacted by the touristic souvenir art market in the 1700 to 1800s.[54] The touristic art trade was a direct response to the economic and political hegemony of European power in North America.[55] The touristic art trade (as further discussed in relation to Inuit art in Section II) has an impact on how art is made, the styles and subject matter of the work made, and how it is sold. Because the NWT was colonized and settled relatively recently, it was largely missed by this complicated and popular touristic art market. Generally without this influence, the Northwest Territories has had the opportunity to create its own set of artistic conventions. Though clearly not working in a silo, NWT artists have incorporated contemporary techniques and artistic skills, proving the adaptability and creativity of northerners. Though there is artistic overlap in other northern communities I see these six main aesthetics as what define the Northwest Territories as the Northwest Territories. The iconic aesthetics of hide tanning, porcupine quillwork, the Delta braid, the five petal rose, moose hair tufting, and most recently the quirky settler NWT iconography is strong, adaptable, and resilient enough to withstand an unsupportive industry.

Materiality and Craft

The notion of art, as a term, likely did not exist in the NWT before contact, though the desire to create beautiful things did. Artistry, as a communicator of meaning, has always been a

[54] Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).
[55] Phillips, 3.

part of all things created and honoured by Indigenous peoples.[56] The following section will discuss the etymology of the terms "art" and "craft" while considering the full array of human senses in the reception of art. Drawing on critical craft theory and reception theory, I argue that western societal perceptions of material and craft have affected why NWT art does not have a wider recognition.

The term "craft" in Western art history has been used pejoratively to describe any handwork or process that served a utilitarian or ritual purpose. The western art historical canon has historically prioritized painting and sculpture, and works deemed "craft" have long been valued as inferior and less deserving of complex art historical analysis.[57] As explained by Sally J. Markowitz in "The Distinction between Art and Craft": "Craft objects often have what are loosely called practical or utilitarian functions, while paintings and sculptures have, depending on the view, no use at all, only an aesthetic use."[58] Thus, textile arts, ceramics, and other material practices with a practical purpose are considered lower in the hierarchy of media. As the Western art world is broadening its scope to include Indigenous artists in its midst, there is a tendency to categorize artists who use "traditional" mediums as a means to brand (or exoticize, or re-colonize) them. This Euro-centric divide between art and craft has seeped its way into Canadian art history during the mid to late 20th century. In the Northwest Territories, the pre-contact semi-nomadic or seasonally-travelling Indigenous populations, would only carry the necessities and as such, would adorn or decorate these objects lovingly. By reducing the moccasins, babiche bags, parkas, and birchbark baskets – which require immense talent and patience to create – to

[56] Richard Hill, "Introduction," in *Native American Expressive Culture*, ed. National Museum of the American Indian (U.S.) (Akwe:kon Press, American Indian Program, 1994).
[57] T'ai Smith, "The Problem with Craft," *Art Journal* 75, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 80–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2016.1171544.
[58] Sally J. Markowitz, "The Distinction between Art and Craft," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 28, no. 1 (1994): 57, https://doi.org/10.2307/3333159.

handicrafts devalues the artistry while also side-stepping the recognition of Indigenous aesthetics and conceptual systems as necessary ways of understanding art.[59] As illustrated in *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* (Appendix A), northern Indigenous art forms have been partially defined by government administrators and the southern art market. The power of NWT artistic traditions comes not from being defined by outsiders but from the continued relevancy that NWT aesthetics hold.

Many of the Northwest Territories art forms, both traditional and contemporary, are made from natural materials: stone, hide, fur, or bone, for example. The material of any art form is important, as the adage goes: "The medium is the message."[60] Regionally, in the North, this point is understood to be true as the intentional non-human kinship practiced during the collection of materials is as much a part of the art making process and methodology as any other stage. The harvesting of these materials is both integral to the art practice and integral to the rhythm of a year as certain materials can only be gathered according to the season and at specific locations at those times. Materials from animals (like quills from a porcupine or hide from a moose) are gathered as a by-product of a hunt. It is a gentle, holistic, and thoughtful process accompanied by offerings of tobacco and prayer to thank the animal for its life.[61] Melaw Nakehk'o, in reference to the harvesting of natural materials such as tanned hides, says: "We occupy our traditional land, we are adhering to our traditional teachings and honouring our relationship with the animals that sustain us. Moosehide tanning is Land Back."[62]

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[59] Deborah Doxtator, "Basket, Bead and Quill, and the Making of 'Traditional' Art," in *Basket, Bead and Quill* (Basket, Bead and Quill, Thunder Bay Ont: Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1996), 18, https://e-artexte.ca/id/eprint/20028/.
[60] "The medium is the message" is a phrase coined by the Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan and the name of the first chapter in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,* published in 1964.
[61] Farrell Racette, "Traditional Arts and Media: Resilience and Survivance," 23.
[62] Melaw Nakehk'o in "Here Is Where We Shall Stay," Kane.

The common Dene, Métis, and Inuvialuit art practices in the North of beading, quillwork and birchbark basketry (birchbark being the base for most quillwork) are outside the European artistic canon which favoured so-called fine art practices such as painting and sculpture as early as the 16th century. Southern art markets had less of a frame of reference for artforms using the natural materials that Indigenous artists of the NWT used then and continue to use now. In addition to the unfamiliarity, I believe that historically, the westernized perception of materiality has hurt the reception of NWT art in a number ways: due to the sensorial aspects of the material, the longevity of the materials, and the gender of the maker.

The sensorial aspects of scent, touch, and sound are crucial components to NWT arts. For example, moose hide has a lovely, warm, distinct scent of campfire. Beads are smooth and glossy. Birchbark is papery and brittle. The overemphasis on ocularcentrism[63] in contemporary cultural theory poses a block for understanding the full range of interactions within Indigenous material culture. The Western valuation of seeing as the primary sense for the production of knowledge and the demarcation of touch, taste, and smell largely impact the reception of art and material culture today. [64] A multisensory approach allows for a richer, more accurate reception of artwork as the senses are fundamental to personhood. For example, a pair of moccasins are created to be worn. By only looking at them, a viewer could never understand the lightness of the hide or the softness of the lining that also keeps your feet warm and dry; nor the comforting smell of wood smoke; or the pleasing texture of fur trim or tight beadwork. Let alone how easy they are to move in, or how they catch the light while dancing. Without wearing them, one risks misinterpreting the ingenuity of this footwear that is best appreciated through movement.

[63] Occulatcentism is a term used to describe the bias that Western cultures emphasize when ranking vision over the other senses.
[64] Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture*, English ed, Wenner-Gren International Symposium Series (Oxford ; Berg, 2006), 7.

Sensorial craft theory argues that the disembodiment of a complete range of senses from the reception of material culture was integral to colonization and museum collection practices across the globe.[65] By displaying Indigenous artworks behind glass and blocking access to these other sensorial experiences, it disassociates the artwork from its original context and diminishes the full appreciation of its meaning.

Paul Stoller, an American cultural anthropologist, further argued that the impact of this marginalization of the senses constitutes a Western masculine theory of knowledge as opposed to a more embodied and multisensory "female" approach to the world.[66] Thus, the senses are one of the multiple ways gender influences the northern art world. As the most common media, hide tanning, beading, and basketry are all largely practiced by women and as explained above, the practicality of the objects and the gender of the maker impact their patriarchal categorization as craft. Further, functional art is practiced in the intimacy of one's home, thus historically not taken seriously in art history.[67] Craft is not only socially, but financially devalued in the hierarchy of art. Craft, as a pejorative categorization, entirely affects the market valuation of artwork, and the differentiation translates to a lower financial value than 'high-art.' Thus, we must consider how the materiality and all of the senses impact the reception, or subconscious reception, of NWT art. These biases against the sensorial nature and function of natural materials, I argue, continue to impact the reputation (or lack thereof) of Northwest Territories arts.

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[65] Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips, 7.
[66] Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*, Contemporary Ethnography Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).
[67] Tanya Lukin-Linklater, "'Memory Is Embodied:' Tanya Lukin-Linklater Interview," *The Alaska Native Studies Blog* (blog), September 27, 2013, http://alaskanativestudies.blogspot.com/2013/09/memory-is-embodied-tanya-lukin.html.

Additionally, natural materials, the backbone of NWT artwork, have an eventual expiry date for their time to return to the earth; a reality that artists using these materials have accepted. While the materials may eventually perish, what is important is that the techniques, knowledge, and memory of craft transfers to the next generation. This skill sharing to ensure the longevity of practice is as important, if not more important, than the individual product. The popularization of social media has allowed northern artists an accessible platform to share artistic techniques, sell their artwork, and connect with other makers. Therefore, despite the fact that common materials used in the NWT might have been historically less favoured by collectors due to an unfamiliarly, or a gendered demarcation, there is an active resurgence afoot. These natural materials are a crucial element in the ecosystem of northern life. A fundamental tenant of Indigeneity across cultures is to respectfully use all elements of the land; when an animal is hunted, no part goes to waste in respect for the animal who gave its life to sustain human existence. Moreover, natural materials are locally available. Being able to harvest your own artistic materials allows for self-reliance and empowerment by not always having to depend on imports; this is especially important in the North where transportation is difficult.

In NWT art, materiality has been and will continue to be inherently important. While natural materials might have once invited misinterpretation, today they are celebrated for their integral role in artistic expressions. Shawna McLeod is one such artist who emphasizes materiality in her art. Her business name is quite literally: *From the Land Creations*. When asked about her connection to the land and natural materials McLeod explained: “I am always thinking of different ways to incorporate a piece from the land or the water into my jewelry as a way to create those connections for my clients and supporters, and so that they can feel proud and strong

and grounded in the jewelry that they wear."[68] McLeod's choice of natural media directly supports the message she portrays in her artwork. The foundational materials of animal hides, porcupine quills, bones, and antlers define what makes NWT art distinctive. So, while stereotypes or misinterpretation of these materials might have affected their initial reception, McLeod's work is a fantastic example of how natural materials are quite essentially NWT art. Grounded in critical craft theory and reception theory, my argument asserts that Western societal perceptions of material and craft have significantly contributed to restricting the broader recognition of NWT art. However, it's important to note that this is not the sole obstacle for the territorial arts sector. The following two sections delineate the impact of the 1999 territorial division on NWT art before delving into a discussion on the numerous challenges faced by artists in the Northwest Territories.

Section II. Northwest Territories and Nunavut: The 1999 Territorial Division and its Impact on the Arts

"On April 1, 1999 a new Northwest Territories was created when new boundaries were drawn in Canada's North. Two new territories, a new NWT and Nunavut (which means "our land" in Inuktitut), were created. The motivation for creating two new territories in Canada's North stemmed from the people of Nunavut's desire to have their own government, one that is closer to the people and more culturally based including the use of Inuktitut as the working language of the new government."[69]

To understand the history of arts in the Northwest Territories is to understand the history of the NWT. Art is never produced in a silo; instead it is a reflection of the world around it. Under 25 years ago, the geography and social climate of the North changed significantly due to the division of the Northwest Territories and the creation of Nunavut. The process of division

[68] Shawna McLeod, personal communication with author, November 2022.
[69] Legislative Assembly of The Northwest Territories, "Creation of a New Northwest Territories," accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.ntassembly.ca/visitors/creation-new-nwt.

(for the purposes of this study, this entire process will be referred to as 'division') began as early as the 1960s when a commission was formed to study the development of government in the Northwest Territories. In 1976, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), the main political Inuit organization of the time, proposed the creation of Nunavut as part of the comprehensive Inuit land claim settlement, including the Inuvialuit area of the Beaufort Sea. Later that year, due to economic developmental pressure in their region, the Inuvialuit split from the ITC and pursued their own land claim.[70] At the end of 1977, the NWT Inuit Land Claims Commission made a recommendation to the Federal Government that a new territory called Nunavut be established with its own government. In 1982, NWT voters were asked: "Do you think the Northwest Territories should be divided?" and 56.6% of the voters supported the idea, with the vote in what is now Nunavut being very high in favor. In November 1992, Inuit overwhelmingly approved the Nunavut Final Land Claim Agreement and took a huge step towards realizing the new territory of Nunavut and their own government. Between 1992 and 1999, the Members of the 13th Legislative Assembly and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) were responsible for the overwhelming task of establishing two new territories. Many decisions were made to allow for the transferring of responsibility for programs and services to the new Nunavut Government in time for April 1st, 1999.

This division has had lasting impacts on all northern residents. Artistically, the division sparked an interesting conversation about how to visually define each territory. The cultural objects, art and archive collections formerly held at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC) in Yellowknife, NWT were divided into two. Thus, the committees tasked with splitting the collections had to ask: what artistically separates the western Arctic and the

[70] Legislative Assembly of The Northwest Territories, "Creation of a New Northwest Territories."

eastern Arctic? Division meant that many of the symbols that once identified the NWT were no longer as relevant. Consider the iconic NWT vehicle license plate, a bold polar bear shape that remains affixed to our cars today, though only a minor part of our geography is home to polar bears. The GNWT's logo is also the shape of a polar bear, thus it is on signage, government vehicles, drivers licenses, and legal forms, as a continual reminder of the legacy of the territorial division. This lingering Arctic symbolism does not make sense today in the way it once did pre-1999. Many company logos, entire government departments, and of course, the territorial museum had to adapt to the new boundaries as major portion of the population and geography were no longer associated with the new NWT identity.

The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife holds the territorial cultural objects, art and archives collections. As outlined in *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* (Appendix A), after the 1999 territorial division, the PWNHC collections were divided into two, between NWT and Nunavut. The collections were separated largely by geographical boundary, meaning they split the artwork made in and by artists from the new NWT and Nunavut. This process of negotiation took about a year and a half.[71] The Government of Nunavut's 8,000-piece art collection was sent to the Winnipeg Art Gallery on long-term loan in 2015 where it remains today. The Government of Nunavut's 140,000 item artifact collection was transferred to the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa in 2017, also on long-term loan. Both collections are currently stored in southern institutions because Nunavut does not have a facility with the capacity to store or maintain them.[72]

[71] CBC News, "N.W.T. Museum, Nunavut Divide up Artifacts," CBC, April 3, 2002, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/n-w-t-museum-nunavut-divide-up-artifacts-1.334890.
[72] CBC News, "Iqaluit Museum Curator Worries Winnipeg's Inuit Art Gallery Too Far from Home," CBC, March 26, 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/winnipeg-new-inuit-art-gallery-too-far-1.5963758.

The NWT portion of the collection was selected based on the GNWT's interest in: retaining Dene, Cree, Inuvialuit, Inuit, and Métis cultural historical items which originated within the current boundaries of the NWT; materials significant to communities within the current NWT; representative items significant to the cultural and natural history of the pre-1999 NWT; and representative items relating to the circumpolar history and regions.[73] Nunavut, being an almost entirely Inuit territory, had pre-formed conceptions of identity and artistic direction already established due to the rich cultural heritage of Inuit. This is why, long before division, Inuit art had a separate market with its own structures, institutions, funding, and legislations.

Inuit Art

The Inuit art market has its own unique history that was established long before the 1999 territorial division. The pre-1999 NWT territorial and federal governments invested special interest in Inuit art as early as the 1920s. Their goal, as expressed in an advertisement circulated a 1986 issue of the Inuit Art Quarterly on behalf of the Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Economic Development and Tourism, was: "Helping Inuit artists to help themselves…"[74] (fig. 13). Cooperatives and art studios were established across the eastern Arctic teaching Inuit how to do soapstone carving, printmaking, ceramics, drawing, and textile arts. The cooperatives provided materials, then sold and marketed artwork on the artist's behalf to a network of art galleries in southern Canada, the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, and the Hudson's Bay Company. There are multiple reasons why a focus on Inuit art was highlighted at this time.

[73] Government of the Northwest Territories, "Appendix C-1 Areas of General Interest Expressed by the Government of the Northwest Territories," in *Division of Significant Cultural and Historical Collections of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre: Report and Recommendations,* 2002.
[74] Government of the Northwest Territories (Department of Economic Development and Tourism), advertisement in *Inuit Art Quarterly Vol 1 No 3*, Fall 1986, 24, https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/docs/default-source/iaq-issues/iaq-1.1-10.4/1-3.pdf?sfvrsn=508122a4_4.

First, the western regions of the Northwest Territories were profiting from a prosperous mining industry. Inuit in the eastern Arctic did not have the same economic systems, their hunting and trapping based economy was deemed to be too cyclical and unstable, thus the government established arts programs as a way to bolster and diversify the economy.[75] Secondly, the diminishing value of fur during the Great Depression had left many newly settled Inuit suddenly dependent on governmental support; a situation that had been causing great distress to both the self-reliant Inuit and the government. Thirdly, Inuit art provided post-World War II Canada with a desired sense of a Canadian visual identity:[76] "It is no accident that the concept of Canadian sovereignty in the North was developed during the same period as Inuit art."[77] Another factor in Inuit art's success was its aesthetic accessibility, in contrast to other "primitive arts" Inuit art was free from codified symbols.[78] Dr. Heather Igloliorte explained that the romantic notions of Inuit life associated with the rugged tundra and an exoticized Arctic appealed to the European and Euro-Canadian art world's taste for nostalgia found in "modern primitive art" during the first half of the twentieth century.[79] Because of this distinct confluence of Arctic Administrators, the HBC, and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild during a period of focused governmental support, Inuit art was promoted in different ways and given considerable attention in the 1950s, 60s, and beyond, leading to the development of a unique art market and myriad other impacts. The arts of

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[75] Helga Goetz, "Inuit Art: A History of Government Involvement," in *In the Shadow of the Sun: Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art*, ed. Canadian Museum of Civilization., Paper / Canadian Ethnology Service, 0316-1862 (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1993), 358, http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9780660140124.pdf.

[76] Kristin K Potter, "James Houston, Armchair Tourism, and the Marketing of Inuit Art," in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. Jackson Rushing (London ; Routledge, 1999), 39. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0649/98048803-d.html.

[77] Bureau of Management Consulting, Supply and Services Canada, "CANADIAN ESKIMO ARTS COUNCIL PROGRAM EVALUATION," March 1979, 9, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/aanc-inac/R5-208-1979-eng.pdf.

[78] Heather Igloliorte, "'Hooked Forever on Primitive Peoples' : James Houston and the Transformation of 'Eskimo Handicrafts' to Inuit Art," in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, ed. Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, Modernist Exchanges (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 82.

[79] Igloliorte, 77.

the Northwest Territories (the Subarctic and the Western Arctic, home primarily to the Dene and Métis) were not given as much attention during this period.

Today, scholarship is continuing to reveal the layers of complexity around the early Inuit art movement that at times enforced extractive policies and a colonial mindset onto Inuit artists, even while purporting to support them. The many federal government Arctic Administrators, as they were titled (the most well-known being James Houston), had great control in the early days over how southern Canada, and North America more generally, imagined the Arctic and its peoples, as they were the primary points of contact between the northern Inuit art creators and southern Inuit art buyers.[80] Thus, they were able to market Inuit art to armchair tourists through their own southern lens, drawing on romantic notions of the Arctic and of Inuit as an "untouched" people who existed outside of modernity. Before Inuit created their own co-operatives, this southern art market had a high degree of influence over what kinds of artworks were made, what was sold, how it was marketed, and where it was exhibited in southern Canadian cities and internationally. These decisions have continued to shape the supply and demand for Inuit art, even though today Inuit artists create with much greater autonomy by forming all-Inuit boards for existing co-operatives, selling their work outside of co-operative structures, forming direct relationships with art galleries and dealers, working within in the public arts funding system, and more. The continued significance and exciting developments in recent years—for example, Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory winning the Sobey Award in 2021—should be credited not to the early history of government administration but to the wealth and abundance of cultural creativity and Inuit ingenuity.

[80] Potter, "James Houston, Armchair Tourism, and the Marketing of Inuit Art," 39.

Though an imperfect and extractive industry, the positive impacts of the development of Inuit art included: the establishment of studios in Arctic communities, the formation of co-operatives, the building of relationships with the southern Canadian art world, and the development of national and international markets for Inuit art. These structures allowed for Inuit art to become a household name. Yet the rest of what is now the Northwest Territories, though not entirely ignored, was not provided the same artistic infrastructure. Thus, NWT artists had to find their own ways to assert their cultural self-determination and resilience through their art practices.

Findings of *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline*

"The history of the arts and crafts in the North is dotted with the wrecks of grandiose schemes which were abandoned or jettisoned because they were not built on a strong and sustainable base."[81]

As described in the introduction, I decided to create a document entitled: *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* (Appendix A) to organize the findings of the archival research undertaken in my thesis. A timeline, though not the perfect tool, is used in this instance to illustrate our rich artistic history. A linear timeline can imply chronological development and the myth of progress. This myth assumes that societies move forward in stages of development, becoming more civilized and more rational as they advance. Our histories and our futures cannot be told in one coherent narrative; instead they overlap by learning from past generations while responding to future ones. Considering that this thesis research is the first art history of the NWT, *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* aims not to simplify or conflate NWT

[81] Heath Consultants and Government of Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, "A Five-Year Strategy for the Northwest Territories Native Arts and Crafts Society / Heath Consultants.," 1990, i, https://virtua.sac-isc.gc.ca/virtua/eng/bib?id=chamo%3A78643&index=10.

histories, but instead to explain, teach, and share the knowledge I have acquired in an accessible format. I acknowledge there may be errors or omissions in the timeline and I look forward improving it as my knowledge in this field grows.

The main conclusion I have found in the creation of *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline* was the sheer quantity of projects, groups, and institutions that have been formed in the past 100 years with the goal of promoting arts and crafts in the Northwest Territories. The magnitude of attempted projects was confusing to me – with evidence of continual and clear efforts on behalf of government and independent organizations to promote culture and creativity in the NWT, how have we gotten to a point where artists are feeling under-supported and overwhelmed? (These expressions of dissatisfaction from NWT artists are expanded upon in Section III.)

As demonstrated in *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline*, I found that there were three major exhibitions of Dene art in the 1970s and 80s. In 1974, an exhibition of Dene crafts showcased the work of 24 Fort Providence women at the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Women's World, using objects from the University of Calgary's Special Collection**.** In 1977, the work of five Jean Marie River artists was exhibited at the Royal Ontario Museum. A version of this exhibition was later held at the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife. In 1983, *Art of the Dene Women* was an exhibition held at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife and it was later installed at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre in Guelph, Ontario in 1985 (now known as the Art Gallery of Guelph.)

I was impressed by these exhibitions and the numerous past efforts made to support NWT art by independent groups and the federal and territorial governments. It is worth noting that of the list of arts organizations, events, programs, exhibitions, and festivals outlined in Appendix A,

most of them were either short-term events or are no longer in operation. It can be assumed that the reasons for the short-lived organizations might be explained due to issues of staffing, funding, or community interest. (The influence of this confluence of issues[82] will be further unpacked in Section III.) Some of these non-governmental organizations supporting NWT art in the past have included the Yellowknife Branch of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, the Northwest Territories Native Arts and Crafts Society, the Fort Providence Women's Institute, and the Ulukhaktok Arts Centre, who were actively promoting the production and sales of arts as early as 1946.

The Northwest Territories Native Arts and Crafts Society functioned from 1978 to 1998. It was hugely successful during its time. In 1990, for example, they had 600 Dene, Métis, and Inuit artist members across the NWT.[83] The Society operated a retail store, Treeline Trappings, to promote NWT artistic economic development and to sell raw materials and supplies to artists. They held strong relationships with the National Indian Arts and Crafts Corporation and the Canadian Craft Council, among other local groups. Treeline Trappings closed in 1993.

Additionally, the federal and territorial governments established projects such as the Aklavik Fur Garment Shop, the Tuktoyaktuk Fur Garment Shop, and the Inuvik Arts and Crafts Centre to support economic development, though none of these projects remain in operation today, all having closed throughout the 1980s. The Aklavik and Tuktoyaktuk Fur Garment Projects were formed as part of the larger attempt to develop a northern "Handicraft and Cottage Industry" in an effort to diversify local economies and provide employment for northerners. The

[82] The term 'confluence of issues' refers to the intersection of challenges in the NWT arts sector such as a lack of staffing, funding, and community interest, coupled with broader systemic issues. These broader concerns include governmental arts policies, arts funding programs, exhibition opportunities, and other social challenges that collectively impact the lives and careers of artists.
[83] Heath Consultants and Government of Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, "A Five-Year Strategy for the Northwest Territories Native Arts and Crafts Society," 5.

Northern Administration Branch of the Federal Government invested in the Handicraft and Cottage Industry by providing administrative and technical guidance to assist the formation of arts and crafts programs:

> "As is the case with resource harvesting projects, the Department sends specialists into communities to help the people organize a craft program. Once these programs are functioning effectively, the Department withdraws this assistance and a co-operative takes over. This program has now reached the stage where it becomes essential to provide a central marketing service for all cottage industry in the N .W. T.; therefore, a central marketing agency known as Canadian Arctic Producers Limited has been formed in Ottawa. This agency will handle marketing for the Department, and it is hoped for all co-operatives engaged in cottage industry in the north."[84]

Canadian Arctic Producers Limited (CAP) was formed in 1965 as a private company under the sponsorship of the Federal Government Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) and the Co-operative Union of Canada. The company, CAP, was set up to serve as a central marketing outlet for all Arctic producers, with its headquarters in Ottawa. CAP in conjunction with DIAND held much administrative influence over the northern arts and crafts market. A striking example of this influence, as illustrated on the timeline (Appendix A), was the abolishment of a local arts and crafts spending cap in 1968.[85] The implemented dollar value limit administered by DIAND enforced a maximum amount of money that an individual could spend at any craft shop in the NWT (which then included Nunavut):

> "Sales at any one time to local residents, travelling staff, or visitors who are not retailers, should be limited to a total of $50.00 for items under $25.00, and to a total of $100.00 for

[84] NWT Archives/Alexander Stevenson/N-2002-028: 1-1., "Material for Minister's Handbook," December 1965, https://gnwt.accesstomemory.org/n-2002-028-1-1.

[85] After extensive archival research it remains unclear when exactly this policy was instituted. Quoted in a letter by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Northern Administration Branch) to Mr. K.W. Hawkins it stated: "[…] for some years a policy has been in effect […]" thus it is reasonable to surmise it that the spending cap was in place for a few years. Using deductive techniques I concluded that it was likely instituted in 1965 (the year Canadian Arctic Producers was formed) because the spending cap was enforced to ensure that most of the sales of Northern arts and crafts was administered by Canadian Arctic Producers to sell to southern markets.
NWT Archives G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch (Marketing of Eskimo Handicrafts – General File – 1966-68), "Letter Sent by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Northern Administration Branch) to Mr. K.W. Hawkins, Fort Smith, NWT.," September 27, 1968.

> items over $25.00. The sale of single items worth more than $100 will be allowed as long as they are considered to be a single sale."[86]

This rule was established to "ensure that national marketing arrangements were followed and that the bulk departmental production moved to southern markets though Canadian Arctic Producers."[87] On August 29th, 1968, the Deputy Commissioner of the NWT, John H. Parker, requested to review this policy as the NWT Council felt that it was improper and not good business. A letter sent from the Commissioner of the NWT, Stuart Hodgson, announcing the abolishment of this policy on September 27th, 1968 was concluded with the following statement:

> "It should be clearly understood, however, that all local sales of arts and crafts should be handled on a strict cash and carry basis and that no mail orders should be accepted. The latter point is exceedingly important because it creates poor public relations with southern retailers, and such orders involve considerable paper work and interfere with the important development responsibilities of our arts and crafts officers."[88]

While the spending cap was abolished in 1968, an increase in "mark-up" for local arts sales was in effect as of September 5th, 1967.[89] This "mark-up" of 50% was added to the prime cost (labour and materials) for local sales of arts and crafts, whereas for sales made by the Canadian Arctic Producers the markup was 33.5% on top of the prime cost.[90] The mark-up was "effective in making it more profitable for retailers and short-term entrepreneurs to deal through Canadian Arctic Producers or other established marketing agencies."[91] The intention of increased local prices was to ensure that most of the artwork made in the NWT, especially those deemed to

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[86] "'Local Sales of Arts and Crafts' Letter Sent by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development - Northern Administration Branch Director," April 23, 1968, NWT Archives G-1999-014 (062-002-032 Vol 1. Arts and Crafts - Marketing C.A.P. Reports).
[87] NWT Archives G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch, "Letter Sent by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to Mr. K.W. Hawkins," September 27, 1968.
[88] NWT Archives G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch (Marketing of Eskimo Handicrafts – General File – 1966-68).
[89] "Basic Principles of Arts and Crafts Development" (NWT Archives G-1999-014-3-4 (62-002-001), September 5, 1967).
[90] "Basic Principles of Arts and Crafts Development."
[91] NWT Archives G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch, "Letter Sent by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to Mr. K.W. Hawkins," September 27, 1968.

be "quality products," were sent to the southern market. The result of this policy plummeted local arts sales, sparked indignation with local customers, and disappointed visitors.[92] This continued to the point where in 1974, government personnel and tourists found it impossible to purchase carvings in communities where carving was one of the primary art forms and the few pieces available were found to be overpriced.[93] According to Allan Ballantyne, the GNWT Director of Industry and Development in 1971: "Since the bulk of the market and the continuing requirement will come from the south, the pricing structure has been designed to guarantee adequate supplies of Northwest Territories arts and crafts to Canadian Arctic Producers for southern distribution, both to ensure continuation of the dealer and collector interest and the overall price structure for all arts and crafts products."[94]

What is made clear by these policies is that the arts and crafts industry in the North was not developed to celebrate northern identity in the North, but instead for southern audiences as a form of national economic development. The spending cap and the local sales cost mark-up enforced the notion that arts and crafts were not made for local enjoyment and use, but to be quickly exported south in mass quantity.[95] The emphasis on creating good public relations with southern retailers demonstrates the motivations to prioritize business with the south instead of creating a northern arts and crafts industry within the NWT, for NWT patrons and visitors.

Despite the many efforts outlined in *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A Timeline,* it was historically legislated to support NWT arts especially when distributed outside of the

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[92] R.A. Creery, "'Government Employees Trafficking in Arts and Crafts' Letter Sent to NWT Commissioner, Stuart Hodgson.," June 9, 1971, NWT Archives G-1999-014-3-4 (62-002-001 Arts and Crafts Policy and Guidelines Vol 1.).
[93] Tom Espie, "'Availability and Prices of Carvings in Arctic Settlements.' Letter Sent to the NWT Assistant Commissioner," December 13, 1974, NWT Archives G-1999-014 (062-002-000).
[94] E. Allan Ballantyne, "'Arts and Crafts Pricing Structure Northern Sales.' Letter Sent to NWT Commissioner," June 1, 1971, NWT Archives G-1999-014-3-4 (62-002-001 Arts and Crafts Policy and Guidelines Vol 1.).
[95] NWT Archives G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch, "Letter Sent by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to Mr. K.W. Hawkins," September 27, 1968.

territory. This spending cap and the local sales cost mark-ups, though not the only reasons, are arguably evidence of why artists continue to struggle to promote their artistic career within the NWT today; because of the legacy of hostile arts infrastructures within the North. Since its beginning, the NWT arts sector prioritized southern retailers and the federal government's political agenda of promoting a sovereign North.

Section III. "No Clear Pathway:" Current Challenges for NWT Artists

"The strengthening and development of Indigenous art and art communities has an expansive impact, including but not limited to community building, storytelling, cultural continuation, language revitalization, spirituality, knowledge sharing, and historical record keeping."[96]

As evidenced in Section I, the Northwest Territories is bursting with artistic talent. Each region has innovative artists spearheading new directions and movements, though the current arts infrastructures do not reflect the wealth of creativity embedded into our relatively small population. As aforementioned, though important enough to repeat again, there is no visual art infrastructure in the territory, no post-secondary arts education and no territorial gallery. There is no NWT art prize. There is no NWT art history book. Most egregiously, the Northwest Territories consistently receives significantly less funding from Canada Council for the Arts than the other two territories (despite having the largest population.)[97] By not properly supporting creative projects, the NWT is at risk of failing to preserve "community building, storytelling, cultural continuation, language revitalization, spirituality, knowledge sharing, and historical record keeping"[98]; which are the impacts of strengthening Indigenous art and art communities as

[96] Archipel Research and Consulting Inc. and Canada Council for the Arts, "Research on the Value of Public Funding for Indigenous Arts and Cultures," September 29, 2022, 63, https://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2022/09/research-on-public-funding-for-indigenous-arts-and-cultures.
[97] Canada Council for the Arts, "Recipients – 2017 to Present."
[98] Archipel Research and Consulting Inc. and Canada Council for the Arts, "Research on the Value of Public Funding for Indigenous Arts and Cultures," 63.

outlined by the Canada Council for the Arts. In the following section I will attempt to capture what it means to be an NWT artist today by explaining the federal and territorial funding bodies, the current exhibition spaces, the arts programming, and social challenges impacting the lives of artists.

NWT Arts Funding

"Public funding is integral to the success of Indigenous artists, arts, and cultures. Adequately supporting Indigenous artists means supporting Indigenous communities."[99]

As mentioned early in this thesis, according to the Government of the Northwest Territories' NWT Bureau of Statistics in 2018 over 7,583 NWT citizens produced arts and crafts annually, which is 21.6% of the NWT's total population.[100] Of the 7,583 artists, 4,326 are Indigenous, thus 25.8% of the NWT's total Indigenous population are artists (see Table 2.)[101] The amount of federal funding provided to NWT artists does not reflect the number of artists or the quality of talent in the territory. This is especially problematic considering that a quarter of all Indigenous NWT residents are artists. The programs, funding, and supports currently in place do not reflect the over 7,500 artists living and working in the territory.

Until August 2023, the territorial government (GNWT) provided arts funding through two branches: the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment (ECE), and the Department of Industry, Tourism, and Investment (ITI). Between these two departments, funding was allocated to Film, Economic Development, the NWT Arts Council, Community Programs, and Regional Arts and Crafts Funding. The total approximate yearly budget for all GNWT arts

[99] Archipel Research and Consulting Inc. and Canada Council for the Arts, 63.
[100] NWT Bureau of Statistics, "2018 Engagement in Traditional Activities."
[101] NWT Bureau of Statistics.

programs was $2,907,000.[102] Of this funding, approximately $1,261,000 was accessed and distributed through scheduled public open calls for application through three programs: the NWT Arts Council, Support to Northern Performers Grants, and Arts Organizations Operating Contributions.

The NWT Arts Council provided grants to support the "ongoing development and presentation of creative arts in the visual, literary, media, and performing arts in the Northwest Territories."[103] This funding supported individual artists and organizations in professional development, artistic work, or for public presentation on a project-specific basis only. The NWT Arts Council's annual allocated $700,000 in funding was distributed on average to 90 recipients. As voiced in an opinion article on cultural policies in the NWT: "The NWT Arts Council does not jury funding applications. Each applicant gets a little, so few organizations get enough to expand their activities."[104] Meaning that instead of funding only the applications of high calibre and clear feasibility, the NWT Art Council was known to evenly distribute funding to each applicant. Of the 2021-2022 intake, examples of funded projects included anything from comic book series, recording music albums, community mural projects, sewing groups, yoga classes, or the programming of the 2022 edition of the Snowking's Winter Festival.[105] The NWT Arts Council's widely cast net of funded projects is wonderfully inclusive of community programming, though it negatively affects professional artists attempting to jumpstart

[102] Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Arts Strategy 2021-2031," August 2021, 21, https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/nwt-arts-strategy-2021-2031.pdf.
[103] Government of the Northwest Territories (Education, Culture and Employment), "NWT Arts Council Grants," Information (Government of the Northwest Territories), accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/arts-project-grants.
[104] Swan, "Taking a Shot at Art in the Northwest Territories."
[105] Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Arts Council Grant – List of Recipients 2021-2022 Intake," accessed July 2023, https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/arts_grants_-_list_of_recipients.pdf..

their career. A community focused fund to support projects like yoga classes and Scottish Country Dance workshops[106] would be fantastic if there were also programs to support the specific funding needs for artists establishing a livelihood in the arts.

Until August 2023, the only operational funding for organizations in the territory was the Arts Organizations Operating Contributions fund[107] (a program of GNWT ECE), which provided operational funding through contribution agreements to established arts organizations and large cultural events and festivals in the Northwest Territories. The Arts Organizations Operating Contributions' annual budget was $460,000 and was on average distributed to 15 groups many of which were short-term festivals.[108] If we were to assume that the total $460,000 were to be divided evenly between all 15 groups, this would average out to just over $30,000. $30,000 is simply not enough money to even pay the salary of one fulltime staff member, let alone organize programming and events, or pay the national standard artist fees as outlined by CARFAC.[109] While, of course, a grant such as the Arts Organizations Operating Contributions is not expected to be a non-profit organization's sole source of income, it should contribute enough funding to alleviate some financial pressures. By reducing such stresses, it would allow for administrators to apply for other funding programs, develop stimulating exhibitions, and properly propel the NWT arts sector.

[106] Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Arts Council Grant – List of Recipients 2021-2022 Intake."
[107] Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Arts Strategy 2021-2031."
[108] Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Arts Strategy 2021-2031," 18.
[109] The CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule is widely recognized as the national standard for remuneration of visual and media artists in Canada. Their founding principle and continued concern is that artists, like professionals in other fields, must be paid fairly for their creative output and services. For more information see: "CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule," CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule, https://carfac-raav.ca.

This structural dysfunction was publicly recognized by the GNWT as evidenced in the most recent GNWT "NWT Art Strategy," published in August 2021, where the GNWT had committed to a full review of all NWT territorial government arts funding programs. As quoted, "The focus of this review will be to ensure that current programs are run as efficiently as possible and serve the people that they are intending to target. Also included in the review will be the evaluation and measurement of the success of these programs."[110]

In September 2023, forthcoming policy changes were announced to address this legacy; the GNWT has revised their entire arts funding structure. The Arts Organizations Operating Funding and Support for Northern Performers streams have been cancelled and in their place a new series of Arts Project grants and a larger Arts Operating Fund are being introduced.[111] The total annual amount of funding has remained the same (just under $1.3 million per year) but instead the ways in which it is accessible has been revised, promising "updated and streamlined application processes."[112] There are three scales of project grants and three scales of funding for arts organizations. To help distribute the funding equitably there are new funding quotas for each region of the NWT based on the population. The GNWT has also created two separate funding streams for arts organizations and non-arts organizations with a mandate to support the arts, thus addressing an issue that was raised earlier in this section.

[110] Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Arts Strategy 2021-2031," 13.
[111] Ollie Williams, "GNWT Revamps Arts Funding System." *Cabin Radio*, September 19, 2023, https://cabinradio.ca/153756/news/arts/gnwt-revamps-arts-funding-system/.
[112] Williams,"GNWT Revamps Arts Funding System."

Historically, these GNWT funding programs have been hindered by a high level of bureaucracy, therefore actively excluding and extinguishing creative expression. As conveyed by an NWT artist who wishes to remain anonymous:

> "I'm trying to navigate the funding structures: figuring out the Canada Council portal page and apply for funding there, and then I've also applied to the NWT Arts Council for their artist grants. *There's no clear pathway.* It's like a lot of spinning my wheels and going in circles, trying to figure out what the GNWT offers and all their different pockets of funding, which is crazy. You know, ECE has funding, ITI has funding, and there's no collaboration between the departments. ITI does one thing and ECE does another and sometimes things overlap and there's no real communication between the two. It's is definitely a confusing journey for me so far." [113]

Canada's largest federal arts funder, the Canada Council for the Arts, consistently awards the NWT two-thirds less funding than the Yukon and Nunavut (see Table 1)[114] despite the fact that the NWT has the highest population and 21.6% of the NWT residents are artists. For example, in the 2020-21 fiscal year data tables from the Canada Council's website show that the Yukon was given $2,301,325 in grant money. The council received 85 grant applications from the Yukon and 41 grants were awarded.[115] Nunavut – with a population under 40,000 – was awarded a total of $2,117,997 in Canada Council funding. The council received only 22 applications from Nunavut and awarded 19 grants. Whereas the NWT received $466,080. [116] There were 32 applications from the NWT, though only 13 grants were awarded. Nunavut often submits the same amount of applications (or less) than the NWT but has a higher successful funding rate. This discrepancy is perhaps due

[113] Personal communication between author and NWT artist who wishes to remain anonymous, November 2022.
[114] Canada Council for the Arts, "Recipients – 2017 to Present."
[115] Canada Council for the Arts, "Canada Council for the Arts Funding Overview 2020 – 2021," https://canadacouncil.ca/research/data-tables.
[116] Emma Grunwald, "Yukon Arts Scene 'so Ahead' of the N.W.T., Say Arts Advocates and Artists," CBC NEWS, June 24, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-nwt-canada-council-for-the-arts-1.6499722.

in part to the ongoing legacy of government support instituted for Inuit art as previously outlined.

Counterintuitive to this point, in June 2022, Canada Council for the Arts announced two new co-developed initiatives with northern partners, the first being: the co-delivery of support for Inuit artists with the Inuit Art Foundation (IAF), and the second: the co-delivery of support for emerging Indigenous artists in the Yukon with the Government of Yukon.[117] In the wake of these announcements, there had been no public mention of the Northwest Territories until October 2023. The Inuit-specific funding program (open to Inuit everywhere including Inuit in the NWT) was co-delivered by the IAF and the Canada Council, called *Kajungiqsaut Grants,*[118] which distributed over $100,000 in its first year.[119] The *Indigenous Artists and Cultural Carriers Micro-grant pilot program*,[120] a result of the partnership between the Government of Yukon and the Canada Council supported Yukon Indigenous artists by distributing $50,000 in funding in the first year and $150,000 in the second year.[121]

On October 3rd, 2023, an extremely positive sign post indicating a new direction for NWT art was publicly announced when the GNWT and the Canada Council for the Arts celebrated the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. The announcement will support the growth and sustainability of arts and culture in the NWT through capacity-building and sector

[117] Simon Brault, "How the North Is Changing the Council," Canada Council for the Arts, September 20, 2022, https://canadacouncil.ca/spotlight/2022/09/how-the-north-is-changing-the-council.
[118] Inuit Art Foundation,"Kajungiqsaut Grants," accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/artist-programs/kajungiqsaut-grants.
[119] Canada Council for the Arts, "Introducing Co-Delivery Pilot Initiative to Support Inuit Artists," June 15, 2022, https://canadacouncil.ca/press/2022/06/introducing-a-co-delivery-pilot-initiative-to-support-inuit-artists.
[120] Government of Yukon, "New Funding Program for Indigenous Artists and Cultural Carriers Available January 1," December 5, 2022, https://yukon.ca/en/news/new-funding-program-indigenous-artists-and-cultural-carriers-available-january-1.
[121] Canada Council for the Arts, "Partnership to Support Emerging Indigenous Artists in the Yukon," June 29, 2022, https://canadacouncil.ca/press/2022/06/partnership-to-support-emerging-indigenous-artists-in-the-yukon.

development.[122] Through this partnership the Canada Council committed to providing the GNWT with a financial contribution of $750,000 over three years. This financial commitment is notably higher than the other two northern funding programs developed in 2022 with the Yukon Government (distributing $50,000 in funding in the first year and $150,000 in the second year) and with the Inuit Art Foundation (distributed over $100,000 in its first year.) Although, the IAF funding commitment is administered through year to year agreements, whereas the territorial funding agreements both received multiyear commitments. This notably higher multiyear commitment might be the Canada Council's attempt to make reparations for a history of underfunding the NWT and a realization that the current application system is dysfunctional for NWT applicants.

This announcement between the GNWT and the Canada Council also pledged to recruit a full-time Arts Advisor located in the NWT to provide "on the ground" assistance, and increased access to funding for NWT arts and culture organizations. In addition to these commitments, the public announcement also publicised the commitment to create a "unique funding program for eligible arts and culture organizations of the NWT, with a focus on meeting the needs of Indigenous community organizations outside of Yellowknife"[123] to launch in 2024.

The beginning of a long-term partnership between the Canada Council and the GNWT is significant. It demonstrates the public dedication to improving the sector through concrete policy change. This is hugely important, as the complexity of accessing funding was one of the main issues addressed across all my interviews and conversations with NWT artists; it is one of the easiest problems to pin point as evidence for a lack of territory-wide success. Without accessible

[122] Canada Council for the Arts, "Partnership to Support Arts and Culture in the Northwest Territories," October 3, 2023, https://canadacouncil.ca/press/2023/10/new-co-delivery-partnership-to-strengthen-arts-and-culture-organizations-in-the-nwt.
[123] Canada Council for the Arts, "Partnership to Support Arts and Culture in the Northwest Territories."

funding, artists struggle to sustain their livelihood and produce creative projects. Although the picture is more nuanced than funding alone; a shortage of public exhibition space in the NWT also greatly influences the careers of artists.

Art Galleries and Museums in the NWT

As it currently stands, there are two major museums and one non-commercial gallery space in the NWT. The territorial museum, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC), is in Yellowknife, and Fort Smith is home to the Northern Life Museum and Cultural Centre. Additionally, the newly-opened, City of Yellowknife-operated Visitor Information Center has a one-room non-commercial gallery, (though the gallery remains unnamed). I will expand on each of these spaces by explaining their missions and how their efforts affect artists working in the territory.

The main museum in the Northwest Territories is the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife. PWNHC is operated by the territorial government's Culture and Heritage Division of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. They have two full time exhibition staff and they host two public art exhibitions a year. The PWNHC's museum art collection holds approximately 75,000 objects[124] that have been acquired to document and preserve the natural and human heritage of the NWT.[125] The fine art collection contains

[124] Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, "Objects Showcase," accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.pwnhc.ca/collections/objects-showcase/.
[125] Government of the Northwest Territories, "Appendix B: Descriptions of Museum and Archives Collections at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre," in *Division of Significant Cultural and Historical Collections of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre: Report and Recommendations,* 2002.

approximately 5,700 objects including sculptures, prints and drawings, paintings, ceramics and tapestries by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. Items in this collection have been acquired through purchases, donations, or transfers from other government departments.[126] Since opening in 1979, the PWNHC has created a total of 380 exhibition records, of which 106 were art related, this represents 34.4% of exhibition records.[127] The PWNHC's mission is: "To explore, preserve, and share the unique stories of the NWT with the world."[128] The museum is dedicated to the cultural history of the region as exemplified in their permanent exhibitions including: *This Land is Our Home: Wìlìideh Yellowknives Dene, Ice Age Bison Discovery: Our Frozen Past and Thawing Future,* and *We Took Care of Them: RCMP Special Constables in the NWT.*[129] The PWNHC is not a mandated art museum, though they do make efforts to support NWT artists through their annual two public art exhibitions and by acquiring NWT art for their permanent collection.

The Northern Life Museum and Cultural Centre in Fort Smith, NWT, (Thebacha) opened in 1974. They hold a collection of over 17,000 artifacts including traditional work of the Inuit, Inuvialuit, Dene, and Métis. Its mission is: "To share with local, national and international audiences, the distinctive stories, history, natural and cultural heritage of the region of Thebacha, the region influenced by the Slave River and its tributaries."[130]Again, they are not mandated to

[126] Government of the Northwest Territories "Appendix B: Descriptions of Museum and Archives Collections at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre."
[127] Conversation between author and Susan Irving, Manager of Museum collections at the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre, December 2022.
[128] Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. "About the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre," accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.pwnhc.ca/about/.
[129] Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. "Current Exhibits," accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.pwnhc.ca/current-exhibits/.
[130] Northern Life Museum & Cultural Centre. "The Organization," accessed July 7, 2023, http://www.nlmcc.ca/the-organisation/.

support the arts, but the Northern Life Museum makes efforts to host regular arts workshops and cultural events.

The only mandated non-commercial arts space in the NWT is within Yellowknife's Visitor Information Center which opened in September 2022 and is operated by the City of Yellowknife. This un-named space is the first and only public non-commercial dedicated gallery space in the territory. It is one room of 3,250 square feet.[131] Its inaugural show featured a solo exhibition of paintings made by Melaw Nakehk'o.[132] Nakehk'o, a Dene artist from Łíídlı Kų́ę́ (Fort Simpson, NWT), exhibited figurative paintings focused on people she knows from the North. When asked "How does it feel to finally see them on a gallery wall?" in an interview with CBC News, Nakehk'o exclaimed: "They look like actual art pieces!"[133] Though exciting, the gallery continues to have no name and no staff, prompting "[…] questions [which] still need to be answered about who will govern and manage the space and how long local artists will need to wait to exhibit their art."[134] Before this space, a 16-foot cargo trailer worked as the territory's only non-commercial gallery. Operated by the Yellowknife Artist-Run Community Centre (YKARCC), a volunteer organization, the mobile gallery opened in 2019 to address the lack of exhibition space in Yellowknife and the territory at large. Cheekily called, "Art Gallery of the NWT," the trailer was designed to take art to the people. It hosts short term exhibitions (typically 1-3 days) on a weekend or at local festivals and events.

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[131] Measurement provided by Sarah Swan, contract curator of the City of Yellowknife operated Visitor Information Center gallery, in personal conversation with author, June 2023.
[132] CBC News, "Yellowknife's New Visitor Centre Has a Gold-Flecked Path, a Wall of Moss and Sorely Needed Gallery Space," CBC, September 12, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yellowknife-visitor-information-centre-grand-opening-1.6580393.
[133] Melaw Nakehk'o in "Yellowknife's New Visitor Centre Has a Gold-Flecked Path, a Wall of Moss and Sorely Needed Gallery Space," CBC News.
[134] Sarah Swan in "Yellowknife's New Visitor Centre Has a Gold-Flecked Path, a Wall of Moss and Sorely Needed Gallery Space," CBC News.

Without a reputable permanent (and immobile) non-commercial gallery space, artists lack opportunities to exhibit their work, gain recognition, connect with other artists and art administrators, and have critical conversations about their artwork. Exhibitions are a crucial aspect of a career in the visual arts. Sarah Swan, a Yellowknife-based curator, arts writer, and president of the YKARCC, emphasized what NWT artists are missing due to the lack of exhibition spaces: "Good non-commercial galleries stoke curiosity and facilitate appreciation. Visitors can learn how individual stories are woven into the collective one. And, when artists show in a public gallery or artist-run centre, *they get paid*."[135] Additionally, to apply for grants such as the Canada Council, artists must provide proof of previous exhibitions listed in a Curriculum Vitae. Simply put, without opportunities to exhibit it is nearly impossible to access grants.

As explained by Kanyen'kehaka curator Greg Hill, "The flow of artwork has been from the north to the south and rarely does it return. And that's an issue, when an artist can be prolific their entire life and never see their work again, unless they're invited south to an opening to see their work in an exhibition."[136] Thus, without exhibition spaces and opportunities for artists within the North, the extractive legacy of northern art will continue. By displaying the bulk of our art in southern galleries, NWT artists lack the opportunity to present their work to the audience who will best understand the symbolism with no explanation. The profound impact of supporting Indigenous art and art communities, as emphasized in the Canada Council's 2022 "Final Report - Research on the Value of Public Funding for Indigenous Arts and Cultures," extends far beyond aesthetics; the support has rippling beneficial effects on "community

[135] Swan, "Taking a Shot at Art in the Northwest Territories."
[136] Greg Hill in "We The Actual North," Jessica Davey-Quantick, Up Here Publishing (uphere, November 2019), https://www.uphere.ca/articles/we-actual-north, https://www.uphere.ca/articles/we-actual-north.

building, storytelling, cultural continuation, language revitalization, spirituality, knowledge sharing, and historical record keeping."[137] When NWT art is not supported, all NWT residents suffer culturally and creatively. Furthermore, NWT art has to be shared and celebrated both within and beyond our territory. To export NWT artwork elsewhere in Canada while there remains few opportunities to exhibit locally, risks allowing outsiders to continue to define our visual identity for us. In recognizing the urgency of supporting NWT art within its own boundaries, we not only preserve our creative heritage but also empower northern artists to reclaim and assert their own narratives, stories and visual identities.

Social Challenges to Northern Life

In addition to the challenges accompanying accessing funding and a lack of venues to exhibit their artwork, NWT artists, obviously, must manoeuvre the complicated and varied challenges that come with life in the North. Quite simply put, art is not high on the list when triaged in comparison to the lack of affordable housing, employment opportunities, or the lasting impacts of the Indigenous Residential School System on physical and mental health. There are major systemic injustices in the North that are justly prioritized over funding the arts and arts infrastructures. These social issues significantly affect the lives and careers of all residents, artists included. One NWT artist I interviewed explained how the conditions for living in government subsidized public housing affected their artistic career:

> "There was a huge barrier in my lease: you cannot run a business out of this house. And so for five years, I really supressed getting my name out there and any opportunities that came 'I was like, no, I can't do this.' I really tried to not post my face or my name on my social media. We're in a housing crisis, we have no other opportunities or options really to live anywhere else but the GNWT housing programs. I think for a lot of people in the North with the housing crisis, you're never really sure if they're going to come after you or if they're going to kick you out.

[137] Archipel Research and Consulting Inc. and Canada Council for the Arts, "Research on the Value of Public Funding for Indigenous Arts and Cultures."

> *Making art is literally for survival.* You know, you sell a pair of earrings to go and buy groceries.
>
> There's lots of different challenges, I think, to accessing funding - there's lots of red tape and it just makes it really challenging, you know? I think that a lot of the decisions are made by higher-ups living in Yellowknife. A lot of the people that are making these decisions have no idea what it's like to live in a small community. There's a very clear line between what life is like in a smaller community versus what life is like in Yellowknife." [138]

As illustrated by this interviewee, the issues artists face are much more complex and overarching than not having an art gallery or an abundance of arts funding. This is not to say that there is simply no help for artists; the main GNWT program created to support NWT artists is the "*NWT Arts Program."*[139] A program of GNWT Industry, Tourism, and Investment, the *NWT Arts Program* is a platform to promote the economic development of NWT artists. The *NWT Arts Program* has an online portal to share artist profiles, they connect artists to opportunities, they share a weekly newsletter to spread arts news, they organize markets, and they support NWT artists by aiding them take artwork pictures for their portfolios.

The *NWT Arts Program* is extremely beneficial to many, in fact, I turned to its online resources many times throughout this research. Though the program does not represent the desires of all artists in the territory, for example: "I refuse to be a part of the *NWT Arts Program*, which means that I can't be a part of some publications and opportunities. But I do not want to be affiliated with a government organization to determine if I am an artist or not. I get to decide that."[140] When considering the history of governmental art development in the North as outlined in Section II and in *Visual Arts in the Northwest Territories: A*

[138] Personal communication between author and NWT artist who wished to remain anonymous, November 2022.
[139] "NWT Arts Program," Northwest Territories Arts, September 4, 2013, https://www.nwtarts.com/nwt-arts-program.
[140] Personal communication between author and NWT artist who wished to remain anonymous, November 2022.

Timeline (Appendix A), it is reasonable to understand why one might want to distance themselves from this legacy.

Another major concern is the small workforce, as exemplified by the Great Northern Arts Festival, annually held in Inuvik, who cancelled the 2023 edition as the festival had been without an executive director for months and its board struggled to retain the members needed to oversee the event.[141] "We know that this will come as a considerable disappointment, not only to the visual artists who attend to share their artistic pursuits, but also to the numerous performers, art enthusiasts, tourists and local attendees who were intending to participate and attend the festival," organizers wrote in a statement regarding the cancellation. "With the staffing issues at hand, we would be doing all those participating and attending a disservice to try and host an event that would not showcase those involved to the degree they deserve."[142] The Great Northern Arts Festival, established in 1989, is the territory's only annual visual arts festival. Its cancellation has left many artists without a forum or stage to share their most recent work. The festival is another unfortunate example of the current state for the arts in the NWT – there are many overarching factors working against the success of artists, arts organizations, and festivals.

As outlined, there are a plethora of reasons why being an artist in a remote northern region is difficult. With complicated funding bodies that statistically underrepresent the region and its artists, limited exhibition space, and major underlying systemic social issues, Northwest Territories artists are not being properly supported. Insufficient resources, funding, and opportunities in the NWT causes a scarcity mindset, which forces artists into competition with each other. Mullainathan and Shafir in their 2013 book, *Scarcity,* explained

[141] Ollie Williams, "Inuvik's 2023 Great Northern Arts Festival is Cancelled," *Cabin Radio*, June 6, 2023, https://cabinradio.ca/132327/news/arts/inuviks-2023-great-northern-arts-festival-is-cancelled/.
[142] Williams, "Inuvik's 2023 Great Northern Arts Festival is Cancelled."

how this mindset of being perpetually behind, puts one into the pattern of always playing catch-up, an almost impossible feat. This mentality, prevalent in the NWT even decades ago, stems from the small pots of funding available for artists, although expands to a larger cultural anxiety between artists; a scarcity creates a mindset that perpetuates continual scarcity. Mullainathan and Shafir explain, "The scarcity trap, is more than a shortage of physical resources. It is based on a misuse of those assets so that there is an *effective* shortage."[143] While addressing the idea that supports for artists are lacking in territory, I am wary of complying to a negative, scarce outlook that Eve Tuck calls "damage-centered" research. Meaning, research that intends to document peoples' pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression.[144] This kind of research reinforces stereotypes of these people and systems as depleted, ruined, and hopeless. Research that emphasizes what a community is lacking, or a deficit model, explains underachievement or failure; this is why I have turned to a research framework that that celebrates and honours the NWT and its artists. I choose to operate in a mindset of abundance rather than scarcity. While, yes, there are issues in the ways that artists are supported in the territory, by thinking of ourselves as broken and depleted, we are complicit in the production of long-term repercussions. Dysfunction should not be the way that we frame NWT art ecosystems. It is high time to reformulate the ways that the northern art world is framed and reimagine how research can reflect our rich artistic communities. "It is too tempting to proceed as usual."[145]

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[143] Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means so Much* (London, England: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2013), 126, http://swbplus.bsz-bw.de/bsz426993918inh.htm.
[144] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 409, https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15.
[145] Tuck, 412.

Eve Tuck submits "that a desire-based framework is an antidote to damage-centered research."[146] A desire-based methodology is "[…] concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives."[147] Thus, I open this final section, the conclusion, with a "yes and" approach. *Yes,* there are problems with the current art structures in the NWT *and* we refuse to let them define NWT aesthetics.

Conclusion and Futurity

In 2023, artists are using contemporary media to expand upon themes of resurgence, Indigenous futurities and what it means to live in a striking though complicated landscape. Learning from customary artistic techniques, artists are pushing the traditional Northwest Territories aesthetics of hide tanning, porcupine quillwork, the five petal Dene rose, the Delta braid, moose hair tufting and even our more recent 'ramshackle aesthetics' to new limits. By outlining the art history of the Northwest Territories, the regional aesthetics, the ways that materiality and gender impact the reception of NWT art and the current challenges for artists living in the territory, I aimed to paint a picture of the complex layers embedded in the northern arts sector. There are many reasons outlined in this thesis for why NWT art is underrepresented: the division of NWT and Nunavut required a reshaping of visual identities, the history of legislated exportation of northern art to southern markets, statistically low funding rates from the Canada Council, limited exhibition spaces, and the unique social challenges to northern life.

However, I believe it is crucial that we adopt Tuck's desire-based methodology and remain optimistic about the future of NWT art. During the writing of this thesis throughout 2022 and 2023, for example, we have already witnessed some potentially very positive steps forward,

[146] Tuck, 416.
[147] Tuck, 416.

with the aforementioned two major funding announcements by the GNWT and the Canada Council, which signals that NWT artists have been heard and new changes may be on the horizon. This also underscores the timeliness of this research. These new policies and funding opportunities are expected to reshape the NWT art scene.

In addition to these policy changes, positive shifts in the Northwest Territories arts scene have also been evidenced by artists and grassroots organizations pushing for change like the Deh Gah Art Collective which began in Fort Providence in the summer of 2022, co-lead by Lois Phillip and Shawna McLeod. The Deh Gah Art Collective provides Fort Providence families with income and empowers women by teaching artistic and entrepreneurial skills. Also in 2022, Maureen Gruben started the Amauliq Residency[148] in Tuktoyaktuk, the first visual arts residency in the territory. In addition, a "Friends of the Northwest Territories Art Gallery" board was formed in 2022 to advocate, fundraise and plan for a future arts centre.[149] In November 2023, Kablusiak, an Inuvialuk artist, achieved a significant milestone by winning the Sobey Art Award, Canada's largest national art prize.[150] This marks the first time in the award's twenty-year history that it has been granted to an artist from the Northwest Territories. These incredible efforts and achievements are each driving change and support for NWT arts.

Additionally, an exciting development stemming from this research is the forthcoming "Spring Break Up" art exhibition, hosted by the non-profit organization La Guilde in Montreal, QC. Scheduled for March 28 to May 12, 2024, this exhibition is dedicated exclusively to highlighting Indigenous arts from the Northwest Territories, marking a historic moment in

[148] Amauliq Residency. "Amauliq Residency." Accessed October 19, 2023. https://www.amauliqresidency.com.
[149] Dulewich, Jenna. "'The Timing Seems Right': New N.W.T. Arts Centre in the Works." CBC News, November 3, 2022. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/friends-northwest-territories-art-gallery-art-centre-1.6638757.
[150] "Inuvialuk Artist Kablusiak Named Winner of $100,000 Sobey Art Award" CBC News, November 19, 2023. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-artist-kablusiak-winner-sobey-art-award-1.7033293.

showcasing NWT art in an established arts institution. In 1949, La Guilde was the first institution to hold an exhibition and sale exclusively dedicated to contemporary Inuit art.[151] Since then, La Guilde has played a defining role in promoting the Inuit art sector. La Guilde's commitment to expanding their reach and supporting northern artists is evidenced in the announcement of the "Spring Break Up" exhibition, created in partnership with the Inuit Futures in Arts Leadership SSHRC Partnership Grant, which I have been humbled to have been invited to curate. Working with a jury of Indigenous northerners to select works, we will mount the exhibition early in 2024 that prominently features the work of NWT Indigenous artists in Montreal.

The crafting of a thriving and functional NWT arts network will require the investment of all levels of government, grassroots organizations, and artists. This is work that will take years of planning and efforts, and will require the building of trust and relationships based in accountability, respect, reliability, and reciprocity. Yet, I remain positive that the future of NWT art is bright because there are many dedicated artists and cultural workers devoted to finding ways to push their practices, find markets for their work and advocate for increased support. We stand at the dawn of an exciting era for NWT arts, driven by determination and a vision of flourishing creativity. The future of NWT art promises to be a beacon of innovation and cultural resilience.

[151] La Guilde. "Going North: A Beautiful Endeavour," September 7, 2021. https://laguilde.com/en/blogs/saviez-vous-que/vers-le-nord.

Appendix A: Visual Arts In The Northwest Territories: A Timeline

Please note, for the sake of brevity, this is a timeline of selected events that contributed to the broad scale promotion and production of visual arts in what is currently known as the Northwest Territories (NWT.) Art is defined here to include material objects where skill, care and attention have been invested to create a beautiful handmade work. For example, a pair of snowshoes might not fit in the general definition of art, though its creation requires knowledge of complex techniques and a creative eye to complete.

A timeline, though not the perfect tool, is used in this instance to illustrate our rich artistic history. The issue with a linear timeline is that it can imply chronological development and the myth of progress. This myth assumes that societies move forward in stages of development, becoming more advanced. Our histories and our futures cannot be told in one coherent narrative, instead they overlap by learning from past generations while responding to future ones. Thus please take this format of a chronological timeline as a visual tool for the purpose of sharing knowledge.

Time Immemorial

Art and decorative objects has been produced in what is now known as the NWT long before European contact. Beautiful hide clothing, porcupine quillwork, and birchbark baskets are among the earliest artforms recorded upon contact[152] though many other forms were used since time immemorial including: birchbark baskets, fishnets, snowshoes, fish traps, willow root/spruce root baskets, birch bark biting, fish scale art, parkas, mittens, and other clothing.

1920s/1930s Fort Providence Invention of Moose Hair Tufting

Moose hair and caribou tufting was born around the Bouvier/Lafferty kitchen tables in Fort Providence NWT by three Métis women Catherine (Beaulieu) Bouvier, Celine Laviolette Lafferty, Madeleine (Mrs. Boniface) Lafferty.[153] Tufting was invented during or shortly after WW1 in Fort Providence when commercial materials like silk and beads were available. Lafferty used this technique in the 1920s and 1930s to imitate the yarn punchwork of nuns teaching at the residential school. The technique spread quickly through the territory, taking hold in nearly every community.[154]

1946 The Yellowknife Branch of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild was Founded by Ruth Stanton

The original group was composed of Ruth Stanton, alongside Eugenia Ingraham, Ernie Boffa, J. McNiven, J. McElroy, and Didi Woolgar. The Guild supplied Inuit in Kugluktuk and local Dene women with materials and sold their work for them in Yellowknife. The Guild is still in operation today as "The Yellowknife Guild of Arts and Crafts," mainly creating programming around ceramics and fibre arts.

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[152] Kate Duncan, *Northern Athapaskan Art: A Beadwork Tradition*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1989.
[153] Amy Malbeuf, "Apihkêw (s/He Braids, s/He Weaves, s/He Knits)." University of British Columbia, 2016. https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0305066.
[154] Meaghan Brakenbury, "Tuft Love." Up Here Publishing. uphere, August 2022. Https://www.uphere.ca/articles/tuft-love. https://www.uphere.ca/articles/tuft-love.

1959 Aklavik Fur Garment Project

In 1959 the Department of Northern Affairs established a fur garment training project in Aklavik to train women to make garments that could be marketed locally and across Canada. By the end of 1963, they had formed a cooperative, hired a manager and had around 18 ladies as members of the co-op making and selling fur parkas, mittens, and boots.[155] In 1965 it was estimated that the Project, employing local women, returned about $50,000 to the community annually.[156] In 1977 management of the co-op was transferred to the GNWT's department of Economic Development and Tourism.[157] The project eventually closed in the 1980s.

1960 Fort Providence Women's Institute (WI)

The Fort Providence Women's Institute formed in 1960 as a branch of the national movement, the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada. There were 8 branches of Women's Institutes in the NWT Mackenzie District (in Discovery, Inuvik, Ft. Providence, Ft. McPherson, Ft. Smith, Ft. Good Hope, Ft. Simpson and, the Beaufort Delta) with more branches in the Eastern Arctic. The Fort Providence WI was the first in the territory and had a craft making program where participants would learn how to make cushions, arm bands, moccasins in quillwork, beadwork and embroidery. They also hosted workshops to teach men to make snowshoes, toboggans, and medicine drums. They had 16 members: 5 white settler women and 11 Indigenous women.[158] They ran a newsletter called the "Northern Lights Bulletin" and marketed mail order crafts.

1961 Ulukahaktok Arts Centre (Holman Print Shop)

In Ulukhaktok (formally Holman), Father Henri Tardy helped establish the Holman Eskimo Co-operative in 1961 and he encouraged prospective artists as a form of economic development. The first 10 prints were sent to the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council for review in 1963. In 1965, Helen Kalvak, Victor Ekootak, Jimmy Memorana, Harry Egotak, and William Kagyut created the first annual Holman print collection of 30 limited edition prints, which became an immediate market and artistic success. The ability of Ulukhaktok artists to change, develop, and adapt has allowed their production to continue and remain vibrant for over 40 years. In 2001, the Winnipeg Art Gallery staged "Holman: Forty years of Graphic Art," an exhibition that recognized a truly remarkable collection of artists and their work.[159]

1963 Tuktoyaktuk Fur Garment Project

Modeled after the program in Aklavik, the Tuktoyaktuk Fur Garment Project was established to provide income opportunities and vocational skills to Tuktoyaktuk residents. Soapstone carvings, ulu knives and a few other craft items made by men were sold in the

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[155] *North: A Bi-Monthly Publication of the Northern Administration Branch: Bound Issues*. Vol. 13. January Through December 1966. Ottawa: Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 1966. https://www.biblio.com/book/north-bi-monthly-publication-northern-administration/d/230604022.

[156] NWT Archives/Alexander Stevenson/N-2002-028: 1-1. December 1965. https://gnwt.accesstomemory.org/n-2002-028-1-1

[157] NWT Archives/Pat Verge, "Aklavik, A future Fur Fashion Centre?" Arctic in Colour, Vol. 6 No. 3, 1978.

[158] NWT Archives/News of the North, May 4 1961 "Ft. Providence Ladies Busy."

[159] Ulukhaktok Arts Centre. "History of Print Making in the Northwest Territories." http://ulukhaktok.com/about/history-print-making-northwest-territories/.

Tuktoyaktuk Fur Garment Shop, but most items were made by local women, including parkas, mitts, slippers, mukluks, hats, wall hangings, placemats and dolls. In 1968, the fur garment shop was incorporated as a community-owned and operated cooperative, the Nanuk Cooperative Association, which took over responsibilities for the day-to-day operations. The Tuktoyaktuk Fur Garment Shop ceased operations in the early 1980s.[160]

1963-74 Museum of the North

Museum of the North operated as a volunteer society in Yellowknife. They built what is now the Williams Electronics building. Museum of the North ran there from 1963-70. The GNWT took it over and ran until 1974 while planning for the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC) which opened in 1979. Their collections moved over to the PWNHC once it opened.[161]

1965 Canadian Arctic Producers was Formed

Canadian Arctic Producers (CAP) was initially formed as a private company under the sponsorship of the Federal Government Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Co-operative Union of Canada. The company, CAP, was set up to serve as a central marketing outlet for all arctic producers, with its headquarters in Ottawa. CAP began to sell shares to the Arctic Coops and Northern Producers in 1971, thus transforming into a cooperative that remains in operation today.

1968 Arts and Crafts Spending Cap Abolished

The Federal Government Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND had enforced a maximum amount of money that an individual could spend at any craft shop in the NWT (which then included Nunavut): "Sales at any one time to local residents, travelling staff, or visitors who are not retailers, should be limited to a total of $50.00 for items under $25.00, and to a total of $100.00 for items over $25.00. The sale of single items worth more than $100 will be allowed as long as they are considered to be a single sale."[162]

In 1968, this rule was abolished. This rule was established to[163] "ensure that national marketing arrangements were followed and that the bulk of our departmental production

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[160] Tusaayaksat Magazine. "Sewing Culture," 2019. https://issuu.com/tusaayaksatmagazine/docs/tusaayaksat_fall_2019_for_issuu/s/12140455.

[161] NWT Archives/G-1993-007 (Department of Education, Culture, and Employment – Cultural Heritage Division) [2-1]

[162] NWT Archives/"'Local Sales of Arts and Crafts' Letter Sent by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development - Northern Administration Branch Director," April 23, 1968.

[163] After extensive archival research it remains unclear when exactly this policy was instituted. Quoted in a letter by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Northern Administration Branch) to Mr. K.W. Hawkins it stated: "[…] for some years a policy has been in effect […]" thus it is reasonable to surmise it that it was in place for a few years. Using deductive techniques I concluded that it was likely put into place in 1965 (the year Canadian Arctic Producers was formed) because the spending cap was enforced to ensure that most of the sales of Northern arts and crafts was administered by Canadian Arctic Producers to southern markets.
NWT Archives G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch (Marketing of Eskimo Handicrafts – General File – 1966-68), "Letter Sent by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Northern Administration Branch) to Mr. K.W. Hawkins, Fort Smith, NWT.," September 27, 1968.

moved to southern markets though Canada Arctic Producers." This rule enforced that arts and crafts were not made for local enjoyment and use but instead for southern audiences.[164]

1968 "Historic Sites, Museums, and Artifacts in the NWT" Board Formed

Invited by Commissioner Stuart Hodgson, a board was formed to propose the establishment of an art gallery in the NWT. On July 29th, 1968 a formal motion was passed at the 37th legislative session calling for the establishment of a representative collection of northern artwork as a part of the future capital complex. Ideas for an artist's residency, the establishment of a NWT arts council to organize exhibits, and to publish an annual magazine of northern essays were proposed. It was concluded that these ideas would be both too costly and too complicated.[165]

1969 Inuvik Arts and Crafts Centre Established

As a part of the GNWT's program to promote the economic development potential of northern crafts and garments, the Inuvik Arts and Crafts Centre established. The building was sold by the GNWT to the Canadian Arctic Cooperative Federation Ltd in 1975. The annual sales of arts and crafts approached $500,000 in 1975.[166]

1973-2021 Northern Images

Northern Images opened in Yellowknife 1973. It was the first of 8 commercial art galleries owned by Winnipeg based Arctic Co-operatives Limited. After nearly 50 years of selling Inuit and Dene art, Northern Images closed its Yellowknife storefront in 2021 though it continues to operate online.

1974 Establishment of the Northern Life Museum and Cultural Centre in Fort Smith

In 1972 the Northern Anthropological and Cultural Society was founded by long-time residents of Fort Smith: Darrell Clarkson, Bishop Paul Piché, Paul W. Kaeser, SR., Ernie Kuyt, Brother Henri Sarreault, Peter Verhesen and Herman Pieper who served as its first Board of Directors. In 1974 the collection was placed in the newly constructed Northern Life Museum. Still in operation, the Museum now holds over 17,000 artifacts.[167]

1974-75 Exhibition in Calgary of Dene Crafts from the U of Calgary Special Collection

This exhibition showcased the work of 24 Fort Providence women at the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Women's World.

1976 Acho Dene Native Crafts

Acho Dene Native Crafts began operations in 1976 as a project of the Government of the Northwest Territories and still operates as a Subsidiary of the Northwest Territories Business Development and Investment Corporation. Made in the Dehcho by over 40 artists, these products are made using a blend of ancestral techniques and themes with

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[164] NWT Archives/G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch (Marketing of Eskimo Handicrafts – General File – 1966-68.)

[165] NWT Archives/G79-003 Canada Northern Administration Branch (NWT Collection of Eskimo Arts and Crafts (Proposed NWT Art Gallery) 1966-68)

[166] NWT Archives/Yellowknifer, Dec 4, 1975: 49.

[167] "The Museum – Northern Life Museum & Cultural Centre," http://www.nlmcc.ca/the-museum/.

traditional and modern materials to make birch bark baskets, jewellery, moccasins, mittens, mukluks and other souvenirs.[168]

1977 Jean Marie River artists show at the Royal Ontario Museum

5 women from Jean Marie River had their work exhibited at the Royal Ontario Museum. A version of this exhibition was later held at the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife.

1979 The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre Opened

The concept for the territorial museum was approved by the Government of the Northwest Territories in 1972, as a result of concern over the loss of northern artifacts and collections and the need to provide museum services and support throughout the Northwest Territories Building began shortly after, and as it neared completion in 1977, then Commissioner of the NWT, Stuart Hodgson suggested it be named after HRH Prince of Wales. The facility was opened on April 3rd, 1979, the Prince of Wales (now King Charles) attended the opening.

1982 Dene Art Resource Centre Opened in Yellowknife

The Native Women's Association opened in 1978. In 1982, Native Women's Association open their Dene Art Resource Centre in Yellowknife to help talented northern artists gain recognition throughout Canada. The Dene Art Resource Centre arranged commissions and exhibitions for artists. For example, they funded 7 artists to attend the first National Assembly of Native Arts in Regina in 1982. Some of the artists represented by the Dene Art Resource Centre included John Farcy, Don Cardinal, William Bonnetplume, Archie Beaulieu, Don Bourque, Dolphus Cadieux, Linda Rodgers and Frank Baptiste, Young William Cockney, and Colinda Cardinal. The Dene Art Resource Centre sold art supplies at reasonable prices, provided information on painting and drawing materials, and provided information on grants and printed professional pamphlets for artists. The Dene Art Resource Centre closed in the 1990s.

1983 *Art of the Dene Women*

Art of the Dene Women was an exhibition held at the PWNHC in Yellowknife in 1983 and it was later installed at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre in Guelph, Ontario in 1985(now the Art Gallery of Guelph). Organized by Barbara Winter, the exhibit featured 55 objects including clothing, bags, and baskets as well as didactic panels and models explaining the techniques used to make the works on display.

1985-93 Treeline Trappings

Treeline Trappings was a store for arts and crafts operated by the Northwest Territories Native Arts and Crafts Society (under the administration of the Native Women's Association.) They sold works made by roughly 600 Dene, Metis and Inuit artists. Treeline Trappings offered free membership for Dene, Métis, and Inuit and offered a raw materials program for artists at low prices. Treeline Trappings closed in 1993.[169]

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[168] Acho Dene Native Crafts. "Information about Acho Dene Native Crafts in Fort Liard NWT," http://www.adnc.ca/about/.

[169] NWT Archives/*Yellowknifer,* October 20, 1993.

1985-98 Arctic Art Gallery

Owned and operated by Marg Baile, Arctic Art Gallery was a commercial gallery in Yellowknife. Arctic Art Gallery represented artists like Mona Thrasher, Gabe Gely, Dorothy Francis, and Graham Shaw. Baile hosted annual auctions of original paintings, carvings and limited edition prints using many forms of remote bidding options (via bidding forms, fax, e-mail or telephone.) In May 1998 Baile sold the gallery to Arctic Co-operatives Ltd.[170]

1986 Expo 86 NWT Pavilion

The Northwest Territories constructed a large award-winning pavilion for Expo 86 in Vancouver. Operating for six months, the Pavilion consisted of exhibitions, a gift shop, a restaurant named "Icicles." The gift shop sold NWT made arts and crafts including soapstone carvings, dolls, sealskin parkas, beaded mukluks, qiviut scarves, seal leather purses, sealskin mosquitos, and seal leather briefcases, totaling $1.3 million in sales. The exhibition, designed in Vancouver by Dave Jensen of D. Jensen and Associates, drew attention to the territory's history and industries. The exhibition themes included "oil and gas, hunting, trapping fishing, mining, fur exhibit, pre-contact, and contact to 1960." The GNWT's goal for participating in the Expo were to increase exposure, tourism, government marketing, and corporate marketing. The pavilion created 140 short term jobs for northerners and "by the purchase of Northern arts and crafts, country foods and northern services and building supplies, NWT Expo stimulated Northern business by injecting $3.5 million into the territorial economy, much of it in the smaller communities of the north."[171]

1987 *Six Visions*: A special exhibit of contemporary Dene and Métis artists

Organized by Dolphus Cadieux, Six Visions is said to be the first joint exhibition of Dene and Métis art in the Northwest Territories. Held at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, it featured 8 paintings and 11 drawings by six artists (including John Farcy, Don Cardinal, and Dolphus Cadieux.) [172]

1988 Great Northern Arts Festival Established

The annual festival was cofounded by Charlene Alexander and Sue Rose. This 10-day event continues to take place in Inuvik every July, featuring up to 80 artists and 40 performers, a 4000-piece gallery and the opportunity to work alongside local artisans during hands-on workshops. Carving, textiles, sewing, jewelry, performing arts, arctic fashion and northern culture are on display throughout the event.

1989 Norman Wells Historical Centre

Opened in 1989, the Norman Wells Historical Centre portrays the history of the construction of the Canol Pipeline, geology, bush aviation, Mackenzie riverboats and Sahtu

[170] Doug Ashbury, "Art in the Deal: Baile Sells Gallery to Arctic Co-Operatives." Northern News Services, May 13, 1998. https://nnsl-archive.blackpress.ca/nnsl/1998-05/may13_98art.html.

[171] NWT Archives/"The Story of the Northwest Territories Pavilion at Expo 86," February 1987, GNWT Northwest Territories Culture and Communications.

[172] NWT Archives/"Information North, Arctic Institute of North America, 1986" and additional information from the collections staff at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, and personal communication with Dolphus Cadieux.

Dene culture. The Centre's Great Bear Gallery gift shop features traditional Dene craft items and local artwork.[173]

1991 *Arts from the Arctic*

Arts from the Arctic was a circumpolar art exhibition hosted at the Anchorage Museum in Alaska. It featured artwork by artists from the NWT (Holman, Hay River, Cape Dorset), Yukon, Labrador, Sweden, Finland, Nunavut, Quebec, Russia, Greenland, and Norway. The works exhibited were them divided up and given to collections in each of the participating regions.

1995-99 Fine Arts Program at Aurora College in Inuvik

Joanne Carolyn McNeal developed the one year "Fine arts certificate program", the first of its kind in the territory, that began in 1995 and eventually ended in 1999.

1999 Nunavut Becomes a Territory

The territorial division impacted many aspects of northern life. One such impact was the subsequent division of art and archival collections at the PWNHC. The collections were separated largely by geographical boundary, meaning they split the artwork made in and by artists from the new NWT and Nunavut. The Government of Nunavut's 8,000 piece art collection was sent to the Winnipeg Art Gallery on long-term loan in 2015 where it remains today. The Government of Nunavut's 140,000 item artifact collection was transferred to the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa in 2017, also on long-term loan.

1999 Open Sky Festival

From its inception, the Open Sky Creative Society has held an annual summer festival in late June or early July on the flats at the confluence of the Liard and Mackenzie Rivers in Fort Simpson. This annual event hosted a series of workshops, musical performances, craft vendors and artists' demonstrations.[174]

2000 Gwichin Traditional Skin Clothing Project

The Gwichin Traditional Skin Clothing Project was a project created in partnership with PWNHC, the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), and the Gwichin Social and Cultural institute to repatriate the knowledge and sewing skills by replicating a 19th century coat in the CMC collection. The goal was to make 5 multipiece summer outfits, one outfit for each community (Inuvik, Aklavik, Tsiigehtic, Fort McPherson and one for the collections at PWNHC). More than 40 seamstresses worked on this project for over 2.5 years.[175]

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[173] Northwest Territories Arts. "Norman Wells Historical Centre," January 24, 2014. https://www.nwtarts.com/organization-profile/norman-wells-historical-centre.

[174] Open Sky Creative Society. "Festivals," https://www.openskycreativesociety.com/festivals/.

[175] Judy Thompson and Ingrid Kritsch. *Long Ago Sewing We Will Remember : The Story of the Gwich'in Traditional Caribou Skin Clothing Project*. Government of Canada Publications, 2002. https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/278328/publication.html.

2000 Hay River Heritage Centre

Opened on July 1st 2000, the volunteer-run Hay River Heritage Centre operates out of the old Hudson's Bay Company store. They house a large collection of artifacts and host cultural events.

2011 Yellowknife Artist Run Centre Formed

Since 2011, the YKARCC has operated a variety of short term spaces, including an old church, an apartment above a Vietnamese restaurant, empty spaces in the Centre Square Mall, a cargo trailer.[176] They continue to program exhibitions and arts programming to stimulate artists in Yellowknife.

2016 *Northern Contemporary*

Curated by Casey Koyczan, Northern Contemporary was a group show featuring works by Aidan Cartwright, Davis Heslep, Janna Graham, and Margaret Nazon held at the Arnica Artist-Run Centre, in Kamloops, BC.[177]

2019 Far North Photo Festival

Founded by Pat Kane, the Far North Photo Festival is a space to elevate the work of visual storytellers in Northern Canada and across the Arctic. The festival provides a platform for northerners to share northern stories in a northern setting. The Festival operated in 2019, 2020 and 2022.

2021 *Rooted and Ascending*

The exhibition, *Rooted and Ascending*, curated by Melaw Nakehk'o, was the first group show of NWT Indigenous artists. It was held at the PWNHC and online in a virtual gallery built by AbTeC (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace.) Featured artists: Kablusiak, Casey Koyczan, Robyn McLeod, Margaret Nazon, Siku Allooloo, Riel Stevenson-Burke and Cody Fennell. *Moose Hide Dome* was created by Melaw Nakehk'o, Casey Koyczan, Tania Larsson and Davis Heslep in collaboration with Western Arctic Moving Pictures and Dene Nahjo.[178]

2022 Visitor Centre Art Gallery

In September 2022, the City of Yellowknife opened a gallery in the city inside of their new visitor information centre in the Centre Square Mall. This un-named space is the first and only public non-commercial dedicated gallery space in the territory. It is one room of 3,250 square feet. It hosts around 4 exhibitions a year. Its inaugural exhibit featured paintings by Melaw Nakehk'o.[179]

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[176] Meaghan Brackenbury,"YK ARCC Celebrates 10 Years by Pushing for NWT Art Gallery," April 30, 2021. https://cabinradio.ca/61207/news/arts/yk-arcc-celebrates-10-years-by-pushing-for-nwt-art-gallery/.

[177] Casey Koyzcan, *Northern Contemporary*. Kamloops, BC: Arnica Artist-Run Centre, 2016. https://e-artexte.ca/id/eprint/33556/.

[178] Sarah Swan, "Rooted and Ascending." Galleries West, November 1, 2021. https://www.gallerieswest.ca/api/content/42c4dbf2-36b0-11ec-9321-12f1225286c6/.

[179] "Yellowknife's New Visitor Centre Has a Gold-Flecked Path, a Wall of Moss and Sorely Needed Gallery Space." CBC News, September 12, 2022. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yellowknife-visitor-information-centre-grand-opening-1.6580393.

2022 Maureen Gruben started the Amauliq Residency in Tuktoyaktuk,

The Amauliq Residency, the first visual arts residency in the territory, hosted its inaugural two cohorts in 2022.[180]

2022 Deh Gah Art Collective

The Deh Gah Art Collective began in the summer of 2022 in Fort Providence and was co-lead by Lois Phillip and Shawna McLeod. The Deh Gah Art Collective accepted 9 applicants to for a funded opportunity to take workshops on the introduction to beading, healing and trauma work, moose hide tanning, soap making, medicine harvesting, leather purse making, vest making, dying moose hair for tufting, entrepreneurial skills, etc. The aim of this collective is to provide Fort Providence families with income, to empower women, and to teach them artistic and entrepreneurial skills.

2022 Forming of the "Friends of the Northwest Territories Art Gallery" Board

The "Friends of the Northwest Territories Art Gallery" board was formed to advocate, fundraise and plan for a future arts centre.[181] They aim to earn charitable status to begin fundraising to construct what they hope will be a 29,000 square-foot building.

2023 GNWT Revamps Arts Funding Systems

In September 2023, the GNWT has revised their entire arts funding structure by introducing a new series of Arts Project grants and a larger Arts Operating Fund.[182] The total annual amount of funding has remained the same (just under $1.3 million per year) but instead the ways in which it is accessible has been revised, promising "updated and streamlined application processes."[183]

2023 Canada Council for the Arts Forms Partnership to Support Arts in the NWT

In October 2023, the GNWT and the Canada Council for the Arts formed a partnership to support the growth and sustainability of the arts and culture in the NWT.[184] Through this partnership the Canada Council committed to providing the GNWT with a financial contribution of $750,000 over three years. This announcement between the GNWT and the Canada Council also pledged to recruit a full-time Arts Advisor located in the NWT to provide "on the ground" assistance, and increased access to funding provided by the Canada Council for the Arts for NWT arts and culture organizations.

2023 Kablusiak Won the Sobey Art Award

In November 2023, Kablusiak, an Inuvialuk artist, achieved a significant milestone by winning the Sobey Art Award, Canada's largest national art prize.[185] This marked the first time in the award's twenty-year history that it had been granted to an artist from the Northwest Territories.

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[180] Amauliq Residency. "Amauliq Residency."
[181] Jenna Dulewich, "'The Timing Seems Right': New N.W.T. Arts Centre in the Works."
[182] Williams, "GNWT Revamps Arts Funding System."
[183] Williams,"GNWT Revamps Arts Funding System."
[184] Canada Council for the Arts, "Partnership to Support Arts and Culture in the Northwest Territories."
[185] "Inuvialuk Artist Kablusiak Named Winner of $100,000 Sobey Art Award" CBC News, November 19, 2023. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-artist-kablusiak-winner-sobey-art-award-1.7033293.

2024 *Spring Break Up*

Spring Break Up, a group exhibition of NWT Indigenous artists is to be held in Montreal at La Guilde in the spring of 2024. This exhibition, curated by Laura Hodgins, is dedicated exclusively to highlighting Indigenous arts from the Northwest Territories, marking a historic moment in showcasing NWT art in an established arts institution.

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Table 1. Total Canada Council for the Arts funding awarded to the Territories, a 10-year trend

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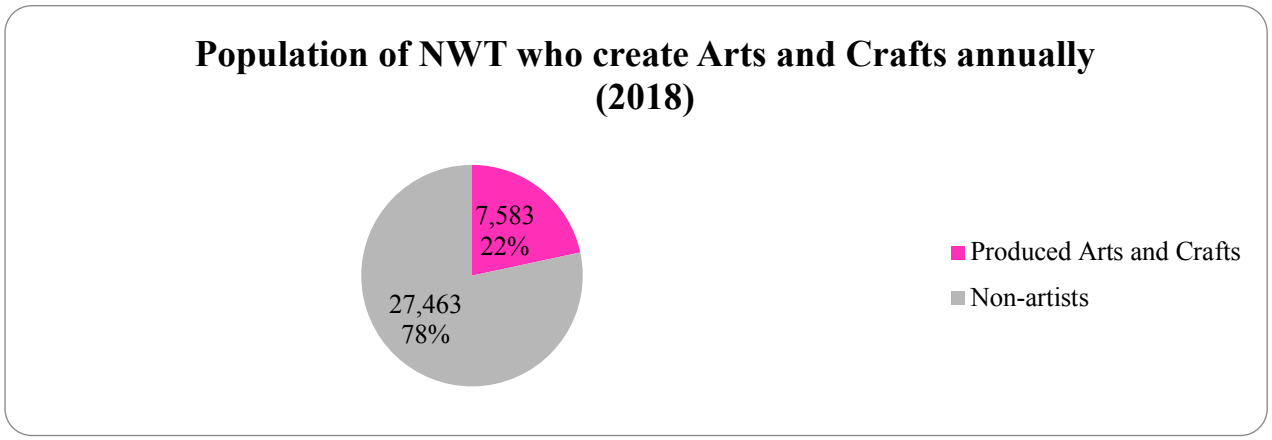
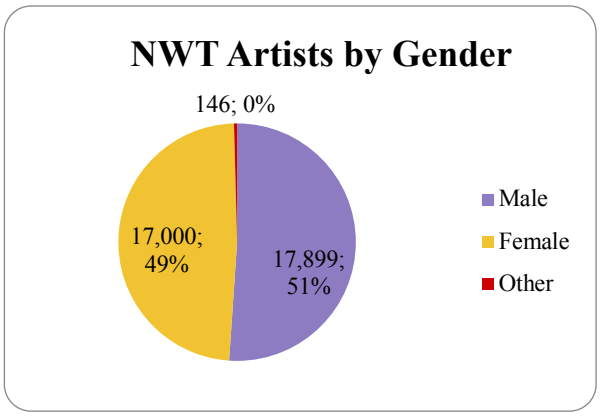
Fiscal Year	**Yukon**	**Nunavut**	**Northwest Territories**
2013-14	$492,578	$551,850	$167,575
2014-15	$457,985	$438,916	$244,401
2015-16	$420,800	$516,300	$198,700
2016-17	$941,300	$1,500,000	$1,200,000
2017-18	$880,100	$723,600	$212,300
2018-19	$1,300,000	$1,700,000	$391,300
2019-20	$1,500,000	$1,600,000	$402,800
2020-21	$2,700,000	$2,500,000	$538,400
2021-22	$2,800,000	$1,200,000	$427,000
2022-23	$2,333,514	$1,686,264	$485,220
Average	**$1,382,628**	**$1,241,693**	**$426,770**

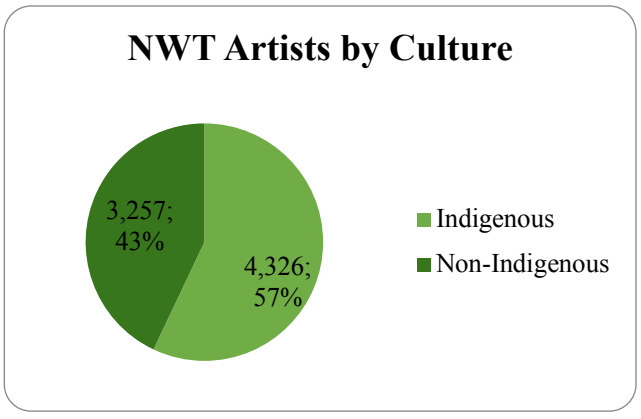
Source: Canada Council for the Arts. "Recipients – 2017 to Present," https://canadacouncil.ca/about/public-accountability/proactive-disclosure/grant-recipients/recipients-2017-present.

Table 2. Population of NWT who create Arts and Crafts annually (2018)

	Total Population 15+ in 2018	Produced Arts and Crafts (Number)	Produced Arts and Crafts (%)
Northwest Territories	35,046	7,583	21.60%
Demographic Characteristics			
Male	17,899	2,009	51.1%
Female	17,000	5,503	48.5%
Other/Non-identified	146	71	0.4%
Indigenous	16,737	4,326	57%
Non-Indigenous	18,309	3,257	43%







Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics. "2018 Engagement in Traditional Activities." Accessed July 6, 2023. https://www.statsnwt.ca/Traditional%20Activities/.

Figures

Figure 1. Margaret Nazon, *Galaxy Cluster* (2017), Beadwork on textile, 18” x 18.” https://margaretnazon.com/browse-the-gallery/#jp-carousel-232.

Figure 2. Pat Kane, Northern food security for the National Geographic Society, 2023. Image accessed on Instagram (@patkanephoto), July 5th 2023. Image posted June 7, 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/CtM4Z5WPH0o/.

Figure 3. Map of the Northwest Territories. Image accessed from Housing Northwest Territories and edited by author for clarity, https://www.nwthc.gov.nt.ca/en/about-housing-northwest-territories.

Figure 4. Morgan Tsetta, Image accessed on Instagram via (@morgantsettafilms) on July 5th 2023. Posted October 22, 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/CGqYdROJ-Nd/.

Figure 5. Morgan Tsetta, Image accessed on Instagram via (@morgantsettafilms), on July 5th 2023. Posted on November 3, 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/CHI7nUGJOQG/.

Figure 6. Sheena Yakeleya, Image accessed on Instagram via (@sheena_yakeleya) on July 5th 2023. Posted October 7, 2022. https://www.instagram.com/p/CjanIhDrDxyoKz-vkOEgfrCOZQS5A_gVoV3mkE0/.

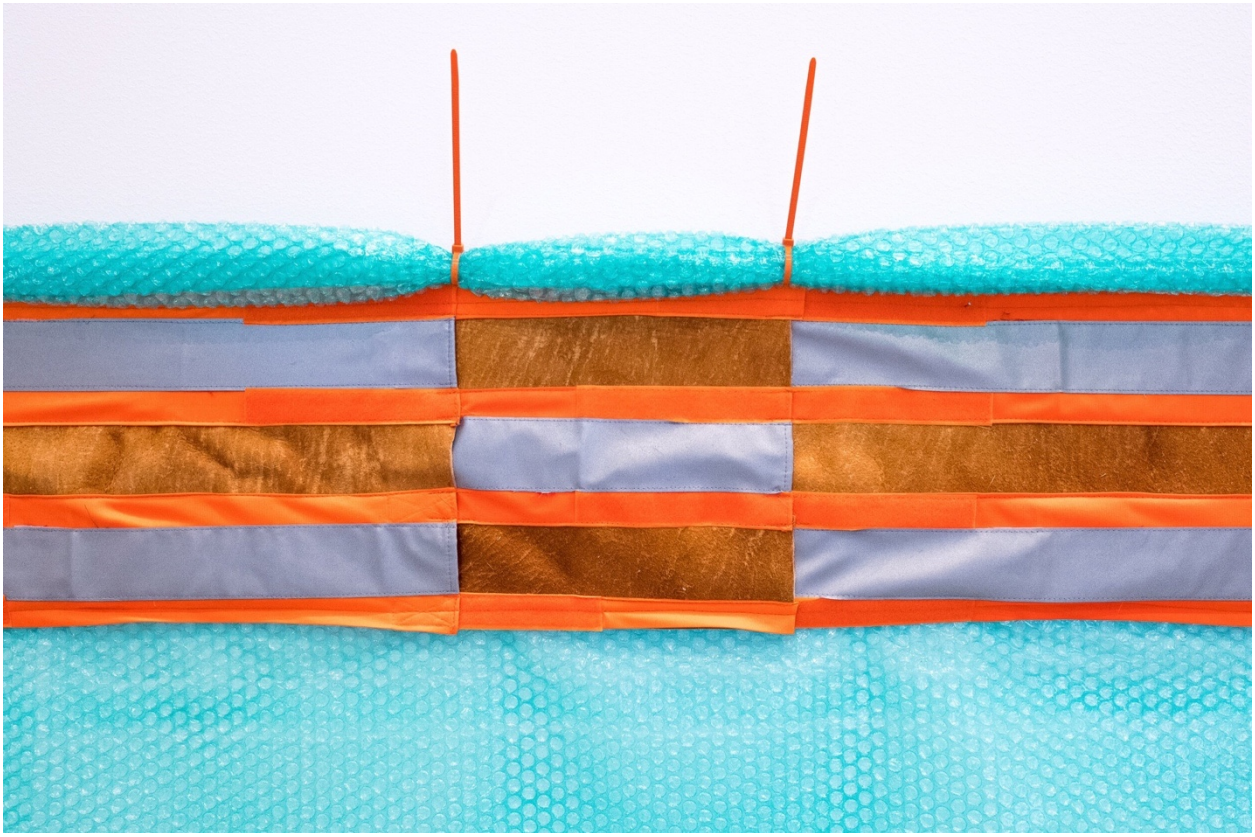


Figure 7. Maureen Gruben, *Delta Trim*, 2018, Bubble wrap, reflective tape, velcro, zip ties, moose hide; 261” x 19.” https://www.maureengruben.com/m57avtst7895otkh7rk9uec2doaukv.

Figure 8. Erasmus Apparel, Dene Rose Crewneck Sweater. Image accessed July 5th 2023. https://www.erasmusapparel.com/products/copy-of-dene-rose-crewneck-sweater.

Figure 9. “Arctic Trading Co. Original Native Caribou Moose Hair Tufting Kit w/ instruction.” Image accesed on EBay on July 5th 2023. https://shorturl.at/eqvT2.

Figure 10. Robyn McLeod, Image accessed on Instagram via (@robynmcleodfashion) on June 9th 2023. Image posted February 9th 2022. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZxQgAjvsyI/.

Figure 11. Jen Walden, *Northern Crossing*, 22"x28", Acrylic on canvas. https://www.jenwalden.com/wildlife-1/northern-crossing?pgid=khcg69ah-e49b8a_ac555d55c88240e4aee30a28d3ce259bmv2.

Figure 12. Walt Humphries, *Geophysical Wizzardry,* 1991, watercolour, 27” x 33", (photo by Bill Braden; collection of Laurie Weir.)
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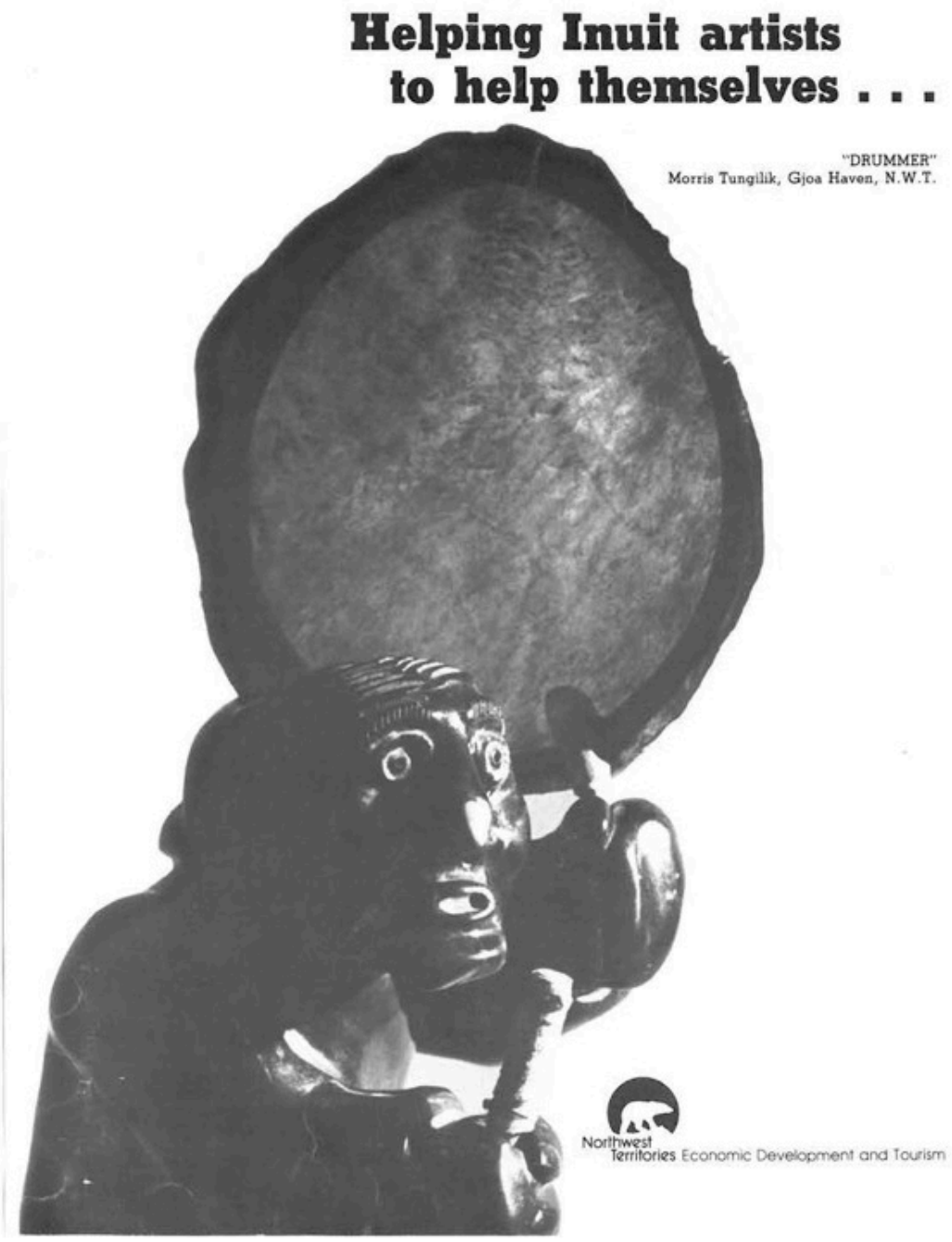

Figure 13. Inuit Art Quarterly, Vol 1 No 3, Fall 1986. https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/docs/default-source/iaq-issues/iaq-1.1-10.4/1-3.pdf?sfvrsn=508122a4_4.